

HTS 2016
Social Issues and Public Policy
M/W/F 12:20 - 1:10 PM
Architecture East, Room 207

Dr. Amy D'Unger (School of History and Sociology)

Office: 105 Old Civil Engineering Building (next to the library)

Office Hours: Lots! View available appointments and schedule one @ <https://gatech.gradesfirst.com>

Office Phone: 404.894.7448

E-Mail: amy.dunger@hsoc.gatech.edu

Introduction:

This course will examine a variety of issues considered to be “social problems.” In order to do so, we must first understand how particular issues come to be considered “problems” in the first place, while other issues do not. We will begin with the constructionist perspective, which centers around one question: why do we recognize some social conditions as “problems” while simultaneously ignoring other conditions? Additionally, why do we recognize some social conditions as problems at one time, while during a later period we do not consider them problems?

After examining how things become social problems, we will be considering a variety of social issues in detail, including criminal justice and mass incarceration, the heroin epidemic in the United States, access to voting and racial redistricting, environmental injustice, and human trafficking. To do this, we will be using the latest social science research and “real world” examples from the most reputable journalistic sources (e.g., the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*).

Area E Approved Learning Outcome:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Explain how the course satisfies the learning outcome:

This course will focus on how problems are socially constructed, how power and stratification impact which issues come to be recognized as problems, and a series of current social problems. Students will learn how social, political, and economic forces influence social behavior through an examination of such subjects as access to voting; drugs and incarceration; and problems with the environment.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to explain how problems are socially constructed.
- Students will compare and contrast major social problems impacting the United States.
- Students will analyze how social, political, and/or economic forces shape the American response to social problems.

Text: There is one *REQUIRED* book for this class.

- Heiner, Robert. 2015. *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism, Fifth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN# 978-0-19-023672-4.

This book is available at the BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE in Tech Square. You can also purchase it online, but please make sure to get the *correct publication year (2015, see above)*. All other readings for the semester are available ONLINE. They are indicated with a bibliographic entry for the reading and, in some cases, a web link. You can access these readings via the Canvas

site for this class. Go to Modules > Course Readings. Many of the readings are excerpted from recent books written in the area. Because they are not online, you can access a PDF version in the same Canvas folder as the online resources (“Course Readings”).

If you are interested in reading more, a bibliography of the books used in the class is included in Appendix I. PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PURCHASE THESE BOOKS!

Course Requirements:

(1) Writing Assignments: Students will complete two short written assignments, with due dates noted on the syllabus. Each paper is to be approximately 3 – 4 pages long and will be posted in the “Assignments” section of Canvas. **Late assignments will not be accepted.** The assignments will cumulatively count for **40%** of your grade.

Assignment #1: Due Monday, January 28th (20%)

Assignment #2: Due Monday, April 1st (20%)

(2) Examinations: There will be two examinations for this course. The midterm exam is scheduled for Friday, February 15th in class and the final exam is scheduled for Friday, April 26th from 11:20 AM – 2:10 PM. Each of these exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions, which will require students to draw on course readings, lectures, and discussions. The midterm examination will count for **25%** of your grade and the final examination will count for **30%** of your grade (**EXAMS = 55% TOTAL**).

(3) Attendance and Class Participation: On the following pages is a schedule of the readings required for the course. **You are expected to have read the assigned material prior to the class.** Discussion will correspond to the material in the readings, but may not review it in detail. Some days may include guest speakers or films and will not cover the readings at all, so both reading and class attendance are important. “Class participation” includes two elements: **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSION**.

I will take attendance most class periods. Excused absences will not be counted against you. Excused absences will be granted if there is documentation of attendance at an academic event, participation in an athletic event, illness, or family emergency. *Other excused absences will be granted at my discretion.*

In addition to attending class, you must participate in class discussion. Using attendance as the baseline grade (e.g., a student who attends 75% of the class sessions will have a 75% base grade), good class discussion participation can adjust the final participation grade upward by up to 5%. For example, a student with a 75% base participation grade who consistently has informed things to say in class could improve her participation grade to 80%. The final class participation grade (attendance + class discussion) will count for **5%** of your final grade.

Guidelines for Class Discussions:

1. Feel free to speak your mind; however, be respectful of other students and the instructors. We will be discussing potentially controversial topics at times.
2. Because this is a large class, please raise your hand to be called on, so I can make sure that a variety of students can participate.
3. If you disagree with someone, respond to the argument or idea and not to the person who said it. This keeps the discussions from getting personal.
4. Be careful of generalizing from personal experience. While our personal experiences can inform our sociological discussions, the way we experience or perceive a particular event or experience may vary.

