Social Class and the Attack on Public Education
HCOL 186
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: Tues and Thurs: 3:00-4:00 PM and by appointment

“It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity ... is a right which must be made available to all, on equal terms.

-U. S. Supreme Court, Brown vs. Board of Education

“Nowhere is there a more intense silence about the realities of class differences than in educational settings”

-Bell Hooks

Course Abstract

Schools and schooling in the United States are characterized by inequality. This course examines stratification -- structured social inequality -- in the school system, exploring the numerous ways in which socioeconomic status affects both the organization of schools and student performance. To do so, we will consider some major theoretical perspectives on the sociology of education, as well as empirical research on the subject. We will also examine charter schools, “no child left behind,” and the role of higher education in the American educational system.

Required Readings (Books available through the bookstore)

Armstrong and Hamilton, Paying For The Party
Sacks, Tearing Down the Gates
Ravitch, The Death and Life of the Great American School System
Johnson, The American Dream and the Power of Wealth

Other Required Readings (Blackboard unless otherwise noted)

Ballantine and Hammack, Chapter 1
Ballantine and Hammack, Chapter 3
Ballantine and Spade, Macrolevel Theories of Education
Bennett et al. “Beyond the Schoolyard”
Bourdieu, “Cultural reproduction and social reproduction”
Bowles and Gintis, “Schooling in Capitalist Societies”
Course Requirements:

Course performance will include three specific assessment areas including participation, examinations, and a final written research paper.

1. **Class participation:** This course is discussion based and will be heavily dependent on required readings; please be sure to complete assigned readings for the day read before class. On many days, a student(s) will be assigned the responsibility of leading the discussion of the readings for the day. This means that the assigned person will come prepared with questions to stimulate discussion. Participation will constitute 10% of your final grade, half of which will be assessed at the mid-term.

Here are some guiding questions that will help you understand your assigned readings and prepare you for class:

1. What are the interesting ideas presented in the assigned readings? What is unusual, special or unique about those ideas?
2. How different is this work from similar work from other authors that you have read?
3. What have you learned from the readings?
4. If the empirical research is flawed, what are the flaws and how might you approach the research questions?
5. How can you improve the discussion that occurs in class? How can you relate what you now know and understand….to what *that* person just said?
6. Is the frequency of your participation appropriate?

Your seminar participation will be evaluated by how well your participation addresses these questions. Students who systematically attempt to respond to these questions in class discussions will receive full credit for seminar participation. This course is organized around discussion and participation and will be heavily dependent on required readings. Its success, then, will depend on careful
reading of class assignments. (And, of course, you must attend class to participate.) And for a more concrete idea of how participation is evaluated, see BB.

3) **Midterm and final Examinations.** There will be two exams, both of which are open book: the mid-term exam (30% of your grade) will be on February 26th and the final (30% of your grade) on **May 5th from 10:30-12:30.** The final examination date is set by the University’s Registrar and cannot be adjusted.

4) **Research Paper and Presentation:** Your term papers (approximately 15 pages) will be on a topic of your choosing; paper topics, with bibliography are due no later than March 10th. Each student will present their paper (7 minute presentation; 3 minutes for questions) to the class between April 19th and April 26th. Final papers are due in class on April 23rd. (30% of your grade).

**Course Outline and Reading Assignments (Note: (B)=Blackboard)**

1. **Introduction and Course Overview:** C. Wright Mills  
   Jan. 13: C. Wright Mills  
   Jan. 15: Sociology of Education/Social Stratification  
   Read: C. Wright Mills (B); Ballantine and Hammack, Chapter 1 (B); Ballantine and Hammack, Chapter 3 (B)

2. **Macrolevel Theories of Education**  
   Jan. 20: Functionalism/Conflict Theory  
   Read: Ballantine and Spade (BB); Gans (BB);  
   Jan. 22-27: Reproduction Theory  
   Jan. 22. Read: Bowles and Gintis (BB); Bourdieu (See above, ‘Other Required Readings’); Reyes and Rodriguez (B)  
   Jan. 27. Read: Weininger and Lareau (B); Sacks p. 1-36

3. **Race**  
   Jan. 29-Feb. 3  
   Jan. 29. Read: Logan et al. (BB); Read Sachs  
   Feb. 3. Read: Percell (BB); Morris (BB); Sachs

4. **Social Stratification and Social Mobility**  
   Feb. 5-10  
   Feb. 5. Read Hertz (BB); Sacks  
   Feb. 10. Sacks

5. **Tearing Down the Gates**  
   Feb. 12-17  
   Finish Sacks

6. **Gender**  
   Feb. 19-24  
   Feb. 19. Mickelson (B); Start Johnson\(^1\)  
   Feb. 24. Read Johnson

   ********Midterm: Feb. 26th********

7. **The American Dream and the Power of Wealth**  
   Mar. 10-12  
   March 10: Read Johnson  
   March 12: Finish Johnson

\(^1\) We will discuss Johnson in Section 7 below.
8. Tracking and More
   March 17: Read Spade et al. (BB) Ferrare (BB); Start Armstrong and Hamilton (A&H)
   March 19: Bennett et al. (BB); A&H

8. Why Invest in Education?
   March 24-26: March 24: The Role of Human Capital
                 Read: Schultz (BB); A&H
                 March 26: Public Good versus Private Good
                 Read: Labarree (BB); A&H

9. Neoliberalism and Higher Ed
   March 31-Apr 2: March 31: Read Saunders (BB); A&H
                  March 26: Read Mintz (BB); A&H

10. Paying for the Party
     April 7-9: Finish A&H

11. Student Presentations
     Apr. 14-16: Read Ravitch chap 1-4^2

12. Charter Schools and “Waiting for Superman”
     Apr. 21-23: Read Renzulli and Roscigno (BB); Ravitch, chap 5-8
                  Video: Waiting for Superman
     April 26: Read Ravitch
                   Video: Waiting for Superman
     Apr. 28: Finish Ravitch.

***************Final Exam: Tuesday, May 5th, 10:30-12:30***************

^2 We will discuss Ravitch on April 21 and April 28