

Urban Inequality and *The Wire*

AAAS 115

Harvard University

Fall 2010

Wednesday, 2-4 PM

24 Barker Center

<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/37899>

Co-Instructors:

William Julius Wilson

bill_wilson@harvard.edu

Taubman 406

Office Hours: By appt; contact Edward Walker,

edward_walker@harvard.edu, Taubman 408

617.496.5612

Anmol Chaddha

achaddha@fas.harvard.edu

Du Bois Institute, Floor 3R

Office Hours: By appointment

Teaching Fellow:

Jeremy Levine

jrlevine@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

This course examines a series of topics related to urban inequality and poverty. We will use the television series, *The Wire*, as a thread to integrate topics that form the basis of a thorough understanding of urban inequality, including: crime, incarceration, work and labor markets, the unregulated economy, urban politics, and education. The content of the course is comprised of academic research that will be examined in conjunction with the series.

Rather than approaching the subject from the perspective of film/visual studies or the humanities, this course approaches the study of urban inequality through the lens of social science. Of course, the series is fictional, not a documentary. That said, it offers a sophisticated depiction of systemic urban inequality that constrains the lives of the urban poor. *The Wire* reflects fundamental sociological principles that have long been the concern of social scientists and policymakers focusing on social inequality. The assigned readings analyze the institutions governing life in urban neighborhoods, as well as the social, economic, political and cultural factors that shape the experiences of the urban poor. To be clear, this course is not intended to teach students about the show, per se. Instead, the course integrates academic research with the series to develop a rigorous examination of urban inequality.

REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Assignments . Students will write weekly responses to the assigned course material (600 words max) that consider the following:

- What did you see as the most important insight or idea from the assigned readings and episodes?
- What are your critical reactions to the readings and episodes (strengths and weaknesses)?
- What issues would you particularly like to discuss in class?

These responses must be submitted to the course website no later than 10 AM on the day before class.

Class Discussion. In addition to regular participation in seminars, students will lead a presentation on the assigned readings and episodes for one weekly seminar. Presenters will provide an overview of the main arguments and a critique of the weekly assignments. The presentations should be no more than 20 minutes, and students do not need to submit a weekly response for the week they are presenting.

Grade

- Class participation (weekly responses, seminar discussion, and presentation): 50%
- Final Take-Home Exam: 50%

MATERIALS

The following books are available at The Coop and on reserve at Lamont Library. Assigned readings from other books are compiled in the coursepack, which is available at The Coop. Assigned readings from journals are posted on the course website. DVDs of *The Wire* are available at The Coop and on reserve at Lamont.

Dudley, Kathryn Marie. 1997. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 2009. *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*. New York: W. W. Norton.

SCHEDULE

September 8

Introduction and logistics

I. Crime, Policing, and Incarceration

September 15

Wilson, William Julius. 2009. *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*. New York: W. W. Norton. Chapters 1-3.

Venkatesh, Sudhir and Steven Levitt. 2000. "Are We a Family or a Business? History and Disjuncture in the Urban American Street Gang." *Theory and Society* 29: 427-462.

Fagan, Jeffrey. 1989, "The Social Organization of Drug Use and Drug Dealing Among Urban Gangs." *Criminology*, 27 (4): 633-670.

Moskos, Peter. 2008. *Cop in the Hood: My Year Policing Baltimore's Eastern District*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 4.

The Wire: Season 1, Episodes 1-4.

September 22

Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Introduction and Chapters 1-4.

Anderson, Elijah. 1994. "The Code of the Streets." *Atlantic Monthly*, May: 81-94.

Kotlowitz, Alex. "Blocking the Transmission of Violence." *New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 2008

The Wire: Season 1, Episodes 5-9.

September 29

Harcourt, Bernard. 2006. *Language of the Gun: Youth, Crime and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 3-6.

Katz, Jack. 1988. *Seductions of Crime*. New York: Basic Books. Chapters 3 and 4.

Bobo, Lawrence D. and Victor Thompson. 2010. "Racialized Mass Incarceration: Poverty, Prejudice, and Punishment." Pp. 322-355 in *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, edited by Hazel R. Markus and Paula Moya. New York: Norton.

The Wire: Season 1, Episodes 10-13.

Recommended Readings for Part I

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108 (5): 937-75.

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

Sampson, Robert J., SW Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277: 918-924.

Spergel, Irving A. 1990. "Youth Gangs: Continuity and Change." *Crime and Justice* 12: 171-275.

Sugrue, Thomas. 1996. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2002. *American Project: The Rise and Fall of an American Ghetto*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Western, Bruce. 2008. "Reentry: Reversing Mass Imprisonment." *Boston Review* 33(4).

