

## POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

PUBLIC POLICY 736, POLITICAL SCIENCE 736, SOCIAL WORK 858

FALL 2014

**Professor Mary Corcoran**

**5223 Weill Hall 764-9517**

**Office Hours: Wednesday 11-1**

**Other times by appointment**

**Website:**

<http://www.ctools.umich.edu>

This seminar will examine the nature and extent of poverty in the U.S., its causes and consequences, and the antipoverty effects of existing and proposed government programs and policies. The types of questions to be addressed include the following:

What is poverty? What roles do increases in inequality, declines in marriage rates, mass incarceration, structural economic changes, skill bias, education, and changing social norms play in generating and reproducing poverty and lack of opportunity?

The first ten weeks of this course (Topics 1-8) focus on social science theory and evidence about the causes, consequences and costs of poverty. The last three weeks of the course (Topics 9-11) examine crime policy, the Minimum Wage, and the Obama, "My Brother's Keeper Initiative. We may schedule an additional class on Pre-K proposals (Topic 12).

### **Short Paper Requirements (All Students)**

Students are required to write eight short (3-5 typed pages) papers on the topic areas. All students must write papers on Topics 3 and 4, Topic 6, and Topic 7 (Sept. 26, Oct. 3, Oct. 17, Oct. 24 or Oct. 31). Seven papers *must* be on topics 1-8. One paper *must* be on topics 9-11. ***Students cannot write any of their required short papers on their group presentation topic.*** Each paper should cover a single week's required readings. Papers are due on the days readings are required. **No late papers will be accepted.** If you wish to do two separate papers on one topic's set of readings, this is permissible. The second paper can count toward your total number of required papers. The second paper can be turned in one week later than the first paper.

What should these short papers cover? Papers will be graded on the thoughtfulness of the response. Try to respond to (not summarize) the readings. Papers should both address the readings and show a clear understanding of the readings. Papers could evaluate the arguments and evidence in a reading; could link the readings to arguments and evidence covered in prior class readings, lectures, and discussions; or could lay out how the readings could inform policy. Papers should make an argument, be clear and organized, and have no misspellings, typographical errors, or grammatical errors.

### **Joint Class Presentation Requirement (Masters and 1<sup>st</sup> Year PhDs)**

Students are also required to make a joint class presentation and lead a discussion group on that presentation once during the last three weeks of the course. Students will be assigned to one of three policy groups on October 3. The students in each group will cover the arguments and evidence for and against a particular set of proposals for crime policy, the Minimum Wage, the Obama My Brother's Keeper Initiative, or pre-K policy. You can choose to cover all the policy options considered in a week's readings. Or you can intensively focus on one or two options. Similarly, you could choose a briefing format, debate format, role-playing interactive format, a TV-show format, etc. There are two requirements. There should be an hour put aside for questions/discussion from the class. As part of the presentation students should prepare a *jointly written*, 1-2 page outline of the major issues and arguments as well as a short list of discussion questions for the class. These should be handed out to the class at the beginning of the presentation. Students *cannot* write a short paper on their group presentation topic.

**All students are expected to attend their classmates' presentations (Nov. 14, Nov. 28, and Dec. 5). This is a prerequisite for the class. If you are absent during any presentation without prior approval from Professor Corcoran, your grade will automatically drop one-third of a letter grade.**

### **Research Proposal Requirement (Advanced PhDs)**

Students must write a proposal which reviews the literature and proposes a research study on a poverty-related topic. Students considering writing their third-year papers, prelim papers, or thesis in this area should use this proposal to explore a possible topic. Your goal is to design a proposal for a publishable paper. Forty percent of your grade will be based on this proposal. The schedule for this proposal is as follows:

**TOMORROW:** Start thinking about possible topics. This can be the hardest part of your proposal. Make a list of 2 or 3 possibilities, discuss them with relevant faculty, make an appointment to see Professor Corcoran if that would help, and do some background reading on each topic so you have some idea of what has been done. Don't settle on a topic until you have done some reading, have a question that research could help answer, and have some idea about how (what evidence) you might go about answering it.

**October 3:** Email Professor Corcoran a brief description of your proposed topic and research question. Hand in a hard copy version in class.

