

AMH 3931

Poverty and Welfare in American History

Matt Gallman

Fall 2015

T 10:40-11:30 Th 10:40-12:35

Flint 019

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Course Summary

This course is a very broad survey of how Americans have thought about poverty and poor relief (or welfare) over the last two centuries or so. We will be looking at how a wide variety of reformers, journalists, politicians and artists have thought about the “problem of poverty.” We will be trying to figure out what questions they asked, what answers they came to, and how – if at all – that conversation has evolved over time. The class will establish the core themes of the course as we progress.

We will also be doing our best to explore and understand the experiences of America’s poor. The evidence will often be impressionistic, and we will not pretend that we have the whole story.

In essence, this semester will be an analysis of America’s ongoing conversation with, and about, the nation’s underclass. We will mention important pieces of legislation, but our focus will be largely on the people involved in these discussions.

This success of this course will depend heavily on student preparation and participation. Very few class meetings will be organized as traditional lectures. Most classes will emphasize the close readings of assigned documents, often depending on the efforts of student leaders or presenters.

Class Meetings and Preparation

This is very much a discussion-based course. You are expected to attend all classes, prepared to talk about the assigned readings. I will take roll fairly regularly, and more than two absences will adversely affect your grade. You should also come to class with notes on the documents and readings. These notes should include discussion topics to raise in class as well as any questions that you might have. You will have periodic open note quizzes on the readings.

{Note: I will tell you to take good notes on the first day of class. Then, I bet you will not take notes. Then I will give an open note quiz and you will do poorly. Then I will yell at you. Then you will start taking good notes. (Although I could be wrong.) }

Since our focus is so much on group discussion, this will be an “electronic free”

classroom. Please do not make use of computers or other electronic devices during class.

Readings

This course has very regular readings from a variety of sources. Some of the readings are from the required purchases, listed below. Quite a few of the readings are primary sources that I have either linked to the “Resources” page on the Canvas page, or I have put on reserve (also linked on the “Web Links” page.) It is your responsibility to pay attention in class and consult the syllabus and come to class having read the assigned readings (with notes). PLEASE do not come to class and tell me that you were confused about what to read or that your book “has not arrived yet.” That is, I expect you to take a professional approach towards the readings.

The main readings (to purchase) are:

(1) [Michael Katz, *In The Shadow of the Poorhouse*](#).

This is an excellent interpretive overview of the history of poverty and welfare in American history. Be sure to buy the revised edition. This is pretty much our textbook.

(2) [Seth Rockman, editor, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic*](#).

This is a really nice short volume of documents on poverty and welfare in the first decades of U. S. history. These documents will be the basis of your first essay.

(3) [James Agee and Walker Evans, *Cotton Tenants: Three Families*](#).

This is pretty much a long magazine article, republished as a book. Evans was a photographer and Agee a writer/journalist. It is a marvelous window into life in Alabama during the Great Depression.

(4) [Jonathan Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*](#).

This is a fairly new book, but available in an inexpensive paperback. Kozol is a brilliant commentator on American poverty and education. In this book he offers capsule biographies of people he has worked with for the last 25 years. These longer narratives provide a very different window into both modern poverty and public policy responses to the poor.

(5) [Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*](#).

Ehrenreich is a journalist and commentator on American social policy. She decided to see if she could live as a working class woman in various communities. The book is a fascinating window into “getting by” at the fringes of the American economy, and it is an interesting portrait of the author as well as the topic.

You will write an essay about *Cotton Tenants*, with a particular emphasis on the power of photographs. You will also write an essay about both Kozol and Ehrenreich. There are also quite a few readings from primary sources linked under “Pages.”

Written Assignments and Presentations

You will write five short (1000-1250 word) essays in this course. Each essay will be a response to required readings (there will be no outside research). Usually your papers will be the subject of a Thursday class discussion. On some occasions I may require a

presentation based on your papers.

All written work must be your own work. If I discover that you have submitted anything that is not your own work I will fail you **for the course**.

Please review the University's honesty policy at

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>

You will also write a short final take-home examination based on the assigned readings and class discussions/lectures. There will be no in-class midterm or final.

Grading (based on 500 points)

- Essay #1 50
- Essay #2 50
- Essay #3 50
- Essay #4 50
- Essay #5 100 [This essay will be a bit longer.]
- Preparation and Participation 100 (This grade includes quizzes on the readings).
- Take-home final essay 100

Missed classes or excessive lateness will result in reduced grades.

