

Fall 2007

Sociology 591

*From Poor Law to Working Poor: The world of low-income America*

Monday 4:30-6:50 - O'Neill Library 247

Professor: Lisa Dodson

Lisa.Dodson@bc.edu or 2-6864

Room 408 McGuinn

Office hours: By arrangement, but generally I will meet with students on Mondays before or after class.

*Syllabus*

From “warning off paupers” to welfare reform and, now, low wages and growing inequality, this course offers an overview of American attitudes and public policies toward poor/low-income people and their children. Readings examine relationships between poverty and race, gender, families raising children, immigration, and the low-wage job market. We will consider past and contemporary images and language describing “the poor” and how these may influence public opinion and social policy. The course will encourage students to examine their own assumptions about who is poor, why they are, and to consider public and private roles and responsibility for reducing poverty. *Your grade will be based on class participation, a paper, and work in a student-led group presentation (see last pages for details).*

**Course texts are in the bookstore and also may be available used, @ online bookstores:**

1. Trattner, William (1998). *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*. (6th. ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.
2. Dodson, Lisa (1999). *Don't Call Us Out of Name: The Untold Story of Women and Girls in Poor America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
3. Shulman, Beth (2003) *The Betrayal of Work: How low wage jobs fail 30 million Americans*.
4. Lareau, Annette. (2003). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## September 10<sup>th</sup>

Every class will start with an open forum for a few minutes. This is encouraged but voluntary for undergraduates; I do expect graduate students to participate. It is a chance for you to bring up reflections from the previous class, personal observations, activities in which you are involved or current events related to poverty in the US.

Review Student Roster – introductions

Review syllabus, paper, student-led discussions (see attached last pages)

### Sign up for student-led discussions

Introductory lecture

No Readings

## September 17<sup>th</sup> History: 1750-1850 - Colonial times, poor houses and slavery

- Discussion of your reading questions and comments
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

Trattner, Chapters 1- 4

## September 24<sup>th</sup> History Continued: 1850-1900 - Civil War to the Progressive Era

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

1. Trattner, Chapter 5: The Civil War and After – Scientific Charity
2. Jones, Jacqueline (1985). “Bridge of Bent Backs and Laboring Muscles: The Rural South 1880- 1915,” Chapter 3 in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*
3. Dudden, Faye “Domestics” Chapter 2 in *Serving Women* (1983)  
[Course Reserves]

## October 1<sup>st</sup> Child laborer and the priceless child

### Paper topics circulated and discussed

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

1. Zelizer, Viviana “From Useful to Useless” and “From Child Labor to Child Work” Chapters 2 and 3 in *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1985) [Course Reserves]
2. Trattner, Chapter 6: Child Welfare

## October 8<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS

## October 15<sup>th</sup> Family structure, family myths and single mothers

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion
- *For those who want it – Time to discuss your papers*

Readings:

1. Coontz, Stephanie. “Leave it to Beaver” and “We Have Always Stood on Our Own Two Feet” Chapters 2 & 4 in *The Way We Never Were* (1992)
2. Williams, Lucy. “Race, Rat Bites and Unfit Mothers” (1995)
3. Jenks and Edin, “Do Poor Women Have a Right to Bear Children”? (1995)

[Course Reserves]

**October 22nd** The “epidemic” of teen pregnancy and poverty policy

**Speaker:**

Patricia Quinn, Senior Director of Public Policy and Programs  
 Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy  
 105 Chauncy Street, 8th floor  
 Boston, Massachusetts 02111  
 p: 617.482.9122 x114| f: 617.482.9129  
 www.massteenpregnancy.org

The Alliance is the foremost Massachusetts organization representing, advocating for and supporting the lives and voice of parenting and pregnant teens. If possible, Tricia will be accompanied by a young parent who can provide greater insight into the issues we are discussing. *Note:* There may be volunteer opportunities for interested students (this has happened in the past) with the Alliance so please feel free to ask the representative(s) about that if you are interested.

