Poverty and Social Policy in the United States

Syllabus, Fall, 2010

Tuesdays, 4:00-5:50 6 E. 16th St. Room 908

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Office hours: Tues. 2:-3:50 & Weds. 4:-5:50

This is a course about poverty in the United States, its causes, its consequences, and its remedies. The thesis is a simple one: it is that poverty, the significant absence of resources compared to the norm in the society, lies at the root of a host of major social and personal problems: health status, family dysfunction, housing quality, neighborhood stability, crime, poor education, and opportunity for socioeconomic mobility.

During the course of the semester we will spend some time defining and measuring poverty, exploring its causes, and learning about major policy initiatives designed to diminish, mitigate or end poverty.

Assignments

The course is designed as a seminar, that is, a structured discussion focused on the readings for the week and the student reports described below.

Students will be responsible for participating in the weekly discussions, taking a full role in one of the group projects, taking part in the oral presentation of that project before the class, writing an individual memo on their part of the project (approximately 10 pp.), and writing a take-home exam.

<u>The group projects.</u> Projects are described at the end of this syllabus. Students will be asked to rank their first three choices during the first week. I will then form 3- or 4-person teams for each project by the second week. Although much of the work, especially field visits, should be done jointly, the research and writing should be divided into discrete parts to enable single-authored memos. The entire team will be responsible for the class presentation. *Memos are due one week after the class presentation.* The memo must be sent to me as an e-mail

attachment and it will be due no later than 4:00 PM one week after the presentation. The grade for the project will be based primarily on the individually written memo, but the quality of the class presentation can enhance or detract from that grade. The project grade accounts for 50% of the course grade.

<u>The final exam.</u> This is take-home exam based on the readings and the class discussions. I will circulate questions on Dec. 7 and the exam (approximately 8-10 pp.) will be due as an e-mail attachment in my in-box by 4:00 PM on Dec. 14.

Sadly, there will be a penalty for late papers. Here is a definition of "late": any paper received at 4:01 PM or later on the due day is deemed a late paper.

Books for Purchase

Maria Cancian and Sheldon Danziger, eds., <u>Changing Poverty, Changing Policies</u> (NY: Russell Sage, 2009)

Paul Tough, Whatever It Takes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Mariner, 2009)

Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed (NY: Henry Holt Owl Books, 2001)

Jason DeParle, American Dream (NY: Viking, 2004)

Other Readings

Starred readings will be e-mailed to you in advance.

I. POVERTY: AN INTRODUCTION

1. August 31. Poverty: What It Means to be Poor in a Rich Country

Tony Judt, Ill Fares the Land, Chapter 1.*

Patton, "Poverty Comes to the Suburbs," Governing*

Robert Coles and Randy Testa, eds., selections from Growing Up Poor*

2. Sept. 7. Defining and Measuring Poverty

Maria Cancian & Sheldon Danziger, Chapters 2 and 14 (Meyer & Wallace, "Poverty Levels and Trends in Comparative Persspective;" and Haveman, "What Does It Means to Be Poor in a Rich Society?").

3. Sept. 14. Causes of Poverty

Cancian & Danziger, Chapters 1 & 3 (C&D, "Changing Poverty and Changing Antipoverty Policies" and Blank, "Economic Change and the Structure of Opportunity for Less-Skilled Workers")

Jason DeParle, Part I.

4. Sept. 21. Poverty, Race and Immigration

Ann Lin & David Harris, Chapter 8 (Stoll, "Race, Place, and Poverty Revisited")*

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 5 (Raphael and Smolensky, "Immigration and Poverty in the United States")

Jason DeParle, Part II.

5. Sept. 28. Poverty and Family Structure

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 4 (Cancian and Reed, "Family Structure, Childbearing, and Parental Employment")

Sara McClanahan, "Fragile Families and the Reproduction of Poverty," <u>Ann Am Acad Pol Soc Sci</u>*

Jason DeParle, Part III.

II. POVERTY POLICY

6. Oct. 5. The Challenge of Working Out of Poverty

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 11 (Holzer, "Workforce Development As An Antipoverty Strategy")

Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed, Chapters 1 and 2.

7. Oct. 12. Income Support

PROJECT #1. REPORT: TANF & THE STATUS OF WELFARE REFORM IN NYC.

