

POVERTY IN AMERICA IN (NON)FICTION AND FILM

Course Number: UGS 303

Instructor: Miguel Ferguson

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Semester: Fall 2009

Office Number: SSW 3.122b

Meeting Time/Place: Thursday 1:00-4:00

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Utopia Theater in School of Social Work

Office Hours: Thursday 11:00-1:00 or by
appt.

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Office Hours: By appt.

I. Course Description

This course introduces students to the critical issue of poverty in the United States, past and present. Using literature, novels, investigative journalism, and film (not textbooks!), the course explores an array of issues associated with poverty in America. From turn of the century muckraking journalism that exposed the horrors of tenements and stockyards to contemporary depictions of poverty in the era of welfare reform, mass home foreclosures, multi-billion dollar bank bailouts and “cash for clunkers,” this course examines works of film and writing that have both shamed and stoked our national conscience. In the process, we will also learn about the causes of poverty, trends in poverty over time and with regard to specific vulnerable groups, and what we can do to end poverty as we know it.

II. Books

1. King of the Hill, by A.E. Hotchner
2. Change Me Into Zeus’s Daughter by Barbara Robinette Moss
3. The Working Poor by David Shipler
4. Caught in the Storm by M. Ferguson, H. Neuroth-Gatlin & S. Borasky

III. Films

1. Matewan
2. King of the Hill
3. New Harvest, Old Shame
4. Roger & Me
5. Legacy
6. When the Levees Broke: Acts I & II
7. Sin Nombre

IV. Course Requirements

The entire class will meet once a week on Thursdays to discuss a book, watch a film, or listen to a lecture. Students will also attend one of three discussion section on Fridays (led by course TAs) to take quizzes or further discuss material covered in class. Over the course of the semester we will read four books and watch seven films.

Though this is a large-format course, contributions from each student are still needed to advance the learning process. Students will be expected to come to class on Thursdays and individual discussion sections on Fridays prepared to participate in class learning.

▶ Film/Book Quizzes

Students will be given five (5) quizzes on a random basis throughout the semester. The quizzes will be given during the respective discussion sections on Friday and will cover information covered the previous day in class. This will include information about the book or film as well as any pertinent lecture material, so it will be important for students to be thoroughly familiar with the films/books and lecture material discussed in class the previous day. Each quiz will be worth 10% of the overall grade.

▶ Short Film or Poverty Script

Working in groups of three, the “final exam” will consist of a short film (5-10 minute) or “poverty script” students will create related to the subject of poverty. Students must meet with the instructor prior to selecting their film or script topic, but may pursue a variety of alternatives as a means to meet the requirements of the assignment. More information on the short film/poverty script project will be given during the third week of class.

▶ Class Participation

Students will be graded on the quality of their contribution to the collective learning pursuits of the class, including participation in class, e-mail discussions, and office visits with the instructor or TAs. Since attendance is a key condition of participation, more than two absences will result in a letter grade *at least* one grade below an “A”. Each subsequent absence will reduce the overall participation grade by one letter grade. Students will provide a written assessment of their participation on the last discussion section meeting of the semester (Dec. 4).

□ Service Assessment

In order to gain firsthand experience with the issue of poverty, students will be expected to complete 10 hours of service with an organization that works with and/or provides services to, low-income populations. Students will be required to submit written verification from an agency employee that the ten hours of service has been completed. At the end of the semester students will provide a written assessment of their 10-hour service and overall class participation to the instructor. The assessment should be 2-3 pages in length (12 point font, 1.5 spaced) and answer the following:

- Provide a brief history of the organization and the services it offers. Why did you choose this organization and type of volunteer work? What sort of work did you do? What specific low-income population(s) did you serve? What are the main poverty-related problems being experienced by this population? What other type of assistance does this population need? Summarize your overall experience.

Grade Formula

Class Participation	(15%)
Service Assessment	(10%)
Book/Film Quizzes (5)	(50%)
Short film or Poverty script	(25%)

Grades will be determined as follows:

100 - 94 =	A	93 - 90 =	A-	
89 - 87 =	B+	86 - 84 =	B	83 - 80 =B-
79 - 77 =	C+	76 - 74 =	C	73 - 70 =C-

V. Course Schedule (Books in bold, films underlined)

Topic of Study, Readings, and Assignment Due Dates	
Aug 27	Overview of the Course Rules for Conscious Living
Sept 3	<u>MATEWAN</u> Well-intentioned labor leader Joe Kenehan (Chris Cooper) arrives in Matewan, W. Va., to unionize the coal mine workers. But his efforts to organize the coal company workers spark one of the most violent incidents in the history of the 1920-21 Coal Wars. Tensions grow between the minors and the company men, igniting a powder keg of racial hostility, corruption and betrayal.
Sept 10	Talkin' 'bout poverty: Trends, size, scope, causes & demographics
Sept 17	<u>KING OF THE HILL</u> A young boy struggles on his own in a run-down motel after his parents and younger brother are separated from him in Depression-era St. Louis.
Sept 24	King of the Hill Library Workshop
Oct 1	<u>NEW HARVEST, OLD SHAME</u> A CPB Frontline update of Edward R. Murrow's classic 1960 documentary Harvest of Shame that revisits the migrant farm workers who annually travel from Florida to the mid-West and back. From their decrepit housing and inadequate medical benefits to the substandard wages and lack of access to ordinary labor law protections, 800,000 migrants, thirty years after Murrow's expose, still live in labor camps and suffer working conditions as bad, if not worse, in 1990 than they did in 1960.

