

AMH 3931
Poverty and Welfare in American History
Matt Gallman
Fall 2017

MWF 12:50-1:40

Flint 0111

Office: Keene-Flint 203

Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 2:00 – 4:00

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Course Summary

This course is a broad survey of how Americans have thought about poverty and poor relief (or welfare) over the last two centuries or so. We will be looking at how a wide variety of reformers, journalists, politicians and artists have thought about the “problem of poverty.” We will be trying to figure out what questions they asked, what answers they came to, and how – if at all – that conversation has evolved over time. The class will establish the core themes of the course as we progress.

We will also be doing our best to explore and understand the experiences of America’s poor. The evidence will often be impressionistic, and we will not pretend that we have the whole story.

In essence, this semester will be an analysis of America’s ongoing conversation with, and about, the nation’s underclass. We will mention important pieces of legislation, but our focus will be largely on the people involved in these discussions. This success of this course will depend heavily on student preparation and participation. Very few class meetings will be organized as traditional lectures. Most classes will emphasize the close readings of assigned documents, often depending on the efforts of student leaders or presenters.

Class Meetings and Preparation

This is very much a discussion-based course. You are expected to attend all classes, prepared to talk about the assigned readings. I will take roll fairly regularly, and more than two absences will adversely affect your grade. You should also come to class with notes on the documents and readings. These notes should include discussion topics to raise in class as well as any questions that you might have. You will have periodic open note quizzes on the readings.

{Note: When I refer to taking good notes on the readings, this should be taken very literally. You should come to each class with separate notes (not merely underlinings) on the assigned readings.) Since our focus is so much on group discussion, this will be an “electronic free” classroom. Please do not make use of computers or other electronic devices during class. Please turn off your phones and put them away before class begins.

Readings

This course has very regular readings from a variety of sources. Some of the readings are from the required purchases, listed below. Quite a few of the readings are primary sources that I have either linked to the “Resources” page on the Canvas page, or I have put on reserve (also linked on the “Web Links” page.) It is your responsibility to pay attention in class and consult the syllabus and come to class having read the assigned readings (with notes).

The main readings (to purchase) are:

(1) Michael Katz, *In The Shadow of the Poorhouse*.

This is an excellent interpretive overview of the history of poverty and welfare in American history. Be sure to buy the revised edition. This is pretty much our textbook.

(2) Seth Rockman, editor, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic*.

This is a really nice short volume of documents on poverty and welfare in the first decades of U. S. history. These documents will be the basis of your first essay.

(3) James Agee and Walker Evans, *Cotton Tenants: Three Families*.

This is long magazine article, republished as a book. Evans was a photographer and Agee a writer/journalist. It is a marvelous window into life in Alabama during the Great Depression.

(4) Jonathan Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*.

Kozol is a brilliant commentator on American poverty and education. In this book he offers capsule biographies of people he has worked with for the last 25 years. These longer narratives provide a very different window into both modern poverty and public policy responses to the poor.

(5) J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*.

This is the best-selling memoir of a young man who grew up in Ohio, in a family with deep Kentucky roots. We will compare Vance and Kozol and I will enjoy watching your heads explode. You will write an essay about *Cotton Tenants*, with a particular emphasis on the power of photographs. You will also write an essay about both Kozol and Vance.

There are also quite a few readings from primary sources linked under "Pages."

Written Assignments and Presentations

You will write four short (1000 words) essays and one slightly longer essay in this course. Each essay will be a response to required readings (there will be no outside research). Usually your papers will be the subject of a Thursday class discussion. On some occasions I may require a presentation based on your papers.

All written work must be your own work. If I discover that you have submitted anything that is not your own work you will fail the course.

Please review the University's honesty policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>

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You will also write a short final take-home examination based on

the assigned readings and class discussions/lectures. There will be no in-class midterm or final.

Grading (based on 500 points)

- Essay #1 50
- Essay #2 50
- Essay #3 50
- Essay #3 50
- Essay #4 100
- Preparation and Participation 100
- Take-home final essay 100

Missed classes or excessive lateness will result in reduced grades.
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Participation Grades will Reflect

- Coming to class prepared to discuss readings.
- Active engagement in discussions (and when your classmates are presenting).
- Success on very simple 10 point (unannounced) reading quizzes, which measure preparation.
- Presentations in class.

Attendance Deductions

- After two absences, the final grade number will be for each additional unexcused absence.
- If a student is habitually late, this will result in a reduction off the final grade.

