

Course Syllabus	
CLASS AND CULTURE	
SOC 369	Fall 2024

<u>Professor:</u> Timothy Nelson tjnelson@princeton.edu	<u>Office:</u> Wallace 181
<u>Preceptors:</u> Eliana Gagnon ecgagnon@princeton.edu Ronnie Clevensine vc9146@princeton.edu	<u>Office Hours:</u> Tuesdays 2:30-3:30
<u>Meeting:</u> MW 11:00-11:50 East Pyne 010	

Course Description: This course examines the intersection of social class and culture—both the popular culture of movies, TV, music, etc., and “culture” in the anthropological sense as the shared way of life of a people. Although the topic has wider application, we will focus here primarily on the contemporary American scene. The course is divided into four main sections. First, we introduce the concepts of class, culture and a few other key concepts. Second, we dissect the cultures of each of the classes within American society, beginning with the “Old” and “New Money” classes, the “New Class” of intelligentsia, the much-invoked Middle Classes, the iconic Working Class, and continuing through the poverty-stricken Lower Classes. Third, we ask to what extent people’s identities, relationships, or chances for social mobility are shaped by their class culture. Is there a “culture of poverty” or is “cultural capital” the right concept to explain social reproduction? Finally, we look at high and popular culture as well as mass media, paying close attention to patterns of cultural consumption (“taste”) and ask in particular about their role in reproducing the class structure. Can mass culture inspire resistance, or does it only serve to reinforce existing hierarchies?

Goals and Objectives: The goal of the course is to familiarize students with the basic debates surrounding the intersection of class and culture and to equip them with concepts that they can use to identify these issues in their own lives and in the social world around them. Specifically, the course orients students to how culture can contribute to or undermine class consciousness, how social classes are identified by distinctive cultural markers, and how these markers may in turn be used as a basis for social and economic incorporation or exclusion.

Course Structure:

Class: We will meet together on Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the semester. Attendance is strongly encouraged and will be recorded. As there is no single textbook, the coherence and unifying narrative of the course will come through lectures, discussions and other in-class activities. In other words, if you don’t come to class AND do the readings, you will be lost very quickly.

Precepts: Attendance is required. Precepts will facilitate discussion and/or in-class exercises meant to reinforce key concepts.

Presentations: Each student will be part of a small group that will give two presentations in precept over the course of the term. The topics of the presentations will tie into current themes covered during the class.

Papers: Students will write three short papers (4-5 double-spaced pages) throughout the semester. These short papers ask the students to synthesize the theoretical concepts with empirical material that they collect through reflections, observations or interviews. Due dates for these, as well as detailed prompts, will be posted on the course website.

Exams: There will be a take-home final exam to be completed after classes are over.

Journal/Scrapbook: Finally, students will work on a journal/scrapbook throughout the semester which further sensitizes them to the class-relevant discourses that surround them.

Grading: The breakdown of the course components is:

1. Short Papers	30%
2. Presentations	15%
3. Take-Home Final Exam	20%
4. Journal/Scrapbook	25%
5. Class participation	10%

Required Materials: None. All course reading will be uploaded on Canvas.

And now, the fine print:

1. This course will mess with your mind and may damage your social life.

If I do my job and you work hard in this course, you will acquire certain kind of “sixth sense.” But instead of seeing dead people you will see social class. Everywhere. The scales will have fallen from your eyes, and the things you used to simply enjoy, like going to a restaurant or a clothing store, will now betray their class implications to you. This will probably start to annoy your friends and family, because you will no longer be able to watch a TV show or go to the movies without saying something like, “This sitcom betrays a hopelessly upper-proletarian habitus,” or “That movie EXACTLY illustrates DeMott’s notion of the ‘upending’ narrative!” Just imagine how popular these kinds of statements will make you around the residence hall, the locker room, or the eating club.

2. This course will get personal.

That’s right, I’m talking to *you*. You probably don’t like to think about it, but you possess not only a race and a gender, you also occupy a particular social class location and trajectory. If this thought makes you uncomfortable, then you’d better find another course right now. Here we will discuss social class openly and in mixed company (Princeton is more class-diverse than one might suspect, and becoming more so all the time). This means you may become embarrassed when reflecting upon the décor of your grandmother’s house or flush at the thought of where your family goes for vacation. But don’t worry—the culture of all social classes is equally noble/ridiculous if viewed objectively, and the ability to do just that is one of the goals of the class.



Class Meetings, Readings and Assignments

Part I: Basic Concepts. What is social class? Are there distinct social classes? What is the difference between a gradational versus a relational approach to class? How does “status” relate to class? How do we understand culture? Here we get an introduction to the tricky concept of “habitus,” which will underlie much of our subsequent discussions of class cultures.		
Date	Topic	Readings
09-04	Introduction to the Course	
09-09	1. Social Class and Status	Dennis Gilbert, “Social Class in America,” from <i>The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality</i> .
09-11	2. Culture and Habitus	Matt Wray, “Introduction,” from <i>Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader</i> . David Swartz, “The Sociology of Habit: The Perspective of Pierre Bourdieu.”
Part II: Class Cultures. Do classes have distinct cultures? Here we examine the peculiar cultural attributes and lifestyles which belong to each social class. Particular attention will be paid to the transition to adulthood within each class, as this is often the crucial life stage in which cultural background intersects with class trajectories. Beginning with the upper classes (Old and New Money), and the educated elite, we then look at the middle classes and the interesting case of the Black middle and upper-middle class, in which the race/class issues regarding culture are brought to the fore. Finally, we look at the working class and the experience of poverty in America.		
Date	Topic	Readings
09-16	3. The Upper Class: Old Money	Tad Friend, “Tomatoes,” from <i>Cheerful Money: Me, My Family and the Last Days of Wasp Splendor</i> . Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr. “The Composition of Old Money,” from <i>Old Money: The Mythology of America’s Upper Classes</i> .
09-18	4. The Upper Class: New Money	Rosita Armytage, “Old Money, New Money,” from <i>Big Capital, the Micropolitics of Wealth in Pakistan</i> . Rachel Sherman, “Parenting Privilege,” from <i>Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence</i> .
09-22	First Paper Due at 11:59 PM	
09-23	5. The “New” Class	David Brooks, “The Rise of the Educated Class,” from <i>Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There</i> . Charles Murray, “Our Kind of People,” from <i>Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960-2010</i> .
09-25	6. The American Middle Class	Annette Lareau, “The Hectic Pace of Concerted Cultivation: Garrett Tallinger,” from <i>Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life</i> .

