

Anthropology 314: Human Biology and Society

Spring 2015: The biology of poverty

Instructor: Adam Van Arsdale
Lecture: TBD, Mo/Th 2:50-4:00
Office: PNE 348

Office Hours: Monday: 11-12,
Thursday: 1:30-2:30
Phone: 781-283-2935 (office)
e-mail: avanarsd@wellesley.edu

Course Description:

The aim of this course is to examine the issue of poverty from a biocultural perspective. The concept of poverty has a complex history, with anthropological discussions dating to the 19th century outlining it as a product of evolution. More nuanced perspectives from the 20th century have instead identified the way in which conditions of poverty promote certain kinds of cultural practices, and how individuals within such systems exert their own agency. Today, the phrase “culture of poverty” is uttered by politicians across the spectrum. This course will examine that history, but also develop an understanding of poverty that examines not just its cultural practices, but the ways in which poverty creates complex biological feedback mechanisms. In this more developed view, poverty becomes not merely a cultural phenomenon, but one with significant feedback into developmental and hereditary evolutionary systems. From this perspective, the “problem of poverty” can be seen as something necessarily persistent, grounded in transgenerational evolutionary and cultural processes. Students will engage in collaborative projects at the end of the semester examining the state of poverty in the greater Boston area.

Texts:

- Righteous Dopefiend, (2009)
Philippe Bourgois & Jeffrey Schonberg, University of California Press
- Primary literature (.PDFs available via Sakai and library website)

Course Goals:

- Understand poverty from a biocultural anthropological perspective?
- Examine how poverty affects biological development?
- Examine how poverty interacts with transgenerational hereditary systems?
- Explore solutions to poverty in lieu of its complex causation

Grading:

- Essays (3) – 45%
- Poverty mechanisms project – 15%
- Boston project – 30%
- Participation – 10%

Sakai:

The course will utilize the Sakai platform for facilitating the distribution of class resources and discussion outside of the classroom (<https://sakai.wellesley.edu/portal/>). The

sakai site includes a “Resources” section which will contain folders for additional readings, lectures and other course materials

Concerns:

If you have any concerns regarding your ability to complete the assignments of the course or trouble understanding specific concepts, I am always available for consultation. In addition to my office hours I can be reached with regularity via e-mail. Assistance is also available for students through the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center. All work in this class is subject to the Wellesley Honor Code. While students are encouraged to discuss the course materials and assignments both in and out of class, all of your work must reflect your own independent efforts. All assignments must be turned in on time. Unless approval is granted from Prof. Van Arsdale, no late assignments will be accepted. No extra credit will be available for this course. Much of the material for this class is cumulative in nature – ***please contact me early if you feel yourself falling behind!***



COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

UNIT 1 – FOUNDATIONS

Week 1: (Jan. 26-30) Introduction/Contemporary conversations on poverty

Monday, January 26 – Introduction, what is this course about?

Thursday, January 29 – What is the contemporary conversation on poverty and inequality?

Readings:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Color-Blind Policy and Color-Conscious Morality,” *The Atlantic*, June 2013
<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/color-blind-policy-and-color-conscious-morality/276567/>
- Paul Ryan, “Bill Bennett Show” (interview, 3/12/14)
<http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/article/2014/mar/14/context-paul-ryans-poverty-comments-racial-attack/>
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The case for reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014
<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Week 2: (Feb. 2-6) 19th and early 20th century views on poverty

Monday, February 2 – Proto-evolutionary inequality in humanity

Thursday, February 5 – Eugenics and early anthropology

Readings:

- J.C. Nott, G. Glidden (1854), “Types of Mankind,” 67-72, Lippincott, Grambo, & Co.
- E. Haeckel (1865), “The Pedigree of Man,” 79-85.
- Henry F. Osborn (1927), “The Influence of Habit in the Evolution of Man and the Great Apes,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 216-230.
- Franz Boas (1932), “Modern Life and Primitive Culture,” in *Anthropology and Modern Life*. 202-246. Norton

****Essay #1: Due Feb. 6, 5pm, via course sakai site****

Week 3: (Feb. 9-13) A contemporary culture of poverty and anthropology

Monday, February 9 – The “culture of poverty”

Thursday, February 12– the Sánchez family

Readings:

- Oscar Lewis (1966), “The culture of poverty” *Scientific American* 215(4):19-25
- Oscar Lewis (1959), “On the Edge of Mexico City: The Sánchez Family” *from Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, Basic Books. 211-292.
- Philippe Bourgois (2001) “Culture of Poverty.” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes. 11904-11907. Oxford: Pergamon.

