

**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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Office location: Room 4177, 295 Lafayette St., 4th Floor (on the SE corner of Lafayette and Houston).

Phone: 212-998-8371

**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:**

Poverty in America: A Handbook. John Iceland. 2<sup>ND</sup> Edition. University of California Press. 2006.

Diverging Fortunes: Trends in Poverty and Inequality. in The American People series. Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk, Population Reference Bureau. Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.

When Work Disappears: The World of New Urban Poor, William Julius Wilson. Vintage Books. 1996.

Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage. Kathryn Edin, Maria Kefalas. Paperback. University of California Press. 2005

American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare, Jason DeParle. Penguin Press. 2005.

Other readings on the course blackboard

Optional:

*Higher Ground: New Hope for the Working Poor and Their Children.* Duncan, Greg, Aletha Huston and Tom Weisner. Russell Sage (2007).

### **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.

NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll. 2001. Poverty in America. See summary at:  
<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=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  
DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 1: The Pledge: Washington and Milwaukee, 1991

### **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

Iceland, John. Poverty in America. Chapter 3.

DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 3: The Crossroads: Chicago, 1966-1991

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

Micklewright, John. 2002. “Social Exclusion and Children: A European view for a US  
debate.” Center for Analysis and Social Exclusion paper #51 (February), London School  
of Economics: pp.1-35. <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper51.pdf>.  
(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  
Gottschalk, Population Reference Bureau. Pp. 9-19

DeParle, American Dream. Chapter 4-5: The Survivors: Milwaukee, 1991-1995;  
The Accidental Program, 1935-1991

DeParle, Jason. 2006. "Orphaned." *New York Times Magazine*, August 27, 2006.  
(Available on blackboard)

## **5. Feb. 13, 15**

Poverty Dynamics, Inequality

Diverging Fortunes: Trends in Poverty and Inequality. Sheldon Danziger and Peter  
Gottschalk, Population Reference Bureau. Pp. 20-25

"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)

DeParle, American Dream. Chapter 6-7: The Establishment Falls: Washington, 1992-  
1994; Redefining Compassion: Washington, 1994-1995;

## **6. Feb. 20, 22**

Poverty in international context

Smeeding, Rainwater & Burtless, "U.S Poverty in a Cross-national Context"

World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty (on blackboard)

DeParle, American Dream. Chapter 8-9: The Elusive President, 1995-1996; The Radical  
Cuts the Rolls: Milwaukee, 1995-1996

## **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.

DeParle, American Dream. Chapter 10: Angie and Jewell Go to Work, 1996-1998

### **8. March 6, 8**

Causes of Poverty: Social Stratification

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

DeParle, American Dream. Chapter 11-12: Opal's Hidden Addiction: Milwaukee, 1996-1998;  
Half a Safety Net: 1997-2003;  
Visit with Jason DeParle (author of American Dream)

**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

DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 13-14: W-2 Buys the Crack: Milwaukee, 1998; Golf Balls and Corporate Dreams: Milwaukee, 1997-1999

Film: Film: *Life and Debt*

**12 April 10, 12**

Poverty and Policy: past and current welfare programs

Iceland, Chapter 7

DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 15-16: Caseworker XM128W: Milwaukee, 1998-2000; Boyfriends: Milwaukee, Spring 1999;

“The Compassion Gap in American Poverty Policy”, *Contexts*, 2006 (On Blackboard)

“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

DeParle, American Dream, Chapter 17-18: Money: Milwaukee Summer, 1999; A Shot at the American Dream: Milwaukee, Fall 1999; Epilogue: Washington and Milwaukee, 1999-2004

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](http://www.census.gov)

Bureau of Labor Statistics [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) [www.ssw.wisc.edu/~irp/](http://www.ssw.wisc.edu/~irp/)

Joint Center for Poverty Research (JCPR) [www.jcpr.org](http://www.jcpr.org)

National Poverty Center (NPC) [www.npc.umich.edu](http://www.npc.umich.edu)

National Center for Children in Poverty [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)

National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) [www.nber.org](http://www.nber.org)

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

Population Reference Bureau [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)

Administration for Children and Families, DHHS [www.acf.dhhs.gov](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov)

Brookings Institution [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

Cato Institute [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org)

Center for Law and Social Policy [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

Economic Policy Institute [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org)

Employment Policies Institute [www.epionline.org](http://www.epionline.org)

Heritage Foundation [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)

RAND [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

American Enterprise Institute [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)