

**FYSP 191: Social Justice in the United States
Oberlin College**

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Tues. and Thurs: 3-4:15pm
Room: King 321

Course description: The goal of the course is to introduce students to contemporary issues surrounding social justice in the U.S. Social justice refers, most broadly, to reducing unfair inequalities facing members of a society. We will go beyond the rhetoric surrounding relevant issues and investigate them from the ground-up through texts written by academics and non-academics. We will also challenge the texts with other points of view. In addition, you will have the opportunity to engage in service learning in a social justice organization, to understand the process by those whose job it is to pursue it.. The issues covered are controversial and opinions on the proper actions vary. More important than your actual opinion is the degree to which it is based on the literature and outside experience.

Required Readings:

Ehrenreich, B. 2001. *Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America*.
New York : Metropolitan Books.

Kozol, J. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: children in America's schools*.
New York : Crown Pub

Massey, D. and N. Denton 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pipher, M. 1995. *Reviving Ophelia: saving the selves of adolescent girls*.
New York : Ballantine Books

Other readings on Blackboard or distributed in class.

Office hours: Tuesday, 4:30-5:30; Wednesday, 4:30-5:30. Each student is encouraged to come by my office hours at least once during the semester. The point of office hours is to go over topics discussed in class, hear your thoughts/critiques of class, refer to assignments, and to give you an opportunity to discuss issues related to class generally. If you cannot make it to my office hours because of a class, work, or athletic requirement, we can set up another time. Email is also a convenient way to ask me questions.

Course Requirements:

Student responsibilities:

1) Regular attendance to all classes and outside events. Students anticipating lengthy absences should contact me in advance.

2) You should arrive on time for class and remain for the entire period unless you make arrangements with me prior to class. All cell phones need to be off.

3) Completion of each week's readings by the beginning of class on Tuesday. You will not be able to successfully complete this class without reading the assignments on time. This class is a seminar, which makes student input essential to a worthwhile experience.

4) Participation of 2hrs/week in one of three service learning organizations: Oberlin High School, Oberlin Community Services, and Lorain County Urban League. The service learning is an integral part of the course. The point behind this is not to simply volunteer, but to give you an opportunity to see how an organization actually pursues social justice. Groups do not tackle head on major issues and solve them, but instead build piece after piece to address specific goals that relate to broad issues. To that end, you will be involved in short and long-term efforts in one of the sites during the semester. You are responsible not only to carry out the duties assigned by the site coordinators in a professional manner, but to reflect on your involvement and its implications for social justice. This will also entail interviewing key leaders in the organization to collect their thoughts on their organizations' goals. The service learning sites and the assigned books overlap and can inform one another. You will have many opportunities to talk about your service learning experience. By the end of the semester, you should be able to discuss what you learned not only about specific topics in the readings, but also about the process of achieving social justice itself.

5) Completion of all required assignments. All assignments must be completed by the beginning of class, not during or after class. If you anticipate that you may miss a due date because of illness or a personal emergency, I require a doctor's note or some other documentation *before the assignment is due*. If you do not supply this documentation, your assignments will be penalized one third of a grade (for example, an A will slip to an A-, a B+ to a B, etc.) starting the day of the assignment and for every calendar date past the due date.

Required assignments:

1. Class participation. This is measured not simply by how much you say, but how reflective you make your comments. The success of this seminar depends on class participation. *15% of final grade.*
2. Paragraph response to readings, due Tuesday of each week. This should not be merely a summary but instead your thoughtful reaction to the reading that can spark discussion pertinent to the class. *10% of final grade.*
3. One page summary of service learning update, due four times in the semester. See syllabus for dates. *10% of final grade.*
4. In teams of two, you will write a 7-8 page paper and give a 20 minute presentation (including time for questions). This will involve you finding four or more articles or books, as a team, that contradict or challenge some important element of the assigned book. The purpose is to take into account critiques of the assigned reading and come to a synthesis of the points of view. Your paper and presentation will be an assessment of the readings and your conclusion of the point of contention based on the available data. For most groups, the reading assigned to critique will overlap with your service learning site. You do not need to incorporate insights from your service learning, but you may wish to. *25% of final grade.*