**October 6-8:** Make an appointment with Professor Corcoran to discuss the topic.

**November 7:** Submit a revised research question, and a 5-15 page literature review of research relevant to your question. This review should include a brief discussion of how answering your question will add to what is already known and a brief outline of kinds of evidence you will use to answer the question. Hand in a hard copy in class and email me an electronic copy.

**December 5:** Submit a 10-20 page proposal that includes: (1) a brief statement of problem, (2) a literature review showing how you will add to past research, (3) a brief explanation of the relationship of your work to current theories of poverty, and (4) a research plan. For example, if results of past studies disagree, you should suggest possible reasons for these discrepant results and show how your analysis might resolve this controversy

**Discussion/Attendance Requirements (All Students):**

This is a seminar, and all students are expected *to arrive on time, to have read the assigned articles prior to the session in which they will be discussed*, to attend class regularly, and to participate in class discussion. Students should be prepared to talk on the discussion questions at the end of each topic area. Each student will be asked in class to summarize a week's readings and to critique particular readings at least once. **This seminar meets 13 times this semester and is two hours long. Arriving on time and attending class regularly is required. If students miss more than two classes or are consistently late to class, their grades will automatically drop one-third of a letter grade. Thus, a B+ would become a B.**

**Laptop Policy:** *No laptops allowed in class.*

**Grading (Masters and 1<sup>st</sup> Year PhDs):**

Grades will be based on the short papers (70 percent), class discussion (10 percent) and the class presentation (20 percent).

**Grading (Advanced PhDs):** Grades will be based on short papers (50 percent), class participation (10 percent) and research proposals (40 percent).

**Grading of Class Participation:**

Listening is as important as speaking in class participation. Students who are more comfortable listening than talking can receive full credit for class participation.

**Readings**

Required readings are marked with an \*. All required readings on a topic area should be read on the day lectures on that topic begin. Most required papers/articles are available from the web. Required articles not available on the web have either been put on reserve in the 3120 Weill Hall, or in the online course pack at: <http://www.ctools.umich.edu>

The following books are required for the course.

K. Edin and M. Kefalas. Promises I Can Keep

K. Edin and T. Nelson. Doing the Best I Can

K. Newman, No Shame in My Game OR S.A. Venkatesh, Off The Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor

A. Goffman, On the Run OR S. Raphael, The New Scarlet Letter

## **Interesting Web Sites:**

Administration for Children and Families: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>  
American Enterprise Institute <http://www.aei.org>  
Asst. Secy. of HHS for Planning and Eval.: <http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov>  
Brookings Institute: <http://www.Brookings.edu>  
Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>  
Center for American Progress <http://www.americanprogress.org>  
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: <http://www.cbpp.org>  
Center for Law and Social Policy: <http://www.clasp.org>  
Children’s Defense Fund: <http://www.childrensdefense.org>  
Future of Children <http://www.futureofchildren.com>  
Heritage Foundation: <http://www.heritage.org>  
Institute for Research on Poverty: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp>  
Joint Center for Poverty Research <http://www.jcpr.org>  
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation: <http://www.mdrc.org>  
Michigan Program on Poverty and Social Welfare Policy:  
<http://www.ssw.umich.edu/poverty/pubs.html>  
National Poverty Center: <http://www.npc.umich.edu>  
Urban Institute: <http://www.urban.org>  
Welfare Information Network: <http://www.welfareinfo.org>  
PEW Research Center <http://people-press.org/>  
Stanford Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality  
(SCPSI) <http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi>

## **TOPIC 1. THE MEASURE OF POVERTY; TRENDS IN POVERTY, INEQUALITY, AND WEALTH (SEPTEMBER 5 AND 12)**

**NOTE: IF YOU WRITE A SHORT PAPER FOR TOPIC 1, I RECOMMEND ADDRESSING THE READINGS UNDER PART II OR PART III.**

### **Part I. Concepts and Measures of Poverty (Sept. 5)**

Definitions of poverty/economic disadvantage embody assumptions about what is necessary to insure full participation in a society. These assumptions guide the design of public policies—tax policies, education policies, labor policies, anti-poverty policies. Measures of poverty are used to set criteria for program eligibility (e.g., Food Stamps) and to monitor the effectiveness of anti-poverty interventions. The U.S. measure of poverty is an absolute measure based on family size that is updated annually for inflation. Europeans have a broader conception of economic disadvantage which encompasses social exclusion on multiple dimensions. Sen proposed a capability measure. When analysts compare poverty rates across countries they typically use a relative income-based measure of poverty—e.g., incomes less than half the national median income. Measures of poverty reflect beliefs about why people are poor and about the ramifications of poverty.