If at any time you feel that outside issues (family, medical, financial, mental health, etc.) are hampering your ability to be successful in this class, please come and talk to me! I can only assist if I know about the situation—in the degree that you feel comfortable discussing it—BEFORE it has impacted your grade.

Statement on Diversity and Inclusion:

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in broader society.

Accommodating Disabilities:

If you have or acquire any sort of condition that may require special accommodation(s), please inform me AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (e.g., not the day of an exam) so that we may make the appropriate arrangements. Proper documentation from the Office of Disability Services will be required. Please contact them to get more information on available services and accommodations, as well as documentation requirements. They can be reached via the web at <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu>. Please note that there are no retroactive accommodations.

Academic Conduct:

All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the policies of the Georgia Tech Honor Code with respect to behavior and academic honesty. Anyone engaging in acts that violate these policies, such as cheating, will be penalized. For more information on the Honor Code, see the Office of Student Integrity website at www.osi.gatech.edu and the text of the honor code at www.policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code. ***If you are not familiar with what constitute plagiarism, ASK! Being uninformed of the policies does not absolve you from the responsibility of following them!***

Make-Up Policy:

Permission is needed to make-up an exam or assignment. If you are going to miss an exam or assignment deadline, please make every effort to **notify me ahead of time** and to gather appropriate material to justify your absence (e.g., a note from your physician if you are ill). A mutually convenient time will be arranged for you to make up the exam. Make up exams will **only** be allowed in a situation of an excused absence (e.g., Georgia Tech sporting event, illness, family emergency, etc.).

Use of Technology Policy:

The use of tablets and computers is permitted in class ONLY IF USED FOR CLASS WORK and DOES NOT DISTRACT OTHER STUDENTS OR ME. Yes, I know that when you giggle while I'm talking about mass incarceration, you're actually looking at Instagram. ***Students may lose the privilege of using electronics in the classroom if they prove to be disruptive. NO TEXTING.*** Period. Zip. Put your phone away. It can wait. ***YES, I CAN SEE YOU.***

Those who violate this policy will be asked to leave the class that day and will not be counted as in attendance.

How Can I Succeed in This Course?

(1) Attend class and be on time—there is nothing more disruptive to your learning than missing class and there is nothing more disruptive to other students than individuals who come in late and interrupt the class discussion.


(2) Do the reading!!! It will help you to participate in class and write quality papers, and it ESSENTIAL for your success on the exams.

(3) Notes, notes, notes. Take notes on each of the readings. They do not have to be in great detail, but should extract, synthesize, and summarize the piece. What is the main point of the article/chapter? What is a good example of the main point? How can this be integrated with other material discussed in class and the texts? etc. etc. *These notes will be valuable study tools for the exams.* Also, study in groups—others may pick up on material that you overlooked, and vice-versa.

(4) The reading load varies for each class. Anticipate days with heavier reading and START EARLY, if possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS (SUBJECT TO REVISIONS/ADDITIONS)

Part I: The Construction of Social “Problems”

January 7	 Introduction and Welcome	READ THE SYLLABUS (YES, SERIOUSLY...)
January 9	Sociology and Social Problems	<i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 1 – 14)
January 11	The Social Construction of Problems: Who Plays a Role?	<i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 14 – 23)
January 14	The Social Construction of Problems: How Does it Happen?	
	Spector, Malcolm and John I. Kitsuse. 2010. “Constructing Social Problems,” pp. 11 – 18 in <i>Conflicting Interests: Readings in Social Problems and Inequality</i> , edited by Robert Heiner. New York: Oxford University Press.	
January 16	Moral Panics, Statistics, and Censorship	<i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 136 – 152)

Part II: The Origins of Policy—Voting

January 18 **Some Context: What Kind of Society Do We Have?**

Wright, Erik Olin and Joel Rogers. 2015. “What Kind of Society is American Society?”, pp. 10 – 33 in *American Society: How it Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton.

January 21  **No Class- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

January 23 **What is a “Democracy?”**

Wright, Erik Olin and Joel Rogers. 2015. “Democracy: How it Works,” pp. 405 – 420 in *American Society: How it Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton.



January 25 **Elections and Voting**

Wright, Erik Olin and Joel Rogers. 2015. “Elections and Voting,” pp. 421 – 445 in *American Society: How it Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton.

