

**Social Problems
SOCY 2—Winter 2009**

**10A, T/TH 10-11:50AM
X-period: W 3-3:50**

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Or by appointment

Course description:

Daily news reports direct much of our attention to social problems such as crime, inequality, and poverty. Yet rarely are these reports accompanied by a discussion of the systematic causes of these problems. More often we become witness to an endless stream of media coverage reporting seemingly isolated incidents and events, in a sensationalized manner. Seldom are we informed of the process by which some events or behaviors come to be defined as social problems, or the decision-making process by which some social problems are selected for coverage, while others are ignored. The purpose of this course is to subject a selection of social problems, as well as the coverage of those problems, to a sociological analysis. We will attempt to answer questions such as, “How does a social problem become defined as such?” “What are the causes of various social problems?” Throughout the course we will explore solutions to these social problems and ask, “What can be done?” directing some of our attention to those organizations, individuals, programs and policies that have implemented constructive responses to issues of public concern.

The active participation of all members of the class is essential to the course’s success. It is essential that students read all the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss and debate the issues raised in them. Students are expected to not only read, but also reflect upon the assigned readings before coming to class. To facilitate discussion, I will post reflection questions for students to consider as they read the course material. All students will be expected to understand key concepts from all reading materials. As part of student engagement in the class, it is expected that all outside distractions are turned off prior to coming to class (this includes cell phones and other electronic devices).

Each week a sub-set of students will serve as discussion leaders. Discussion leaders will write a **5-6 page paper** (typed, double spaced) analyzing that week’s readings (see the attached assignment description for the paper and the policy on late papers). There will also be a **group project** (details to be distributed at a later date). Students will also be graded on **class participation** overall. Class attendance, contributions to in-class discussions, and participation in group activities all contribute to your class participation grade. Because it is necessary to be in class to participate, **missing more than four class periods without a valid excuse, approved by me, means you cannot receive any better than a C for your class participation part of the grade.**

The final grade will be determined based on the following weighting scheme:

- Class participation: 10%
- Discussion paper: 20%
- Group project: 20%
- Mid-term exam: 25%
- Take home final exam: 25%

There will also be opportunities for extra credit. See attached.

***** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, by the end of the second week of classes (January 12, 2009).** All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Disability Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested. Also, stop by the Academic Skills Center in 301 Collis Center to register for support services.

*** For individual peer tutorial assistance with papers, research, and new media projects, students may use RWIT, the Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology. Make appointments online at www.dartmouth.edu/~rwit, or drop by the Center at Baker-Berry Library, Level One, from 4 to 6PM and 7 to 10PM, S-Th.

Honor principle and work in this course:

(1) **Papers:** You are encouraged to discuss your papers with other students in the class, however the writing of your paper is independent work. You should cite concepts and materials from class and readings appropriately in your papers. At a minimum, papers should have at least two references (the book you are analyzing and one other book or reference material, may be another book from the course).

(2) **Exams:** Exams are independent work ONLY. You are encouraged to study for the in-class mid-term with other students from class, but the exam is completely independent. The take-home final exam is also completely independent—you should not discuss the exam with any other students from the course.

Classroom discussion: Focused class discussion is possible only if people are willing to abide by the conventions of civilized discourse. All points of view must be expressed politely and with due respect for the differing opinions of others.

Required Reading

Textbooks:

The following books are required, and can be purchased from the Dartmouth Bookstore or Wheelock Books. They are also on reserve in Baker/Berry library.

Conley, Dalton. 1999. Being Black, Living in the Red. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. Media/Society: Industries, Images and Audiences. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Duncan, Cynthia M. 1999. Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Glassner, Barry. 1999. The Culture of Fear. New York: Basic Books.

Hamer, Jennifer. 2001. What it Means to Be Daddy: Fatherhood for Black Men Living Away from Their Children. New York: Columbia University Press.

Miringoff, Marque-Luisa and Sandra Opdycke. 2008. America's Social Health: Putting Social Issues Back on the Public Agenda. New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc.

Other reading materials:

The following are required reading and are located on the internet or via blackboard. Throughout the term I will place other short readings on blackboard.

Federal Interagency on the Well-Being of Children. 2008. "America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Child Well-Being, 2008."
http://www.childstats.gov/pdf/ac2008/ac_08.pdf

Austin, Algernon. 2008. "Reversal of Fortune: Economic Gains of 1990's Overturned for African Americans from 2000-07." Briefing Paper 220, Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
<http://www.epi.org/briefingpapers/220/bp220.pdf>

Churilla, Allison. 2008. "Urban and Rural Children Experience Similar Rates of Poverty." Issue Brief 2, Durham: The Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire.
http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB_UrbanRuralChildren08.pdf

Timothy Grall. 2006. "Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2003." Current Population Reports P60-230. US Census Bureau.
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/cs03.html>

Course Schedule

Section I: Social Construction of Social Problems

January 6: Social Construction and Theoretical Explanations

Introduction to the course

January 8: The Media

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. Media/Society. Chapters 1, 2, 4
Sign up for discussion paper assignments

Section II: Inequality: The Reality of Life in America

January 13: Racial and Economic Inequality

Conley, Dalton. 1999. Being Black, Living in the Red. Chapters 1-3

January 15: Racial and Economic Inequality

Conley, Dalton. 1999. Being Black, Living in the Red. Chapters 4-6
Austin, Algernon. 2008. "Reversal of Fortune."

