

## **THE POLITICS OF POVERTY AND WELFARE**

V53.0382

Spring 2006

Mon./Wed. 11 AM-12:15 PM

206 Silver

Grader: Margot Asher

E-mail: asherm@nyu.edu

Prof. Lawrence M. Mead

Department of Politics

726 Broadway, #765

Phone: 212-998-8540

E-mail: LMM1@nyu.edu

Hours: Tues. 3-5 PM

This course is about poverty and welfare, and the controversies about them, in the United States. We will study the nature of poverty and poverty politics, the development of antipoverty policies and programs, contending theories about the causes of poverty and welfare, recent welfare reforms, and future policy directions.

American family welfare was radically reformed at the federal level in the 1990s. Wisconsin was the state that, more than any other, led the way. The course will concentrate mostly on the national scene, but we will also look closely at Wisconsin. There one can see the potential of inspired statecraft to overcome—or at least reduce—the poverty problem.

These issues have been the focus of my research. Among academics, I was the principal advocate of work requirements in welfare, the approach that now dominates national policy. I have been an advisor to government on reform in Washington, Wisconsin, and New York City, as well as abroad. This course frames the issues more conservatively than you may have encountered in earlier study. But this is how they are typically framed in the political arena today.

However, there is still intense debate about how to understand poverty and overcome it. The course will consider a wide range of viewpoints. I have assigned readings from my own books, but also from other authors who disagree with me. You will have ample opportunity to develop your own position, and doing this is the main point of the course.

### **READINGS**

Students should purchase the following books at the bookstore, although those who wish to limit costs may read them on reserve at Bobst. They are listed in rough order of assignment:

Sar A. Levitan, Garth L. Mangum, Stephen L. Mangum, and Andrew M. Sum, *Programs in Aid of the Poor*, 8th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

Lawrence M. Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Rebecca M. Blank and Ron Haskins, eds., *The New World of Welfare: An Agenda for Reauthorization and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001).

Lawrence M. Mead, *Government Matters: Welfare Reform in Wisconsin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Jason DeParle, *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and the Nation's Drive to End Welfare* (New York: Viking, 2004).

These additional readings will be on reserve at Bobst. Students may purchase a copy of them at New University Copy Center, 11 Waverly Place, phone: 212-473-7369:

Isabel V. Sawhill, "The Behavioral Aspects of Poverty," *The Public Interest*, no. 153 (Fall 2003): 79-93.

Isabel V. Sawhill, "The Underclass: An Overview," *The Public Interest*, no. 96 (Summer 1989): 3-15.

Harry J. Holzer and Paul Offner, "The Puzzle of Black Male Unemployment," *The Public Interest*, no. 154 (Winter 2004): 74-84.

Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chs. 2, 8.

Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), chs. 4, 12, 17.

John C. Weicker, "The Labor Force Movie," *American Outlook*, Winter 1999, pp. 51-3.

Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "'We'd Love to Hire Them, But . . .': The Meaning of Race for Employers," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1991), pp. 203-32.

Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), ch. 3.

Elijah Anderson, "The Story of John Turner," *The Public Interest*, no. 108 (Summer 1992): 3-34.

Theda Skocpol, "Sustainable Social Policy: Fighting Poverty Without Poverty Programs," *The American Prospect*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 58-70.

Rebecca M. Blank, *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage, and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 252-74.

Lawrence M. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986), chs. 1, 3.

Lawrence M. Mead, ed., *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997), chs. 1-2.

Paul Starobin, "The Daddy State," *National Journal*, March 28, 1998, pp. 678-83.

## REQUIREMENTS

Students will take a midterm and final examinations, write a paper, and receive credit for participation in class. The exams will each count 25 percent of the final grade, the paper 30 percent, and participation 20 percent.

The midterm and final examinations will be two-part. The first half of each test will be to write six identifications of terms or concepts taken from the course, chosen out of 12. The second half will be to answer one broad essay question, chosen out of three. Each part of the test will count about half the grade. On the midterm, both halves of the exam will cover all material up to that point in the course. On the final, the identifications will be drawn from material after the midterm, but the essays will cover the whole course. Details about the paper are given below.

Participation grades will consider both attendance in class (1/3) and contributions to class discussion (2/3). For each lecture, an issue will be posed to which students should prepare responses, to be made orally. Discussion will seek, not only to contrast different positions, but to identify the underlying assumptions that really divide them. These premises, I believe, often come down to what psychology one imputes to the poor or the better-off.