January 28 **The Fight to Vote**
ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

Bai, Matt. 2012. “How Much Has *Citizens United* Changed the Political Game?” *The New York Times*, July 17.
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/how-much-has-citizens-united-changed-the-political-game.html>)

Desilver, Drew. 2016. *U.S. Voter Turnout Trails Most Developed Countries*. Pew Research Center.
(<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/02/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/>)

Keyes, Scott. 2013. *Seven Voting Reforms Other Countries Have Used to Boost Their Turnout Rate*. Think Progress. (<https://thinkprogress.org/seven-voting-reforms-other-countries-have-used-to-boost-their-turnout-rate-87926709a576#.tytefx4ux>)

Waldman, Michael. 2016. “Introduction,” pp. ix – xiv in *The Fight to Vote*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

January 30 **Who Gets to Vote?**

Liptak, Adam. 2016. “Supreme Court Rejects Challenge on ‘One Person, One Vote.’” *The New York Times*, April 4. (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/05/us/politics/supreme-court-one-person-one-vote.html?_r=0)

Montgomery, David and Michael Wines. 2016. “District Fight May Persist in Texas After Supreme Court Ruling.” *The New York Times*, April 4. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/05/us/district-fight-may-persist-in-texas-after-supreme-court-ruling.html>)

Waldman, Michael. 2016. “One Person, One Vote,” pp. 125 – 140 in *The Fight to Vote*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

February 1 **Voter Fraud**

Levitt, Justin. 2007. *The Truth About Voter Fraud*. Brennan Center for Justice.
(<http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/The%20Truth%20About%20Voter%20Fraud.pdf>)

Wines, Michael. 2016. “All This Talk of Voter Fraud? Across U.S., Officials Found Next to None.” *The New York Times*, December 18. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/18/us/voter-fraud.html>)

Wines, Michael. 2016. “Critics See Efforts by Counties and Towns to Purge Minority Voters from Rolls.” *The New York Times*, July 31. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/us/critics-see-efforts-to-purge-minorities-from-voter-rolls-in-new-elections-rules.html>)

February 4 **Voter Suppression**

Anderson, Carol. 2018. "A History of Disenfranchisement," pp. 1 – 43 in *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Williams, Vanessa. 2016. "A Growing Conflict Over Voting Rights is Playing Out in Georgia, Where the Presidential Race is Tightening." *The Washington Post*, October 24. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/growing-conflict-over-voting-rights-in-georgia-where-the-presidential-race-is-tightening/2016/10/24/2e9d2caa-84e6-11e6-a3ef-f35afb41797f_story.html?utm_term=.338142ff3110)

February 6 **Voter Suppression**

Brennan Center for Justice. 2016. *New Voting Restrictions in Place for 2016 Presidential Election*. (<http://www.brennancenter.org/voting-restrictions-first-time-2016>)

Editorial Board. 2016 "Where Unfair Voting Practices Begin." *The New York Times*, December 3. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/opinion/where-unfair-voting-practices-begin.html>)

Wines, Michael and Alan Blinder. 2016. "Federal Appeals Court Strikes Down North Carolina Voter ID Requirement." *The New York Times*. July 29. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/us/federal-appeals-court-strikes-down-north-carolina-voter-id-provision.html>)

February 8 **Drawing the Lines**

McGann, Anthony J., Charles Anthony Smith, Michael Latner, and Alex Keena. 2016. "The Unnoticed Revolution," pp. 1 - 21 *Gerrymandering in America: The House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the Future of Popular Sovereignty*. New York: Cambridge University Press.


February 11 **Politics and Partisan Bias**

McGann, Anthony J., Charles Anthony Smith, Michael Latner, and Alex Keena. 2016. "Political Explanations of Partisan Bias," pp. 146 - 175 *Gerrymandering in America: The House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the Future of Popular Sovereignty*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

February 13 **Ratf**ked**

Daley, David. 2016. "Introduction," pp. xi – xxviii in *Rat F**ked: The True Story Behind the Secret Plan to Steal America's Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Daley, David. 2016. "The Mastermind," pp. 1 – 16 in *Rat F**ked: The True Story Behind the Secret Plan to Steal America's Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton.

February 15 

MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Part III: Crime and Incarceration Policies and Their Origins

February 18 From Voting to Crime

Alexander, Michelle. 2013. "Introduction," pp. 1 – 17 in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

Keyssar, Alexander. 2016. September 30. "Who Gets to Vote?" *The New York Times*, September 30. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/opinion/sunday/who-gets-to-vote.html?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article>)

Robertson, Campbell. 2016. "Suit Accuses Alabama of Bias in Law that Bars Some Felons from Voting." *The New York Times*, September 26. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/27/us/suit-alabama-bias-felons-voting.html>)

February 20 The Politics of Punishment

Pratt, Travis. 2009. "The Politics of Punishment in America," pp. 13 – 26 in *Addicted to Incarceration: Corrections Policy and the Politics of Misinformation in the United States*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

February 22 The Making of Mass Incarceration

Hinton, Elizabeth. 2016. "Introduction: Origins of Mass Incarceration," pp. 1 – 26 in *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

February 25 The Social Costs of Incarceration

Pratt, Travis. 2009. "The Social Costs of Incarceration," pp. 79 – 98 in *Addicted to Incarceration: Corrections Policy and the Politics of Misinformation in the United States*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

February 27 The Individual Costs of Incarceration

Pager, Devah. 2008. "Mass Incarceration and the Problems of Prisoner Reentry," pp. 71 – 83 in *Against the Wall: Poor, Black, and Male*, edited by Elijah Anderson. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

March 1 Who Benefits from Incarceration?

