

SOCI 151: Introductory Sociology
Topic: Privilege, Power, and Social Mobility
Syllabus for Spring 2024

Professor Catherine Tan
(She/Her/Hers)

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Class meeting:
Location - TBD
Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30am to 11:45am

Office Hours:
Blodgett 304D
Tuesdays and Thursdays between 3:00pm-4:00pm
*And by appointment!

Course Description

The objective of this course is to help students cultivate their sociological imagination, shifting their analytical perspective from individuals to societies, from “biographies” to “histories.” This course pairs classical and contemporary theory to explore issues of privilege, power, and social mobility. How is privilege reproduced? How is poverty an inter-generational trap? How does belief in meritocracy obfuscate structural inequalities? How are social advantages and disadvantages embodied? –and how do they shape everyday choices and constraints? Throughout this course, students will be bringing sociological theory and current issues into conversation.

Pandemic Policies

The COVID-19 pandemic has created multiple uncertainties, which demands flexibility and patience from faculty, students, and staff. By unanimous agreement of the Sociology Department, instructors may require students wear masks in classrooms, or may shift their course to either a hybrid or fully remote format, as conditions related to the pandemic, the college, and our learning change. At any time, if you ever have any safety concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me!

Course Structure and Assignments

Required Books

If for any reason you are not able to access these books, please contact me.

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2017. *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of for-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*: The New Press.

Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*: Princeton University Press.

Gowayed, Heba. 2022. *Refuge: How the State Shapes Human Potential*: Princeton University Press.

Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2019. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*: Harvard University Press.

Khan, Shamus Rahman. 2010. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Vol. 65: Princeton University Press.

Silva, Jennifer M. 2013. *Coming up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*: Oxford University Press.

Office Hours

“Office hours” are times reserved outside of our usual class meetings for students to discuss and/or ask questions about the course materials and concepts with me 1:1. While you are not *required* to attend office hours, I strongly encourage students to see me *at least twice* during the semester even if you do not have a specific question (I will start the conversation. It will not be awkward, I promise). You may also make an appointment to meet with me outside of the set hours.

Assignments and Points

Class Participation*	25
Memos One	25
Memo Two	25
Memo Three	25
Memo Four	25
Total	125

*Class participation includes engaging in discussions, asking questions, and attending classes.

Memos

Instead of a midterm and final, I will have four memos due throughout the semester. Each memo will be 1.5 to 2.5 pages (roughly, 975 to 1625 words) following formatting expectations (see below). Memos will ask students to reflect on the themes/concepts of the previous weeks, engage with the readings, offer their analysis, and demonstrate their understanding of the materials. Because memos are short, students are expected to write efficiently AND effectively—these are important skills to learn and practice.

Formatting

Please give yourself enough time to make sure that your assignments are in compliance with the formatting expectations before turning in your work. When in doubt, use THIS syllabus as a model. If you have trouble making this format changes on your word processing program, please consult with the college tech services.

- Font: Times New Roman
- Size: 11
- Margins: 1-inch all around
- Left alignment
- Single-spaced
- Consistent in-text references and bibliography (I prefer ASA or Harvard citation styles)
- Upload at .docx or .doc (no pdfs please)

Engagement

Maintaining an academic, respectful, and honest classroom environment is a collective effort. I am relying on everyone to please:

- Be respectful of others' ideas and arguments. This means providing space for fruitful debate.
- Allow speakers to complete their comments/questions before sharing your own thoughts. You do not have to raise your hand to speak, but please do not interrupt each other.
- Arrive to class on time.
- Complete and submit your assignments on the days they are due.
- You are allowed to use your laptop/tablets for taking notes.
- Improper use of laptops and cellphones will impact your participation grade.

Email Policy

You may email me any time/day, but please do not expect an immediate response. I try to respond to emails within 24 hours. I only reply to emails Monday-Friday (so, I might not respond to emails received on Friday until the next Monday). In your email subject line, include the name of the course (i.e., SOC1 151). In the body of your email, please use a proper address (e.g., Dear Prof. Tan) and signature.

