SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

We can have a democratic society or we can have great concentrated wealth in the hands of a few. We cannot have both.

Justice Louis D. Brandeis

The economic anarchy of capitalist society...is in my opinion, the real source of evil. We see before us a community of producers the members of which are unceasingly striving to deprive each other of the fruits of their collective labor—not by force but on the whole in faithful compliance with legally established rules.

Albert Einstein

[Marx claims] that money is the only ‘true need’ produced in capitalism. People no longer feel drives to see, hear, love and think, but only to have, to own what is seen, heard, loved and thought about....For Marx, the desire to own is not a characteristic of human nature but of historically conditioned human nature, and the desire to own everything with which one comes into contact is the peculiar product of capitalism....

Bertell Ollman

Much of Western history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior...

Audre Lorde

Hand in hand with [the] centralization [of capital]...develop, on an ever-increasing scale...the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market...Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation...

Karl Marx

Course overview
On one level, this course aims to deepen awareness of social class theories; data on the maldistribution of resources, wealth, and honor; the nature and dynamics of the social class system in the U.S. and the world; and visions of something possible beyond where we are now. The intention is to stimulate social and personal imagination and to awaken and/or extend awareness of the connections among issues of domination, human sensitivity, self-awareness, critical analysis, and action.

The second level of consideration is social psychological. Everyone in a society plays a part in maintaining or changing structures of domination; the part is determined partly by background and partly by foreground. Background is objective personal history and the realities of social structures. Foreground is consciousness, motivation, imagination, daring, complex and sometimes bewildering feelings, daily experiences, and present situation; these sometimes are consistent with one’s past and sometimes are not.

The reading includes a critical look at the ideology of competition; theories of social class; and a re-examination of U.S. history as taught conventionally as stories conveying “ruling ideas” rather than domination and liberation struggles. As the world is rapidly becoming a gigantic single social class system, with international corporations determining political as well as economic policies and practices, a major focus of the course is on globalization. The course will build toward some thoughts about a feasible and more humane future.

Please ponder social class issues throughout the semester (and, we hope, beyond). Think, for example, of (a) connections among classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of domination, (b) social class as it appears at Brandeis in social structure, curriculum, town-gown relations, language, attitudes, behavior, etc., (c) social class in popular culture (film, TV, internet, novels, magazines, newspapers, video games, social, media), (d) social class bases of environmental/ecological crises that are growing fast, and (e) social class issues as they appear or do not appear in national, state, and local politics. Pay special attention to how class is and is not dealt with in national political discourse and in your education at Brandeis.

We shall also bring into our discussions many social class issues underlying, raised by, and infusing the recent presidential election in this country and its likely aftermath.

Course mechanics and requirements

Format: The class meets Tuesdays and Fridays 12:30-1:50. Class time will combine lecture and discussion, with occasional guest speakers and films. We may have one or two evening meetings for speakers and/or films. They will be scheduled later.

There will be an additional hour scheduled for a weekly discussion group facilitated by a teaching assistant. These groups will be small, somewhere around 6-10 people. Regular attendance at class and discussion group is required.

Written work: Students are asked to write in “cooperative learning groups” of 2-3
students for discussing reading, class sessions, personal responses, and miscellaneous observations about social class. A short response paper will be due every few weeks. See schedule below for specifics. It should, staying close to the texts, raise issues, problems, questions, insights, disturbances, etc. connected with the readings for the period covered. It may also include class discussions you want to extend, criticize, etc., observations and feelings about consumerism and social class, and miscellaneous observations about social class at Brandeis, in Waltham, in Cambridge, in Boston, in your home town or city or country, in your family, in the news, in the U.S., in the world. Completing all response papers is a course requirement.

Two field assignments.

1. In groups as small as two or as large as five, spend an hour in Hanneford’s Super Market or a Shaws or a Stop and Shop or a Market Basket (there is a new one in Waltham), and also an hour in a Whole Foods Market. We will work in class on comparing products, displays, layout, bodies, postures, faces, and movements of customers and staff, and perhaps more. This will be assigned early in the semester. A group report of 2-4 pages will be expected, comparing the two research sites in terms of social class issues.

