

Race, Poverty and Family Justice

Fall 2011—Mondays, 11am-5pm
MCI Framingham/BU/Harvard
Syllabus Draft
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This course meets inside Framingham prison¹ and surveys some of the key topics in urban sociology, focusing on major social problems in American cities. With particular attention to factors associated with crime, such as poverty, race, education, gender and employment, the course draws from different academic, media and narrative sources. Our focus on urban communities of concentrated poverty is intended to challenge students to think about policy solutions to complex problems. How do we respond to under-resourced schools, violence, joblessness, drug addiction and incarceration? The last three weeks of the semester will be reserved for students to present research proposals designed to address the problems discussed in class. Questions for consideration: In what ways do various political, economic and religious ideologies shape our understandings of race? What kinds of practices lead us out of poverty? How do we understand family justice?

Goals

While this seminar aims to survey innovative sociological research, our unique setting – at MCI Framingham with Harvard students and students who are enrolled in Boston University’s Prison Education Program (college students who are incarcerated and serving time inside the prison) – affords a special opportunity to explore the topics of race, poverty and family justice. In addition to the social science research, guest lecturers, seminar discussion and course reading that will guide our work, the remarkable variety of social experiences among the students helps contribute to new ideas, discussions and collaborations. To this end, teams of students will work on joint projects with the aim of making new proposals for improving family justice, guided by both our seminar discussion and course reading.

Reading Materials

Reading materials will be available either electronically or in hardcopy in a course reader. For Harvard students, the electronic materials will be available online on the course web site. Students should print these materials and bring them to class. For BU students, course readers will be supplied. In addition to required texts, we will occasionally provide handouts for additional reading or class discussion.

Procedure

Each course session will meet on Monday afternoons. We will begin with silence followed by a brief check-in. Our time each week will be divided into several parts. There will usually be a presentation/lecture to help set the seminar’s agenda that will be followed by open discussion. We will often have in-class writing, student presentations, guest lecturers, and group work. Questions may be asked at any time. There will be an opportunity for a one-on-one mid-term evaluation for students to present enduring questions, challenges and ideas to influence the progress of the course. The guidelines for engagement are simple: we voice all relevant questions, respect all opinions, allow others to speak, and agree to disagree.

Grading/ Requirements:

¹ NB: MCI Framingham is the world’s oldest penal institution for women.

The final grade will be based on class participation; in-class writing; response papers (3); a mid-term examination; group work; presentations; a thesis draft; and a final research paper. Class participation includes reading preparation/comprehension/integration, in-class writing and group work. Students are expected to complete all reading assignments with serious reflective attention before class, take careful notes, participate in class discussion and complete all assignments on time. Response papers are to rely closely on the assigned readings and explain your ideas as sharply and succinctly as possible (1 page). Students will be evaluated on their use of the readings and their ability to move our conversations forward in class discussion. Class participation is essential for the success of the course; *absences reflect in final grade*.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

Class Participation (includes discussion, writing and group presentations)	40%
Midterm	20%
Thesis Draft/Final Research Paper	40%

The final research paper will be an opportunity for each of you to become well acquainted with a topic that particularly interests you. Ten to fifteen pages in length, it will be based on a topic of your own choosing. (We will discuss specific requirements as the course progresses.) At least four of the course required texts and one additional written source must be utilized to support your argument, which must take into account the goals of the course. ***Your final paper is due on the last day of class in person.***

If any aspect of the above information remains unclear to you, I request that you communicate with me before committing to the course. I will interpret your continued enrollment as your understanding of and agreement with these goals and requirements.

Please, to the best of your ability, be on time.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1, Introductions, September 12th

In-Class Writing Exercise

How do you understand race, poverty and family justice?

Assignment: Read Paula Rothenberg Selections from *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States* (Seventh Edition): "Civilize Them with a Stick," *Mary Brave Bird (Crow Dog) with Richard Erdoes*; "Yellow," *Frank Wu*; "The Circuit," *Francisco Jimenez*; "Crossing the Border Without Losing Your Past," *Oscar Casares*; "This Person Doesn't Sound White," *Ziba Kashef*; "What I Learned About Jews," *Joe Wood*; "With No Immediate Cause," *Ntozake Shange*; "Requiem for a Champ," *June Jordan*; "The Politics of Parenting," *Kelly Mayhew*; "The Case of Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson: Ableism, Heterosexism, and Sexism," *Joan Griscom*; "C.P. Ellis," *Studs Terkel*; and Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* Selections: Essays and Speeches: "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"; "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference"; and "The

Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (pps 40 - 45 and 110 – 123)

Week 2, Telling Our Stories, September 19th

Introductions Cont'd, Discuss Rothenberg Texts and Lorde

Assignment: Read Michelle Alexander. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press. Chapter 1, "The Rebirth of Caste" and Chapter 5, "The New Jim Crow". Write Response Paper #1: According to the reading, how do race and punishment intersect?

