egalitarianism n (1905) 1: a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic rights and privileges 2: a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people

elitism n (1947) 1: leadership or rule by an elite 2: the selectivity of the elite; especially: snobbery <elitism in choosing new members> 3: consciousness of being or belonging to an elite

Course overview: In this class, we’ll consider the premise of human equality in light of the differences we see in contemporary America. We will examine statistical (Herrnstein, Phillips) and anecdotal (Frank, Epstein, and Henry) evidence for manifest differences, as well as explanations for these differences grounded in sociology (Shapiro), political economics, psychology, and history. Concepts such as “class,” “elites,” “snobbery,” “stratification,” and “human value” will be considered in depth.

Our treatment will largely focus on three parameters of difference:

We will examine the concept of intelligence – what it is, what it is not, and how it is related to socially valued concepts (e.g., creativity and parenting skill) and cultural constructs such as merit. In addition to intelligence, we’ll briefly consider other forms of psychological inequality.

We will consider wealth and the growing gap between rich and poor as forms of economic inequality. We will come to understand these growing differences, and we will consider whether this is the way it should be in America.

Finally, we will consider moralism, snobbery, and resentment as manifestations of cultural or social inequality. America is a country characterized and divided not just by rich and poor, but also by religion, by region, and by values. Here, the gap is not between rich and poor or smart and dull, but between effete “latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, New York Times-reading” snobs and authentic Folgers-drinking, burger-munching, pick-up driving, Fox-TV-watching Americans. Do these difference matter, and if so, why?

Readings: There are six books for the class. We anticipate assigning significant portions of the three required texts and smaller portions of the three recommended texts. In addition, you will be responsible for the hot-linked articles given on the syllabus below:

Required


May 16 Equality and Inequality: An Introduction

First day of class, in-class reading and discussion:

May 18 Interpretations of IQ and intelligence

Herrnstein, p. 1-50 and 553-567.

May 23 The “cognitive elite” and stratification in America

Herrnstein, p. 51-125.

May 25 Intelligence, social behavior, longevity, and social class

Herrnstein, p. 127-190.

June 1 Policy implications


June 6 Economic stratification in the United States

Herrnstein, p. 509-552
Shapiro, Introduction

**June 8 Theories of stratification and class**

Shapiro, Readings 1-2, 6-7, 12, 17-18

**June 13 Education and class**

Phillips, Chapter 4 and Afterword  
Shapiro, Readings 41-43  

**June 15 Elitism and egalitarianism**

Epstein, Chapt. 1-4  
Henry, Chapt. 1  
Steinhauer, J. NY Times series on Class Matters – Markers of status.

**June 20 Materialism and mobility**

Epstein, Chapt. 10-11  
Henry, Chapt. 6-7  

**June 22 Two Americas**

Henry, Chapt. 8  
Frank, Chapt. 1-2  

**June 27 Group Discussion**

Review all.