Section III: Inequality, Poverty and Family Structure

* Recommended: **Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Keynote Address: Sherman Alexie**,
Monday, January 19th 7PM Spaulding Auditorium

Also see other activities at: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ide/programs/mlk/>

January 20: Experiencing Poverty: Single Mothers

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. Promises I Can Keep. Introduction and Chapters
1-4

January 22: Poverty in the Media

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. Promises I Can Keep. Chapters 5-6, Conclusion,
and Appendices

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. Media/Society. Chapter 6

* Recommended: **Guest speaker, Kathryn Edin** Friday, January 23rd 3:00PM-4:30PM

January 27: Experiencing Poverty: Nonresident Fathers

Hamer, Jennifer. 2001. What it Means to Be Daddy.

Timothy Grall. 2006. "Custodial Mothers and Fathers."

Introduce group projects: choose topic

Section IV: Spatial Inequality and Poverty

January 29: Rural Poverty and Inequality

Duncan, Cynthia M. 1999. Worlds Apart.

Churilla, Allison. 2008. Urban and Rural Children Experiencing Poverty.

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. Media/Society. Chapter 8

February 3: Rural Poverty

Guest lecture: Cynthia Mil Duncan, The Carsey Institute, UNH

Duncan, Cynthia M. 1999. Worlds Apart.

Midterm

February 5: Review for exam

February 10: In-class Mid-term exam

Section V: Recognizing and “Solving” Social Problems

February 12: Social Construction of “Problems”

Glassner, Barry. 1999. The Culture of Fear.

February 17: Social Problems: Evaluating U.S. Society

Miringoff, Marque-Luisa and Sandra Opdycke. 2008. America’s Social Health.

Federal Interagency on the Well-Being of Children. 2008. America’s Children in Brief.

February 19: Applied Research, Social Programs and Policy

Video on the Harlem Children’s Zone

Readings to be determined (will be posted on Blackboard)

Section VII: Group Projects

February 24: Group Presentations

February 26: Group Presentations

March 3: Group Presentations

March 5: Social Problems, Politics, and the Nature of Media

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. Media/Society. Chapters 3, 5, 7

March 10: Last Class, Review

Receive Take-home Final Exam, **DUE: March 14 at 1PM**

Discussion Paper Assignment

In this assignment you are to write a brief review and analysis of the book. Use the questions below as a *guide* to your analysis. The paper should be written as an essay, not as answers to the specific questions below. The paper is due the first day the book is discussed in class. It is **highly recommended** that you read the entire book *prior* to writing the paper, even though the discussion of the book may span two class periods.

Due: in class first day book assigned.

1. Summary and thesis statement (one paragraph)

Provide a brief summary of the book (1-3 sentences)

What is the author's thesis?

2. Context of the problem

According to the author, why should we care about this problem?

a. what is the history or background of this problem?

b. what are the effects or consequences of this problem (negative and positive)?

Are there different consequences of the problem for different groups?

3. Causes of the problem

What factors (causes) does the author explain produce this problem? How is this author similar to or different from other theories on this problem? i.e. How does the *author* say his/her work differs from others who have analyzed this problem?

4. Evidence

What kind of evidence does the author use to examine this problem? What does this type of evidence reveal about the problem? How is it helpful for enhancing our understanding of the problem? Is the evidence adequate to address the questions raised by the author? How might additional information, evidence or data affect the author's thesis?

5. Solutions to the problem

What are the typical solutions proposed for this problem? What, if any, are the solutions offered by the author?

How does the author's work affect our understanding of this problem? For example, will this book affect the way we think about a problem, how we define what is a problem, how we understand the extent of the problem, how we might address the problem, etc.

6. Take a personal position (one paragraph)

What are your own reactions to the author's examination of this problem? Do you agree with the author? Why or why not? What do you think are the best ways to address this problem?

Policy on Late Papers

Discussion papers handed in any time after the beginning of the class in which they are due will receive a full letter grade reduction, meaning that the highest possible grade you can get on a late paper is a B. Because your paper is expected to be a source of discussion for the class, **if you do not come to class on the day your discussion paper is due, you will receive an additional letter grade reduction, meaning the best possible grade you can receive is a C.** I will deduct an additional half a letter grade for each additional class period your paper is late. **Any paper more than two weeks late will not be accepted.**

Extensions may be given for extreme individual circumstances. If you are having problems completing an assignment, for whatever reason, it is best to talk with me as soon as possible. Talk to me after class, come to see me in my office during office hours, or email me and we can set up a time to meet. I may be able to help you get the paper done on time, and I will be more sympathetic than if I hear of your problem the day before or the day the assignment is due. **Please note that talking with me will not necessarily lead to an extension.**

Also note that computer failure is never considered a justifiable excuse for a paper extension. Computers sometimes freeze or breakdown; power outages happen. The best way to deal with these possibilities is to **save your work, and save often.**