#WelfareReformSyllabus Annotated

**Week 1. The History of Public Assistance in the U.S.**

Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (Basic Books, 1996). Traces the origins of social welfare, both public and private, from the days of the colonial poorhouse through homelessness and the war on welfare in the 1980s.


Annelise Orleck and Lisa Hazirjian eds. *The War on Poverty, 1964-1980: A New Grassroots History* (University of Georgia Press, 2011). Essays examine anti-poverty politics from the ground up in rural as well as urban areas, on farms and Indian reservations, highlighting coalitions across race, class and gender that effectively deployed federal poverty program resources.


**Week 2. Federal Policy and the Racialized Ideology of Female Dependency**

Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy From Colonial Times to the Present.* (South End Press, 1996). Traces the development of the ideology of “the family ethic” and how it became embedded in AFDC, Social Security and Unemployment insurance programs, with differential impacts on white women and women of color.


Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Harvard University Press, 1998). Uncovers the origins of Aid to Dependent Children and the emergence of a two-track system of public aid, in which single mothers received highly stigmatized “welfare” while other groups, such as the aged and the unemployed, got “entitlements.”

Rickie Solinger, *Beggars & Choosers How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption Abortion & Welfare in the United States* (Hill & Wang, 2002). Shows how historical distinctions between women of color and white women, and between poor and middle-class women, excluded certain women from the class of “deserving mothers,” and how a language of “choice” fueled new public policies concerning Medicaid funding for abortions, family tax credits, teen pregnancy, and welfare.

**Week 3. The Welfare Rights Movement and Social Activism of the 1960s and 1970s**


Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Chronicles the history of the National Welfare Rights Organization, the largest membership organization of low-income people in U.S. history, and shows how closely tied that story was to changes in mainstream politics, both nationally and locally in New York City.


Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2006). Tells the story of how a group of welfare mothers in Las Vegas built one of this country’s most successful antipoverty programs, and proved that poor mothers are the real experts on poverty.


MEDIA:

Video: *America’s War on Poverty* (5-part series by Henry Hampton and Blackside)

**Week 4. Historicizing the Backlash Against Welfare**

Eva Bertam, *The Workfare State: Public Assistance Politics from the New Deal to the New Democrats* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). Seeks to explain how we got a tattered safety net based on forced labor rather than entitled need, locating the turning point in the 1960s and 1970s with Southern Congressional Democrats seeking to preserve their regional racialized power.

Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). Traces the history of how labor unions, anti-poverty activists, and moderate liberal groups fought to extend the promise of the family wage to poor African Americans families through massive federal investment in full employment and income supports, but also inadvertently paved the way for successful right-wing attacks on welfare.


Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965.* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Demonstrates that women, work, and welfare were intertwined concerns of the liberal welfare state beginning just after World War II, and that liberals' public debates and disagreements over welfare in this era caused unintended consequences including a shift toward conservatism.


Ellen Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* (University of California Press, 2005). Examines how and why a state-level revolt against welfare, begun in the late 1940s, was transformed into a national-level assault that destroyed a critical part of the nation's safety net, and at how opponents of welfare targeted Puerto Ricans and Chicanos as well as blacks for cutbacks through a powerful, racially coded discourse.

**Week 5. Framing the Lives of Welfare Recipients on the Eve of “Reform”**
Randy Albelda and Ann Withorn, eds. *Lost Ground: Welfare Reform, Poverty and Beyond* (South End Press, 2002). Essays by well-known feminist, anti-racist, and class-based scholars from a variety of disciplines provide cogent critiques of welfare reform.

Lisa Dodson, *Don’t Call Us Out of Name: The Untold Lives of Women and Girls in Poor America* (Beacon Press, 1999). Draws on in-depth interviews with poor girls and women in Boston to explore how they navigate having children at a young age, relying on cash assistance, employment decisions, and child rearing decisions.

Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). Examines the lives of low-income mothers in three cities, documenting how they work hard to get and maintain the meager resources available to them to keep their families safe and secure.

Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare’s End* (Cornell University Press, 1998). Points to the racial, class, and gender biases of both liberals and conservatives to explain the enduring consensus supporting welfare reforms that force the poor single mothers to relinquish basic rights and compel them to find economic security in work outside the home.

David Zucchino, *Myth of the Welfare Queen* (Scribner Publishers, 1997). Tells the stories of two welfare recipients in Philadelphia as the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (welfare reform) is being passed, and details the creative actions welfare recipients take to build a social movement to end poverty.

**Week 6. Media Representation, Racial Politics and the Attack on Welfare**


Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Anti-Poverty Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 1999). Analyzes the intersection of race, media and racialized perceptions of poverty and welfare, and how the white public’s disdain for the black poor lead many to oppose anti-poverty programs.

Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York University Press, 2004). Shows how stereotypes of African American mothers and politically motivated misperceptions about race, class and gender were effectively used to instigate a politics of disgust that drove the passage of welfare reform in 1996.

Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America* (Yale University Press, 2011)

Bonnie Thornton Dill, Maxine Baca Zinn and Sandra Patton, “Race, Family Values and Welfare Reform” in A New Introduction to Poverty: The Role of Race, Power, and Politics, edited by L. Kushnick and J. Jennings (NYU Press, 1999): 263-286. Discusses the intersection of race and gender in the welfare debates and how race was used to demonize and colorize poor mothers.

**Week 7. The Politics and Paradigms of Welfare Research**


Alice O’Connor Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History (Princeton University Press, 2001). Traces the way poverty has been understood and studied across U.S. history, tracing the disciplinary and political influences of research on poverty over the pre and post-welfare eras.

Sanford Schram, Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty (University of Minnesota, 1995). Critiques how welfare policy is analyzed and set in the U.S., demonstrating that how we study issues affects what ultimately gets done about them, and how research on these issues can be done differently and more effectively.

**Week 8. The Experiences of Welfare Recipients Post-1996**


Katherine Boo 2001. “After welfare.” The New Yorker, April 9, 93-107. Reveals many of the myths around welfare reform, especially around employment, through the eyes of one family that struggles to survive after welfare reform.


Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Documents the experiences and perspectives of welfare recipients and government case workers in two different cities during the implementation of welfare reform, showing how this policy contradicts traditional family values as it forces women to work and to leave their kids in childcare or at home alone.


Laura Lein and Deanna T. Schexnayder; with Karen Manges Douglas and Daniel G. Schroeder, *Life After Welfare: Reform and the Persistence of Poverty* (University of Texas Press, 2007). Traces the lives of 179 Texas families after the 1996 reforms, showing how impossible it has been for mothers and their children to survive on what they received monthly, how essential support from extended family has been, how often people end up homeless and how relentlessly local officials have pursued recipients for overpayments or perceived “fraud.”

**Week 9. Work and Welfare in the Neoliberal Era**


Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis, *Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform* (NYU Press, 2006). Documents the consequences of welfare reform for Mexican immigrant women and their families in Southern California, providing a detailed portrait of how welfare reform resulted in the denial of benefits to eligible immigrant families as well as the channeling of immigrant women into unstable, low-wage jobs.

Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker, and Jill Weigt, *Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Work, and Welfare Reform* (Cornell University Press, 2010). Draws on in-depth interviews with poor families and welfare workers, and survey data tracking more than 750 families over two years, to question the validity of claims that welfare reform has been a success.

Jamie Peck, *Workfare States* (Guilford Press, 2001). Traces the development and implementation of neoliberal workfare policies, and how reforms have been shaped by labor markets and political conditions, how gender and race come into play, and how local programs fit into the broader context of neoliberal economics and globalization.

**Week 10. Welfare Reform and Education**


Amanda Freeman “Single moms and welfare woes: A higher-education dilemma” The Atlantic (August 16, 2015). Presents more recent post-recession findings about the struggles low-income women in higher education face since welfare reform.


