

CHC/LAT 230

Spaces of Inequalities and Alternative Futures

Course Description:

The critical interface between social theory and social policy is explored, with analytical attention paid to the interrogation of inequalities, the state, and economy. The 'spatial turn', with its specification of space and place, as well as, categories of political economy will provide analytical lens to empirical inquiry and theoretical debates. Topics such as, class inequality, work, poverty, multicultural citizenship, and residential segregation will be addressed within a comparative and relational framework.

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When it comes to inequality, America has no equal. The surge in inequality over the past two decades has been reported in the popular media, in such mainstream venues as the Economist and Business Week, and debated in fir and Alan Greenspan, the head of the Federal Reserve has expressed concern about the 'social costs' of growing inequality. In a speech in 2004, Greenspan said, "We need to pursue equality of opportunity to ensure that our economic system . . . is perceived as just in its distribution of rewards.

Drawing upon social theory, urban planning, cultural studies, and human geography, the course explores how social policy issues are constructed and contested in contemporary society. Social policy embraces a wide range of activities, from education and housing policies to labor and poverty. In all these areas, social policies are hotly contested with regard to the role of the state and the kind of policies it should pursue. One of the guiding themes throughout this course will be how the state both reflects and generates

contradictions in ways that might present opportunities to advance a program of real democratic change and not be merely some 'utopian' project.

A critical social policy--what does it mean, how is it developed and implemented, and what impact does it have on the Latino population and other racialized groups in the United States? What are the political and ideological forces driving policy today? And what forces are emerging that will likely influence policy in the coming decade? Questions regarding the limits and possibilities for democratic renewal in a market-driven society will be explored, as well as, the role of the state in generating and reducing inequalities. This means examining the spaces of capitalism and the state as objects of social conflict. Where the politics and democratic struggles of marginalized groups and anti-inequality social movements are shaped, and in turn, shape the struggles themselves. Gender-specific assumptions underpinning concepts and discourses of contemporary social policy debates will be assessed, and alternatives explored. This will highlight important social policy and theoretical debates about the issue of human agency or action within the context of broader social processes and structures, which can limit or enhance opportunities. The course will conclude with an intellectual project of speculating about the future.

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to demonstrate ability to:

- Locate social theory in its socio-political context, and critically appraise their social policy relevance.
- Identify the main intellectual contexts of policy research in their area of interest.
- Understand and critically engage with key conceptual and social policy debates germane to inequalities and other social divisions.

- Understand the social spaces of research: That is, methods don't just describe social realities, but also help to create them. To recognize that many 'realities' are vague and ephemeral.
- Understand the role of the researcher in social policy research.
- Use critical methods for analyzing the city, its social space and spatial practices.
- Articulate ideas in discussion and in writing, and foster reflective thinking and research.
- Link theoretical frameworks with 'empirical' inquiry, and recognize the limits of expecting outcomes to have clarity and precision.
- Engage with and incorporate as appropriate democratic and social justice-driven social policy research.
- Assess arguments and evaluate evidence

Note on Readings Assignments:

Students are expected to do the reading thoroughly before the class meeting for which it is assigned, and to participate actively in class meetings. Some of the readings are very demanding, and the amount of reading in some weeks is quite substantial, so be sure to leave enough time. Emphasis is on mastering, responding critically and creatively to, and integrating the material, and, especially, extracting from the readings ideas or approaches that are useful to you in your own work. Try to extract something of value from each assigned reading, even as you evaluate it critical.

Requirements:

- Mid-term (25%)
- Book Review (25%)
- Final Paper (50%)

Required Texts:

- Alperovitz Gar, *America Beyond Capitalism* (New York: Wiley, 2005)
- Massey Doreen, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005)

- Arreola Daniel , *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places* (Austin: UT Press, 2004)
- Dohan Daniel, *The Price of Poverty* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2004)

Course Outline:

- Week 1            Inequalities in the Age of Utopias: An Introduction
- Week 2            Social Policy Issues as Constructed and Contested
- Week 3            Latino Immigrant Workers and Spaces of Capitalism
- Week 4            Political Economy of Inequalities
- Week 5            Class, Class Relations, and Class Formations
- Week 6            Racialized Spaces and Places
- Week 7            Capitalism, the State and Citizenship
- Week 8            Social Movements & Alternative Futures I
- Week 9            Social Movements & Alternative Futures II
- Week 10 Review of Course