Oct 8	Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter The War on Poverty and LBJ's Great Society
Oct 15	<u>ROGER & ME</u> In this blistering, satirical documentary, ex-journalist Michael Moore gives a personal account of the tough times in his hometown of Flint, Mich., after the General Motors plant was closed in the mid-1980s. The film revolves around Moore's dogged attempts to gain an interview with Roger Smith, the elusive and well-insulated head of GM and the man responsible for massive layoffs that eliminated more than 30,000 jobs and left the town destitute.
Oct 22	<u>LEGACY</u> In this Academy Award-nominated documentary, filmmaker Tod Lending chronicles one family's inspiring journey toward the American Dream and away from the despair of their crumbling Chicago housing project. Offering proof that people can overcome insurmountable odds if hard work and miracles collide, the film tracks the journey of 16-year-old Nickole Collins, who went on to get a college education and break her family's legacy of poverty.
Oct 29	The Working Poor
Nov 5	<u>WHEN THE LEVEES BROKE: ACTS I & II</u> Spike Lee commemorates the people of New Orleans with a four-hour epic documentary that doesn't just recount the events of late August 2005 but asks why they unfolded the way they did in the first place. Weaving interviews with news footage and amateur video, Lee uses the film to give meaningful voice to the people who were left behind. With a detached unsentimental eye, he delivers a poignant account of a major moment in recent U.S. history.
Nov 12	Caught in the Storm
Nov 19	<u>SIN NOMBRE</u> Fleeing retaliation from the violent Central American street gang he has deserted, young hood Casper boards a northbound train, where he takes refuge on top of the moving freight cars and hopes for a fresh start in a new country. Dodging authorities and other dangers, he finds a new friend in Sayra, a Honduran girl also making a run for the American border.
Nov 26	Thanksgiving holiday – NO CLASS
Dec 3	Student short films/poverty scripts Course Evaluation
Final TBA	Student short films/poverty scripts Cont'd

The University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Professional Conduct in Class

Students should act appropriately in class. This means students should arrive on time, be prepared to participate in class discussion, and show respect for one another's opinions. We will not, nor should we, always agree with one another. In this environment we should be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometime we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. However, students are expected to engage one another with respect and professionalism.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>).

Documented Disability Statement

Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to their e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-sensitive. Students can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Safety

Students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor's instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

Use of Blackboard in Class

This class utilizes Blackboard—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://courses.utexas.edu>—to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to give students online quizzes and surveys. Students can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk by calling 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Please plan accordingly.

Cell Phones and Computers

Cell phones must be put away during class; computers may only be used for note-taking. Students who disrupt class by using cell phones or computers for non-class related activities may be marked absent and asked to leave for the remainder of that class.

Web-Based Information Sources on Poverty and Family & Child Policy

Government Agencies

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:

Administration for Children and Youth <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation (ASPE) http://aspe.hhs.gov/_/index.cfm

NICHAHD National Children's Study <http://www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov>

U.S. Department of Commerce

Bureau of the Census <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html>

U.S. Department of Labor

Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Policy Development & Research Information Service <http://www.huduser.org/>

Think Tanks and Advocacy Groups on Children's Issues

Alliance for Children and Families <http://www.alliance1.org/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation <http://www.aecf.org/>

Center for Law and Social Policy <http://www.clasp.org/>

Chapin Hall Center for Children (Chicago) <http://www.about.chapinhall.org/>

Child Care and Early Education Research Connection <http://www.childcareresearch.org/>

Children's Defense Fund <http://www.childrensdefense.org>

Child Welfare League of America <http://www.cwla.org/>

Child Trends <http://www.childtrends.org/>

Institute for Child and Family Policy (Columbia) <http://www.childpolicy.org/>

National Center for Children in Poverty (Columbia) <http://www.nccp.org/>

Think Tanks and Advocacy Groups on Social Policy in General

Brookings Institution <http://www.brookings.edu/>

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities <http://www.cbpp.org/>

Center for the Study of Social Policy <http://www.cssp.org/>

Institute for Women's Policy Research	http://iwpr.org/
Food Research and Action Center	http://www.frac.org/
Heritage Foundation	http://www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/
Hudson Institute Welfare Policy Center	http://wp.hudson.org/index.cfm
National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty	http://www.nlchp.org/
Urban Institute	http://www.urban.org/
(Texas) Center for Public Policy Priorities	http://www.cppp.org/
(Texas) Public Policy Foundation	http://www.texaspolicy.com/

University-based Research Centers

National Poverty Center University of Michigan	http://www.npc.umich.edu/
Institute for Research on Poverty University of Wisconsin	http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/
Kentucky Center for Poverty Research University of Kentucky	http://www.ukcpr.org/Index1.html
Rural Poverty Research Center University of Missouri	http://www.rupri.org/
Joint Center for Poverty Research Univ of Chicago/Northwestern Univ	http://www.jcpr.org/
Institute for Policy Research Northwestern University	http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/
Center for the Study of Urban Poverty University of California at L.A.	http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/csup/index.php
Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change Case Western Reserve University	http://povertycenter.cwru.edu
Institute on Race and Poverty University of Minnesota	http://www.irpumn.org/
National Center for Children in Poverty Columbia University	http://www.nccp.org/
University of Maryland Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families	http://www.casey.umd.edu