Accommodations

Please do not hesitate to contact me during the semester if you have any individual concerns or issues that need to be discussed.

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Aug 25 Introduction
2 Aug 27 Defining Terms
Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, Chapters 1 and 2.
Read: Katz, iii-xvii.

THE EARLY REPUBLIC

- 3 Sept 1 Colonial America and English Traditions
Read: Katz, 3-59.
4 Sept 3 Explaining Poverty in the Early Republic
Read: Rockman, Documents 1, 2, 4, 19

[Note: In these two weeks you will be reading 16 different documents. The total number of pages is not great (about 100 pages), but this is a lot of different material to keep track of, reflecting diverse opinions. It is absolutely crucial that you take good notes on the individual documents so that we can discuss them effectively.]

- 5 Sept 8 Responding to Poverty in the Early Republic
Read: Rockman, Documents 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15

6 Sept 10 Solutions: Large and Small

Read: Rockman, Documents 17, 18, 22, 23, 24

PAPER #1 DUE (This will be based on the Rockman documents.)

SCIENTIFIC CHARITY?

7 Sept 15 Scientific Charity

Read: Katz, 60-87; Josephine Shaw Lowell, *Public Relief and Private Charity* (New York, 1884), pages 1-8, 58-96, 101-111. [Linked under Web Pages.]

Sept 17 **No Class – Dr. Gallman out of town**

8 Sept 22 Saving Children and Families

Read: Katz, 88-113.

9 Sept 24 Charles Loring Brace

Read: Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (New York, 1872), pp i-xii (this includes the Table of Contents – read this to get a sense of his main themes), 13-24, 223-245, 440-448. [Linked to Web Pages.]

PAPER #2 DUE (Assessing Lowell and Brace)

BUILDING THE SEMI-WELFARE STATE

10 Sept 29 Rethinking Families

Read: Katz, 117-150.

11 Oct 1 Mothers' Pensions

Read: "State Pensions to Mothers in Hamilton County, Ohio" in *The Survey* (December 12, 1914), 289-90. [Linked to Web Pages.]

PAPER #3 DUE The Mothers' Pension Acts

12 Oct 6 Rethinking Cities

Read: Katz, 151-184.

13 Oct 8 Jane Addams and Hull House

Read: Jane Addams, "The Devil Baby at Hull House." [Linked under Web Pages.]

You might wish to begin the longer Riis reading for next week.

14 Oct 13 Talking About the Poor

Read: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Chapters IV, VIII, XI, XII, XIII, XV, XVII, XIX, XX, XXI. [Linked under Resources.]

15 Oct 15 Picturing the Poor

Read: Photographs by Jacob Riis. TBA.

16 Oct 20 The Federal Government Steps In

Read: Katz, 151-212 (two chapters).

17 Oct 22 The New Deal

Read: Katz, 213-255. Reading is light, should start reading *Cotton Tenants*.

18 Oct 27 Journalists and Tenant Farmers – 1

Read: *Cotton Tenants*, 1-135. Paper due on Thursday, so read more if you can.

19 Oct 29 Journalists and Tenant Farmers – 2

Read: *Cotton Tenants*, 136-end.

PAPER #4 DUE (analysis of Jacob Riis and Cotton Tenants: words and images.)

THE GREAT SOCIETY AND BEYOND

20 Nov 3 Rediscovering Poverty

Read: Katz, 259-282

21 Nov 5 Michael Harrington

Read: Excerpt from Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962). [Linked under Web Pages.]

Read: James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: a Letter from Harlem" in *Esquire* (July 1960); republished in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961). [Linked under Web Pages.]

Read: O. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," *Scientific American*. October 1966, pp. 19-25. [Linked under Web Pages.]

22 Nov 10 The War on Welfare

Read: Katz, 283-334.

Nov 12 ***No Class Meeting – Dr. Gallman out of town***

MODERN STORIES

23 Nov 17 Working Women - I

Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*, pp. 1-49

24 Nov 19 Working Women – II

Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*, pp. 51-238.

25 Nov 24 Policy Debates

Nov 26 *Thanksgiving*

26 Dec 1st Life Stories – I

Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, pages TBA.

27 Dec 3rd Life Stories – 2

Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, finish.

PAPER #5 DUE IN CLASS: COMMENTARY ON LIFE STORIES

28 Dec 8th Final Thoughts