All these assessments will emphasize quality of argument. I encourage students to differ with my views, but your positions should rest on more than personal preferences. You must also appeal to hard evidence. Assessments will stress whether and how students make use of the assigned readings. You will not be able to get through the course relying only on background knowledge or the lectures. Students are *strongly* advised to do the readings prior to the classes for which they are assigned, and to take notes on them. Handouts on this and other useful skills will be distributed.

Final grades will be determined by ranking the class on the basis of average. About the top quarter or third of the class will receive A's, the middle 40-50 percent B's, the rest C's or—in unusual cases—lower grades. Students should note that, because of this scaling procedure, final grades may not correspond precisely to what one might expect on the basis of average. Often, I give out more B's during the term than I want to for the record. So in the final reckoning, some students with high B averages may get A's, and some with low B averages may get C's.

Extensions, makeups, or Incompletes will be given only for *unexpected* demands on your time, such as illness or family crises—not demands that can be foreseen, such as other scheduled activities. Incompletes will be given only for cause and only on the basis of consultation out of class *prior to the final exam*. To arrange extensions, makeups, or Incompletes, students must confer with me in my office during office hours or at other agreed times. A brief conversation before or after class is insufficient. So, if you are in difficulties, speak to me in good time. Students who disappear without explanation without completing their work will simply fail the course.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is the schedule for class meetings, with reading assignments for each. Authors mentioned refer to the books or additional readings listed above. Readings should be completed in advance of class, to permit participation in discussion.

### Jan. 18: Introduction

#### I Poverty

**Jan. 23: What is Poverty?** The poor as understood in history, in the public understanding, and in the poverty measure used by government. *Issue: Should our definition of poverty consider only income? What about inequality? Lifestyle?*

Levitan et al., pp. 1-7; Sawhill, “Behavioral Aspects of Poverty.”

**Jan. 25: Who Are the Poor?** The composition of the poor population. Variations by demographic characteristics and other variables. The crucial role of employment. *Issue: Is the poverty debate about low income—or employment?*

Handout on poverty; Levitan et al., pp. 7-26; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 48-57.

**Jan. 30: The Long-Term Poor:** The distinction between the short-term poor and dependent and the long-term. The underclass, nonworking men, and the homeless. *Issue: Are the poor different from other people?*

Levitan et al., pp. 26-7; Sawhill, “Underclass”; Holzer and Offner, “Puzzle of Black Male Unemployment.”

**Feb. 1: Poverty Politics:** Public attitudes toward poverty and welfare. Historic patterns of poverty politics. The influence of poverty on American politics. *Issue: Does the public accept or reject the poor? In what sense?*

Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 1-24, 57-65, 210-39; Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, chs. 2, 8.

## II History

**Feb. 6: Poverty before 1960:** The poverty problem up through the 1950s. The New Deal reforms and the postwar elimination of most working poverty. *Issue: Back when most of America was poor by today's standards, why wasn't poverty an issue?*

Patterson, chs. 1-5.

**Feb. 8: The Great Society:** Poverty becomes a political issue, and becomes less tractable. The 1960s and 1970s created a profusion of new social programs, most of them still operating. The welfare boom. *Issue: Was the Great Society successful or not?*

Great Society handout; Patterson, chs. 6, 8-12; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 25-33.

**Feb. 13: The Conservative Era:** After 1980, the Republicans attack abuses, curb dependency, and impose tougher work and child support requirements. A further rise, then fall in welfare. *Issue: Did conservative antipoverty policy succeed any better than liberal?*

Patterson, chs. 14-16; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 33-47.

## III Programs

**Feb. 15: Social Insurance vs. Welfare:** Large middle-class programs like Social Security and Medicare are costly but popular. Welfare programs like AFDC/TANF are much cheaper but also more controversial. *Issue: Is the sharp distinction we make between social insurance and welfare justified?*

Levitan et al., pp. 43-99, 105-9, 112-22; DeParle, ch. 5.

**Feb. 20: President' Day—no class.**

**Feb. 22: Other Programs:** Training, education, and social service programs have only small effects on poverty but are important politically. *Issue: Do these programs matter for overcoming poverty, or not?*

Levitan et al., pp. 122-7, 130-54, 167-90, 211-38, 247-50.

