

AMH 3931  
**Poverty and Welfare in American History**  
**Matt Gallman**  
**Spring 2020**

T Period 4 (10:40 AM - 11:30 AM) FLI 0119  
R Period 4 - 5 (10:40 AM - 12:35 PM) Room FLI 011

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Office hours: Thursday 1:30-3:30  
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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. This is not really a course about public policy, although certainly some public policy will creep into discussions.

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).

Please acquire copies of the books to bring with you to class. **Kindle copies or books on your phone are not permitted.** The books are all pretty inexpensive and class discussions require that you have actual books with you.

The main readings (to purchase) are:

- (1) William I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Free Press, 1999).  
This is a valuable survey of lots of terrain. You should keep up with the readings and turn to this book as background for your essays. It is essentially our textbook.
- (2) Seth Rockman, editor, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic* (Waveland, 2014).  
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 several class discussions and of your first essay.
- (3) James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Mariner, 2001).  
James Agee was a brilliant poet and journalist. Walker Evans was a prize-winning photographer. In the midst of the Great Depression, they set out to explore the lives of three tenant families. This is the product of their labors.
- (4) Jonathan Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes* (Broadway Books, 2013).  
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. We will discuss two chapters in the first week of class and the rest of the book late in the semester.
- (4) Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (Broadway Books, 2016).  
Desmond is a sociologist at Princeton, who works on American poverty. In this book he set out to understand the lives of eight Milwaukee families who had all faced the challenges of eviction. It recently won the Pulitzer Prize.

## Written Assignments and Presentations

You will write four short (1000 words) essays and one 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>

There will be no in-class midterm or final.

**Grading (based on 500 points)**

- Essay #1 50
- Essay #2 50
- Essay #3 50
- \* Essay #4 50
- Essay #5 50
- \* Final Essay 150
- Preparation and Participation 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 drop for each additional unexcused absence.
- If a student is habitually late, this will result in a reduction of the final grade.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>. Generally speaking, if planned (approved) events are going to require you to miss class, you will be given additional work.

**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.

If you have an accommodation letter you should plan to meet with me in the first two weeks of class.

**Course Evaluations**

Students may complete their evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https->

[3A\\_ufl.bluer.com\\_ufl\\_&d=DwIGaQ&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=1qtWVKU2uNohMAWR5pYYVu0F\\_ty9jxk4wI-DcSEfmKub76k8eaDIYvGQkZMpCQZ6&m=KCQMaruvDecGkQ95LBWWejChKpHp\\_d3olzGps63zo0Ao&s=2ry1lk1Sd2MT9xMTXgaRslOLmzE7-Mky8W2E\\_HUO3wQ&e=](https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/?d=DwIGaQ&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=1qtWVKU2uNohMAWR5pYYVu0F_ty9jxk4wI-DcSEfmKub76k8eaDIYvGQkZMpCQZ6&m=KCQMaruvDecGkQ95LBWWejChKpHp_d3olzGps63zo0Ao&s=2ry1lk1Sd2MT9xMTXgaRslOLmzE7-Mky8W2E_HUO3wQ&e=) .

## Class Meetings and Assignments

Tues	10:40	Flint 0119
Thurs	10:40-12:35	Flint 0111

### Introductions

1. Tues Jan 7 - Defining Terms
2. Thur Jan 9 - Fire in the Ashes  
READ: Trattner, pp. 1-12; Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*, Chapters 1-2.

### The Early Republic: Explaining Poverty

3. Tues Jan 14 - Explaining Poverty  
READ: Trattner, pp. 15-44; Rockman, 1-33.
4. Thur Jan 16 - Explaining Poverty: Documents  
READ: Rockman, documents # 1, 2, 4, 19.

### The Early Republic: Responding to Poverty

5. Tues Jan 21 - Responding to Poverty - I  
READ: Trattner, 47-73.  
READ: Rockman, Documents # 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15.
6. Thur Jan 23 - Responding to Poverty – 2  
READ: Rockman, Documents #17, 18, 22, 23, 24  
ESSAY #1 DUE IN CLASS (On Rockman documents).

### Scientific Charity

7. Tues Jan 28 - The Civil War and New Organizations  
READ: Trattner, 77-103.
8. Thur Jan 30 - The Charity Organization Movement  
READ: Josephine Shaw Lowell, *Public Relief and Private Charity* (New York, 1884), pages 1-8, 58-96, 101-111. (Linked on Canvas)

### Saving Children and Families

9. Tues Feb 4 - Saving Children and Families  
READ: Trattner, 108-134.
10. Thur Feb 6 - The Children's Aid Society  
READ: Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (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. (Linked on Canvas.)  
PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS: Lowell and Brace

### **Building the Semi-Welfare State: Rethinking Cities**

11. Tues Feb 11 - Sanitation  
READ: Trattner, 140-59.
12. Thur Feb 13 - Settlement Houses  
READ: Trattner, 163-87.  
READ: Read: Jane Addams, "The Devil Baby at Hull House." [Linked on Canvas.]
13. Tues Feb 18 - Muck Raking  
Thur Feb 20 - Gallman Out of Town
14. Tues Feb 25 - Jacob Riis - I
15. Thur Feb 27 - Jacob Riis - II  
READINGS TBA  
PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS: Addams and Riis
- Tues Mar 3 - HOLIDAY
- Thur Mar 5 - HOLIDAY

### **Building the Semi-Welfare State: Rethinking Families**

16. Tues Mar 10 - Mental Health  
READ: Trattner, 192-210.
17. Thur Mar 12 - Mothers' Pensions  
READ: Trattner, 214-229.  
READ: "State Pensions to Mothers in Hamilton County, Ohio" in *The Survey* (December 12, 1914), 289-90. [Linked on Canvas.]  
PAPER #4 DUE IN CLASS: Mothers' Pension Acts

### **The Federal Government Steps In**

18. Tues Mar 17 - The Rise of Social Work  
READ: Trattner, 253-269.  
START READING *LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN* (specifics TBA)
19. Thur Mar 19 - The Great Depression and Beyond  
READ: Trattner, 273-99.
20. Tues Mar 24 - Photographing Poverty
21. Thur Mar 26 - A photographer and a journalist  
DISCUSS: *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

### **The Great Society?**

22. Tues Mar 31 - The Post-War World  
READ: Trattner, 304-331.
23. Thur Apr 2 - Discovering Poverty?  
READ: Read: James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: a Letter from Harlem" in *Esquire* (July 1960); republished in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961). [Linked on Canvas.]  
READ: Read: Excerpt from Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962).

**Life Stories: *Fire in the Ashes***

24. Tues Apr 7

READ: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes*

25. Thur Apr 9

READ: Kozol, *Fire in the Ashes* (finish)

**Life Stories: *Evicted***

26. Tues Apr 14

READ: Desmond, *Evicted*. Details TBA.

27. Thur Apr 16

28. Tues Apr 21

FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS. This longer essay will invite your thoughts on the final three books.