Week 3, Race and Punishment, September 26th

Discuss Alexander and "The New Jim Crow"

Assignment: Read Oscar Lewis. 1963. "The Culture of Poverty." Reprinted in *Society* 35:7-9 (1998); Daniel Patrick Moynihan. 1965. *The Negro family: The Case for National Action*. Washington DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research; William Julius Wilson. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago. Chapter 2; and David K. Shipler. 2004. *The Working Poor Invisible in America*. New York: Knopf. Chapter 5.

Week 4, Poverty, October 3rd

Discuss Lewis, Moynihan, Wilson and Shipler

Assignment: Read Eula Biss. 2009. *Notes From No Man's Land*. "Relations", pp. 13-35; Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. "Conclusion," pp. 187-220; Adrian Nicole Le Blanc. 2003. *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble and Coming of Age in the Bronx*. New York: Scribner. Chapters 1, pp 3-18 and Chapter 9, pp. 83-91 (hardcover); and Suniya S. Luthar and Adam Goldstein. 2004. "Children's Exposure to Community Violence: Implications for Understanding Risk and Resilience." *Journal of Clinical and Adolescent Psychology*. 33: 499-505. Write Response Paper #2: Describe the main causes of economic disadvantage of "low-skill" urban workers.

Week 5, Families, October 17th

Discuss Biss, Edin, Le Blanc and Luthar/Goldstein

Assignment: Read Fordham, Signithia; Ogbu, John U. 1986. "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the 'Burden of Acting White.'" *Urban Review* 18: 176-206; Jonathan Kozol. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Harper Perennial. Chapter 3; David Simon and Edward Burns. 1997. *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*. Broadway Booth. Pages 266-285; and Eula Biss. 2009. *Notes From No Man's Land*. "Land Mines", pps. 45-55; Study for Midterm.

Week 6, Education and Opportunity Gaps, October 24th

In-Class Midterm; Discuss Fordham/Ogbu, Kozol, Simon/Burns, and Biss.

Assignment: Read Glenn Loury. 2008. *Race, Incarceration and American Values*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1-86; Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. "Conclusion."; Western, Bruce. 2008. "Reentry: Reversing Massing Incarceration." *Boston Review* July/August 7-12; and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Mary Lyndon Shanley. 2008. "No Further Harm: What We Owe to Incarcerated Fathers." *Boston Review* 13:17.

Week 7, Mass Incarceration, October 31st

Discuss Loury, Western, and Katzenstein/ Shanley

Assignment: Read *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, "The Girl With the Cast," Chapter 4 (104-135). Write Response Paper #3: What policies can reverse mass incarceration?

Week 8, The Vulnerable Observer, November 7th

Discuss Behar and Final Papers

Assignment: Complete Thesis Draft

Week 9, Thesis Workshop, November 14th

Week 10, Student Presentations, November 21st (Guests, TBA)

Week 11, Student Presentations/Final Papers Due, Nov. 28th

Grading Rubric for Written Work:

Response Papers, Individual Thesis Draft and Final Project

All papers should be double-spaced, 12 point font. You can use endnotes or footnotes according to whatever style suits you: Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, etc. Plagiarism is serious and can result in failure of the course. Papers will be graded according to the following:

A—The concept responds incisively to a particular question with adequate analysis and is relevant. Work is guided by a controlling thesis that clearly delineates the argument and research method; it will have a sense of ‘inevitability’ and will be supported by substantial well-chosen evidence, with an appropriate sequence of paragraphs and clear transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Paper is sophisticated, original, and well argued, accompanied by counter-argument & refutation. It contains appropriate syntax/diction, and is free from grammatical/spelling errors.

B—The concept responds well to the question and its analysis goes beyond the obvious. The central thesis is clear and determines the paper's structure. Work is supported by adequate and appropriate evidence with distinct units of thought in paragraphs coherently arranged, using some transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Such a paper usually contains some mechanical difficulties, occasional problematic word choices or awkward syntax errors, grammar errors, and wordiness.

C—The concept responds adequately to the question but may have some factual, interpretive, or conceptual errors. It has an overly general thesis and gives no indication of organization to follow; it provides some evidence but is not always relevant, sufficient, or integrated into the paper. Paper has uneven paragraphs and some brief, weakly unified, or undeveloped areas. It has awkward or missing transitions, occasional major grammar errors, (e.g., agreement, verb tense) frequent minor grammar errors (e.g., prepositions, articles), occasional imprecise diction, awkward syntax, and is wordy.

D—The paper confuses some significant concepts, including those in the problem itself. It has a vague or irrelevant thesis and the evidence is usually narrative, anecdotal, awkward, or incorrectly incorporated. The work's organization is repetitive and wanders with frequent major and minor grammar problems.

F—The paper misunderstands the problem and/or course concepts. It has no discernible thesis and little evidence that is simply listed or not cited at all. The organization is arbitrary with weak paragraph structure and illogical or no transitions. Work contains numerous grammatical errors and stylistic problems and is overwhelmingly non-standard with errors in practically the entire paper.