A. Jones-DeWeever, “When the spirit blooms: Acquiring higher education in the context of welfare reform. Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, 27(3-4) 2008: 113-133. Highlights the importance of higher education for low-income women and reports findings from a study in California that looked at obstacles faced by welfare recipients in their pursuit of higher education.


Carla Shedd Unequal City: Race School and Perceptions of Injustice (Russell Sage, 2015).

**Week 11. Food Insecurity, Housing, and Federal Policy**

Matthew Desmond, “Forced Out: For Many Poor Americans, Eviction Never Ends” The New Yorker (February 8 & 15, 2016).

Roberta Feldman and Susan Stall, The Dignity of Resistance: Women Residents’ Activism in Chicago Public Housing (Cambridge University Press, 2004). Chronicles the four decade history of Chicago’s Wentworth Gardens public housing residents’ grassroots activism, challenging portrayals of public housing residents as passive, alienated victims of despair.

Susan Levine, School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program (Princeton University Press, 2010). Examines the history of school food programs, from their origins in early twentieth-century nutrition science, through the establishment of the National School Lunch Program in 1946, to the transformation of school meals into a poverty program during the 1970s and 1980s.
Caitlin Rathe, “The Right’s Food Stamp Embarassment: A history lesson for the haters” Salon (September 1, 2014)

Loretta Schwartz-Nobel, Growing Up Empty: How Federal Policies are Starving America’s Children (Harper Perennial, 2003). Shows that hunger has reached epic proportions, running rampant through urban, rural, and suburban communities, impacting the working poor, who have jobs but do not make enough to support their families.

Rhonda Y. Williams, The Politics of Public Housing; Black Women’s Struggles against Urban Inequality (Oxford University Press, 2005). Challenges the notion that low-income housing was a resounding failure that doomed three consecutive generations of post-war Americans to entrenched poverty, and recovers a history of black women’s grassroots activism, of political awakening, and of class mobility, all facilitated by the creation of affordable public housing.


Week 12. The Criminalization of Poor People


**Week 13. Family Life and Gendered Care Work**


This article traces the ways in which anti-poverty policies in the United States moved from the expectations of non-employment to employment, without regard for the time mothers spend raising children.

Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Shows the ways in which social policy made home care a low-wage job that was stigmatized as welfare and relegated to the bottom of the medical hierarchy, and also tells a story about a powerful social movement by women of color.


**Week 14. Twenty Years After Welfare Reform**


American and Latina women in their struggle to obtain and maintain employment, and concludes that TANF hurts women of color instead of promoting their economic independence.


Ron Haskins “Are Conservatives Serious About Fighting Poverty” (Brookings Institute, 2016).

Annie Lowery “It’s Time For Welfare Reform Again” *New York Magazine*


MEDIA:

Interactive Website: Your State on Welfare

Podcasts: Poverty in America: The Struggle to Get Ahead

Infographic: Thirty Years of Poverty


**Week 15. New Movements Rising**

Willie Baptist and Jan Rehmann, *Pedagogy of the Poor: Building the Movement to End Poverty* (Teachers College Press, 2013). Mixes stories and lessons coming out of 50 years of the poor organizing the poor with chapters on social theory and social analysis.


The Poverty Initiative, *A New and Unsettling Force: Re-Igniting Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign*, (The Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary, 2009). Emphasizes the important role of those most impacted by poverty have to play in efforts to alleviate and eliminate poverty, from the Poor People’s Campaign of 1967-68, to contemporary poor people’s organizing in the 21st century.


Rose Ernst, *The Price of Progressive Politics: The Welfare Rights Movement in an Era of Colorblind Racism* (New York University Press, 2010). Shifts the focus of discussion from aid recipients to reformers, taking a critical look at the people fighting for reform and showing a gap between how black and white activists come at the issue in very different ways.

**Video:** *Living Broke in Boom Times,* Skylight Pictures, 2009. Focuses on the National Union of the Homeless of the 1980s and 1990s, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union in the wake of welfare reform, and the formation of a national Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

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