Changing Poverty, Changing Policies. Ch. 14, R. Haveman. “What Does it Mean to be Poor in a Rich Society?” (CTools)

T. Renwick. 2012. “What is the Supplemental Poverty Measure and How Does it Differ from the Official Measure?” U.S. Census Bureau.

<http://blogs.census.gov/2012/11/08/what-is-the-supplemental-poverty-measure-and-how-does-it-differ-from-the-official-measure/>

\* D.S. Johnson and T.M. Smeeding. "A Consumer's Guide to Interpreting Various U.S. Poverty Measures." *Fast Focus*. No. 14-2012. Institute for Research on Poverty. [www.irp.wisc.edu](http://www.irp.wisc.edu)

## **Part II. How Well Does the Poverty Measure Pick Up Quality of Life or Extreme Poverty? (Sept. 12)**

Annie Lowry. 2014. "Changed Life of the Poor: Better Off but Far Behind." *NYT*. May 1, 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/business/economy/changed-life-of-the-poor-squeak-by-and-buy-a-lot.html>

\* Schaefer and Edin. 2013. "The Rise of Extreme Poverty in the United States and Income Transfers." *Social Service Review* <http://npc.umich.edu/publications/u/2013-06-npc-working-paper.pdf>

R. Rector. 2012. "Poverty Like We've Never Seen It." <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2012/11/poverty-like-weve-never-seen-it>

\* R. Rector and R. Sheffield. 2011. "Air Conditioning, Cable TV, and an Xbox: What is Poverty in the United States Today?" Backgrounder, #2575, Heritage Foundation. [http://thf\\_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/bg2575.pdf](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/bg2575.pdf)

\* Boteach, Melissa and D. Cooper. 2011. "What You Need When You're Poor: Heritage Foundation Hasn't a Clue." Center for American Progress. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2011/08/05/10063/what-you-need-when-youre-poor/>

## **Part III: A Rising Tide No Longer Lifts all Boats: Trends in Economic Growth, Economic Inequality, and Poverty (Class Lecture, Sept. 12)**

In the Post-War Boom, a rising tide lifted all boats. From 1949-1972, real incomes doubled for all income groups; income inequality narrowed a bit; and poverty rates dropped. Since the 1980's, the benefits of economic growth are not equally shared; income inequality has grown; and the poverty rate has remained above its 1973 low point. In the Great Recession, poverty rates rose sharply and remained high after 2009.

\* S.H. Danziger. (2007). "Fighting Poverty Revisited: What Did Researchers Know 40 Years Ago? What Do We Know Today?" *Focus*, vol. 25(1): 3-11, <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc251a.pdf>

C. Freeland. 2012. "A U.S. Recovery but Only for the 1 Percent." *New York Times*, 3/18/2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/09/us/09iht-letter09.html>

L. Mishel and N. Sabadish. 2012. "CEO Pay and the Top 1%", EPI Issue Brief #331, May 2, 2012. <http://www.epi.org/files/2012/ib331-ceo-pay-top-1-percent.pdf>

\* Emmanuel Saez, 2013. "Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States." <http://eml.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2012.pdf>

#### **Part IV: Trends in Wealth (Class Lecture Sept. 12)**

F. Picketty and E. Saez. Inequality in the Long-Run. *Science*. 344, 2014, 833-843  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/344/6186/838.full>

\* R. Gebeloff and S. Dewan. 2012. "Measuring the Top 1% by Wealth Not, Income." *Economix*. *New York Times*. January 17, 2012.  
[http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/measuring-the-top-1-by-wealth-not-income/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=0](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/measuring-the-top-1-by-wealth-not-income/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0)