- Class should write down questions and comments for the speakers for discussion
- Discussion of readings should be integrated into your questions
- Discuss you papers

Readings:

Luker, Kristin. “Why do they do it?” Chapter 6 in *Dubious Conceptions* (1996)  
 [Course Reserves]  
 Dodson (1999) Chapters 1- 4

**October 29th** Welfare Debates: Dependency versus Self Sufficiency

**Turn in you paragraph about paper topic/approach!**

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

Dodson, Chapters 5 - 8

Mead, Lawrence (1992) "Welfare Reform" Chapter 9 in *New Politics of Poverty*  
[Course Reserves]

Note: Class, please Google <FESS Resources> and then go to The Self Sufficiency Standards Report for Massachusetts (FESS means Family Economic Self Sufficiency) and skim, for our discussion.

### **November 5<sup>th</sup>** Marriage as the solution to family poverty

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

1. Theodora Ooms

[Adapting Healthy Marriage Programs for Disadvantaged and Culturally Diverse Populations: What are the issues?](#)

2. Robert E. Rector, Patrick F. Fagan, and Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., "Marriage: Still the Safest Place for Women and Children," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 1732, March 9, 2004. [Read Online](#)  
[<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/bg1732.cfm>]

3. Other reading

### **November 12<sup>th</sup>** Caring for families when mothers have "gone to work"

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

2. Olicker, Stacy (2000) "Examining Care at Welfare's End" Chapter 11 in *Care Work* edited by Madonna H Meyer
3. Heymann, Jody (2005) "Inequalities at Work and at Home" Chapter 4 in *Unfinished Work* edited by Heymann and Beem.
4. Dodson (2007) "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy" *Social Politics* 14(2)

Recommended!!! Lichtenstein, "That Disposition to Theft, With Which They Have Been Branded: Moral Economy, Slave Management and the Law" *Journal of Social History* 21(3) [Course Reserves]

### **November 19<sup>th</sup>** Raising Inequality

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings:

Lareau, Chapters 1, 3-5 (you can skip chapter 2) but I recommend the entire book!

**November 26<sup>th</sup>** Low-wage labor market

- Discussion of readings
- Student-led discussion

Readings: Shulman, Beth (2003) *The Betrayal of Work: How low wage jobs fail 30 million Americans*, Chapters:  
EPI: readings on family budgets and trends in low-wage work

**December 3rd**

**Speaker:** Becca Guttman  
1199SEIU  
21 Fellows Street  
Roxbury, MA 02119  
617-989-8033

Need background and readings from SEIU... or union history?

**December 10<sup>th</sup>**

- Student-led discussion
- Hand in papers

**Participation and grading**

Based on past experience, I have learned to be explicit about grading issues and below you will find how I weight the coursework. Overall, I expect graduate students to perform at a more advanced level in their participation and written work.

***Participation is 33% of your grade***

This is a highly participatory class. Each week we will go around the room and take some of your (prepared) comments and questions from the readings to put up on the board for class discussion. I have reduced the reading volume significantly so that you will have time to really engage with and discuss the material. I will be calling on people who do not volunteer. If you have a very difficult time speaking in class; talk with me about this. [One alternative will be some form of written work – such as very brief response papers – due *on the day* the readings are discussed.]

**If you are going to be absent, please make sure you email me be in advance of class – I will be taking attendance!**

***Paper is 33% of your grade*** – we will discuss the paper in class.

You have one paper (*maximum 20 pages double-spaced, 12pt font, plus footnotes that are no more than a page*) and it will be assigned weeks in advance so there should be no problem getting it in on time and late papers *will* lose credit. It must be turned in to me

as hard copy, on the due date, in class. You will choose from a list of 3 topics for your paper – below. **On October 29<sup>th</sup>**, you must submit a paragraph summarizing your approach to the paper (a thesis statement and where you are getting information to research and outline of your argument).

You are free to choose different approaches to your topic – national policy, legal debate, local “lived experience” or a specific perspective -- so you may use an array of resources (library, newspapers, policy institutes, interviews, specific court case(s), getting in touch with people who are actively involved on the issue, etc.). Regardless of your approach, you will be expected to frame the major issues, very briefly, and in your own words. I do not want you to take up space reciting case law or reams of public policy; rather summarize what is going on in these debates (2-3 pages). You can certainly present a thesis that takes a position. *Remember the underlying focus of this class is on poverty class and the American experience so keep this frame central to your thinking.*

Please think this through in advance and ask me questions early on! I will save some time before October 29<sup>th</sup> for in-class discussion of the papers.

### **Paper topics**

### **Student Presentations topics**