**Feb. 27: Midterm Examination**

## IV Theories of Poverty

**March 1: Disincentives:** Conservatives, and some liberals, say poverty is due to the disincentives to marry and work set up by the welfare system. Should welfare be abolished? Can incentives to work be improved? *Issue: Is welfare really a cause of poverty?*

Murray, *Losing Ground*, chs. 4, 12, 17; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 115-18, Blank/Haskins, chs. 5, 10.

**March 6: The Labor Market:** Liberals commonly blame poverty on low wages, growing inequality, or a lack of jobs. Can welfare mothers survive by working? *Issue: Is it reasonable to expect poor adults to support themselves?*

Mead, *New Politics*, chs. 4-5; Weicher, "Labor Force Movie."

**March 8: Racism:** Liberals say that racial discrimination blocks integration and employment for the poor, most of whom are nonwhite. Conservatives deny this. *Issue: Does racism cause poverty, inequality, neither?*

Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 111-15; Kirschenman and Neckerman, "We'd Love to Hire them, But . . .".

**March 13-18: Spring recess**

**March 20: Absent Fathers:** Nonmarriage as a cause of poverty. Why do poor parents typically have children without marrying? The mystery of poor men and the limitations of the child support system.

Edin and Kefalas, chs. 1-3; Blank and Haskins, ch. 17.

**March 22: Single Mothers:** Once poor mothers are on their own, can they support themselves? Why do poor single mothers often decline to work? *Issue: Is it reasonable to expect poor single mothers to work?*

Edin and Lein, *Making Ends Meet*, ch.3; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 118-32; Blank/Haskins, chs. 12, 18.

**March 27: Culture:** Conservatives say that poverty is due mainly to a "culture of poverty" or the ethnic background of the poor. *Issue: Do the poor have different attitudes than the better-off?*

Mead, *New Politics*, ch. 7; DeParle, chs. 2-3; Anderson, "The Story of John Turner."

**V Policy**

**March 29: Liberal Reform:** Liberals want to "make work pay" rather than strictly requiring it, such as through universal programs, work-connected benefits, assured child support, or guaranteed jobs. *Issue: To solve poverty, is it enough to promote work without enforcing it?*

Skocpol, "Sustainable Social Policy"; Blank, *It Takes a Nation*, pp. 252-74; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 159-66.

**April 3: Work Enforcement:** Conservatives blame poverty on permissive public policies. They seek to enforce work and other civilities as a condition of aid. The drift of welfare reform in this direction. *Issue: To overcome poverty, is it enough to enforce work?*

Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*, chs. 1, 3; Mead, *New Politics*, pp. 166-72, 185-209.

**April 5: Paternalism:** The close oversight of clients as an approach to antipoverty policy. Seen in other areas of social policy besides welfare. *Issue: Is enforcing good behavior effective? Acceptable?*

Mead, *New Paternalism*, chs. 1-2; Starobin, "The Daddy State."

**April 10: Marriage:** Plans pressed by the Bush Administration to promote marriage as a solution to poverty. Policy and political challenges faced by this approach. *Issue: Can marriage really be a solution to poverty?*

Blank and Haskins, ch. 16; Edin and Kefalas, ch. 4, conclusion.

**VI Welfare Reform**

**April 12: PRWORA: Politics and Policy:** Origins and politics of the radical 1996 welfare reform. *Issue: Was PRWORA explicable in light of the past, or was it a radical departure?*

Blank/Haskins, chs. 6-7; DeParle, chs. 6-7.

**April 17: PRWORA: Implementation and Effects:** The implementation of TANF and its largely-good effects. *Issue: Which of the theories of poverty are most supported by this success?*

Blank/Haskins, chs. 2-4, 15; DeParle, ch. 12.

*Papers due in class.*

**April 19: Wisconsin: Politics:** The programs and politics behind the nation's most dramatic welfare reform. *Issue: Why did welfare reform become so extreme in the Badger State?*

Mead, *Government Matters*, chs. 2-3, 6; DeParle, ch. 9.

**April 24: Wisconsin: Implementation and Effects:** The administrative statecraft behind the Wisconsin reform, and its largely-favorable effects. *Issue: Did Wisconsin get to the bottom of poverty?*

Mead, *Government Matters*, chs. 4, 7, 10; DeParle, chs. 14, 17-18.