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 8 (Scholz, et al., "Trends in Income Support")

8. Oct. 19. Food Security

PROJECT #2. REPORT ON FOOD ASSISTANCE IN NEW YORK CITY

Feeding America, Hunger in America 2010, Chapters 1, 5, 6. 7.*

9. Oct. 26. Childcare Issues

PROJECT #3. REPORT: CHILDCARE FOR LOW INCOME PEOPLE IN NEW YORK

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 9 (Waldfogel, "The Role of Family Policies in Antipoverty Policy")

10. Nov. 2. Health Care for the Poor

PROJECT #4. REPORT: HEALTH CARE OPTIONS FOR LOW INCOME NEW YORKERS

Lin & Harris, Chapter 6 (Williams and Mohammed, "Poverty, Migration, and Health")*

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 12 (Swartz, "Health Care for the Poor: For Whom, What Care, and Whose Responsibility?")

11. Nov. 9. Educating Poor Children

REPORT #5. MAYORAL CONTROL OF THE CITY"S SCHOOLS.

Cancian & Danziger, Chapter 10 (Jacob & Ludwig, "Improving Education Outcomes for Poor Children")

Lin & Harris, Chapter 5 (Farkas, "How Educational Inequality Develops")*

12. Nov. 16. The Charter Option: Harlem Children's Zone

REPORT #6. CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

Paul Tough, Whatever It Takes.

13. Nov. 30. Housing the Poor

REPORT #7. PUBLIC HOUSING, SECTION 8, AND HOPE IV

Alex Schwartz, Housing Policy in the United States, Chapters 5, 6, 8.*

- 14. Dec. 7. Wrap-Up
- 15. Dec. 14. Final Exam Paper due.

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

#1. TANF & THE STATUS OF WELFARE REFORM IN NYC

Locate and visit the office where you apply for TANF. Describe and document the application process. Set your account in the context of TANF in New York City. What are the eligibility rules? How many people are receiving TANF in NYC? Who are they? How do people manage on TANF? What are the impacts of TANF here? How does NYC compare to the rest of the nation?

#2. REPORT ON FOOD ASSISTANCE IN NEW YORK CITY.

- A) Locate and visit the office(s) where you apply for food stamps and WIC. Describe and document the application process. Discuss eligibility rules and enrollment data. Set your account in the context of food insecurity in NYC. How do people manage with these programs?
- B) Identify a food pantry and visit it. Describe how it works: where the pantry gets its food; who runs the pantry; its clientele; who's eligible to use it and how often; how the pantry keeps track of its clients; how the pantry relates to larger emergency food organizations.

#3. REPORT ON CHILDCARE FOR LOW INCOME PEOPLE IN NEW YORK

- A) Generate a list of childcare options for low income families in New York City. Visit a representative low income childcare facility and interview the staff regarding challenges they face and impacts of their program. Set the New York low income childcare system in the context of national funding and other data.
- B) Explore the Headstart program in New York City. Visit a Headstart facility. Report on the New York program in the context of national Headstart data, including reports on the impact of Headstart on young children.

#4. REPORT ON HEALTH CARE OPTIONS FOR LOW INCOME NEW YORKERS

What is the health status of New York City's poverty population? What are the health care options for poor people in the city? Describe the role and status of the city's public hospitals. Visit a neighborhood health clinic and report on its operations. How will Obamacare affect the health care system for poor New Yorkers?

#5. REPORT ON MAYORAL CONTROL OF THE CITY"S SCHOOLS

Explore the scope of mayoral control of the schools in New York City. What aspects of the school system does the mayor control? What is the argument for this arrangement? What have been its effects? How does it compare to mayoral control of schools in other cities? Visit the teachers union and interview key union leaders on mayoral control.

#6. REPORT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

Identify and visit a charter school serving low income children. How is it working? What is the parent role here and in chartersin general? How many charter schools are there in the city? Whom do they serve? With what effect? How do they compare to conventional public schools? How does the New York experience compare with charters nationally?

#7. REPORT ON HOUSING THE POOR IN NEW YORK CITY

How are low income New Yorkers housed? Describe and document the process of applying for public housing. Do the same for Section 8 vouchers. Who lives in these types of publicly supported housing? What is the city's role in housing poor people?