

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES 101-6

Freshman Seminar: Race, Poverty, & Public Policy in America

Fall 2008

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:50am

Kresge Hall, Room 2-425

Professor Celeste Watkins-Hayes, Ph.D. (c-watkins@northwestern.edu)

Office: Crowe 5-113; Phone: (847) 491-4805 (Email preferred)

Office Hours: Thursdays 3:30-5:30pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: There has been long-standing concern in American society about the plight of the poor. Policy and public opinion reflect the various sides of the debate, resulting in programs and discourse that embody a constant tension between the desire to meet the basic needs of the poor and the fear of overextending the hand of the state. At the same time, while the majority of the poor do not come from any particular minority group, the disproportionate representation of families of color among the country's impoverished does raise important questions. In this freshman seminar, students will develop an in-depth understanding of the scope of poverty in America and consider competing theories on its causes. Students will also read work that examines the role of racial stratification in the creation and perpetuation of economic marginalization and reflect on its present day incarnations. Both scholarly work and examples from recent events (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, the HBO television program *The Wire*, the 2008 presidential election) will provide fodder for analysis. As students develop a keen knowledge of the historical and contemporary debates on poverty in America, we will study public policy responses to the plight of the poor from outdoor relief to present-day initiatives. The last part of the course will consider debates on the future of anti-poverty policy with special attention paid to the relationship between racial and economic stratification. Students will write 3 reflection papers (3-4 pages each) and one final research paper (8-10 pages).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: The course will consist of two class meetings per week. Early completion of the week's readings is critical to getting the most out of class time. Students who have not completed the readings by their corresponding lectures will be considered delinquent.

3 Reflection papers: Select three of the first 9 weeks of class in which to write written responses to the readings and class discussions of the week. Each response should **briefly** summarize at least 3 the assigned chapters/articles (excluding Lipson and Booth et al) and consider them in relation to the course's general themes and in-class discussions. This should not be a regurgitation of class lectures or readings, but an analysis demonstrating thoughtful engagement with the course materials. The best papers will offer scholarly critiques and raise questions in response to the arguments presented to you and will offer ways of thinking about course themes that take your interpretation of the materials in creative directions. **Papers are due the Friday of the week of the corresponding discussion by 7pm** (e.g., papers based on the first week of class should be turned in on Sept 26). Papers should be emailed to the professor (CC yourself to ensure delivery of the attachment). No extensions will be granted. However, each paper can be re-written to improve your grade as long as you meet with the professor about how you intend to improve it. **Hardcopy rewrites are due one week after the professor returns the original paper to you and must include the original paper in the packet.** Rewrites should be submitted under the door to Prof. Watkins-Hayes's office (Crowe 5-113). Papers must be doubled spaced, printed in 10-12 pt type, and between 3-4 pages. Together, the 3 papers will account for **45% of your final grade.**

Class Attendance & Participation: Students are required to read all assigned materials and attend each class session promptly, prepared to discuss the materials in an analytical and critical manner. Attendance will be documented with sign-in sheets. Students are held responsible for signing in to document this course requirement. **Signing in for another student or asking another student to sign your name to the class register is a violation of the course's academic honesty policy.** Participation & attendance in class will account for *15% of the final grade*.

Final Paper: Students will write one final research paper - doubled spaced, printed in 10-12 pt type, and 8-10 pages. Paper topics will be distributed on 11-18-08. The final paper will be due between 12-2pm on Thursday, December 11, 2008 in Professor Watkins-Hayes' African-American Studies office. Papers Submitted Late Will Be Downgraded. The final paper comprises **40% of your final grade**. Extra Credit Opportunity: Emailing your final paper to me (c-watkins@northwestern.edu – CC yourself to confirm that the attachment was sent) by 5pm on December 8, 2008 will result in 1.5 percentage points being added to your final course grade.

Extra Credit Opportunity:

Throughout the quarter, the Departments of African-American Studies and Sociology will host lectures, seminars, and other special events that are directly related to course themes. If you attend one of these events in its entirety and write a 2-page summary and reaction paper for the event (incorporating what you have learned in the course in your discussion), you will receive extra credit. **This is not a review or critique of the event itself, but a commentary, response, and critique of the ideas presented at the event.** Students may submit extra credit papers for up to 3 events. Each paper will be due in class or via email to the professor within one week of the event by 11:59pm. Eligible events will be posted under the “Extra Credit Events” section of Blackboard. Each paper will count for up to 1.5 percentage points being added to your final grade.

Grading Standards:

A paper: sophisticated and comprehensive engagement with course materials. Little to no grammatical or spelling errors. Demonstrates both understanding and interrogation of course materials.

B paper: solid analysis of the course materials. A few grammatical or spelling errors. More summary than analysis of course materials, but assignment lays out important points and provides some original analysis.

C paper: average level of analysis of course materials. Many grammatical or spelling errors. Primarily a summary of course materials.

D paper: little to no analysis of course materials. Numerous grammatical or spelling errors. Incorrect data points that suggest a lack of understanding of course materials.

REQUIRED READING:

Available at the Norris bookstore and on reserve in the Main Library:

Lipson, Charles. *Doing Honest Work in College: How To Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press.

Booth, Colomb, and Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. University of Chicago Press.

Iceland, John. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. 2nd ed. University of California Press.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefales. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. 2007 edition. University of California Press

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. 2006 ed. Harvard University Press.

