

Social Problems in Our Social Solutions

Fall 2015, Sociology 178/Sociology of Social Problems

Instructor: Joseph Klett (jklett@ucsc.edu; always include 'SOCY178' in subject line)

Class hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 4pm–5:45pm in Social Sciences 1, room 110

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:30pm in College Eight, room 325

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will study some social problems in the contemporary United States. Easy enough. Social problems – things like institutional racism, poverty, and environmental inequality – are long-standing issues that you're probably already familiar with. But the path we will take in this course might not be so familiar: rather than treat social problems as if they come out of nowhere, we will consider social problems as they are *actively created* by social processes meant to solve problems from previous periods. In this regard, think of the object of this class as the social problems in our social solutions.

In Part I of class, we will take the theoretical perspective of social construction – how we, as a society, collectively define things as things that we think of as good, bad, or otherwise. Empirically, we will spend our time on the theme of crime and punishment as this relates to inequalities of race and class, the effects of urbanism, and fights for justice. What historical processes have led us to our current situation? What cultural values are at work in these ways of thinking? What material facts about modern life make certain issues harder to settle than others?

In Part II of class, we will study how these processes affect everyday life. Much of this happens in urban places, where populations are dense, where communities are shifting, and where the powerful exert control on the powerless. Why is it so hard for the working poor to get out of poverty? Why can it be so hard to live in an urban environment? What's it take to get treated like a full citizen? And why are those cops driving a tank???

In Part III of class, we will discuss the social activity emerging in response to our current state of affairs. From militias to high finance, from drones to squatters, the social world keeps moving. Who are these actors, and what do they imagine to be solutions? How do their actions reproduce old problems, and how do they create new issues, yet to be defined by society?

Our goal is to understand how social problems are made and how solutions can both respond to and reproduce these problems. Central to this work will be your participation in a policy group: group members will participate in an on-going dialogue in which to evaluate different perspectives on social problems, to present initial findings to the class, and to compile a portfolio of group work that synthesizes a policy brief. By the end of the course, each student will be skilled at recognizing and analyzing social problems, and each student will be versed in understanding social solutions in a sociological manner.

COURSE READINGS

There is one required text for this course. Get a copy! The book is available at the Literary Guillotine:

Michelle Alexander. 2010. *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press.

All other readings are found in the 'Resources' folder on eCommons, except where a link is provided.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (% of final grade; all work submitted after the deadline will receive a 10% deduction per 24 hours)

- A) *Participation* (10%): Show up and say stuff! You are expected to attend lecture well-read and prepared to discuss the readings prior to the start of class. Your undivided attention is expected at each lecture. Computers may *only* be used for taking notes and sharing work. Do not come to class to sleep. You get one unexcused absence; additional unexcused absences will receive a 2% deduction

- B) *News Journal* (25%): Read all about it! There will be four journal entries required throughout the quarter. I will provide you with a worksheet of prompts. Here you will provide an analysis of three news stories collected over a two week period, relate them to recent lectures and group discussions, and cite the sources. The journals are due 10/16, 10/30, 11/13 and 11/25 (always by 9pm).

- C) *Policy Group and Portfolio* (40%): Collaborate! Each student will be part of a policy group. The purpose is to develop a policy brief addressing crime and punishment in the United States. The group will meet regularly to discuss readings, lectures, viewings, and additional materials the group has collected. This group project will be collected in a portfolio and submitted with a policy brief in Week 10.

- D) *Final Exam* (25%): Wrap it up! You will complete a take-home exam consisting of three short essays. The details of this assignment will be discussed in Week Four. The Final Paper is due in your drop box at 9pm on December 10.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

You are expected to follow the University guidelines for academic honesty. Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak to me *before* the assignment is due. For more information on penalties for plagiarism, see *The Navigator* (<http://reg.ucsc.edu/navigator/>) and the *UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook* (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>).

SPECIAL NEEDS and ACCOMODATIONS

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the quarter, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter or at least two week prior to an exam. Contact DRC at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

COURSE OUTLINE (things marked VIEW will be watched in class)

1.1 - Thursday 9/24, Introduction to the Sociology of Social Problems

1. Overview
2. Syllabus and class mechanics
3. Student learning goals

1.2 - Tuesday 9/29, Crime and Punishment in America

1. Michelle Alexander, "Introduction" and "The Lockdown" in *The New Jim Crow*
2. C. Wright Mills, 'The Sociological Imagination'
3. David Novak, chapters 1-4 in *Downtime: A Guide to Federal Incarceration*
VIEW: *Prison State* (Frontline, 2014)

NO CLASS, Thursday 10/1

Part I: Constructing Social Problems

2.1 - Tuesday 10/6, Racialization

1. Michelle Alexander, "The Color of Justice" in *The New Jim Crow*
2. Mona Lynch, 'The Contemporary Penal Subject(s)'
3. EXPLORE: <http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/>

2.2 - Thursday 10/8, Stratification I

1. Michelle Alexander, "The Rebirth of Caste" in *The New Jim Crow*
2. Loic Wacquant, 'The Place of the Prison in the New Government of Poverty'
3. Jordan Colosi, 'Life's Race'

3.1 - Tuesday 10/13, Education

1. Michelle Alexander, "The Cruel Hand" in *The New Jim Crow*
2. Catherine Kim, Daniel Losen and Damon Hewitt, chapters 1 and 6 in *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*
VIEW: *Chicago under the Gun* (Chicago Tribune, 2013)