College Resources & Policies
Title IX Reporting Responsibility and Resources

Vassar College is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. Vassar College has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware all Vassar faculty members are “responsible employees,” which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone privately, you can contact any of the following on-campus resources:

- Counseling Service (counselingservice.vassar.edu, 845-437-5700)
- Health Service (healthservice.vassar.edu, 845-437-5800)
- Charlotte Strauss-Swanson, SAVP (Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention) director (savp.vassar.edu, 845-437-7863)
- SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) advocate, available 24/7 by calling the CRC at 845-437-7333

The SAVP website and the Title IX section of the EOAA website (eoaa.vassar.edu/title-ix/) have more information, as well as links to both on- and off-campus resources.”

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is a very serious matter (cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, etc.) and will be dealt with accordingly. Students should expect a failing grade for the assignment/exam. The incident will also be reported to the Department Chair and the Dean. For more information on academic honesty, please refer to this link: <https://deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/college-regulations/j/>

Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (AEO). Students in need of disability (ADA/504) accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

Textbook Accessibility and Affordability

Vassar students often report challenges accessing and affording required course materials. The College is committed to ensuring that every student can participate fully in the curriculum, regardless of financial need. The [Movement for Affordable Textbooks \(MAT\)](#) website highlights a variety of resources – financial, library, departmental, and peer-to-peer – that can help [students](#) navigate the costs of textbooks and other materials.

Course Schedule

This schedule indicates the themes and readings of each week and any assignments due. This schedule is tentative and may change to reflect our progress as a class.

Each week’s assigned readings must be completed *before* class. Please be prepared to discuss the assigned readings in class/online.

For each day, read in the order listed.

*NOTE: Readings may change (except for the books)

*ANOTHER NOTE: Keep in mind the context. Many of the “classic” readings in sociology are old. Written in another era, some of these texts will be rather sexist, racist, homophobic, etc. We can be critical and still engage with their intellectual contributions to the field.

Week One Introduction

Jan 18 *Thursday:*
Review syllabus.

Week Two Sociological Imagination

Jan 23 & 25 *Tuesday:*
Mills, C. W. 1959. “The promise.” *The sociological imagination*, Oxford University Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill and Sirma Bilge. 2020. “What is intersectionality?”
Intersectionality: John Wiley & Sons.

Thursday:

Durkheim, Emile. "What is a social fact?" *The Rules of Sociological Method*.

Week Three Colonialism and racism

Jan 30 & Feb 1

Tuesday:

Du Bois, W.E.B. 1989. "Of our spiritual strivings." *The souls of black folk [1903]*.

Fanon, Frantz. 2008. "The black man and language." *Black skin, white masks [1952]*, Grove press.

Thursday:

Nakano Glenn, Evelyn. 2015. "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(1):52-72. doi: 10.1177/2332649214560440.

Kashyap, Monika Batra. 2020. "US Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and the Racially Disparate Impacts of COVID-19." *Calif. L. Rev. Online* 11:517.

[Professor Tan hands out Memo One Prompt; covers week 2 to 4]

Week Four Ethnic identity in America

Feb 6 & 8

Tuesday:

Waters, Mary C. 1990. "The Cost of a Costless Community." *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*: Univ of California Press.

Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. 2015. "Assimilation." Pp. 14-17 in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, edited by C. J. Schlund-Vials, L. T. Võ and K. S. Wong: NYU Press.

Ramírez, Catherine S. 2017. "Assimilation." Pp. 14-18 in *Keywords for Latina/O Studies*, edited by D. R. Vargas, N. R. Mirabal and L. La Fountain-Stokes: NYU Press.

Thursday:

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2002. "The Linguistics of Color-Blind Racism: How to Talk Nasty About Blacks without Sounding "Racist"." *Critical Sociology* 28(1-2):41-64.

Podcast: *Factually! With Adam Conover* (featuring Ruha Benjamin). 2020. <https://omny.fm/shows/factually-with-adam-conover/technology-and-race-with-ruha-benjamin>

Week Five Marx and Weber

Feb 13 & 15

Tuesday:

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "Communist Manifesto." (Page 14-34 in the pdf)

Thursday:

Weber, Max. "Class, status, and party."

Weber, Max. "Domination and stratification."

DUE: Memo 1 by 11:59pm Feb 15th on Moodle
Covers weeks 2 to 4

Week Six **Socioeconomic inequality: precariousness**

Feb 20 & 22

Tuesday:

Desmond, Matthew. 2012. "Eviction and the Reproduction of Urban Poverty." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(1):88-133.