#### **Part V: Changes in Top Federal, Marginal Rates for Federal Income Taxes and Capital Gains Taxes (Class Lecture Sept. 12)**

The top federal marginal tax rate was 70% in 1981. It dropped to 50% 1982-1986 and then dropped even further to 28% to 31% between 1988-1992. It rose to 39.6% between 1993 and 2002; dropped to 35% 2003 to 2011, is currently 39.6%. The top marginal long term capital gains tax rate was about 40% in 1977, ranged between 20% and 30% 1978-2002, then fell to 15% from 2003 to 2012, and rose to 20% in 2013. It is now effectively 23.8% due to the ACA (Affordable Care Act) leveraging an additional 3.8% Medicare Tax on investment income over 200K/250K.

Roberton Williams. 2012. "Tax Rates on Capital Gains." TAX FACTS, Tax Policy Centers. <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/UploadedPDF/1001583-tax-rates-on-capital-gains.pdf>

Committee for Responsible Federal Budget. 2013. "The Tax Breakdown: Preferential Rates on Capital Gains." <http://crfb.org/blogs/tax-break-down-preferential-rates-capital-gains>

Paul Krugman. 2012. "The History of Capital Gains Taxes." *NY Times*. January 18, 2012.  
<http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/the-history-of-capital-gains-taxes/>

#### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – TOPIC 1***

1. How do Shaefer and Edin define extreme poverty? How much has extreme poverty grown since TANF replaced AFDC in 1996? What public welfare programs do extreme poor households utilize?
2. Can "a rising tide lift all boats?" Does economic growth always reduce poverty? Has the relationship between growth and poverty changed in recent decades?

3. Compare trends in income and wealth inequality across U.S. and Europe. (Saez and Picketty)
4. Why do Rector (2012) and Rector and Sheffield (2011) argue that current poverty measures exaggerate the incidence of hardship? Assess their argument (See Lowry, Boteach and Cooper 2011; Ehrenreich 2009; and Brown 2009.)
5. Describe changes in income inequality since 1980 (Saez). Speculate on potential policy implications of these changes.
6. Social inclusiveness and capability measures focus on the normative and ethical responsibility of government while absolute measures focus on the economic safety net. Which method is preferable? Explain your reasoning. Address both ethical and practical concerns (Haveman).
7. Compare the U.S. Official Measure (OPM) to the new Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). What are the key differences between these measures? What components of the SPM lead to the biggest drops in poverty relative to the OPM? What components of the SPM lead to the biggest gains? How does using the SPM change the demographic profile of the poor?

## **TOPIC 2. EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND THE LABOR MARKET(SEPT. 19)**

Since 1980, mean real wages rose for college educated workers and dropped for workers with a high school diploma or less. As a result, the “college wage premium” grew steadily.

*NOTE: If you write a paper on Topic 2 I recommend writing on Part II.*

### **Part I. The Growing Importance of College, The Decline in Middle Skill Jobs**

Since the 1980’s, employment of men without a college degree has declined, employment growth has been concentrated in high-skill, high-wage jobs and low-skill, low-wage jobs and middle skill jobs have been disappearing.

D. Autor. 2014. “Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Among the Other 99 percent” Science  
(See <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/344/6186/843.full>)

C. Rampell. 2013. “Life is OK if You Went to College.” New York Times. May 3, 2013.  
[http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/life-is-o-k-if-you-went-to-college/?\\_r=0](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/life-is-o-k-if-you-went-to-college/?_r=0)

\* David Leonardt. The Upshot: Is College Worth It. NYT. May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?_r=0)

### **Part II. Joblessness, Culture, and the Inner-City**

\* Anderson. “The Story of John Turner” Public Interest 1992. (strongly recommended)  
([http://www.nationalaffairs.com/public\\_interest/detail/the-story-of-john-turner](http://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/the-story-of-john-turner))

\* W.J. Wilson, 2009 More Than Just Race. Chapter 3 (C-TOOLS)

W.J. Wilson, 2008. "Jobless Poverty" in D. Grusky (ed.) *Social Stratification*, pp. 340-349 (CTOOLS)

