

Contemporary Social Problems: Poverty
V93.0510.001
Spring Term 2007
Lecture: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30am-1:45pm
Location: Rm. 305, 194 Mercer Street

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding to contemporary social problems of poverty and inequality. We will discuss the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of poverty in the United States and, on a more limited scope, to poverty in other parts of the world. In analyzing these problems, the course emphasizes the institutions through which they are created and perpetuated, including social norms, hierarchies, and markets.

Topics discussed in this class include: Who are the poor? How have views of poverty evolved over time? What are the different ways people use to measure and understand poverty? How have trends in poverty dynamics change over time? How do labor markets, demographic process, human and social capital contribute to poverty? We will also read various quantitative and qualitative studies on poverty, and review the history of antipoverty social welfare programs regarding their goals, effectiveness, and limits.

REQUIRED BOOKS:


Other readings on the course blackboard

Optional:


COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:

The class format will be a combination of lectures and discussions with occasional film or guest speakers. There will be readings every week. Regular attendance and high levels of involvement in the class are essential to the success of this course. Class attendance forms part of what I expect as involvement. More broadly, class involvement is evaluated by whether you come to every class prepared to raise questions and discuss the readings due for that day, and submit any assignment that may be due that day.

Grades will be based on class participation, two in-class exams that consist of multiple choices and essay questions, weekly summary of reading materials, and a 10-page term paper. Final grades for the class will be determined as followed:

- Participation 10%
- Weekly summary of reading materials 20% (about 3 double-spaced pages per week, to be collected 4 times a semester at an unannounced time)
- Midterm exam 25%
- Final exam 25%
- Term paper 20%

Class Policies:
- No late submission for the class assignments
- No make-up for the mid-term and final exams
- No incomplete given for this class
Guidelines for Written Assignments:

I will evaluate your written work, both on class assignments and on examinations, on several dimensions: content, clarity, coherence, organization, critical thinking, and effective integration of course and/or outside readings. The essays should be analytical rather than only descriptive. Not more than a third of the paper should be the summary of the book. You should comment on the book in relation to the contents covered in this course, i.e., the nature and extent of poverty, causes and consequences of the poverty, and policy implications. Make reference to materials we have read throughout the course to backup your views and arguments. I also expect a clear writing style, proper grammar, correct spelling, appropriate punctuation, and proper use of citations.

It is also imperative that you work alone on the short papers. While you may wish to discuss the contents with other members of the class, your work must be developed and written individually.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is unacceptable. It is a serious academic offence, and will result in a failing grade for the course. You are expected to cite any material that you’ve used, including Internet materials, and even if you’ve paraphrased the material.

CLASS OUTLINE

Part I: Overview
Week 1: Introduction and overview of main concepts

Part II. Views and Measurement of Poverty
Week 2: Views of poverty in history

Week 3: Measurement of poverty

Part III: Trends, Characteristics of the poverty population
Week 4: Characteristics of the poverty population and inequality

Part IV: Poverty Dynamics & International Contexts
Week 5: Poverty dynamics

Week 6: Poverty in the international context

Part V. Causes

Week 7: Causes of poverty: economic processes

Week 8: Causes of poverty: social stratification

Week 9: Causes of poverty: family structure, gender, and race

Part VI. Consequences
Week 10: Consequences of Poverty – culture, neighborhood, schools, crime

Week 11: Poverty, Globalization, and international development

**Part VII. Policy and conclusion**

Week 12: Policy: past and current welfare programs

Week 13: Policy: effects of welfare reform and anti-poverty policy

Week 14: Review
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

1. Jan. 16, 18
   Course overview, introductions, and discussion of basic themes

   What is a social problem? How does one think about and study social problems?
   “Aint No Making It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-income Neighborhood”, Jay
   Macleod, Introduction.

   D=13806. See also: http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/poverty/ and follow link
   to “View the results” to look through specific topics.