Thursday:

(You will be assigned to one of these)

Randles, Jennifer. 2020. "'Willing to Do Anything for My Kids': Inventive Mothering, Diapers, and the Inequalities of Carework." *American Sociological Review*.

OR

Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review*.

OR

Brantley, Mia. 2023. "Can't Just Send Our Children Out: Intensive Motherwork and Experiences of Black Motherhood." *Social Problems*.

Week Seven **Socioeconomic inequality: uncertain futures**

**Feb 27 &
Feb 29**

Tuesday:

Silva, Jennifer M. 2013. *Coming up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*: Oxford University Press. [Chapters 1 and 2]

Thursday: LEAP DAY!!!

Silva, Jennifer M. 2013. *Coming up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*: Oxford University Press. [Chapters 3 and 4]

[Professor Tan (1) returns Memo One and (2) hands out Memo Two Prompt covering weeks 5 to 8 and (3) Midsemester questionnaire]

Week -- **SPRING BREAK**

March 1-17

Week Eight **Socioeconomic inequality: social (im)mobility**

March 19 & 21

Tuesday:

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2017. *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of for-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*: The New Press. [Introduction, Chapter 1 and 4]

Podcast: *The Ezra Klein Show* (featuring Louise Seamster who graduated from Vassar) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/02/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-louise-seamster.html>

WEDNESDAY TALK

Hajar Yazdiha presents at Vassar at 5pm; location TBD

Thursday:

Gowayed, Heba. 2022. *Refuge: How the State Shapes Human Potential*: Princeton University Press. (Chapters TBD)

Week Nine

Other forms capital

March 26 & 28

Tuesday:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241–58 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Mull, Amanda. 2020. "The New Trophies of Domesticity" [Online]. *The Atlantic*. Available: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/01/kitchenaid-lecreuset-peak-domesticity/605716/>

Sugar, R. 2019. "'Good taste' is all about class anxiety" [Online]. *Vox*. Available: <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/9/26/20873938/good-taste-class-anxiety-s-margot-finn>

WEDNESDAY TALK

Heba Gowayed presents at Vassar at 5pm; location TBD

Thursday:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. "Structures, Habitus, Practices." *The logic of practice*: 52-65.

[Professor Tan hands out Memo Three Prompt]

**DUE: Memo 2 by 11:59pm March 28th on Moodle
[Covers weeks 5-8]**

Week Ten

Presentation of Self

April 2 & 4

Tuesday:

FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Loeb Art Center

Goffman, Erving. "Performances." 1978. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*: Harmondsworth London.

Thursday:

Goffman, Erving. "The Art of Impression Management." 1978. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*: Harmondsworth London.

Week Eleven **1%**

April 9 & 11

Tuesday:

Mills, C.W. 1956. "Higher Circles." *The Power Elite*.

Thursday:

Jones, James R. 2024. *The Last Plantation: Racism in the Halls of Congress*.

Princeton University Press. [Chapters One and TBD]

[Professor Tan returns Memo Two]

DUE: Memo 3 by 11:59pm April 11th on Moodle
[Covers weeks 9 and 10]

Week Twelve **The aspirational class**

April 16 & 18

*Tuesday: *I AM AWAY AT A CONFERENCE**

Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*: Princeton University Press. [Chapters 1 and 2]

Thursday:

Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*: Princeton University Press. [Chapters 3 and 5]

The Norwegian Coat:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/25/fashion/norwegian-wool-coats.html>

[Professor Tan hands out Memo Four Prompt; covers weeks 11 to 14]

Week Thirteen **Becoming elite**

April 23 & 25

Tuesday:

Khan, Shamus Rahman. 2010. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Vol. 65: Princeton University Press. [Introduction and Chapter 1]

Wednesday night extra:

Watch *Class Divide* documentary in Rocky 300 at 7pm.

Thursday:

Khan, Shamus Rahman. 2010. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Vol. 65: Princeton University Press. [Chapter 3]

Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2019. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*: Harvard University Press. [Introduction]

Week Fourteen Becoming elite

April 30

Tuesday:

Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2019. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*: Harvard University Press. [Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Conclusion]

[Professor Tan returns Memo 3]

**DUE: Memo 4 by 11:59pm May 3rd (Friday) on Moodle
[Covers weeks 11 to 14]**