\* Elijah Anderson. 1994. "The Code of the Streets." The Atlantic Monthly. May 1994. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/race/streets.htm>

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 2**

1. Read, review and evaluate the model of inner city poverty outlined by Wilson. Pay attention to how political, economic, and cultural forces have affected inner-city men's employment in the inner-city. What does this model imply for poverty policy?
2. How consistent are Anderson's model of "street" and decent cultures and John Turner's story with Wilson's arguments? Does Turner lack job skills and a work ethic? Can he negotiate with public officials – judges and patrol officers? Does he support his children? Is Turner caught between the "street" and the "decent" cultures? Are Turner's options limited by discrimination – either in his interactions with the courts or with colleagues at work? Explain.
3. Returns to education and the college wage premium increased since 1980 even though educational attainment rose steadily in past decades. Yet Autor recommends increasing the number of college graduates. Why? Explain his reasoning.

### **TOPIC 3. HAS WORK DISAPPEARED FROM THE INNER CITY? WHO IS WORKING IN THE INNER-CITY? (SEPT. 26)**

*All students must write a paper on either No Shame in My Game or on Off the Books.*

#### **Part I. Who is Working in the Inner City?**

\* K. Newman, 1999. No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City. Chapters 1,3-6, Epilogue.

\* J. DeParle. "Flipping Burgers." *N.Y. Times*, 9/5/99. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/16/books/flipping-burgers.html?pagewanted=1?pagewanted=1>

\* Alan Wolfe, "Mead Goes to Harlem." *The New Republic*, May 10, 1999. (CTools)

K. Newman. 2006. Chutes and Ladders, Ch 1, 3, pp 5-54, 84-116 (CTools)

#### **Part II. The Underground Economy**

Residents in Venkatesh's very poor inner-city neighborhood employ a variety of strategies – both licit and illicit – to “get by”. There are distinct understandings about dispute resolution and distinct reciprocal networks of support. But this support may come at a cost.

\* S.A. Venkatesh. 2006. Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor.

### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 3***

1. Discuss No Shame in My Game. Evaluate Wilson's arguments about work in inner cities in light of Newman's data. How, if at all, might you change or expand Wilson's model to deal with the Newman findings?
2. Evaluate No Shame in My Game in light of the two book reviews. Is Newman too “romantic” in her portrayals of Burger Barn workers?
3. How much upward mobility is there among low-wage workers? Evaluate Newman's (Chutes and Ladders) evidence on this issue. What does Newman identify as key paths to mobility?
4. Wilson describes the inner-city poor as socially isolated. Is that true of the community Venkatesh portrays? If yes, explain how Venkatesh's evidence shows social isolation. If no, explain how his evidence shows connections and networks.
5. One resident uses a “fish tank” metaphor. What was meant by this?
6. Describe patterns of connection, helping, and reciprocity in Venkatesh's book. What are the strengths of these? What are the weaknesses? Could these patterns inhibit individual mobility? If yes, how?

### **TOPIC 4. PRISONS AND WORK (OCT 3)**

***All students must write a short paper on either On the Run or The New Scarlet Letter. Students will be assigned to policy groups.***

Starting in 1980, incarceration rates have soared in the U.S. In 2008, more than one in every 100 adults and one in every nine black men ages 20-34 were behind bars. The U.S. incarceration rate in 1993 was 5 to 10 times higher than those in Western European countries and the black U.S. incarceration rate was 20 times higher than European incarceration rates. Over 30 percent of black men born in the late 1960's who had a high school diploma or less had been incarcerated by 1999.

Incarceration has economic and civic costs. On the economic side, prison disrupts careers, can lead to stigma from employers, can break up families, and can result in temporary or permanent loss of eligibility for federal and state government benefits such as Food Stamps, cash welfare, housing subsidies, and education subsidies. On the civic side, inmates lose the right to vote not only while in prison, but also in some states while on probation, on parole or permanently. (Note: Felon disenfranchisement policies vary across states). In 2012, 2.5 percent of voting-age adults were disenfranchised due to a current or previous felony conviction. Nearly 7.7 percent of voting-age African-Americans were disenfranchised. In 31 states and in federal courts, felons are permanently banned from jury service. Over 6% of adults in the U.S. and about 30% of African-American men currently face such bans.