Harris, Alexes. 2016. "Criminal Monetary Sanctions in the United States," pp. 18 – 51 in *A Pound of Flesh: Monetary Sanctions as Punishment for the Poor*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.

March 4 The Prison Industrial Complex

Dewan, Shaila and Andrew W. Lehren. 2016. "Alabama Prosecutor Sets the Penalties and Fills the Coffers." *The New York Times*, December 13. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/alabama-prosecutor-valeska-criminal-justice-reform.html>)

Schlosser, Eric. 1998. "The Prison-Industrial Complex." *The Atlantic Monthly*, December, pp. 51-77. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/304669/>)

Part IV: Manufacturing Prisoners: The War on Drugs and the Heroin Epidemic

March 6 The War on Drugs

Hinton, Elizabeth. 2016. "From the War on Crime to the War on Drugs," pp. 307 – 332 in *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

March 8 Race and the War on Drugs

Chambliss, William J. 2001. "The War on Drugs: America's Ethnic Cleansing," pp. 85 – 107 in *Power, Politics, and Crime*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

March 11 Critiques of the War on Drugs **Social Problems (pp. 170 – 179)**

Beiser, Vincent. 2010. "First, Reduce Harm," pp. 219 – 226 in *Conflicting Interests: Readings in Social Problems and Inequality*, edited by Robert Heiner. New York: Oxford University Press.

March 13 The Origins of the Heroin Problem

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "The Poppy," pp. 52 – 55 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "Dr. Jick's Letter," pp. 15 – 16 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "The Adman," pp. 28 – 31 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

March 15 The Blossoming of OxyContin

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "Liberace in Appalachia," pp. 23 – 27 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "Canaries in Coal Mines," pp. 197 – 201 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Ryan, Harriet, Lisa Girion, and Scott Glover. 2016. "'You Want a Description of Hell?' OxyContin's 12 Hour Problem." *The Los Angeles Times*, May 5. (<http://www.latimes.com/projects/oxycontin-part1/>)

Ryan, Harriet, Lisa Girion, and Scott Glover. 2016. "More Than 1 million OxyContin Pills Ended up in the Hands of Criminals and Addicts. What the Drugmaker Knew." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 10. (<http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-oxycontin-part2/>)

March 18 – 22 No Classes- Spring Break

March 25 When the Well Runs Dry

Quinones, Sam. 2015. "Introduction," pp. 5 – 9 in *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.

APPENDIX I

NOTE THAT YOU DO NOT NEED TO PURCHASE THESE AND WE WILL BE READING ONLY SMALL EXCERPTS THAT ARE PROVIDED TO YOU VIA CANVAS!

- Alexander, Michelle. 2013. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Anderson, Carol. 2018. *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Anderson, Elijah, editor. 2008. *Against the Wall: Poor, Black, and Male*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chambliss, William J. 2001. *Power, Politics, and Crime*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Daley, David. 2016. *Rat F**ked: The True Story Behind the Secret Plan to Steal America's Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Girdner, Eddie J. and Jack Smith. 2002. *Killing Me Softly: Toxic Waste, Corporate Profit, and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Harris, Alexes. 2016. *A Pound of Flesh: Monetary Sanctions as Punishment for the Poor*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Heiner, Robert. 2010. *Conflicting Interests: Readings in Social Problems and Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hinton, Elizabeth. 2016. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kara, Siddharth. 2009. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McGann, Anthony J., Charles Anthony Smith, Michael Latner, and Alex Keena. 2016. *Gerrymandering in America: The House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the Future of Popular Sovereignty*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nichols, Andrea J. 2016. *Sex Trafficking in the United States: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pellow, David Naguib. 2002. *The Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pratt, Travis. 2009. *Addicted to Incarceration: Corrections Policy and the Politics of Misinformation in the United States*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Quinones, Sam. 2015. *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Taylor, Dorceta E. 2014. *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility*. New York: New York University Press.
- Waldman, Michael. 2016. *The Fight to Vote*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Wright, Erik Olin and Joel Rogers. 2015. *American Society: How it Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Zimring, Carl A. 2015. *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism*. New York: New York University Press.