

# Alabama Poverty Project

## Teaching about Poverty

### Other Active Learning Exercises

**1.** Send students to interview service providers in the poor community, i.e. food bank, clothing bank, homeless shelter providers. Questions such as: how many people do they serve each week, the reasons why clients need these services, etc. would be appropriate to ask.

**2.** “We Versus They Exercise” Ask students to interview their family members about poverty in their own family’s past.

**A.** If there were relatives who were previously poor, ask how they got out of poverty.

**B.** If there are currently poor relatives, interview them regarding their conditions, causes of their poverty, and how they are coping.

**C.** When students return with their interview results, ask them to juxtapose what they “know” about a loved one’s poverty with what we assume is true of all other poor people EXCEPT OUR LOVED ONES. (And therefore, we can expect that other people think our loved ones are the undeserving poor while thinking their loved ones are the deserving poor.)

**D.** Lead discussion on why there are two views of poverty, one applied to people we love and one applied to strangers. Which view undergirds public policy on poverty? Why?

Ask students to look for how their poor relative viewed the poor as well? Did they view others as undeserving, immoral people while viewing themselves as deserving?

**E.** If desired, the facilitator can provide a min-lecture on the history of welfare policy using Piven and Cloward’s *Regulating the Poor*.

**3.** Useful videos:

**A.** *Bill Moyers Journal: Minimum Wages* follows the fortunes of four different households in Milwaukee and their responses to job-loss as the city deindustrialized. This is an excellent vicarious experience of downward mobility. After watching the film, ask students to discuss individual versus social causes for poverty.

**B.** *Bill Moyers Journal Living on the Edge*, a sequel to *Minimum Wages*. Moyers returns to Milwaukee twice over five years to see how two of the families are doing after job-loss and downward mobility.

**C.** *Roger & Me*, Michael Moore’s documentary on deindustrialization in Flint Michigan, its effect on working families and the community

**D.** *It Was a Wonderful Life* follows the stories of six different hidden homeless women as they struggle to survive, one day at a time in a society that is not ready to deal with those who “used to have.” This movie shows how easily anyone can become poor and challenges our ideas of who can feel secure in our society.

**E.** *No Hunger in My Home* profiles the experience of hunger in a California suburb in light of the more than 20 million Americans who are hungry. This film challenges us to examine our responsibilities as individuals and communities to help with the growing problem of hunger in our country.

**F.** *Ending Welfare As We Know It* traces the lives of six welfare mothers over the course of a year as they try to make ends meet, find good child care and means of transportation, and deal with all the other issues in their lives in the midst of the new welfare reform. It covers families in three different states and shows that “the solutions to welfare dependency are as complex as the reasons people turn to welfare in the first place.”

For more information on these videos, please contact the Alabama Poverty Project at (205) 726-4064 or e-mail us at [povertyp@samford.edu](mailto:povertyp@samford.edu).