

# Poverty in America/Alabama

## Course Syllabus

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### **Unit One: Who are the poor and why are they poor?**

- I. The socio-economic sources of poverty
- II. A brief history of the universe of poverty in America
  - A. the impact of the Civil War on black and white poverty in the South.
  - B. the impact of immigration
  - C. the economic strategy of developing regions (attracting new industry by offering low wage, low skill jobs, tax incentives, a anti-union climate)
  - D. economic cycles (the depressions of 1873-79, 1893-89, 1929-40)
  - E. cyclical poverty vs. systemic poverty
  - F. the role of ethnicity, gender, race, and class in American poverty
- III. A brief history of poverty in Alabama
- IV. The sociology of poverty
  - A. the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor
  - B. “inside” and “outside” relief
  - C. the poverty establishment and attitudes toward the poor: changes through the decades; social reform as social control; patronizing the empowering the poor

### **Unit Two: How do we render the lives of the poor? How do middle and upper class people comprehend the lives of the poor?**

- I. Live with the poor, get inside their skins, see the world from their perspective
- II. Study, learn
  - A. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men
  - B. “To Render a Life”
  - C. The relationship of economic indigence, political powerlessness, and culture (folk religion, art, music, story telling)

### **Unit Three: How do informed people of good will help the poor?**

- I. Charity
- II. Government (local, state, federal) welfare
- III. Systemic problems and systemic change
  - A. reforming the 1901 Alabama Constitution
  - B. tax reform

- C. education reform
- D. health reform
- IV. Experiences of activists
  - A. Scott Douglas, Greater Birmingham Ministries
  - B. Kimble Forrister, Alabama Arise
  - C. Linda Tilly, Voices for Alabama's Children

**Unit Four: What do religion and the Bible have to say about poverty?**

**Unit Five: How does poverty look through the eyes of survivors?**

Rick Bragg and Barbara Robinette Moss

**Notes on Readings, Writing Assignment and Final Exam**

The course will rely heavily on your reading to address the questions raised in the syllabus. You should read the books in the order in which they are listed:

Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, paperback edition

Rick Bragg, *All Over But The Shoutin'*

Barbara Robinette Moss, *Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter*

The writing component of the course (due Jan. 17) will consist of a 10 page analytical essay—no footnotes or bibliography necessary—about poverty in one Alabama county of your choice. You should use the Alabama Poverty Project report, *The Picture of Poverty*, which is available online free-of-charge as PDF file at [www.alabamapoverty.org](http://www.alabamapoverty.org), or in printed form (\$20) from <http://www.atlasbooks.com/marktplc/01577.htm>. Whichever county you select, I want you to drive out into the county, especially down the back roads where poor people live. I want you to put faces, houses, roads, places with the numbers. The data is rich and will provide insightful material for you. But is there something you see while driving that helps you understand the world of the poor in this county?

On January 19 I will administer the final exam, which will consist of five broad essay questions, of which you will write about three.

## Selected Course Bibliography

### Poverty in America/the South

- Charles Boger and Judith Welsh Wegner, eds. *Race, Poverty, and American Cities*.  
Robert Coles. *Children of Crisis: Migrants, Sharecroppers and Mountaineers*.  
Warren R. Copeland. *And The Poor Get Welfare: The Ethics of Poverty in the United States*.  
Benjamin DeMott. *Created Equal: Reading and Writing About Class in America*.  
Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*.  
Paul Farmer. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War On the Poor*.  
Linda Gordon. *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*.  
Elna Green. *Social Welfare in the South* (2 vols.)  
Cindy Hahamovitch. *The Fruits Of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty*.  
Michael Harrington. *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*.  
Jacqueline Jones. *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses From the Civil War to the Present*.  
Richard Louv. *Childhood's Future: 101 Things You Can Do For Our Children's Future*.  
James T. Patterson. *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1980*.  
Kevin Phillips. *The Politics of Rich and Poor*.  
Jill Quadagno. *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War On Poverty*.  
David K. Shipler. *The Working Poor: Invisible In America*.  
Fred Taylor. *Roll Away the Stones: Saving America's Children*.  
Walter I. Trattner, ed. *Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor: From Poor Law to Welfare State*.  
Steven Vanderstaay. *Street Lives: An Oral History of Homeless Americans*.

### White Poverty In Alabama

- Wayne Flynt. *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*.  
May Jordon. *Where the Wild Animals is Plentiful*.

### Black Poverty In Alabama

- Onnie Lee Logan. *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife*.  
Nelle Painter. *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*.  
Sarah Rice. *He Included Me*.  
Theodore Rosengarten. *All God's Dangers*.

### Culture and Poverty In Alabama

Byron Arnold. *Folksongs of Alabama*.  
John Beardsley, et al. *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*.  
Virginia Pounds Brown. *Totting the Lead Row*.  
Ray Browne. *Popular Beliefs and Practice in Alabama*.  
Joyce Cauthen. *With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow*.  
Newman I. White. *American Negro Folk Songs*.

### **Religion and Poverty**

Conrad Boerma. *The Rich, the Poor—and the Bible*.  
James A. Cogswell. *The Church and the Rural Poor*.  
Susan Pace Hamill. *The Least of These: Fair Taxes and the Moral Duty of Christians*.  
Ronald H. Nash. *Poverty and Wealth: The Christian Debate Over Capitalism*.  
J. Leslie Hoppe. *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty In the Bible*.  
Jim Wallis. *The Soul of Politics, God's Politics, and Who Speaks for God?*  
R. George Wright. *Does the Law Morally Bind the Poor?*

The *Bible*:

Exodus

16:18

20:15,17

21:2-11,16

22:21-27

23:1-12

Leviticus

25

Deuteronomy

15:1-11

I Samuel

2:1-10

8:1-3

I Kings

21

Job

5:15-16

20:4-29

22:2-11

24:1-12

29:11-17

30:25

31:13-28

34:16-30

Psalms

9

12:5-8  
14:1-6  
35:12-40  
49  
68:7-10  
69:30-33  
72:1-14  
113  
132:13-16  
140:12-13  
146:5-9

#### Proverbs

10:2-5,15-16  
14:20-31  
17:5  
19:17  
21:13  
22:2,7,9,16,22-23  
28:3-28  
29:7,13-14  
30:8-14  
31:10-20

#### Ecclesiastes

5:8-20  
9:13-16

#### Isaiah

1:2-20  
3:13-15  
10:1-4  
11:1-9  
25:4-6  
32:7-8  
41:17-20  
42:1-4  
58  
61

#### Jeremiah

5:26-31  
9:17-18  
22

#### Ezekiel

18:10-13  
22:29  
45:9-12

Amos

2:6-7

4:1-3

5:7-12

8:4-7

Micah

6:10-13

Zechariah

7:8-12

Malachi

3:5

Matthew

6:19-34

16:26

19:16-30

20:1-16

25:31-46

26:6-13

Mark

10:17-31

12:38-44

13:3-9

Luke

1:46-55

2:7

4:18-21

6:20-26, 30-31

7:22-23

8:14

9:58

11:37-42

12:13-34

14:12-24

16:1-31

18:18-30

19:1-10

Acts

2:42-47

3:1-10

4:32-37

5:1-11

Romans

12:13

2 Corinthians

8:1-24

9:6-15

Galatians

2:8-10

3:26-29

Ephesians

4:28

Colossians

3:11

I Timothy

5:3-16

6:3-10,17-19

Hebrews

13:1-3,5-6

James

1:9-11

2:1-17

4:13-17

5:1-6

I John

3:17-18

Revelation

3:17-18