Coursepack available at www.universityreaders.com (Copy on Reserve at Main Library)

COURSE OUTLINE (I recommend reading the pieces for each day in the order listed on the syllabus):

PART 1: What is the Problem We Are Trying to “Solve”? General Readings on Poverty & Race

Week 1: Introduction & Course Overview

9-23-08

- Chapter 1, Iceland’s *Poverty in America*
- Chapter 3 of Lipson’s *Doing Honest Work in College*

9-25-08

- Review the website “**Staying Afloat: Some Scattered Suggestions on Reading in College.**”
http://weblogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/?page_id=84

Try to apply the site’s suggestions as you complete today’s reading:

- Schwalbe, Michael, “Finding Out How the Social World Works.” **PDF on Blackboard**
- *Coursepack*: Omi and Winant, “Racial Formation: Understanding Race & Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era.”
- *Coursepack*: Feagin, “Racist America: Racist Ideology as a Social Force.”

PART 2: Equal Access to the American Dream? Competing Theories on the Making of America’s Poor

Week 2: Labor Market

9-30-08 (Macro Perspectives)

- Chapters 4 & 5 in Iceland’s *Poverty in America*
- *Coursepack*: Reich, “Why the Rich are Getting Richer and the Poor, Poorer.”
- **RECOMMENDED**: *Coursepack*: McCall, “Restructuring Inequalities: A Gender, Class, & Race Perspective.”

10-2-08 (Meso and Micro Perspectives)

- Wilson, William Julius. “When Work Disappears.” **PDF on Blackboard site**
- Waldinger & Lichter, “‘Us’ and ‘Them’: Employer Preferences in Hiring.” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Skim Part 1 (Chapters 1 & 2 – pgs 9-27)

Week 3: Education

10-7-08 (Macro Perspectives)

- *Coursepack*: Bowles and Gintis, “Schooling in Capitalist America.”
- *Coursepack*: McKoy and Vincent, “Housing and Education: The Inextricable Link.”
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 3 (Skim Ch 4)

10-9-08 (Meso and Micro Perspectives) – KATHLEEN BETHEL VISIT

- *Coursepack*: Ogbu, “Multiple Sources of Peer Pressures Among African American Students.”
- Carter, Prudence, “Straddling Boundaries: Identity, Culture and School.” **PDF on Blackboard site**
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 5

Week 4: Race & Space: Geographic Containment & Housing

10-14-08

- Massey and Denton, Selection from the book *American Apartheid*. **PDF on Blackboard**
- *Coursepack*: Engel and McCoy, “From Credit Denial to Predatory Lending: The Challenge of Sustaining Minority Homeownership.”
- Skim “Appendix: Bibliographical Resources” in Booth’s *The Craft of Research*
- Skim Lipson’s *Doing Honest Work in College* Ch 1 & 2

10-16-08

- *Coursepack*: Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann, “Abandoned Before the Storms: The Glaring Disaster of Gender, Race, and Class Disparities in the Gulf.”
- *Coursepack*: Portes and Rumbaut, “Making it in America.”
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 6

Week 5: Family Structure & Resources

10-21-08

- *Fragile Families* Research Brief, “Mothers’ and Children’s Poverty and Material Hardship in the Years Following a Non-Marital Birth.” **PDF on Blackboard site**
- *Coursepack*: Lareau, “Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life.”
- Skim Lipson’s *Doing Honest Work in College* - Chapter 4

10-23-08

- *Coursepack*: Oliver and Shapiro, “Black Wealth/White Wealth: Wealth Inequality Trends.”
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 7, 8

PART 3: Makin’ It in Poor (and Working Poor) America

Week 6: Work

10-28-08

- Venkatesh’s *Off the Books* – Chapters 1-3

10-30-08

- Venkatesh’s *Off the Books* – Skim Ch 4-6, Read Ch 7
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Nickel-and-Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America.” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 16

Week 7: Families

11-4-08

- Edin and Kefales – Introduction & Ch 1, 2
- *Coursepack*: Nelson, “Relying on Welfare as a Single Mother: A Rural Case Study.”

11-6-08

- Skim Edin and Kefales – Ch 3, 4, 5, and 6
- *Coursepack*: Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney, “Family Circumstances of Children in Immigrant Families.”

Week 8: Neighborhoods

11-11-08 (Meso and Micro Dynamics)

- Anderson, Elijah, “The Code of the Streets” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Ferguson, Ann Arnett. “Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity.” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - Ch 9

11-13-08 (Macro Dynamics)

- *Coursepack*: Sampson and Wilson, “Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality.”
- *Coursepack*: Browne-Marshall, “Race, Crime, and Injustice.”
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* – Read Ch 10
- **RECOMMENDED**: *Coursepack*: Zatz, “The Changing Forms of Racial/Ethnic Biases in Sentencing.”

PART 4: What is to be Done?

Week 9: Policy Solutions: Past & Present

- HAVE YOU COMPLETED 3 REFLECTION PAPERS? **This week is your last opportunity.**
- FINAL PAPER TOPICS WILL BE HANDED OUT THIS WEEK

11-18-08

- Iceland’s *Poverty in America*, Ch 2 & 7
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* Skim Ch 11, Read Ch 12

11-20-08

- Coates, David. “Has Welfare Reform Benefited the Poor?” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Conclusion of Edin and Kefales’s *Promises I Can Keep*
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* - 13 & 14

Week 10: Last Day: Wrap Up

11-25-08

- Iceland’s *Poverty in America*, Ch 8
- Gans, Herbert. 1995. “The Uses of Undeservingness.” **PDF on Blackboard**
- Booth’s *The Craft of Research* – Skim 15 & Read 17
- Read Booth’s “Ethics of Research” – pg 273-276 in *The Craft of Research*

FINAL PAPER DUE BETWEEN 12-2PM ON DECEMBER 11, 2008 - Crowe 5-113
Extra Credit – Submit paper by 5pm on December 8, 2008 – on digital Dropbox on Blackboard