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
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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!

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**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:


- Paul Ryan, “Bill Bennett Show” (interview, 3/12/14)

  [http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/](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:

**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:

**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)

**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:
- 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:
- 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:
- 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
- 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:
- Righteous Dopefiend – Chater 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:
• 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**