Michael Pinard. 2010. "Reflections and Perspectives on Reentry and Collateral Consequences." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 100(3): 1213-1222.  
[http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/fac\\_pubs/1041/](http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/fac_pubs/1041/)

B. Western. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.

\* A. Goffman. 2014. On the Run

\* S. Raphael, 2014, The New Scarlet Letter

C. Wildeman. 2009. "Parental Imprisonment, the Prison Boom and the Concentration of Childhood Disadvantage." *Demography*. 46 (2): 265-280.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2831279/>

Devah Pager. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology*. 168 (937-975). <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc232i.pdf>

Eduardo Porter. 2014. "In the U.S. Punishment Comes Before the Crimes." *NYT*. April 30, 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/30/business/economy/in-the-us-punishment-comes-before-the-crimes.html>

\* Alice Goffman. 2014. "On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto." 2009. *American Sociological Review*. 74(2).  
[http://www.soc.umn.edu/~uggen/Goffman\\_ASR\\_09.pdf](http://www.soc.umn.edu/~uggen/Goffman_ASR_09.pdf)

#### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 4***

1. How have incarceration rates changed? Which groups have been most affected by these changes? How have these changes affected measured inequality? What factors do Raphael or Western cite as accounting for trends in incarceration?
2. What are the consequences of incarceration for men's long-run employment and earnings? Discuss and assess Raphael's and Pager's arguments and evidence on this issue.
3. Many states limit the civic rights (voting, jury service) of felons. What are the broader implications for political representation and democracy? Discuss

#### **TOPIC 5. GUEST SPEAKER – ALEX MURPHY (OCT. 10)**

#### **TOPIC 6. THE EITC AND THE EXTREME POOR (OCT. 17)**

#### **Part I. Barely Getting By: The EITC**

When Clinton ran for reelection, he vowed to "End welfare as we know it and make work pay." Clinton's expansion of the EITC in 1993 was one step to make work pay.

"Policy Basics: The Earned Income Tax Credit." CBPP  
<http://www.cbpp.org/files/policybasics-eitc.pdf>

\* Halpert-Meekin, Edin, Tach and Sykes, in press. It's Not Like I'm Poor. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6. (C-TOOLS)

## **Part II. Falling Under: The Extreme Poor**

\* K. Edin & H.L. Shaefer (Forthcoming). *\$2 a Day in America*. "Chapter 2: The Perils of Low-Wage Work." Available on CTools.

Shaefer and Edin. 2013. "The Rise of Extreme Poverty in the U.S. and Income Transfers" (reread)

### ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 6***

1. Review one of four assigned chapters in It's Not Like I'm Poor. Pick one claim that the authors make and assess that claim using examples and quotes from that chapter to support your reasoning.
2. The EITC is only available to families with earned income. The EITC for childless workers is very small. Alternatives to the EITC might include higher minimum wage or a Negative Income Tax. Discuss the pros and cons of each approach.
3. Edin and Shaefer describe the work experiences of two women, Jennifer Hernandez and Rae McCormick. What does this essay show us about the jobs available to these women?
  - a. Difficulties in finding a job.
  - b. Scheduling variability in work hours.
  - c. Variability in number of work hours/weeks.
  - d. Working conditions – physical demands, stresses, pace of work, repetition,.
  - e. Benefits.
  - f. Imbalances of power between workers, customers, and managers.
  - g. Job stability.
4. How do characteristics of low-wage jobs affect the ability of Jennifer and Rae to make ends meet? How do the working conditions and other job characteristics of low-wage jobs affect Jennifer's and Rae's childcare arrangements, health, and ability to remain stably employed? HINT: Recall that Jennifer Hernandez states that her goal is to earn \$13/hour in a full-time job that provides steady hours and decent working conditions.
5. Do the extreme poor have family support to cushion them in hard times or are families part of the problem?
6. How do Jennifer's and Rae's health issues affect their abilities to cope? Discuss.
7. What are the implications of the essay "The Perils of Low-Wage Work" for labor policy and childcare policy?

