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Soc 98: Junior Tutorial Culture and Poverty in Contemporary America Spring 2013

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2:00pm-5:00pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will cover the cultural aspects of poverty, with a particular (although not exclusive) focus on the contemporary United States. In particular, we will examine contending ideological theories on the causes of poverty, arguments on the role of culture and structure in reproducing conditions of poverty, and studies documenting how cultural factors are related to social violence, concentrated disadvantage, and social mobility, among other topics. The readings will showcase a wide range of research methods, including quantitative analysis of survey and administrative data, ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and archival research. The issues of race and gender will be woven into our readings and discussion throughout the semester.

The format of the course will involve facilitated group discussion and presentations. I am a strong believer in active learning; thus, I will use discussion in place of traditional lectures whenever possible, encouraging questions, debates, and structured reflections. The course will culminate in a 20-30 page final paper on culture and poverty based on original empirical research. Possible topics for this paper include: an examination of how cultural norms of trust are related to social violence, how culture interacts with racial differences in poverty, the role of elites in perpetuating cultural myths on the causes of poverty, the structural and political limits of cultural explanations of poverty, how people deal with new cultural environments, and so forth.

REQUIREMENTS

Requirements include attendance at class and participation in class discussions, weekly response papers, a final research paper, and a presentation in class on your findings. Grades will be based on four main activities:

(1) Class Participation (20%): Students are expected to read and review readings before class. Discussion will be a significant part of the class and its success will depend on the contributions of all members. Effective participation includes active listening, asking questions about the readings and handouts, responding to the ideas of your classmates, taking notes, offering ideas and comments, completing reading assignments, engaging in intellectual debates, and considering alternative points of view. An assessment of your class participation will be provided halfway through the semester. Also, during the last two

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weeks of the semester, students will provide brief (10-15 minutes) class presentations of their empirical findings from their research projects. These presentations will be included in the final class participation grade.

(2) Critical Response Papers (20%): For the first ten weeks students are expected to write seven critical response papers based on that week's readings. Each response paper should critically analyze the main concepts and theories of each of the week's readings, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of the arguments. Each critical response paper should be between two to three double-spaced pages in length. The response papers are due by 5pm the day before that week's class.

(3) Research Proposal (10%): By the fourth week of class, students are required to write an outline of their research project. The proposal should describe the research topic, review the relevant research literature, and outline how data will be collected. All kinds of empirical research strategies are encouraged, including quantitative analysis of survey data, ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, archival work, and so forth. The research proposal should be between two to three double-spaced pages in length. ***Although not required, I strongly recommend that you discuss your research topic with before the fourth week of class.*** The proposal is due by 5pm the day before the fourth week's class.

(4) Final Research Paper (50%): Based on the topic chosen for the research proposal, students are expected to conduct a project based on original empirical research. The format of the final paper should include a clear statement of your arguments or hypotheses, thorough review of the current relevant literature, detailed presentation of the findings, and a concluding section discussing the theoretical implications of the project, possible directions for further research, as well as strengths and limitations of the project. You are required to include a full list of citations at the end of the paper.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 28): Course introduction

No readings.

Week 2 (February 4): Introduction to Paradigms of Poverty

Harvey, David L. and Michael Reed. 1992. "Paradigms of Poverty: A Critical Assessment of Contemporary Perspectives." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. 6(2): 269-297.

Hoynes, Hilary W., Marianne E. Page, Ann Huff Stevens. 2006. "Poverty in America: Trends and Explanations." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(1): 47-68.

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Week 3 (February 11): Classic Statements on Culture and Poverty

Harrington, Michael. 1962. *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*. New York: Touchstone Press (A Division of Simon & Schuster). Pp. 1-19, 158-174.

Lewis, Oscar. 1969. "The Culture of Poverty." In *On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, edited by Daniel P. Moynihan. Pp. 187-220. New York: Basic Books.

Bourgois, Philippe. 2001. "Culture of Poverty." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes. Pp. 11904-11907. Oxford: Pergamon.

Harvey, David L. and Michael Reed. 1996. "The Culture of Poverty: An Ideological Analysis." *Sociological Perspectives* 39(4): 465-495.