Accommodations

Please do not hesitate to contact me during the semester if you have any individual concerns or issues that need to be discussed. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Class Meetings and Assignments

Introductions

- 1 M August 21 Defining terms
2 W August 23 Read: Katz, iii-xvii.
3 F August 25 Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, Chapters 1 and 2.

The Early Republic: Explaining Poverty

- 4 M August 28 Read: Katz, 3-59.
5 W August 30 Read: Rockman, Documents 1, 2.
6 F September 1 Read: Rockman, Documents 4, 19.

The Early Republic: Responding to Poverty

- M September 4 Holiday
7 W September 6 Read: Rockman, Documents 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15.
8 F September 8 Continue discussion
9 M September 11 Read: Rockman, Documents 17, 18, 22, 23, 24
Essay #1 Due in Class (based on Rockman documents)

“Scientific” Charity

- 10 W September 13 Read: Katz, 60-87
11 F September 15 Read: [Josephine Shaw Lowell, *Public Relief and Private Charity* \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) (New York, 1884), pages 1-8, 58-96, 101-111. (Entire book linked on Resources Page and above.)

Saving Children and Families

- 12 M September 18 Read: Katz, 88-113.
13 W September 20 Read: [Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) (New York, 1872), pp i-xii (this includes the Table of Contents – read this to get a sense of his main themes), 13-24, 223-245, 440-448. (Entire book linked on

- Resources Page and also above.)
- 14 F September 22 Assessing Lowell and Brace
Essay #2 Due in Class

Building the Semi-Welfare State: Rethinking Families

- 15 M September 25 Read: Katz, 117-150.
- 16 W September 27 Read: "[State Pensions to Mothers in Hamilton County, Ohio](#)" ([Links to an external site.](#)) [Links to an external site.](#) in *The Survey* (December 12, 1914), 289-90. [Linked on Resource page and above.]
- 17 F September 29 TBA

Essay #3 Due in Class

Building the Semi-Welfare State: Rethinking Cities

- 18 M October 2 Read: Katz, 151-184.
- 19 W October 4 Read: [Jane Addams, "The Devil Baby at Hull House](#) ([Links to an external site.](#)) [Links to an external site.](#).
- " [Linked on Resource page and above.]
- F October 6 Homecoming

Jacob Riis and Urban Poverty

- 20 M October 9 Read: [Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*](#) ([Links to an external site.](#)) [Links to an external site.](#) (1890). Chapters IV, VIII, XI, XII, XIII, XV, XVII, XIX, XX, XXI. [Linked on Resource Page and above.]
- 21 W October 11
- 22 F October 13 Discussion: Jacob Riis as photographer.

The Federal Government Steps In

- 23 M October 16 Read: Katz, 151-212 (two chapters).
- 24 W October 18 Read: Katz, 213-255.
- 25 F October 29 begin reading *Cotton Tenants*

Journalists and Tenant Farmers

- 26 M October 23 Read: *Cotton Tenants*, 1-135.

- 27 W October 25 Read: Cotton Tenants, 136-end.
28 F October 27 Discussion: Photographer and Poverty.

Essay #4 Due (on Riis and Evans)

Poverty Rediscovered: The Great Society and Beyond

- 29 M October 30 Read: Katz, 259-282
30 W November 1 Read: James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: a Letter from Harlem" (Links to an external site.) Links to an external site. in *Esquire* (July 1960); republished in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961). [Linked on Resource page and above.]
31 F November 3 Read: Excerpt from Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (Links to an external site.) Links to an external site. (1962). (Excerpt linked on Resource page and above.)

A Culture of Poverty?

- 32 M November 6 Read: O. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," *Scientific American*, October 1966 (Links to an external site.) Links to an external site., pp. 19-25. [Linked on Canvas.]
33 W November 8 Read: Laurie B. Green, "Saving Babies in Memphis: The Politics of Race, Health and Hunger during the War on Poverty," in *The War on Poverty*. (Linked on Canvas.)
F November 10 Holiday

Life Stories

- 34 M November 13 Read: Katz, 283-334.
35 W November 15 Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, pages TBA.
36 F November 17 Read: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, finish.
37 M November 20 Discussion: *Fire in the Ashes*.
W November 22 Holiday

F November 24 Holiday

38 M November 27 Read: Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, pp. 1-60.

39 W November 29 Read: Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, pp. 61-151.

40 F December 1 Read: Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, finish.

41 M December 4 Kozol and Vance

Essay #5 Due: Approaches to Life Stories

42 W December 6 Conclusions

December 13 Take-Home Final Essay due

Due at 12:30 in my office.