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.


SCHEDULE

September 8
Introduction and logistics

I. Crime, Policing, and Incarceration

September 15


*The Wire*: Season 1, Episodes 1-4.

September 22


*The Wire*: Season 1, Episodes 5-9.

September 29


The Wire: Season 1, Episodes 10-13.

**Recommended Readings for Part I**


**II. Work and Labor Markets**

**October 6**


*The Wire*: Season 2, Episodes 1-5.

**October 13**


*The Wire*: Season 2, Episodes 6-12.

**Recommended Readings for Part II**


**III. Urban Politics and Economic Development**

**October 20**


October 27


November 3


**Recommended Readings for Part III**


**IV. Education and Youth**

**November 10**


**November 17**


December 1


Recommended Readings for Part IV