5. Short paper in response to one of the readings, about 4 pages. The assignment is equivalent to the team response you will make to a reading, without a presentation and that you do by yourself. You get to choose which reading you respond to, but it will not be the same reading that your present on in teams of two. You only need to find two or more sources to critique the reading. This assignment gives you more freedom to decide when to turn in the paper, and can help you not have too many assignments due at the end of the semester. *25% of final grade.*
6. At the end of the semester, each service learning group will turn in a final write up of the project's accomplishments and analyses of the organization's role in furthering social justice. We will talk more about this during the semester. *15% of final grade.*

Instructor responsibilities:

- 1) To present lecture and discussion material in clearly understandable language and presentation.
- 2) To assist students in thinking critically about concepts and ideas.
- 3) To respect student opinion and value each student's contributions equally.
- 4) To give feedback on student progress early and often; to be accessible during office hours and after class, and to return all course materials, graded, in a timely fashion.

Other notes:

- 1) Standard university guidelines and rules of academic integrity apply for this course. This pertains to cheating, plagiarism, and other acts of academic dishonesty. Please consult your student handbook or see me for details.
- 2) If you have a learning disability or other disability you are entitled to assistance and accommodations through the university. This assistance includes evaluating your medical documentation, conducting appropriate tests, and contacting your professors to arrange for the recommended accommodations. You must, however, contact me *at the beginning of the semester* to ensure that you receive these services. If you fail to do this, I cannot make special accommodations for you.
- 3) If you would like extra assistance in writing the short paper or for study habits generally, I strongly suggest contacting the Writing Center. I am also available to discuss writing and paper assignments during my office hours.

Tentative course schedule:

Sept. 2: Introduction to the course and to one another

Week of Sept. 7: Introduction to Service Learning Organizations.

- *Hunger in Ohio*, prepared by Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.

Week of Sept. 14: Defining Social Justice

- “Defining Social Justice in a Socially Unjust World.” Reisch, M. 2002. *Families in Society*, vol. 83, 4, p343, 12p.
- “Defining Social Justice,” Novak, M. 2000. *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*. Issue 108.

Week of Sept. 21: Racial Segregation and the Ghetto

- Massey and Denton, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4

Week of Sept. 28: Racial Segregation and the Ghetto (cont.)

- Massey and Denton, chapters 5, 6

NOTE: Write up of service learning due Sept. 21.

Week of Oct. 5: Racial Segregation and the Ghetto (cont.)

- Massey and Denton, chapters 7, 8

NOTE: Write up of service learning due Oct. 5.

NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and presentations due Oct. 7.

Week of Oct. 12: Socio-Economic Class and Hunger

- Ehrenreich, Introduction and chapters 1, 2.

Week of Oct. 19: Fall Break.

Week of Oct. 26: Socio-Economic Class and Hunger (cont.)

- Schwartz-Nobel, Preface, Introduction, and chapter 4.

NOTE: Write up of service learning due Oct. 26.

NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and presentations due Oct. 28.

Week of Nov. 2: Education

- Kozol, chapters 1, 3, 4

Week of Nov. 9: Education (cont.)

- Kozol, chapter 6

NOTE: Write up of service learning due Nov. 11.

Nov. 16: Short paper reading critiques and presentations due.

Nov. 18: Gender

- Pipher, chapters 1-3;

Nov. 23: Gender (cont.)

- chapters 4, 5: Half class; 6, 7: Half class

Week of Nov. 30: Gender (cont.)

- Pipher 8-11 and 15.

NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and presentations due Dec. 2.

Week of Dec. 7: Service Learning Final Presentations.

Dec. 14: Wrap Up.