Professor Thomas S. Weisner  Anthro 157, Topics in Social Anthropology.  Fall, 2007  
UCDC Policy Center, Seminar A, Room 317, Tuesdays 6 – 9 PM.

Working poor families, children and welfare reforms

Instructor:  Thomas S. Weisner  
Depts of Anthropology and Psychiatry, UCLA Center for Culture & Health


Working poor families, children and welfare reforms. Working poor adults faced major policy changes in supports and work requirements in the past decade. This course examines these changes, beginning with historical and comparative perspectives, and the influence of race and class. The course then turns to the consequences of working poor life for parents and children. Children in working poor families were already at greater developmental risk; what is the evidence regarding the effects of low incomes, as well as welfare reforms, on children? We will consider the effects of working poor life on employment and income, making ends meet, child care, parenting, family life, social support, marriage and couple relationships, and children’s development. There is strong evidence for support programs that can better assist today’s working poor adults, parents, and children. However, working poor adults are a diverse group and have varied employment trajectories and family circumstances. These employment trajectories include patterns of increased work hours and wages and more stable employment, stable employment but no growth in wages, rapid cycling between jobs without wage growth, and those with low or no employment. Policies for income, work, and family support are considered in this context. The course considers evidence from ethnography and case studies, surveys, child assessments, administrative data, and policy analyses. Guest speakers from varied research and policy fields also will participate in the course.

Time and Place

Seminar A, Room 317 Tuesdays 6 – 9 PM. The course will meet in a three-hour block each week with a break in the middle. There will be lecture time, discussion time, guest presentations, and student presentations across each week’s class session.

email: tweisner@ucla.edu  
CLASS URL:  TBA  
INSTRUCTOR URL:  http://cultureandhealth.ucla.edu/tweisner/

The class website will be linked from the following locations: 
http://www.registrar.ucla.edu/schedule/  
http://my.ucla.edu/  
http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/classes/

Office Hours: TBA
Goals of this course

About 10 years ago, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), otherwise known as the welfare reform act. At that time, the circumstances of working poor adults and children were near the top of the political agenda; at present, there is seldom a mention of the working poor in political discourse and the media. It is a sign of this that the Katrina disaster and its effects on the poor were so surprising. This course is about the circumstances of the working poor, particularly their work and income, parenting, and children. We will consider some of the history of the idea and the practice of social supports for poor, indigent, orphaned or otherwise in-need children and their parents in the US, and compare to how such supports are provided elsewhere in the developed and less developed world. Then we turn to the PRWORA itself, both at the federal level and how programs devolved to the states. The course will also focus on what happened thereafter. How did patterns of work change, if indeed they changed all that much, for the working poor? What happened with regard to parenting and children’s development? After all, the initial impulse to provide supports for parents (Aid to Families With Dependent Children, or AFDC) was to insure the health and well being of children through supporting their families. The course will focus on several major books on the working poor that have been published over the past decade or so, along with some research papers on course topics. Topics include theory, income, work and making ends meet; parenting, influences of race and class; child care, family life and social supports; and fathers, marriage and couple relationships.

We also consider policy and practice. What might be effective policy in the current political and institutional climate to support working poor families and their children? What research evidence would be strongest and most likely to influence key influentialsthe policy and political world, as well as the public? We will read a review of policy work and an example from the New Hope study, a successful experiment to provide income, child care, health care, and work assistance to working poor adults.

The course is eclectic with regard to discipline and methods. Readings and theories include researchers and authors from across the social sciences. However, there is an anthropological and qualitative bent to many of the readings and all the books—an emphasis on the experience of working poor families and children, and the everyday lives and contexts that matter to them. We will focus on making ends meet every day, on ethnographic studies of families in their neighborhoods and schools, as well as studies from psychology, policy, political science and history, economics, demography, and sociology.

I will invite a number of guests to our class from the policy and research worlds in Washington and elsewhere, who wrote some of our readings and/or participated in the decisions made about supports for working poor families and children.
Class Format and schedule
The class is a structured lecture/discussion. I will lecture and organize class
discussions in varied ways, and provide opportunities for email feedback as well. There
will always be time for class conversation about the readings and lectures, and discussion
with invited speakers.