## **TOPIC 7. WHY DON'T LOW-INCOME PARENTS MARRY? (OCT. 24, OCT. 31)**

Over an individual's lifetime, his or her family alters constantly. Individuals leave home, marry, separate, bear children, move in with relatives—each of these events can alter the family's economic well-being...especially for women and children. Family structure is strongly related to child poverty.

In 2006, 26.6 percent of all white non-Hispanic births were out-of wedlock, 49.9 percent of all Hispanic births were out-of-wedlock and 70.7 percent of non-Hispanic African American births were out of wedlock. Six out of ten long-term poor children live in single mother homes. Many blame the growth in single parents as the cause of increased poverty, welfare dependence, crime and drug use. Why don't these couples marry or postpone child-bearing until after they marry?

**NOTE: Everyone should write a paper on either Promises I Can Keep for Oct. 24, or on Doing the Best I Can for Oct. 31. Everyone should read both books.**

### **Part I. Women's Perspectives (Oct. 24)**

J.De Parle and S.Tavernise. 2012. "For Women Under 30, Most Births Occur Outside of Marriage." *New York Times*, 2/28/12. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/18/us/for-women-under-30-most-births-occur-outside-marriage.html?pagewanted=all>)

\* Edin, K and M. Kefalas. 2005. Promises I Can Keep. (Everyone should read this).

DeParle, J. 2012. "Two Classes Divided by I Do." *New York Times*. July 14, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/us/two-classes-in-america-divided-by-i-do.html?pagewanted=all>

### **Part II. Men's Perspectives (Oct. 31)**

\* H. Pollack. 2013. "Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City", Wonkblog. *Washington Post*. July 1, 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/07/01/doing-the-best-i-can-fatherhood-in-the-inner-city/>

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### **Part III. The Decoupling of Marriage from Fertility: Consequences for Children (Oct. 31)**

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**Discussion Questions: Topic 7**

1. Review the Edin and Kefalas book. Why do low income women put motherhood before marriage? Do you find Edin and Kefalas’ analyses convincing? Do you think Edin and Kefalas “romanticize” their respondents? Why or why not? What are the implications of their findings for marriage promotion policies?
2. Compare the views of men and women as presented in Edin and Kefalas and in Edin and Nelson.

**TOPIC 8. IS THE PLAYING FIELD BECOMING LESS LEVEL? (NOV. 7)**

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 8**

1. Since 1980 college has increasingly become a prerequisite for a successful economic life. The sticker cost of college outpaced inflation over the same period. At the same time gaps in income between rich and poor children widened and gaps in other family advantages (income, college-educated parents, living in an intact family, having a parent without a criminal record) widened between rich and poor children. Review and evaluate arguments and evidence about the implications of this for equal opportunity in the U.S.
2. Equal opportunity is a cherished national norm in the U.S. How do rates of intergenerational mobility in the U.S. compare to those in other western developed nations? (Jantii)

3. Wildeman claims that due to the prison boom, many children now have a parent who has been or will be incarcerated. Review Wildeman's evidence and arguments. Which children are most at risk? What are the likely impacts of this, if any, on equal opportunity?

### **TOPIC 9. SENTENCING REFORMS AND PRISONER REENTRY PROGRAMS (NOV 14)**

Reshaping the states' sentencing policies and designing effective re-entry programs for ex-prisoners raises multiple questions. Does changing mandatory sentencing policies lead to less crime? How much does maintaining prisons cost per year? What are all the costs – economic and civic – borne by prisoners? How can one best design policies to deal with both economic and civic costs? Is there a cost to society when a sizeable minority of citizens are unable to vote, serve on juries, barred from receiving public benefits even after leaving prison? Has the prison boom created a lobby of stakeholders (private prisons, prison employee unions) who resist reforms?

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### **TOPIC 11. MY BROTHER'S KEEPER (DEC. 5)**

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My Brother's Keeper is a "public-private sector initiative aimed to address persistent barriers to equality of opportunity that confront young men and boys of color." The initiative is to be funded by private donations. The budget will be roughly 100 million to 350 million over five years. The initiative have been criticized as vague, "too little too late", a stunt to capture minority votes, racist and sexist. The initiative has been praised for focusing national attention on a pressing social issue in a timely non-ideological manner.

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