

**BIS 393A: Political Inequality**  
Professor David Watkins (Summer 2008)

**Class description:**

This course is a survey of efforts by social scientists and philosophers of a wide variety of stripes to understand and assess inequality in society, and its political implications. This course has two primary goals: to learn about human inequality and its political implications, and to introduce students to different *modes of inquiry* that might yield different insights and conclusions about the facts of human inequality. To this end, we'll read and study works about inequality from the perspective of political philosophy, empirical social theory, economics, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography, fiction, and film. In each case, we'll pay close attention to what we can learn about human inequality from this source, and the method, power, and limits of this approach at generating useful and accurate knowledge and insights about human inequality. Throughout the course, we'll keep two big questions in mind: First, why does human inequality exist, and why does it exist in the form that it does, and second, to what extent is inequality morally and politically acceptable, and to what extent is it a wrong that we can and should rectify?

**Class assignments and grading:**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Amongst Men*  
Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality," *Ethics: An International Journal of Moral And Political Philosophy*  
Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*  
Elizabeth and Stuart Ewen, *Typcasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*  
Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (selections)  
Thomas Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*  
Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*  
Armatya Sen, "100 Million Women Are Missing" *New York Review of Books*, 1990  
David Held and Ayse Kaya, eds., *Global Inequality: Patterns and Explanations*

Students will be evaluated on the strength of a series of short writing assignments, one longer (6-8 page) paper, class participation, and class presentations. There are no formal prerequisites for this course, although background in reading or studying some social science (such as political science, sociology, economics, or geography) will be an asset.