

## **Pamela Sheff: Class At Work In America**

Frontiers 100.25 -Fall 2005

A Question of Teeth: Class at Work in America

Syllabus

[Pamela H. Sheff](#), Professor

PLEASE READ THIS SYLLABUS WITH CARE AND REQUEST CLARIFICATION OF REQUIREMENTS OR POLICIES THAT ARE UNCLEAR TO YOU. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO MEET ALL DEADLINES AND COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS NOTED HERE, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT ANNOUNCED IN CLASS.

### **Required Texts:**

Shipler, David K. The Working Poor: Invisible in America. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

Zweig, Michael. The Working Class Majority. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Zweig, Michael. What's Class Got to Do With It?. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005.

### **Course Approach and Objectives**

What does the appearance of our teeth say about us to others? What would you think if your doctor, your professor or your Senator had obviously broken or missing teeth? How would that differ from your response to missing teeth in your letter carrier or the cashier at the supermarket? The very idea of social class discomfits most Americans: we sense our own place and that of others in the complex web of social strata that make up our society, but we shrink from talking about class. It is, in fact, part of the American myth to deny that social class in any way limits one's individual destiny, and yet, class is the hidden filter that colors and shapes virtually all of our responses to the world around us. In this course, we will explore together the way our own class filters work by reading and responding to concepts in social theory, contemporary and historical social documents, literature, and the media.

This class is a seminar; while the technical definition of a seminar refers to a group of advanced students all doing and sharing their original research under the direction of a professor, we will be working under the more informal definition: a small class built on discussion and collaboration. In essence, we will be teaching each other. In practice, that means you must take responsibility for doing the kind of thoughtful reading, thinking and writing that will make this class truly work; in addition to coming to class each day prepared to discuss the readings, ready to talk and write about your ideas, I will ask you all to play a leadership role in the

classroom. As often as possible, our discussions will be student-led for at least part of the class time.

I want to alert you in advance that some weeks, particularly weeks 2, 4 & 9, have substantial reading assignments. To alleviate the load, I suggest that you read ahead whenever possible. I believe that the essays are compelling and highly readable (that may be my bias, and I am interested in your reactions), and I have tried to structure the syllabus so that you have breaks to think and digest the material.

Policies and Procedures

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. You can neither benefit from nor contribute to a seminar if you are not present.

**Grading:** There will be no exams or quizzes in this course. Instead, we will have 3 short papers, graded homework questions and the class presentations, which you may choose to do individually or in a small group. I grade holistically. I am interested in what you have to say as well as the way you say it. You may always talk with me or Lindsey about your work. I am interested in your continued improvement as a thinker, writer and communicator. **Effort, determination and intellectual growth definitely count!**

Your grade for the semester will be based on your written work as well as your participation in class discussion and your group projects. I will calculate the grades for the course **roughly** using the following weights:

Class discussion: 20 %

Each short paper: 15 %

Class presentations: 20%

Homework/other assignments: 15%

**Due Dates & Late Papers:** All papers and assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Absences do not excuse you from paper due dates. If you are ill, a classmate may turn in your paper. If this is not possible, call me no later than the due date to make other arrangements. **Do not email your paper to me unless I have authorized you to do so.**

- **Papers that are not double-spaced, stapled or paper clipped together** will be returned to you. Such papers are due the next class period and may be penalized as late papers.

**ALL MATERIAL TURNED IN FOR A GRADE, INCLUDING HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS, MUST BE WORD PROCESSED.**

**Class Schedule**

**All reading must be completed prior to the class for which it is assigned. Please bring with you to class each Monday a typed page containing**

**4 thoughtful questions prompted by the readings. We will use them in discussion, and you will turn them in.**

WEEK ONE: Introduction & Overview: What is class?

Reading: *The Working Poor*, pp. 1 - 12; *The Working Class Majority*, pp 1 - 37

We will also discuss how to read actively and how to prepare to lead a class discussion.

WEEK TWO: September 7: Class structure in the United States

Reading: *The Working Class Majority*: pp. 39 - 59; *The Working Poor*, pp. 13 - 76 & 174 - 201

WEEK THREE: Sept 12 - 14: Why do we care about class?

Reading: *The Working Class Majority*: pp. 61 - 75; *The Working Poor*, pp. 121 - 173

WEEK FOUR: Sept. 19 - 22: Race, gender and class

Reading: *What's Class Got To Do With It?:* pp. 19 - 60; *The Working Poor*, pp. 201 - 253

WEEK FIVE: Sept. 26 - 28

1<sup>st</sup> paper due Sept. 26.

In class activity: watching *People Like Us* (video)

WEEK SIX: Oct 3 - 5: Class trends in the United States today

Reading: New York Times series on class (hand out)

WEEK SIX: Oct 10 - 12: Class trends, cont.

Reading: New York Times series, cont.; Wall Street Journal series (hand out)

WEEK SEVEN: Oct 17 - 19: Class trends, cont.

Wall Street Journal series, cont; and LA Times series (hand out); *The Working Class Majority*: pp. 115 - 139

WEEK Eight: Oct. 24 - 26

2<sup>nd</sup> paper due Oct. 26; Draft due in class on Oct. 24 (2 copies)

In class activity Oct. 24: peer review of papers

In class activity Oct. 26: *People Like Us* (video), cont.

WEEK NINE: Oct. 31 - Nov. 2: Class and Values

Reading: *The Working Class Majority*: pp. 77 - 113; *The Working Poor*, pp. 13 - 38 & 255 - 285

WEEK TEN : Nov. 7 - 9: : Class and Education

Reading: *What's Class Got To Do With It?:* pp. 161 - 183;

WEEK ELEVEN: Nov. 14 - 16: Class and Globalization

Reading: *What's Class Got To Do With It?:* pp. 61 - 93; *The Working Poor*, pp. 77 - 120

WEEK TWELVE: Nov. 21 Class and Globalization, cont.  
Reading: *The Working Class Majority*, pp. 141 - 151

WEEK THIRTEEN: Nov. 28 - 30: Class strategies  
Reading: *What's Class Got To Do With It?:* pp. 94 - 139

WEEK FOURTEEN, Dec. 5 - Dec. 7. Strategies, cont.  
Reading: *The Working Poor*: pp. 285 - 300  
3<sup>rd</sup> paper due Dec. 7