2. Also in groups as small as two or as large as five, spend an hour in the elite Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and then another hour across the street in the cemetery for non-elite citizens of Cambridge. You will notice that even in dealing with death, social class continues. Here we will work in class on details of what to look for in terms of headstones and mausoleums, landscaping, ethnicities, and perhaps more. This will be assigned later in the semester, when spring comes to the cemeteries. (Mt. Auburn Cemetery is probably one of the most beautiful parks in the nation.) A group report of 2-4 pages will be expected, comparing the two research sites in terms of social class issues.

Social class observations. We will from the beginning ask students in discussion sections to find some ad, video bit, film scene, sports event, political moment, etc. that exemplify social class issues. The idea will be to open each class with such moments and perhaps follow them very briefly with further observations about social class in films, the political process (election season recently ended included), home communities, Brandeis, Waltham, the US, the world.

The Compact. This is a response to the consumerist thrust of our society. See: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thecompact/ Please read “The Compact,” google a few articles on its implementation, and sign on to it for the semester or a month or a week. Keep a brief journal on your reaction to doing the Compact for whatever period of time you choose. This is a requirement.

Extra events. Students are required to attend at least three non-class events (visiting speakers, panels, films, etc.) discussing social class related issues. For each event, a one-paragraph summary of what was learned at the event and its relation to the course will be part of the final assignment.
Final paper. A final paper, with length depending on number of authors, based on but not limited to readings, speakers, films and videos, and class discussions will be due on May 4 for seniors and May 8 for everyone else. Its precise content will be announced 2-3 weeks before it is due.

Overall. Please word process all response papers and final papers; keep the response papers after they are returned to you., BE SURE TO BACK UP ALL WORK AS YOU GO ALONG; losing work on the computer will not be accepted as an excuse for anything.

Attendance at lectures and sections. As lectures and class discussions of reading and other topics are central to the course, class attendance at all sessions is not only encouraged, it will be taken into consideration in grading. It is essential to keep up to date on submitting written work. Any assignment for which a significant entry (i.e., not hastily thrown together) is not submitted will have to be rewritten. Creativity and experimentation are especially welcome.

TAs will read and respond to response papers and the final paper. The professor will read all final papers at the end of the semester. See below for further discussion of response papers.

Required Reading—Books (given the cost of books, cooperative owning, so to speak, might be considered):

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*
Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*
Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash*
Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*
Alfie Kohn, *No Contest*
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Required Reading—Articles and Chapters (to be available on LATTE)


Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence.
Leonardo da Vinci
# Reading Assignments

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1/17, 1/20</td>
<td>Introduction to the course. Collins, Foreword, Parts I-III</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1/24, 1/27</td>
<td>Collins, Parts IV-VI</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1/31, 2/3</td>
<td>Kohn, chs. 1-4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2/7, 2/10</td>
<td>Kohn, chs. 5-9</td>
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Due 2/14. Response paper on weeks 1-4. What is new to you in Collins? What do you make of that? What is new to you in Kohn? What do you make of that? What are the lines of connection between Collins' book and Kohn's?

### Theories: Markets, Status, and Class

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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/14, 2/17</td>
<td>Marx and Engels; Weber</td>
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### Vacation 2/20-2/24

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/28, 3/3</td>
<td>Friedmans, Intro. and chs. 1-2; Davis and Moore; Tumin</td>
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Due 3/7: response paper on weeks 5-6. How do Kohn, Tumin, and Marx supplement each other? What is the alternate view presented by the Friedmans and Davis and Moore? How do you assess the vast difference between these two approaches to social class?

### Relations of Social Classes to One Another

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<td>7</td>
<td>3/7, 3/10</td>
<td>Isenberg, Introduction and chs. 1, 3-5</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3/14, 3/17</td>
<td>Isenberg, chs. 7,9,12, and Epilogue</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3/21, 3/24</td>
<td>Hochschild, Parts I and II</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3/28, 3/31</td>
<td>Hochschild, Parts III and IV</td>
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due 4/4: response paper on weeks 7-10. How do members of the upper and upper middle classes tend to characterize those in the lower, lower middle, and lower classes? How do members of the second grouping tend to respond to those in the first grouping? Why?

**RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER**

(The articles in this section are from Andersen and Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender: an Anthology*. They will be made available on LATTE or in Xerox form.)


**VACATION 4/10-4/18**

12 4/21  Alexander, chs. 4-6.
Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
Patricia Williams, “Of Race and Risk”
Cornel West, “Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject”
Robert B. Moore, “Racist Stereotyping in the English Language”

due 4/25: response paper on weeks 11-12. Explore how race, class, and gender are separate, independent systems and how they interlock.

**GLOBALIZATION: THE WORLD AS SOCIAL CLASS SYSTEM**

13 4/25, 4/27  Klein  Part One; evening 7-9 PM Film, *Missing*

14 5/2  Klein  chs. 6, 8, 11, 13

**FINAL WORK DUE 5/4 for seniors, 5/8 for everyone else**

I truly believe that individuals can make a difference in society. Since periods of great change such as the present one come so rarely in human history, it is up to each of us to make the best use of our time to help create a happier world.

The Dalai Lama

**Response Papers**

We want in this course to have a conversation among all of us—students, TAs, and professor. One way to do this is through written responses to readings and other course materials. Toward that end, we ask you to work together in groups of two or three (not to be rigid about this, occasionally four work together well) in writing short response papers every few weeks. Here is what we have in mind:
1. It is well to learn to write very succinctly. Practice getting to the point quickly and saying what you mean. The papers should be held to 3-4 pages, although if you really get caught up in something and wish to do so, negotiate for more. Suggested foci: 1) What is new to you in this reading? What do you make of it? What problems do you have with it? 2) What continuities do you see with previous weeks’ readings? 3) What contradictions do you see in the reading, and/or how does it contradict prior reading? What do you make of this? 3) What insights do you gain from this reading and its location in the course? What other connections do you make with materials outside the course?

2. If you find the reading difficult, summarizing can be useful, but do not make the paper a book report. The point of this kind of response paper is to ask if your interpretation of what the author said makes sense to the reader. Do not restate what the author said in her or his terms. Quotations may be used sparingly to illustrate a point or ask a question, and we urge you to work directly from the texts, but do not just repeat the author without using your own words.

3. All reading is interpretation. We never focus on it all, and we never comprehend it all. What matters is that the reader grapple with the text to understand it as fully as possible, to make sense of it, and to offer critical interpretations of it.

4. Please focus on your own questions about the reading, your critical reactions to it, hesitations, reservations, etc. And most important: your own insights about it. Strive to make connections within the reading that the author may not have made. Strive to connect the reading with other reading, with central ideas and issues as they develop in the course, with your own understanding of the world, your reactions to what you see in society and your own life.

5. The premium in these papers is on showing the reader that you are grappling with the course materials, have opened yourself up to the possibility that there is something in them for you, and can think creatively with what we are studying. The premium also is on integrating what may seem like disparate materials, and struggling to make sense of them in your reality as a citizen and as a thinking, feeling, viable actor in society.

6. In the response papers, you may work with class discussions, films, professor’s and TAs’ views, world events, whatever, but always in the context of the readings. I.e., no riffing from the top of your head on interesting things that may be relevant to the course. That is, of course, easy to do in sociology classes but is not helpful. We are looking for real struggle with reading and other course materials.

Back up all work

Please word process all written work. BE SURE TO BACK UP ALL WORK AS YOU GO ALONG; losing work on the computer will not be accepted as an excuse for anything.
Grading standards

Our standards for grading are these:

A—mastery of course materials, full participation, engagement, *insight, understanding, risk-taking, and growth*; the premium is on grappling with the materials and coming to one’s own insights about the course, its issues, its implications, its relation to oneself.

B—clear understanding of course materials and conscientious participation and with little risk-taking and growth or grappling with the course toward and including one’s own insights.

C—fuzzy, incomplete, lethargic relationship with course materials, minimal involvement of self in course, little or risk-taking and growth, no insights of one’s own.

D—not much evidence of having completed much of the reading or having engaged with the materials; presentation careless, sloppy, not serious.

E—even less evidence of engagement, reading, serious reflections, etc.

In addition:

1) If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the instructor immediately.

2) Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).