Young, Alford. 2003. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goffman, Alice. 2010. "On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto." *American Sociological Review* 74(3): 339-357.

II. Work and Labor Markets

October 6

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5.

Dudley, Kathryn Marie. 1997. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction and Chapters 1-4.

The Wire: Season 2, Episodes 1-5.

October 13

Dudley, Kathryn Marie. 1997. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 6-9.

The Wire: Season 2, Episodes 6-12.

Recommended Readings for Part II

Harrison, Bennett and Barry Bluestone. 1998. *The Great U-Turn: Corporate Restructuring and the Polarizing of America*. New York: Basic Books.

Mincy, Ronald B. (ed). 2006. *Black Males Left Behind*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Neckerman, Kathryn and Joleen Kirschenman. 1991. "Hiring Strategies, Racial Bias, and Inner-City Workers." *Social Problems* 38: 433-47.

Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Knopf.

III. Urban Politics and Economic Development

October 20

Caraley, Demetrios. 1992. "Washington Abandons the Cities." *Political Science Quarterly* 107(1): 1-30.

Newman, Kathe. 2004. "Newark, decline, and avoidance, renaissance and desire: From disinvestment to reinvestment." *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences* 594: 34-48.

Hyra, Derek. 2008. *The New Urban Renewal: The Economic Transformation of Harlem and Bronzeville*. Chapters 1-3.

The Wire: Season 3, Episodes 1-4.

October 27

Kaufmann, Karen M. 2004. *The Urban Voter: Group Conflict and Mayoral Voting Behavior in American Cities*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 5.

Thompson, J. Phillip. 2005. *Double Trouble: Black Mayors, Black Communities, and the Call for a Deep Democracy*. Chapter 1.

Boyer, Peter J. 2008. "The Color of Politics." *The New Yorker*, February 4.

"Harold." *This American Life*. Chicago Public Media and Public Radio International. November 21, 1997. Posted at: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/84/Harold>

The Wire: Season 3, Episodes 5-8.

November 3

Wacquant, Loic. 2007. *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 7.

Wacquant, Loic. 2001. "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh." *Punishment & Society* 3(1): 95-134.

Weisburd, David and John Eck. 2004. "What Can Police Do to Reduce Crime, Disorder and Fear?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593: 42-65.

Tyler, Tom. 2004. "Enhancing Police Legitimacy." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593: 84-99.

Rosin, Hanna. 2008. "American Murder Mystery." *The Atlantic*, July/August.

Schmoke, Kurt L. 2008. "Drug Sanity." *The New Republic*, April 14.

The Wire: Season 3, Episodes 9-12.

Recommended Readings for Part III

McRoberts, Omar. 2005. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lehr, Dick. 2009. *The Fence: A Police Cover-up along Boston's Racial Divide*. New York: Harper Press.

Logan, John and Harvey Molotch. 2007. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Goetz, Edward. 2003. *Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

IV. Education and Youth

November 10

Clark, Kenneth B. 1965. *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*. New York: Harper & Row. Chapter 6.

MacLeod, Jay. 1987. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Westview Press. Chapters 2, 6 and 7.

Carter, Prudence. 2003. "Black Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and the Conflict of Schooling for Low-Income African American Youth." *Social Problems* 50(1): 136-155.

Fordham, Signithia and John U. Ogbu. 1986. "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White.'" *Urban Review* 18: 176-206.

The Wire: Season 4, Episodes 1-4.

November 17

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 46-62.

Neckerman, Kathryn. 2007. *Schools Betrayed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction, and Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

Harding, David J. 2010. *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture among Inner-City Boys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 5.

Sharkey, Patrick. 2010. "The Acute Effect of Local Homicides on Children's Cognitive Performance." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107: 11733-11738.

The Wire: Season 4, Episodes 5-9.

December 1

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 1 and 12.

Gabel, Katherine and Denise Johnson (eds.). 1995. *Children of Incarcerated Parents*. New York: Lexington Books. Chapters 1 and 5.

Comfort, Megan. 2008. *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 4.

Wilson, William Julius. 2010. "The Obama's Administration's Proposals to Address Concentrated Urban Poverty." *City and Community* 9(1): 41-49.

Tough, Paul. 2004. "The Harlem Project." *The New York Times Magazine*, June 20.

The Wire: Season 4, Episodes 10-13.

Recommended Readings for Part IV

Fagan, Jeffrey and Deanna Wilkinson. 1998. "Guns, Youth Violence, and Social Identity." In: *Youth Violence*, edited by Michael Tonry and Mark H. Moore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sampson, Robert J, Patrick Sharkey, and Stephen W. Raudenbush. 2008. "Durable Effects of Concentrated Disadvantage on Verbal Ability Among African-American Children." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105: 845-852.