 Course objectives: This course addresses the organizational, institutional and public policy foundations of stratification and racial inequality in the United States. Focusing primarily on the situations of African Americans during the twentieth century, the course develops three basic arguments. First, racial hierarchies and the fates or life chances of individuals and groups are fundamentally determined by the socio-economic contexts of action, public policy and the social structure of markets. For sociologists, individuals and groups are everywhere and always embedded in socio-economic systems that profoundly shape their fates both by channeling, filtering and sorting actors in various ways, and by shaping the payoffs to individual characteristics, efforts and investments. Understanding inequality and racial stratification thus means going beyond a focus on attitudes, personal prejudice and the characteristics of individuals to consider social contexts and their characteristics in some detail.

Second, these contexts or systems are themselves best understood in terms of the organizational and institutional structures identified by economic sociologists—that is, in terms of the rise and decline of corporations, changes in industrial relations, the dynamics of networks and social capital, the ways that private associations and states constitute markets, and the relationship between law, organizations and public policy. These “ordering principles” or social structures of economic life are the sites where life chances, inequalities, and opportunities are constructed, reproduced and transformed.

Third, effective social change means going beyond politics of redistribution, policies that pursue equality via legal or bureaucratic enforcement, and programs that target attitudes or the characteristics of individuals to address the organizational, institutional and public policy bases of racial inequality and stratification. Indeed, social structural analyses and the historical record suggest that policies of redistribution, enforcement and education are likely to fail unless they are coupled with programs of economic development, institution-building and community self-organization that harness existing local arrangements and that confront how law, institutions and public policy have created inequality in markets, wealth and economic opportunity.

The objectives of this course are to: 1) understand how public policy and the institutional and organizational structure of economic life shape inequality and racial stratification in the United States; and 2) build on these analyses to assess and develop programs, policies and prospects for change.

Course outline: The course pursues this agenda in three parts. Part one sets the stage by addressing two debates over racial stratification in the contemporary period. We first revisit debates over the significance of race and ethnicity in a post Civil Rights and multiracial era, considering claims about assimilation and boundary blurring alongside claims about the resurgence of racial caste. We then consider debates over how well individual characteristics and differences explain inequality and racial stratification. Here we engage the “Bell Curve” controversy, using debates over IQ to develop tools for
conceptualizing how social structures, institutions and public policies shape not just the fates of individuals and groups, but also the relative impact of individual characteristics on stratification outcomes.

Part two develops the contextual approach by working systematically through the institutional, organizational and public policy foundations of inequality and racial stratification in the United States. Here, we reject the neo-classical vision of markets as aggregates of autonomous rational actors, arguing instead that markets and economic activity are socially structured and highly organized: They are arenas or practices that are constituted through social networks, corporate hierarchies, private associations, and state bureaucracies, as well as through impersonal system of exchange. And for sociologists, economic institutions like states or corporate hierarchies are key sites where inequalities and identities are constructed, reproduced and transformed. With this in mind, we begin with the rise and fall of the mass production corporation, and with the role that state and private associations play in organizing housing markets, neighborhoods and social space. We then turn see how these pivotal institutions shape – and differentially promote actors’ capacities to develop three different forms of capital – physical, human and social. We address this first by analyzing wealth, schooling and employment networks, and the destruction of these key resources among certain social groups, and second, by exploring how actors respond to impoverishment and economic devastation by trying to reconstruct associations, social networks and political authority within their communities.

Part three tackles the thorny problem of social change. Here, we analyze the fates of the welfare state and legal bans against discrimination, arguably the two most important efforts to use the power of the law and the state to solve problems of inequality, impoverishment and race in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. We address the relationship between law, public policy and economic organization, consider the limits of policies that rely on redistribution or legal-bureaucratic enforcement, and review other kinds of programs and proposals. Using recent advances in economic sociology, we will pay special attention to: 1) assessing the extent to which programs and proposals address or work with the institutional, organizational or public policy dimensions of stratification and racial inequality, and 2) enhancing existing efforts with programs that promote local self-organization, institution-building and “bottom-up” processes of economic and policy development.

