

SOC 427: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Professor Ryan Parsons

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Office: Lamar 561

TTh 11:00am – 12:15pm

Classroom: Lamar 519

Office hours by appointment: <https://calendly.com/parsons-um>

We live in a fundamentally unequal society. How are we sorted into different life trajectories? Why are stratification patterns so persistent? How can we alter those patterns? This course engages with a core topic in sociology – the processes that shape inequality in contemporary society. Stratification impacts all aspects of our social identities: we are divided by race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion, immigrant background, place, and all the other dimensions of social life that define us. The study of stratification is also an urgent task for those interested in the American Dream: Do we live in a meritocratic society, and if not, how can we build one? There are many ways to approach these questions. Our course readings and in-class discussions will center one particularly important phase of life: the transition to adulthood. This crucial time (which many of you are currently experiencing) determines much of our life's trajectory as we form our goals for life, our social networks, and the human capital we take to the workforce. By the end of the course, students will:

- Be able to articulate the processes through which social stratification unfolds
- Describe key examples of axes of stratification in the United States (race, gender, etc.)
- Synthesize and critically assess current literature on social stratification
- Discuss policies and institutions that could be altered to remedy social inequalities

Grading Scale

A	90 – 100%
B+	85 – 89%
B	80 – 84%
C+	75 – 79%
C	70 – 74% (minimum grade to receive credit towards the major)
D	60 – 69% (minimum grade to receive credit)
F	59% and below

Minus grades will only be assigned if I am rounding your final grade up (e.g., a grade of 79 might be recorded as a B- depending on your overall trajectory in the course).

Assessment

- Book exams (25 points each, total of 100 points – lowest score dropped): We are reading five books for this course. At the end of each book, we will have an in-class written exam on the book's arguments. These are open book, open note exams (physical copies of books and notes only). Exams will have 2-4 essay questions and are designed to be completed in 45 minutes. If you miss an exam, you may make it up during the next class period. Make up exams will have different questions. This will be the only opportunity to make up book exams. Your lowest book exam grade will be dropped. I will provide Blue Books.
- Success Strategies (70 points): Success Strategies are meant to assess participation and attendance and are discussed in more detail below.
- Final presentation (20 points): During the final week of class, each student will make a short (6-8 minute) presentation. Topics and a rubric will be shared after Spring Break.
- Final memo (20 points): A short (~600 word) memo related to your final presentation will be due after the last week of classes. Topics and a rubric will be shared after Spring Break.

How is my grade calculated? Grades are determined by dividing the total number of points you receive by 200. Note that there are 210 possible points – this is built in extra credit. Borderline grades may be revised upwards based on your trajectory in the course at my discretion. Consistent attendance is essential to your success in this course.

There is no final exam for this course. All submissions for Success Strategies will be due by the Sunday before exam week starts.

Success Strategies

“Success Strategies” are behaviors or activities associated with strong performance in college level courses. They also serve as opportunities to become more connected with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and other organizations on campus. You must receive 70 Success Strategy points for full credit; there are 120 possible Success Strategy points. You may not receive more than 70, but there are many ways to receive full credit in this category:

- Reading quizzes (3 points each) – There will be a minimum of 20 reading quizzes during class throughout the semester. These are intended to assess whether you've done the reading ahead of time and should be very simple. They will have 1-2 questions and are intended to be complete in a minute or two. Maximum of 60 points. **60 possible points**
 - These must be completed in class.