Class requirements:
Email note. Before the second week of class meetings, email me one or two
pages of notes and comments about the readings, class discussion, and how this course
relates to your personal experiences, and professional and intellectual interests. This
email note is your opportunity to get personal feedback from me on the readings, lectures
or class discussions. What is puzzling to you about the course or the readings, surprising
and exciting, contradicts or fits with what you have learned in other courses, makes you
angry, happy or uneasy, fits or does not fit with your personal experience, influences
what you might study or might be useful in your professional plans and related research?
What would you like emphasized more (or less) in class discussions or lectures? How
does this course fit with what you are learning or have learned in other courses in your
own department or elsewhere? What ideas are you thinking of for your paper? What do
you think of DeParle’s book? No question is too “obvious” for you to ask: what does
“working poor” really mean? Why aren’t all the readings focused more on advocacy?
What about personal responsibility? What about those just above the “working poor”
families? Can I do my paper on immigrants? Etc. Whatever is engaging you about the
class lectures, discussion, and readings can be what you write to me about in your email.

The content of your email note is not graded (although referring to specific
readings or class lectures and discussions is graded). It is your chance to think broadly,
clarify confusions before you get too deep into the quarter, to think aloud about the
readings, and relate the class readings, lectures, and discussion to your overall intellectual
goals and personal life experiences. I will reply to your notes by the following week’s
class. This is the only required email note. However, if you have other questions during
the quarter not covered in class, in questions during the break, or in office hours, you can
always email me other times.

NOTE: BE SURE THAT THE EMAIL ADDRESS YOU USE TO SEND ME
YOUR NOTES IS ALSO YOUR RETURN ADDRESS. IF IT IS NOT YOUR
RETURN ADDRESS – INDICATE WHAT ADDRESS YOU WANT YOUR
COMMENTS RETURNED TO. BE SURE THAT YOUR RETURN ADDRESS
MAILBOX HAS ENOUGH STORAGE SPACE AND WILL BE AVAILABLE TO
RECEIVE REPLIES. MAKE THE SUBJECT LINE OF THE EMAIL SOMETHING I
CAN EASILY RECOGNIZE AS BEING FROM YOU AND ABOUT THIS CLASS
(“MARY JONES ANTHRO 157 NOTE”, NOT FOR EXAMPLE, JUST “NOTES” OR
“DOC”).
**Book review:** Student will prepare a 5-page (double-spaced) book review on the book *American Dream*, by Jason DeParle. The report should have the characteristics of a good book review: 1. summarize the argument and point of view of the book – what does DeParle want his take-home messages to be as you see those? 2. Provide some context from other points of view on where DeParle positions himself amongst other views and the views of the public. 3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book as you see those, and/or as others would see them? 4. Bottom line: your evaluation of the ideas, evidence, and writing. Reference other class material and lectures/class discussion in the report if you want to, but no additional research is expected or required. The book review is due in class on Week 3 of the course.

**Paper:** You will also write one 10 page paper, due week eight in class. Your paper must use the course readings extensively, including the empirical data and relevant theories presented in the readings and in class. The paper of course also can make use of other materials and bring in your other interests. I will hand out a list of what the paper should include several weeks before the due date. The paper can also relate to your own research and personal interests in whatever major you are in.

At week six of the quarter, you will turn in a proposed topic, proposed paper title, and one summary paragraph describing the paper you are thinking of writing. I will read all these and return them, if the topic is OK, or make suggestions. You can still revise and change the paper topics thereafter, but this is a way to get some early feedback. You can also email me about your thoughts about the paper at any point during the quarter, or meet during office hours ( ). The paper itself is then due in class on week eight.

“One-minute papers.” At the beginning or end of some classes, we will write short paragraphs about what we anticipate for the class that day at the beginning, and/or what were the key points from that class at the end. These are not tests. They help focus class discussion and give us some shared questions for class.