Course prerequisite: Sociology 211, Introduction to Sociology, is required for this course. This course assumes a background in classical sociological theory and its modern applications; a basic introduction to social stratification and political sociology; and familiarity with some elementary analytical concepts and techniques, including correlation, p-values, and the logic of hypothesis testing. It also assumes familiarity with specific readings from the introductory class, as signified in list of readings that follows.

Readings and writing assignments: This is a reading and discussion based course whose success hinges critically on students’ preparation and active participation. The reading is varied, ranging from historical and ethnographic materials to multi-variate statistical analyses, and often difficult, requiring a collective “piecing-together” of the argument, evidence and method within the conference. It is also cumulative in character. Thus, falling behind in the reading or failing to prepare for conference is not an option.

To focus and deepen engagement with the course materials, students will conduct a semester long project, involving a series of 4 exercises and a final paper, in which they will analyze a policy or program designed to address the situations and life chances of African Americans in the United States. Students can chose among a wide variety of efforts. They can analyze a federal, state or local program, a legislative reform, a
community organizing effort, or a local development project. However, students must select a program that falls in one of three policy areas: economic development, job or business creation; housing and neighborhood revitalization; or education and skill formation. In addition, the projects must focus from the outset on a specific policy, program or proposal. Furthermore, all projects must critically and systematically assess the viability, strengths and limits of the program in light of the concepts and material developed in class. That is, projects will address the extent to which the policy or program confronts the organizational, institutional and public policy bases of racial stratification. They will consider whether the policy or program involves institutional or organizational reform, as opposed to focusing on attitudes, culture or the characteristics of individuals. And they will use the assessment to outline a proposal for improving the efficacy of the policy, program or effort.

The schedule for the exercises and the final paper appear below.

The following books are required and can be purchased from the Reed College Bookstore. These books are also available on 2-hour reserve at the Reed College library, and will be supplemented with a small packet of articles and chapters on the moodle.


Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth*. 2nd ed

Routledge: New York


READING ASSIGNMENTS

PART 1
POSE THE PROBLEM: TWO DEBATES

Week 1: (January 28, 30)

_The declining significance of race in an era of multiculturalism?_


Week 2: (February 4, 6)

_Deleing significance?_

Introduction, and chapters 1, 3 and 5

_Thinking structurally: the problem of inequality_

Chapters 1, 4-6.

Week 3: (February 11 evening class, 13)

_Thinking structurally: Addressing inequality--states, markets and beyond_


PART II
THE CONTEXTUAL BASES OF RACIAL INEQUALITY:
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Week 4: (February 18, 20)

*Corporation and the Decline of Mass Production*

Review: Michael Burawoy, “The Rise of an Internal Labor Market” and “Consolidating and Internal State,” from *Manufacturing Consent*


**First policy memo**: due Friday, February 21

Week 5: (February 25, 27)

*States, Associations and the Markets for Housing*


Week 6: (March 4, 6)

*States, Neighborhoods and Economic Capital*


Week 7: (March 11, 13)

*States, Neighborhoods and Human Capital*


**Second policy memo due**: Friday, March 14

Spring Break

Week 8: (March 25, 27)

*Networks, Employment and Social Capital*

Week 9: (April 1, 3)

*Reconstituting networks, associations and quasi-states*


PART III:

**LAW, ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: THE WELFARE STATE AND BEYOND?**

Week 10: (April 8, 10)

*Redistribution and the welfare state*


Reread: Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier. “The Third Route: Government Non-Profit Collaboration in Germany and the US

**Third policy memo due:** Wednesday April 9

Week 11: (April 15, 17)

*Civil rights and anti-discrimination law*


Week 12: (April 22, 24)

*Beyond redistribution and bureaucratic enforcement? Policy proposals*


Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, “Getting Along: Renewing America’s Commitment to Racial Justice,” chapter 7 and 9 in *Black Wealth, White Wealth*


**Paper outline due:** To class members, Monday, April 28

**Week 13:** (April 30 rescheduled evening class, May 1)

*Class presentations*

No readings beyond paper outlines

********** **FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, MAY 9 AT NOON** **********