- Reading notes – submit your notes on course readings. One point per page of notes for up to 20 points. Bad-faith submissions (e.g., writing gibberish, writing in huge handwriting) will receive 0 points. **20 possible points**
 - You may submit these up to the Sunday after the last day of classes.
- Annotated readings – We will read a difficult paper using quantitative methods the week before spring break. You may submit a paper copy of the article that has your notes, annotations, questions, summaries, etc. on it. This is intended to demonstrate your engagement with a difficult text. Minimal or shallow annotations will be returned to you ungraded. **10 possible points**
 - Annotations must be submitted by the end of week 9.
- Campus Events – attend up to four *academic* events related to sociology, poverty, inequality, or the South (e.g., talks, panels, documentary screenings) and submit a 300-word summary of the event. You must stay until the end, including any Q&A. Five points each for a maximum of **20 possible points**
 - These must be submitted within two weeks of attending the event.
- Office Hours – Visit my office hours (in person or Zoom) with a question about an assignment for the course material; you can't just come say hi. Ten points per visit for up to one visit. **10 possible points**
 - You may visit office hours for Success Strategy points any time before April 15.

Readings

This is a senior-level class and you will normally be required to read around 150 pages per week, though this will vary. We are mostly reading books, which you should find more “readable” than academic articles. Readings should be completed before class and will serve as the foundation for in-class discussions.

Required books:

- DeLuca, Stefanie, Susan Clampet-Lundquist, and Kathryn Edin. *Coming of Age in the Other America*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2016.
- Metzl, Jonathan. *Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland*, Basic Books, 2019.
- Ray, Ranita. *The Making of a Teenage Service Class: Poverty and Mobility in an American City*. Univ of California Press, 2017.
- Silver, Blake R. *Degrees of Risk: Navigating Insecurity and Inequality in Higher Education*. University of Chicago Press, 2024.
- Thrasher, Steven. *Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide*, Macmillan, 2022.

You may use any edition of these books. **Please note that only physical copies may be used during the open-book book exams.** A few additional readings will be posted to Blackboard.

Office Hours

You were welcome to stop by to chat about the readings, talk about your field notes, or ask questions. You can make an appointment for in-person or virtual office hours here: <https://calendly.com/parsons-um>

Communication

I will do my best to respond to all emails within 2 business days during normal business hours; if you have not had a response by then, please send a follow up message. Emails with questions that can be answered with this syllabus will likely be ignored. Please do not send emails with questions about assignments fewer than 2 days before the deadline.

Academic Honesty and Integrity

I expect you to produce your own work for this class and cite others' ideas appropriately. In cases of inadvertent plagiarism (i.e., incorrect citations) you will be asked to edit and resubmit the assignment. Intentional plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, including copying others' ideas, paying someone to complete your assignments, or cheating during exams, will likely result in your failing the assignment.

Attendance

The University requires that I verify attendance during the first two weeks of the semester. Missing the first two weeks of class may result in your being removed from the course roster. Beyond this requirement, students should plan to attend class every session barring cases of illness (including mental health issues) or University business.

Student Support Services

The University has prepared the following information regarding mental health services:

The University Counseling Center is a professional facility offered by the University of Mississippi to assist students, faculty, and staff with many types of life stressors that interrupt day-to-day functioning, including the stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. They offer individual counseling, couple's counseling, group counseling, stress management, crisis intervention, assessments and referrals, outreach programs, consultations, and substance abuse services. There is no fee for currently enrolled University students and everything you say to your counselor is confidential. You can contact the Counseling Center for information about mental health issues at <https://counseling.olemiss.edu>, counselg@olemiss.edu, 662- 915-3784, 320 Lester Hall, and <https://www.facebook.com/universitycounselingcenterolemiss/>. You can schedule

an appointment or get information about appointments by calling the UCC at 662-915-3784.

Disability Access and Inclusion

The following language was written by the Student Disability Services office:

“The University of Mississippi is committed to the creation of inclusive learning environments for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your full inclusion and participation, or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Barriers may include, but are not necessarily limited to, timed exams and in-class assignments, difficulty with the acquisition of lecture content, inaccessible web content, and the use of non-captioned or non-transcribed video and audio files. If you are registered with SDS, you must log in to your Rebel Access portal at <https://sds.olemiss.edu/rebel-access-portal> to request approved accommodations. If you are NOT registered with SDS, you must complete the process to become registered. To begin that process, please visit our website at <https://sds.olemiss.edu/apply-for-services>. SDS will:

1. Complete a comprehensive review to determine your eligibility for accommodations,
2. If approved, disseminate to your instructors a Faculty Notification Letter,
3. Facilitate the removal of barriers, and
4. Ensure you have equal access to the same opportunities for success that are available to all students.