		Marc Egnal, "Anxious Conformists 1941-1960," from <i>A Mirror for History: How Novels and Art Reflect the Evolution of Middle-Class America</i> .
09-30	7. Middle Class in Different Contexts	Karyn Lacy, "Race and Class-Based Identities: Strategic Assimilation in Middle-Class Suburbia," from <i>Blue Chip Black: Race, Class and Status in the New Black Middle Class</i> . Jennifer D. Ortengren, "Arranging Marriage, Negotiating Dharma," from <i>Middle-Class Dharma</i> .
10-02	8. The Working Class	Jack Metzgar, "There is a Genuine Working-Class Culture," from <i>Bridging the Divide: Working-Class Culture in a Middle-Class Society</i> . Andrew J. Cherlin, "The Would-Be Working Class Today," from <i>Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America</i>
10-07	9. The Rural Lower Class	Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty." Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer, "A World Apart," from <i>\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i> .
10-09	10. The Urban Lower Class	Stefanie DeLuca, Susan Clampet-Lundquist and Kathryn Edin. "Following My Passion: How Identity Projects Help Youth Beat the Street and Stay on Track," from <i>Coming of Age in the Other America</i> .
☺ FALL BREAK ☺		
<p>Part III: Culture and Class in Action. In Part II we investigated each social class individually. In this section, we see what happens when the system is set in motion. The first issue we tackle is social mobility and its flipside, social reproduction. What role do class cultures play in the reproduction of class from one generation to the next? Schooling is one critical site where class can constrain or enable mobility. Anthony Jack has studied low-income and first-gen students attending elite colleges and the dynamics that ensue. Second, Armstrong and Hamilton dive into how college pathways at non-elite schools often thwart upward mobility for poor and working-class students. Lauren Rivera's work on how college graduates are sorted into jobs in finance firms and law school is followed by some more personal experiences and a development of "class consciousness." We then look at Jessie Streib's research on working through class issues in romantic relationships. Finally, my own work on the sorting of religious affiliations shows how class segregates worship experiences and leads to the hardening of what Bourdieu calls "class racism."</p>		
10-21	11. Insiders/Outsiders in Elite Colleges	Anthony Jack, "Come with Me to Italy!" from <i>The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges are Failing Disadvantaged Students</i> .
10-23	12. Mobility Thwarted at Indiana University	Elizabeth A. Armstrong, "Strivers, Creaming, and the Blocked Mobility Pathway," from <i>Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality</i> .
10-27	Second Paper due by 11:59 PM	

10-28	13. Cultural Capital and Elite Reproduction	Lauren A. Rivera, "Beginning the Interview: Finding a Fit," and "Talking It Out: Deliberating Merit" from <i>Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs</i> .
10-30	14. Mobility and Class Consciousness	Selections from <i>Class Lives: Stories from across Our Economic Divide</i> .
11-04	15. Class Backgrounds and Intimate Relationships	Jessi Streib, "Accounts of Crossing the Class Divide," and "Money," from <i>The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages</i> .
11-06	16. Class Sorting in Congregations	Timothy J. Nelson, "At Ease with Our Own Kind," from McCloud and Mirola, <i>Religion and Class in America: Culture, History, and Politics</i> .
Part IV: Popular Culture, Mass Media and Social Class. High culture, low culture and everything in between—what are the class dynamics inherent in the consumption of art, music, literature, fashion and other components of the aesthetic life? How does something as innocent as taste in music work to reproduce the class structure? How do media create "misrecognitions" of all but the dominant middle class in American society? We look at some of the same dynamics playing out in China and Korea, and end by asking if popular culture act as a catalyst for resistance to class domination.		
Date	Topic	Readings
11-11	Media and the Myth of Classlessness	Benjamin DeMott, <i>The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can't Think Straight about Class</i> . chs. 3-5
11-13	Critical Theory	David Held, <i>Introduction to Critical Theory</i> , ch. 3
11-18	Class and Cultural Consumption 1	Herbert Gans, <i>Popular Culture & High Culture</i> , New Introduction and chapter 2
		David Brooks, "Consumption" pp.54-61, 84-102 in <i>Bobos in Paradise</i>
11-20	Class and Cultural Consumption 2	Douglas Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?"
		Richard Peterson, "The Rise and Fall of Highbrow Snobbery as a Status Marker."
11-24	Third Paper Due at 11:59 PM	
11-25	Class and Cultural Consumption in East Asia	John Osburg, "From Fruit Plates to License Plates: Consumption, Status, and Recognition Among Chengdu's Elite," from <i>Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality among China's New Rich</i> .
		Hagen Koo, "Consumption and Class Distinction," from <i>Privilege and Anxiety: The Korean Middle Class in the Global Era</i> .
12-02	Popular Culture and Class Consciousness	Dick Hebdige, <i>Subculture: The Meaning of Style</i> , chapters 4-6
12-04	Course Summary	Take-home exam is distributed