

SOCIOLOGY OF POVERTY
Martín Sánchez-Jankowski
Syllabus
Soc 280
Fall 2015

INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the sociology of poverty. In that effort it will engage a broad literature on the topic that incorporates the research from the disciplines of sociology, economics, and anthropology. The sociology of poverty involves many interrelated topics and we will only be able to touch on some of them. However, the student interested in pursuing specific topics of the subject in more depth will have a firm foundation from which to do so.

The course is about understanding the causes and conditions called poverty. Poverty, or the state of being categorized as living in it, is part of the social stratification system as well as a condition with properties that objectively characterize the experience of individuals living with extreme material scarcity. As such, it involves both the physical (material and body) and social world. This will necessitate looking at food, shelter, disease, markets, and interactions of individuals and states. Having some familiarity with economic theory is useful since a good deal of work on poverty incorporates such theory, but it is not required. What is required is that students consistently and thoroughly engage and interrogate the readings so that learning can be maximized.

Finally, this course will attempt to identify what factors cause and keep people in the condition of poverty, as well as how they relate to produce the type of life people experience when they are in this condition. To do this we will consider the impact of structure, culture and agency in creating and maintaining individuals and groups in the poverty condition. This will allow us to begin to marry explanation with understanding, and increase the likelihood of optimal prediction and successful intervention in one of the more troubling aspects of the human condition.

REQUIREMENTS

There will not be a final paper. Instead we will concentrate on learning what the research assigned has to tell us, and what we make of it in helping us to explain and understand poverty. In order to do this, we will have two requirements for grades:

- (1) Weekly Presentations that will be assigned to two people. These presentations should include: (a) a description of what we know about the subject; (b) a list of what we don't know; and (c) a substantive comment (i.e. theoretical and/or empirical) on the subject matter.
- (2) A paper (Max of 25 pages) on a particular issue addressed in the course that you want to develop and/or explain in more detail. Prior approval must be obtained from me concerning the topic/issue of your intended paper. The material from the paper is expected to come from what you have already read in the course, but if you expect to include additional readings please confer with me before doing so. This paper will be due via Internet to me on **December 14 at 12:00 noon**.

BOOKS

There have been a number of books ordered for the course. If you are thinking of having poverty be one of your specialty areas, then you may want to purchase all of the books. If poverty is an issue in your own graduate-student life, you will be able to get access to all the required readings at the library. I have put all the books on reserve. Not all of the readings are in the books I order for the class. These readings can be found in other books that I have placed on reserve.

READINGS

I. CAUSES OF POVERTY

Abihijit Banerjee, Roland Bénabou, and Dilip Mookherjee, eds., **UNDERSTANDING POVERTY** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Part 1

Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, ***The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*** (NY: Free Press, 1994), Pp. 127-199.

Samuel Roundfield Lucas, **Theorizing Discrimination in an Era of Contested Prejudice: Discrimination in the United States**, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), Chs. 1, 2, 3, 4

II. POLITICS, MACRO-ECONOMICS AND POVERTY

Gören Therborn, **THE KILLING FIELDS OF INEQUALITY** (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity Press, 2013).

III. Income Development Problems

Samuel Bowles and Melissa Osborne Groves, **Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Chs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7

Samuel Roundfield Lucas, **Who Loses?: Discrimination in the United States**, Vol. 2, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), Chs. 8, 9, 10.

Sandra Susan Smith, **Lone Pursuit: Distrust and Defensive Individualism Among the Black Poor** (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007), Ch. 1, 2

Samuel Bowles, Steven N. Durlauf, and Karla Hoff (eds.) **Poverty Traps** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Chs. 2,3,4,5

IV. PERSISTANT POVERTY

Patrick Sharkey, **Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and The End Toward Racial Equality** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

V. SOCIAL LIFE IN POVERTY COMMUNITIES

Martín Sánchez-Jankowski, ***Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

VI. CRIME AND POVERTY

Bruce Western, ***Punishment and Inequality in America*** (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007).

Devah Pager, ***Marked: Race, Crime, Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*** (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), Chs. 2,3,4

VII. HEALTH AND POVERTY

Paul Farmer, ***Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

VIII. THE LIFE COURSE AND POVERTY

Corey Abramson, ***The End Game: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

IX. POVERTY POLICY

Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, ***Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of a Way to Fight Global Poverty*** (Philadelphia: Public Affairs Press, 2012).