3.2 - Thursday 10/15, Stratification II

1. Jane Jacobs, chapters 2 & 3 in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*
2. David Grusky, 'The Stories about Inequality that We Love to Tell'
3. EXPLORE: 'Upshot: The Best and Worst Places to Grow Up':
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/05/03/upshot/the-best-and-worst-places-to-grow-up-how-your-area-compares.html>
VIEW: *Urbanized* (Gary Hustwit, 2011)

4.1 - Tuesday 10/20, Enclosure

1. Don Mitchell, chapters 5 & 6 in *The Right to the City*
2. Naomi Klein, excerpts from *Fences and Windows*
3. WATCH: 'Eminent Domain Outrage in Connecticut':
<http://www.democracynow.org/2009/11/13/eminent>
VIEW: *Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story* (PBS Independent Lens, 2005)

4.2 - Thursday 10/22, Criminalization

1. Sara Wakefield and Chris Wildeman, introduction & chapter 7 in *Children of the Prison Boom*
2. *Disappearing Parents: A Report on Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System*
3. National Immigration Forum, *The Math of Immigration Detention*
4. EXPLORE: 'Immigration Detention Facilities,' <http://www.ice.gov/>
VIEW: *Lost in Detention* (Frontline, 2011)

Part II: The Conditions of Social Life

5.1 - Tuesday 10/27, Life on the Street

1. Eli Anderson, 'The Code of the Streets'
 2. Geoffrey Canada, chapters 1-9 in *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun: A personal history of violence in America*
 3. Orlando Patterson, 'The Real Problem with America's Inner Cities'
 4. Fredrick Harris, 'The Rise of Respectability Politics'
- VIEW: *Fruitvale Station* (Ryan Coogler, 2013)

5.2 - Thursday 10/29, Home and Hardship

1. William Julius Wilson, introduction, chapters 1 & 2 in *When Work Disappears*
2. David V. Lurie and Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'Homeless Vehicle Project'
3. *Homes Not Handcuffs: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*
VIEW: *Homes for the Homeless* (Now on PBS, 2009)

6.1 – Tuesday 11/3, Equity

1. William Julius Wilson, chapters 6 & 7 in *When Work Disappears*
 2. Clair Cain Miller, 'How Losing Your Job Can Be Bad for Your Health'
 3. Charles Blow, 'How Expensive it is to be Poor'
- VIEW: *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989)

6.2 - Thursday 11/5, Development

1. Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow" in *The New Jim Crow*
 2. Sharon Zukin, chapter 4 in *Naked City*
 3. Elaine Misonzhnik, 'Occupy Wall Street Raises Questions about Privately-Owned Public Spaces'
- VIEW: *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Andersen, 2003)

7.1 - Tuesday 11/10, Militarization

1. Mike Davis, 'Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space'
2. Sarah Brayne, 'Surveillance and System Avoidance'
3. David Novak, chapter 6 in *Downtime*
VIEW: *SWAT: Mission Creep* (NYT Retro Report, 2014) and *Police Militarization* (Last Week Tonight, 2014)

Part III: Social Solutions?

7.2 - Thursday 11/12, Militants I

1. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, chapter 4 in *Agents of Repression*
 2. Barton Gellman, 'The Secret World of Extreme Militias'
 3. Charles Blow, 'Police Abuse is a Form of Terror'
- VIEW: *Panthers Revisited* (New York Times Op-Docs, 2014)

8.1 - Tuesday 11/17, Anti-democratic

1. Will Potter, chapters 1, 5 & 6 in *Green is the New Red*
 2. Joseph Masco, 'Sensitive but Unclassified: Secrecy and the Counterterrorist State'
 3. Jim Reed, 'The Skies Open Up For Large Civilian Drones'
 4. Alex Kane, 'How the NYPD's Counterterrorism Apparatus is Being Turned on Protestors'
- VIEW: *Ag-gag Debate* (Democracy Now, 2013)

8.2 - Thursday 11/19, Extra-judicial

1. Elaine Tyler May, 'Security against Democracy: The Legacy of the Cold War at Home'
 2. Pew Research Center, 'Few See Adequate Limits on NSA Surveillance Program'
 3. Andy Newman and J. David Goodman, 'Mayor de Blasio, Speaking to Police Academy Graduates, Hears Some Boos'
 4. Vivian Yee, 'Life in NYC, Where Arrests are Down and Tickets are Rarities'
 5. Connor Friedersdorf, 'The NYPD's Insubordination—and Why the Right Should Oppose It'
- VIEW: *Top Secret America* (Frontline, 2013)

9.1 - Tuesday 11/24, Militants II

1. Donald Mackenzie, 'Be Grateful for Drizzle'
 2. Paul Starr, 'Cultures of Impunity'
 3. WATCH: Democracy Now, 'Occupy Homes: New Coalition Links Homeowners, Activists in Direct Action to Halt Foreclosures':
http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/11/occupy_homes_new_coalition_links_homeowners
- VIEW: *Inside Job* (Charles Ferguson, 2010)

NO CLASS, Thursday 11/26

10.1 - Tuesday 12/1, Grassroots and Astroturf

1. Michelle Alexander, "The Fire This Time" in *The New Jim Crow*
 2. Angela Davis, chapter 6 in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
 3. Edward Walker, 'Industry-driven Activism'
 4. EXPLORE: Eric Lipton, 'Courting Favor':
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/us/politics/attorneys-general.html>
 5. EXPLORE: David Leonhardt, 'California's Upward-Mobility Machine':
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/upshot/californias-university-system-an-upward-mobility-machine.html>
- VIEW: *State Legislatures and ALEC* (Last Week Tonight, 2014)

10.2 - Thursday 12/3, Share policy briefs