If you have questions, contact SDS at 662-915-7128 or sds@olemiss.edu.¹

If you feel that there are other barriers to your success in this course (including disabilities not covered by SDS or difficult personal circumstances) please feel free to reach out to me to discuss ways to improve your experience in this course.

¹ Student Disability Services, University of Mississippi. (n.d.). *Syllabus Statement*. Student Disability Services - Syllabus Statement. Retrieved July 26, 2022, from <https://sds.olemiss.edu/syllabus-statement/>

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1

1/20 - Tuesday: Course Introductions

1/22 - Thursday

- Grusky, D. B., & Ku, M. C. (2008). Gloom, doom, and inequality. *Social stratification: Class, race, and gender in sociological perspective*, 2-28. [Blackboard, ~26 pages]
- *Coming of Age in the Other America (COAOA)* Read Appendix A, "Study History and Methodology," and Chapter 1.

Week 2

1/27 – Tuesday:

- SKIM: Preface and Chapter 1 of Wilson, W. J. (2012). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. University of Chicago Press. [Blackboard, ~24 pages]
- COAOA, Chapters 2-3

1/29 - Thursday: COAOA, Chapter 4-5

Week 3

2/3 - Tuesday: COAOA, Chapter 6-7

2/5 - Thursday: Book exam: COAOA

Week 4

2/10 - Tuesday: *The Making of a Teenage Service Class*, Chapters 1-2

2/12 - Thursday: TMTSC, Chapters 3-4

Week 5

2/17 – Tuesday: TMTSC, Chapters 5-6

2/19 - Thursday: TMTSC, Chapters 7-8 (class will be online/asynchronous today)

Week 6

2/24 - Tuesday: Chapters 9 and Epilogue

2/26 - Thursday: Book exam: TMTSC

Week 7

3/3 - Tuesday: Desmond, M., & Wilmers, N. (2019). Do the poor pay more for housing? Exploitation, profit, and risk in rental markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, 124(4), 1090-1124.

3/5 - Thursday: (continue reading) Desmond, M., & Wilmers, N. (2019). Do the poor pay more for housing? Exploitation, profit, and risk in rental markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, 124(4), 1090-1124.

**Note: March 6 is the last day to withdraw from courses.*

March 7 to 15: Spring Break

Week 8

3/17 – Tuesday: Degrees of Risk, Prologue, Chapters 1-3
3/19 - Thursday: Degrees of Risk, Chapters 4-5

Week 9

3/24 - Tuesday: *Degrees of Risk*, Chapters 6-7
3/26 - Thursday: **Book Exam: *Degrees of Risk***

**3/27: Quantitative article annotation assignment due.*

Week 10

3/31 - Tuesday: *Dying of Whiteness*, Introduction and Part 1
4/2 - Thursday: *Dying of Whiteness*, Part 2

Note: University administrative offices are closed April 3rd.

Week 11

4/7 - Tuesday: *Dying of Whiteness*, Part 3
4/9 - Thursday: **Book Exam: *Dying of Whiteness***

Week 12

4/14 - Tuesday: *Viral Underclass*, Foreword, Introduction, and Chapters 1-3
4/16 - Thursday: *Viral Underclass*, Chapters 4-7

Week 13

4/21 - Tuesday: *Viral Underclass*, Chapters 8-12, Epilogue

4/23 – Thursday: Book Exam: *Viral Underclass*

Week 14

4/28 - Tuesday: In-class presentations

4/30 - Thursday: In-class presentations

Final Memo and remaining Success Strategy assignments due by Sunday, May 3rd at 11:59pm