**Class Participation.** All students are expected to attend the course regularly and to have completed the readings in advance of the discussion. All students are also expected to have something to say each week: e.g., a simple factual or historical question about one of the readings, a point which reveals a methodological bias or assumption, a critique of one or more of the readings, a strong point of an article or book which merits our admiration, a clarification which will help everyone to understand the readings better, a question about topical focus for that week. If everyone comes thus prepared, you will learn from each other as well as from the readings and from me. You may not actually be asked to present that question or point due to the large class size – but you may be asked to write it in a one-minute paper at the beginning or end of the class.
Course Requirements summary

1. Active, informed class participation and full attendance.
2. Your email note about the class, submitted via email before class on the second week of the quarter.
4. Occasional one-minute papers in class.
5. A 10-page paper due in class week eight.
6. Presentation of your paper in class during week 10.

Grading

The paper is 50% of your final grade. The other course requirements (email; DeParle review; one-minute papers; class discussion; final class presentation of your paper) comprise the remaining 50%.

All students receive feedback in the form of comments on the email you write before class week two, comments on the suggested paper topic, and feedback on the final paper.

Internet site

The class has a website and the course syllabus is posted there.

http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/07F/anthro157-1/
Readings

Required texts for all students [chapters to be excerpted from these books in some cases as indicated in the syllabus; those readings will be in the Course Reader. You do not need to purchase Making It Work; excerpted chapters will be handed out in class].


The four books and the course reader should be purchased. Bring the books to class; quote from them in your notes, in class, and in your paper; mark them up; go from reading the text to joint discussion with peers and in class, and then back to the text. You will also need to purchase the course reader with articles and chapters assigned other than these four books. I will also hand out some readings in class from other sources and from Making It Work, at no charge.
Course Outline

Week 1 of quarter: Introduction to the course and the topic. Theoretical perspectives. Definitions of poverty and working poor families in the US, and internationally.


The readings are included in the course reader.

(look through all the assigned books to get an overview of them, including chapters that might be relevant for each topic of the class. Think about a topic you might like to focus on for your paper.)

Your email to me is due next Tuesday at noon, before class next week.

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Week 2: History of poverty support for families in the US. Attitudes about public support.


1-2 page comments about the class and the topic are due on my email a day or more before this class to (tweisner@ucla.edu). NOTE: BE SURE THAT THE EMAIL ADDRESS YOU USE TO SEND ME YOUR NOTES IS ALSO YOUR RETURN ADDRESS. IF IT IS NOT YOUR RETURN ADDRESS – INDICATE WHAT
Week 3. Making ends meet. Income, budgeting, and somehow managing to make it.


Book review of DeParle, American Dream is due today in class.

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Week 4. Parenting. What is similar and what is different about parenting in working poor families. Single parents – both mothers and fathers. What dimensions of parenting are affected by poverty?


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Week 5. Race, Class and the working poor.


A one-page summary of your plans for your paper are due in class next week.

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*A one paragraph summary of your paper outline, including a suggested title for the paper, is due in class today.* These will be read and returned after the break half way through class today.

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**Week 7. Family. Households, extended kin, and social supports. Poverty and family adaptation.**


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**Week 8. Marriage and Partners. Relationships, supports, children, and couples in low income life. Does policy have much to do with family formation in working poor families?**

*(Review materials on marriage, fathers and men in Edin and Lein, Newman, and De Parle for class today.)*


*[Your paper is due in class today. Comments will be returned before or in class next week.]*

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**Week 9. Policy. Evidence for policies that can support working poor families and their children.**

Papers are returned in class today. You can do revisions through the end of finals week.

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Week 10. Student presentations of course papers.

Student papers will be grouped into topics. Each student will present a brief summary of their paper and then each topic will be discussed in class in turn.

[Any rewrites/revisions of your papers can be turned in any time up to the end of finals week.]

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Related readings and background references. These are not required, but are useful for following up topics you are interested in, or for possible supplemental reading for your paper.


The *Future of Children* issue on Children and Poverty--Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer/Fall 1997, a print copy can be ordered by sending e-mail to: circulation@futureofchildren.org. Their website is: www.futureofchildren.org.


