Social Structure and Culture in the Study of Race and Urban Poverty

SOC-254/SUP-207
Spring Semester 2014
Thursdays 2:00-4:00 PM
Room—To be announced

Instructor: William Julius Wilson
Office: Taubman 406
Phone: 617-496-4514
e-mail: bill_wilson@harvard.edu
Office Hours: by appointment; contact Edward Walker, edward_walker@harvard.edu; Taubman 408; 617-496-5612

Teaching Fellow:
Theodore Miller
(email)
(Office address)
Office Hours: By appointment

The purpose of this course is to critically examine current writing and debates on the relative importance of social structure and culture in the social outcomes of urban African Americans and immigrants in the United States. The relevance of these works for public and social policy will also be discussed.

COURSE 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 noon on the day before class.

Class Discussion. In addition to regular participation in seminars, students will lead a presentation on the assigned readings for one weekly seminar. Presenters will provide a brief critique of the assigned readings for that week. The presentations should be no more than 15 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%

All assigned books are available at the Coop and on reserve at the Lamont and Kennedy School Libraries. Additional assigned readings are available on the course website.

CLASS TOPICS AND SCHEDULE

The first class meeting, which will be brief and devoted to logistics only, will be Thursday, January 30, at the normal start time of 2:10pm.

I. Culture and Social Structure in the Study of Race and Urban Poverty.

February 6

Assigned Readings:


William Julius Wilson, “Afterword to Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged*,” [Copy available on the course website]


Recommended Readings:


Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City*, Chapters 3-4, 6-9, 11-14 and 16.


II. Contemporary Readings on Culture and Social Structure in the Study of Race and Urban Poverty.

**February 13**

Assigned Readings:


Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep*. (Introduction, Chapters 4-5, Conclusion).


Recommended Readings:

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep* (chapters 1-3, 6).


February 20

Assigned Readings:


Recommended Readings:


February 27

Assigned Readings:

Bruce Western, Punishment and Inequality in America.


Recommended Readings:


March 6

Assigned Reading:

Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, Off the Books.

Recommended Readings:


March 13

Assigned Readings:

Phillip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters and Jennifer Holdaway. Inheriting the City.

Robert J. Sampson, Great American City, Chapter 10.

Recommended Readings:


**Spring Recess**

**March 27**

**Assigned Reading:**

Roger Waldinger, *Still the Promised City*.

**Recommended Readings:**


**April 3**

**Assigned Readings:**

Sandra Susan Smith, *Lone Pursuit*.


**Recommended Readings:**


April 10

Assigned Reading:

Kathryn Neckerman, *Schools Betrayed*.

Recommended Readings:


April 17

Assigned Readings:

William Julius Wilson and Richard P. Taub, *There Goes the Neighborhood*


Recommended Readings:


April 24

Assigned Reading:

Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block*.

Recommended Readings.


### III. Political Framing and Social Policy

**May 1**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Books Ordered for the Seminar**