   Iceland, John. Poverty in America. Berkeley, Chapter 1

2. Jan. 23, 25
   Views of poverty in the history
   Iceland, John. Poverty in America. Chapter 2
   DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 2: The Plantation: Mississippi, 184-1960

   Herbert J. Gans. The Uses of Poverty: The Poor Pay (on blackboard)

3. Jan. 30, Feb. 1
   The measurement, levels, and trends of poverty


   Diverging Fortunes: Trends in Poverty and Inequality. Sheldon Danziger and Peter
   Gottschalk, Population Reference Bureau. PP.1-9

   debate.” Center for Analysis and Social Exclusion paper #51 (February), London School
   (on blackboard)

   Film: America’s War on Poverty: City of Promise

4. Feb. 6, 8
   Characteristics of the Poor
   Iceland, Chapter 4
   Diverging Fortunes: Trends in Poverty and Inequality. Sheldon Danziger and Peter


5. **Feb. 13, 15**
Poverty Dynamics, Inequality


“Color of the Safety Net”, Chapter 1 from The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality, Thomas M. Shapiro. (on blackboard)

“Top Heavy”, Edward N. Wolff

“Does inequality matter?” Jencks, Christopher. 2002 (on blackboard)

“Importing Poverty”, Camarota, 1999 (on blackboard)


6. **Feb. 20, 22**
Poverty in international context


**MIDTERM EXAM – Feb. 22**

7. **Feb. 27, March 1**
Causes of Poverty

Poverty and Economic Process

Iceland, Chapter 5

When Work Disappears Chapters 1-2.


8. **March 6, 8**
Causes of Poverty: Social Stratification

The invisible Poor, from No Shame in My Game (chapter 1, on blackboard)

March 13, 15 (Spring break)

9. March 20, 22
Causes of Poverty: Family Structure, Race & Gender
   Promises I can Keep (Edin and Kafalas), Chapter 1-3
   Christopher Jencks. 1995. Do Poor Women Have the Right to Bear Children? The American Prospect, Vol. 6, No. 20. (on blackboard)

10. April 27,29
Consequences of Poverty – culture, neighborhood, schools, crime
   Wilson, When Work Disappear, Chapter 3
   Promises I can Keep (Edin and Kafalas), Chapter 4-6, & Conclusion
   Iceland, Chapter 6: Why Poverty Remains High, Revisited

   Visit with Kathryn Edin (author of Promises I can Keep)

11. April 3, 5
International Context - Globalization
   Reading: The Rising Inequality of World Income Distribution, Robert Hunter Wade 2001

   Film: Film: Life and Debt

12. April 10, 12
Poverty and Policy: past and current welfare programs
   Iceland, Chapter 7


   “Let them eat their wedding rings: the role of marriage promotion in welfare reform” (On blackboard), Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, Alternatives to Marriage Project

13. April 17,19 (last day of class)
Policy: Effect of Welfare Reform and Anti-poverty programs
   Iceland, Chapter 8

When work disappears – chapter 8: Social Policy in cross-national perspective
Costs and Benefits With U.S. Methods, Britain Posts Gains In Fighting Poverty, Wall Street Journal Dec. 12, 2006 (on Blackboard)

14 April 24, 26
Review

Book Critique on Deparle, American Dream, Due April 27

May 1 - Reading Day

Final Exam: May 2-9
Useful Homepages for Poverty Related Institutes and Organizations:

Census Bureau www.census.gov
Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) www.ssw.wisc.edu/~irp/
Joint Center for Poverty Research (JCPR) www.jcpr.org
National Poverty Center (NPC) www.npc.umich.edu
National Center for Children in Poverty www.nccp.org
National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) www.nber.org
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities www.cbpp.org
Population Reference Bureau www.prb.org
Administration for Children and Families, DHHS www.acf.dhhs.gov
Brookings Institution www.brookings.edu
Cato Institute www.cato.org
Center for Law and Social Policy www.clasp.org
Economic Policy Institute www.epinet.org
Employment Policies Institute www.epionline.org
Heritage Foundation www.heritage.org
RAND www.rand.org
American Enterprise Institute www.aei.org