Week 4 (February 18): Contemporary Statements on Culture and Poverty

Patterson, Orlando. 2001. "Taking Culture Seriously: A Framework and an Afro-American Illustration." In *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, edited by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington. Pp. 202-218. New York: Basic Books.

Lamont, Michele and Mario Luis Small. 2008. "How Culture Matters: Enriching Our Understanding of Poverty." In *The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist*, edited by Ann Linn and David Harris. Pp. 76-102. New York: Russell Sage.

Wilson, William Julius. 2010. "Why Both Social Structure and Culture Matter in a Holistic Analysis of Inner-City Poverty." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629(1): 200-219.

Week 5 (February 25): Education, Part I: Culture, Labor, and Capital

Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. 2002. "Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited." *Sociology of Education* 75(1): 1-18.

Connell, R.W. 1994. "Poverty and Education." *Harvard Educational Review* 64(2): 125-150.

Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 1-88, 160-184.

Farkas, George. 2003. "Cognitive Skills and Noncognitive Traits and Behaviors in Stratification Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 541-562.

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Week 6 (March 4): Education, Part II: Race, Conflict, and Oppositional Cultures

Fordham, Signithia, and John Ogbu. 1986. "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White.'" *The Urban Review* 18(3): 176-206.

Carter, Prudence L. 2003. "'Black' Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-Income African American Youth." *Social Problems* 50: 136-55.

Tyson, Karolyn, William Darity, Domini Castellino. 2005. "It's Not 'a Black Thing': Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement." *American Sociological Review* 70(4): 582-605.

Week 7 (March 11): Family, Part I: Parenting and the Home Environment

Kohn, Melvin. 1963. "Social Class and Parent-Child Relationships: An Interpretation." *American Journal of Sociology* 68(4): 471-480.

Lareau, Annette 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families" *American Sociological Review* 67: 747-776.

Evans, Gary W. 2004. "The Environment of Childhood Poverty." *American Psychologist* 59(2): 77-92.

NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

March 16-24 – Spring Recess

Week 8 (March 25): Family, Part II: Poverty and the Myth of Cultural Dependency

Mead, Lawrence. 1986. *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship*. Chapters 1-4.

Ellwood, David. 1995. "The Origins of Dependency: Choices, Confidence or Culture?" *Focus* 12: 66-13.

Edin, Kathryn. 1995. "The Myths of Dependency and Self-Sufficiency: Women, Welfare, and Low-Wage Work." *Focus* 17(2): 1-9.

Week 9 (April 1): Social Violence: Honor, Respect, and Codes of the Street

Anderson, Elijah. 1994. "The Code of the Streets." *The Atlantic Monthly* 273(5): 80-87.

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Bourgois, Philippe. 1995. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-47, 318-351.

Cohen, Dov and Joe Vandello. 1998. "Meanings of Violence." *The Journal of Legal Studies* 27(S2): 567-584.

Week 10 (April 8): Social Mobility: Cultural Barriers, Buffers, and Beliefs

Vaisey, Stephen. 2010. "What People Want: Rethinking Poverty, Culture, and Educational Attainment." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629(1): 75-101.

Vermeulen, Hans. 2000. "Introduction: The Role of Culture in Explanations of Social Mobility." In *Immigrants, Schooling, and Social Mobility: Does Culture Make a Difference?*, edited by Hans Vermeulen and Joel Perlmann, pp. 1-22. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Young, Alford. 2006. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp. 3-36, 107-136, 199-206

Week 11 (April 15): Structural Limits of Cultural Perspectives

Brady, David. 2003. "The Politics of Poverty: Left Political Institutions, the Welfare State, and Poverty." *Social Forces* 82(2): 557-588.

Rank, Mark R., Hong-Sik Yoon, and Thomas A. Hirschl. 2003. "American Poverty as a Structural Failing: Evidence and Arguments." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 30(4): 3-29.

Mullainathan, Sendhil and Eldar Shafir. 2009. "Savings Policy and Decision-making in Low-Income Households," In *Insufficient Funds: Savings, Assets, Credit and Banking among Low-Income Households*, edited by Michael Barr and Rebecca Blank. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Week 12 (April 22): Student presentations

Week 13 (April 29): Student presentations