

Race, Poverty, and Community Justice

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This course surveys some of the key topics in urban sociology, focusing on the major social problems of American cities. The course will move from the economic problems created by deindustrialization, to changes in family structure, schools, and public safety. Our focus on urban problems is intended to challenge students to think about policy solutions to problems. The last three weeks of the semester will be reserved for students to present model programs designed to address the problems discussed in class.

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.

Goals

While this course aims to survey the sociological and policy research on the social problems of American cities, our unique setting – at MCI Norfolk with BU and Harvard students – affords a special opportunity to examine these issues. Though social science research will guide our work, we're also hopeful that the great variety of social experiences among the students can help contribute to new discussions, ideas, and discoveries. To this end, teams of students will work on joint projects with the aim of making new proposals for improving American cities, guided by both our seminar discussion and course reading.

Procedure

Each course session will meet on Thursday mornings. We will begin with silence followed by a brief check-in. Our time each week will be divided into three parts: a brief presentation to help set the agenda of seminar discussion, a discussion of the readings, followed by break out into teams to help prepare the program proposals. There will be an opportunity for a 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. Class participation is essential for the success of the course; *absences impact final grade*.

Requirements

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. In addition to required texts, we will occasionally provide handouts for additional reading or class discussion. Students will prepare a 2-3 page reading response each which will be due at the beginning of class. These must be submitted on time, and the page limit must be strictly followed. Part of the exercise involves explaining your ideas as sharply and succinctly as possible. Remember, these are *reading responses*; you are expected to rely closely on the assigned readings in developing your answers.

Grading

The final grade will be determined as follows:

Class participation: 20%

Reading responses: 50%

Team project: 30%

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

Course Outline

Week 1, Setting the Stage, September 25

St Clair Drake and Horace Cayton. 1945. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 14, "Bronzeville."

William Julius Wilson. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago. Chapter 1 and 2.

Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6.

Reading response: Given the initial reading and unique composition of this class, what do you hope to offer and receive from this course?

Week 2, The Labor Market for Low-Skill Workers, October 2

Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk. 1995. *America Unequal*. New York: Harvard University Press, Russell Sage Foundation. Chapters 7 and 8.

David K. Shipler. 2004. *The Working Poor Invisible in America*. New York: Knopf. Chapter 5.

Roger Waldinger. 2003. *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Chapters 2 and 9.

Reading response: Describe the main causes of the economic disadvantage of low-skill urban workers.

Week 3, The Culture of Poverty, October 9

Oscar Lewis. 1963. "The Culture of Poverty." Reprinted in *Society* 35:7-9 (1998).

Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: Norton. Pages 106-141.

Fordham, Signithia; Ogbu, John U. 1986. "Black students' school success: Coping with the 'Burden of Acting White.'" *Urban Review* 18:176-206.

Reading response: What is the culture of poverty thesis?

Week 4, Families and Children, October 16

Daniel Patrick Moynihan. 1965. *The Negro family: The Case for National Action*. Washington DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research.

David T. Ellwood and Christopher Jencks. 2004. "The Uneven Spread of single-Parent Families: What Do We know? Where Do We Look For Answers." Pp. 3-79 in *Inequality*, edited by Kathryn Neckerman. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

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.

Reading response: How have changes in family structure contributed to urban social problems?

Week 5, The City and the Environment, October 23

Racquel Pinderhughes. 2004. *Alternative Urban Futures: Planning for Sustainable Development in cities Throughout the World*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. Chapter 3 and 5.

James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press. Chapters 4 and 8.

Reading response: If you were mayor, how would you address your city's environmental challenges?

Week 6, Education and the Achievement Gap, October 30

Jonathan Kozol. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Harper Perennial. Chapter 3.

Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. 1998. "The Black-White Test Score Gap: An Introduction." Pp. 1-51 in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. Washington DC: Brookings.

Pedro Carneiro and James J. Heckman. 2003. "Human Capital Policy." Pp. 148-208 in *Inequality in America*, by James J. Heckman and Alan B. Kreuger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Reading response: What education policies can improve achievement in inner-city schools?

Week 7, Crime and Policing, November 6

Sampson, Robert J. and William Julius Wilson. 1995. "Towards a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality." Pp. 37--54 in *Crime and Inequality*, edited by John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourgois, Philippe. 1989. "Crack in Spanish Harlem: Culture and Economy in the Inner City." *Anthropology Today* 5:6-11.

Wilson, James Q. and George L. Kelling. 1982. "The Police and Neighborhood Safety." *Atlantic Monthly* March, 29-38.

Jenny Berrien and Christopher Winship. 1999. "Should we Have Faith in Churches? Ten-Point coalition's Effect on Boston's Youth Violence." Unpublished manuscript. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Reading response: Describe a theory of urban crime, and a crime-control strategy based on that theory.

Week 8, Churches and Other Social Capital, November 13

Omar McRoberts. 2002. "Religion, Reform, Community: Examining the Idea of Church-Based Prisoner Reentry." Reentry Roundtable Working Paper. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

John D'Iulio. *The Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Chapter 6.

Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, Don Cohen. *Better Together Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Chapter 4.

Reading response: How does social capital help address urban social problems?

Week 9, Mass Incarceration, November 20

Loic Wacquant. 2000. "The New 'Peculiar Institution': On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto." *Theoretical Criminology* 4:377-89.

Tonry, Michael. 1995. *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime and Punishment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pages 49-80.

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.

Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Mary Lyndon Shanley. 2008. "No Further Harm: What We Owe to Incarcerated Fathers." *Boston Review* 13:17.

Reading response: What policies can reverse mass incarceration?

Week 10, Policy and Politics, December 4

Ira Katznelson. 2005. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America*. New York: Norton. Chapter 2.

Michael B. Katz. 1998. *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare States*. New York: Holt. Chapters 5 and 11.

Jason DeParle. 2004. *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare*. New York: Penguin. Chapter 6 and 7.

Lawrence M. Mead. 1997. "The Rise of Paternalism." Pp. 1-38 in *The New Paternalism*, edited by Lawrence M. Mead. Washington DC: Brookings.

Reading response: What have been the main political forces shaping urban social policy?

Weeks 11, Student presentations, December 11

Students will prepare presentations, 30 minutes each, on model programs in the following policy areas: (1) education, (2) poverty, (3) crime and delinquency, (4) civic reintegration for people with criminal records, and (5) employment. The proposals should detail the program (its scale, its intended recipients), describe its cost, how it will be funded, and its likely benefits. The program might operate at any of the three levels of government.

Students will break into teams of five to prepare their program proposals. The written proposals will be no more than 15 double-spaced pages plus a bibliography.

Grading Rubric for Written Work:

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 considered a serious offense may 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.