**April 26: Wisconsin: The Role of Good Government:** Success in welfare reform depends heavily on governmental quality. *Issue: Could every state do what Wisconsin did?*

Mead, *Government Matters*, chs. 11-12.

### **VII New Directions**

**May 1: Conclusion:** New directions in antipoverty policy. The reauthorization of TANF. Poverty dispersal programs. A new approach to low income men. *Issue: Who benefits politically from welfare reform, left or right?*

Mead, *New Politics*, ch. 11; Mead, *Government Matters*, ch. 13, DeParle, epilogue.

*Course evaluations to be done in class.*

**May 8: Final exam:** 10-11:50 AM, 206 Silver.

## PAPER ASSIGNMENT

**Question:** *If you had to choose just one, which of the various theories of poverty considered in the fourth section of the course do you find the most persuasive, and why?* Note that in answering this question you must choose only one theory and defend it against the others. You are not allowed to combine theories. You have to argue which one is *best*, even if you would prefer to combine them.

**Due:** April 17 in class. Papers handed in after this class will be accepted but penalized  
 –5 points if handed in within a week of the original due date.  
 –10 points if handed in later than this but prior to the time grades are submitted.

Be aware that delays due to commuting, the subway, or computer or printer problems are to be expected and are the student's responsibility.

Extensions without penalty will be given for serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time, such as illness or family emergency. Students in difficulties should confer with me out of class before the paper is due. For illness, bring a note from a parent or doctor.

Extensions beyond when grades go in require an Incomplete. This also requires that there be serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time. You must confer with me out of class *before the end of the course*. Students who fail to turn in a paper, or turn in a paper after grades are submitted, without first arranging an Incomplete will simply fail the course.

**Submission:** Papers may be handed to me in class on or before the deadline, or they may be left in my box at the Politics Department prior to when I leave for the class when the paper is due.

Papers may be mailed to my office, but must arrive prior to the class when papers are due, not simply be postmarked on that date. Papers may not be faxed to the Department or e-mailed to me.

*Keep a copy of your paper, in hard copy or on disk, in case it should become lost.*

**Format:** Papers should observe the following guidelines. Papers infringing the rules will be accepted but incur a penalty of 4 points off per infraction, but not more than 8 points total:

- *The question being answered must be written out on the cover page.* This is to make sure that you focus on it. *Students often forget to do this!*
- Cover page: must include name, local address, and all possible phone numbers. Please place this information in the upper left-hand corner, to make it easier to locate your paper in a stack.
- Length: 10-12 pages, exclusive of cover page and bibliography. In figuring length, half the length of any tables or figures will be added to the text.
- Papers must be typed or written on a computer.
- Spacing: double-spaced, with 22-5 lines to the page.
- Margins: 1-1.5" on the left and top of pages, .75-1" on the right and bottom.
- Type size: close to the size used for this assignment.
- Pages must be numbered, starting with the first page of text. Numbers may be handwritten.
- Binders—avoid. Instead, papers should be stapled at upper left-hand corner.
- All citations must be to material either assigned in the course or allowed under “Sources” below.

**Sources:** The paper may be written entirely from the readings assigned for the course. Other materials may be cited provided they were regularly published, such as books or newspaper or journal articles. This is to assure that they have faced some sort of external review for accuracy. Government reports and statistics and some journal articles may be downloaded from the internet but should be cited in their published form, not using web addresses. You may consult nongovernmental materials from the internet, but none of these may be cited in the final paper, unless they were also regularly published.

**Originality:** Students may discuss the assignment with other students but must write their papers individually, without collaboration with others. Students may seek help with their writing in general, but the writing they hand in should be entirely their own, not edited by others.

**Plagiarism:** Do not use ideas or language drawn from readings without giving the source. Also, do not use an author's actual language as if it were your own. *Always enclose borrowed language within quotation marks to make clear that someone else is talking.* It is plagiarism not to cite a source *and also* to use an author's words as if they were your own--even if you do cite the source.

Do not copy material out of books into your paper. Quote from the books only when the author really says it better than you can, and then make clear that someone else is speaking. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will draw heavy penalties.

At the same time, do not be self-consciously "academic." The paper is intended to test your own thought and expression. Don't feel you have to have a citation on every sentence. There is no need to document facts that are commonly known to your audience.

**Documentation:** See accompanying handout. Citations using either footnote or author/date method may be used.