Week 4: (Feb. 16-20) Poverty in the 21st century – demographics

Monday, February 16 – NO CLASS

Thursday, February 19 –

Readings:

- Righteous Dopefiend – Introduction & Chapter 1 (1-46)
- Kate Bird (2007), “The Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty: An Overview” in *Chronic Poverty: Concepts, Causes, and Policy*, edited by Andrew Shepherd, Julia Brunt

****Essay #2: Due Feb. 27, 5pm, via course sakai site****

UNIT 2 – THE BIOLOGICAL EMBODIMENT AND TRANSMISSION OF POVERTY

Week 5: (Feb. 23-27) Transgenerational Biological Mechanisms

Monday, February 24 – The Embodiment of Culture

Thursday, February 27 – Heredity and Development

Readings:

- Clarence Gravlee (2009) “How Race Becomes Biology” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 139:47-57.
- Aaron Goldberg, C. David Allis, Emily Bernstein (2007) “Epigenetics: A Landscape Takes Shape” *Cell* 128(4):635-638.
- R. Brooke Thomas (1998) “The Evolution of Human Adaptability Paradigms: Toward a Biology of Poverty,” in *Building a New Biocultural Synthesis*, edited by Alan Goodman & Thomas Leatherman. 43-58.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapter 2 (47-78)

Week 6: (Mar. 2-6) Maternal health effects

Monday, March 2 – Maternal health

Thursday, March 5 – Poverty and childbirth

Readings:

- Chris Kuzawa & Elizabeth Quinn (2009) “Developmental Origins of Adult Function and Health: Evolutionary Hypotheses” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38:131-147.
- Katie Hinde (2013) “Lactational Programming of Infant Behavioral Phenotype” in *Building Babies*, Springer Press, 187-207.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapter 3 (79-116)

Week 7: (Mar. 9-13) Childhood nutrition and growth

Monday, March 9 – Growth as a somatic choice

Thursday, March 12 – Childhood as a developmental window

Readings:

- Deborah L. Crooks (1999) “Child growth and nutritional status in a high-poverty community in Eastern Kentucky” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 109(1):129-142.
- Robin Nelson (2009) “Adult health outcomes and their implications for experiences of childhood nutritional stress in Jamaica” *American Journal of Human Biology* 21(5):671-678.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapter 4-5 (117-182)

Week 8: (Mar. 16-20) Parenting

Monday, March 16 – Parenting and incarceration

Thursday, March 19 – NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Readings:

- Lee Gettler & Tom McDade (2011) “Cortisol and testosterone in Filipino young adult men: Evidence for co-regulation of both hormones by fatherhood and relationship status
- Heather Ann Thompson (2010) “Why mass incarceration matters: Rethinking crisis, decline, and transformation in postwar American history” *Journal of American History* 703-734.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapters 6-7 (183-240)

Week 9 (Mar. 23-27): Spring Break

NO CLASSES

Week 10: (Mar. 30-Apr. 3) Environmental toxicity

Monday, March 30 – Shared lives, shared environments

Thursday, April 2 – The inequality of pollution

Readings:

- Gary Evans, Elyse Kantrowitz (2002) “Socioeconomic status and health: The potential role of environmental risk exposure” *Annual Review of Public Health* 23:303-331
- Lawrence Schell, Melinda Denham (2003) “Environmental pollution in urban environments and human biology” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:111-134.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapter 8 (241-270)

****Poverty mechanisms project, due April 10, 5pm, via course sakai site****

Week 11: (Apr. 6-10) Conflict and stress

Monday, April 6 – 20th century conflict and a refugee world

Thursday, April 9 – The long arc of war, famine, and disease

Readings:

- Patrick Clarkin (2009) “Lao health and adjustment in Southern New England three decades after the secret war” *Institute for Asian American Studies Publications* 1-29.
- Tessa Roseboom, Susanna de Rooij, Rebecca Painter (2006) “The Dutch famine and its long-term consequences for adult health” *Early Human Development* 82(8):485-491.
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chapter 9 and Conclusion (271-320)

****Essay #3, due April 17, 5pm, via the course sakai site****

UNIT 3 – POVERTY IN BOSTON

Week 12: (Apr. 13-17) What does Boston look like?

Monday, April 13 – An historical overview of poverty in Boston

Thursday, April 16 – Walking Boston

Readings:

- TBD

Week 13: (Apr. 20-24) Student-chosen topic

Tuesday, April 21– TBD

Thursday, April 23 – TBD

Readings:

- TBD

Week 14: (Apr. 27-May 1) Student-chosen topic

Monday, April 27 – TBD

Thursday, April 30 – TBD

Readings:

- TBD

Week 15: (May. 4-8) Student presentations and concluding thoughts

Monday, May 4 – TBD

Thursday, May 7 – Final class, How is poverty a biological problem and why is this important?

Readings:

- TBD

****Final Boston Project, due May 15, 5pm, via course sakai site****

