Poverty in World History

History 5xx:2xx

Professor Gail Triner

Note: I conceive of this course as a course within the global history curriculum that can serve two purposes. First, it will introduce humanities students to one of the central material circumstances shaping both our present and historical existence. Secondly, for economics and other social science students, the course will expand their technical knowledge of issues surrounding “poverty” to appreciate more fully their impact on human existence.

The precise readings and structure of the course, as presented below, remain somewhat unwieldy; but they demonstrate the “bones” of the course and reflect the skills and activities that the course will develop.

Almost one out of every three people on earth subsist on less that the equivalent of $2 per day. In wealthy countries, people who are poor are becoming poorer, even while the wealthy are becoming wealthier. These circumstances have shattering implications for the future. They also have a very long history. Our goal is to understand the history of poverty a little better, in order to think about its future.

This course will explore “poverty” as people have experienced and understood it at various times, places and circumstances through world history. We will also explore the “twin” of poverty: inequality. Our concerns will be both global comparisons (Why did Europe become richer than China? Is “being poor” different in different parts of the world?) and local (How did poor people live in some particular time place? And, how did the non-poor perceive the poor?)

The topic of this class is unendingly broad, and the topics that we cover are very selective. Our readings and discussions will focus on the historical exploration of an important economic circumstance. Technical expertise in economics is not required for the course; but many economic ideas and the presentation of quantitative data are built into the course.

**Core Curriculum Goals met by History 5xx:2xx**

**Social Science and History**

**h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.**

**j. Identify and critically assess ethical issues in social science and history.**

**k. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science.**

**21st Century Challenges Goals met by History 5xx:2xx**

**a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world.**

**b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.**

**Course Requirements** (See last page of syllabus for a brief discussion of each component.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| % of grade |  |
| 20 | Take-home midterm essay |
| 25 | Take-home final essay |
| 15 | Group project: Lead one session of class discussion |
| 15 | Book report; 3-5 page report on a full reading from one of the books listed below. |
| 20 | Class participation |
| 5 | Final “Reflection Essay” |

**Readings**

Texts (both are available as e-books, as well as hard-copy):

Beaudoin, S. *Poverty in World History* (Routledge: 2007)

Milansovic, B. *The Haves and the Have-nots: A Brief and Idiosyncratic History of Global Inequality* (Basic Books: 2010)

Note: This book is organized around analytic “vignettes,” each of focuses on a specific point and is both descriptive and explanatory.

Additional short readings (posted on Sakai; in most cases, these are short selections of 10-25 pages, drawn from longer accounts):

Haughton, J. & S. Khandker *Handbook on Poverty and Inequality* (World Banks: 2009) Ch.2 “Measuring Poverty” (pp 9-35) and Ch. 6 “Inequality Measures” (pp 101-119)

Sabra, A. *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* Ch 2

Li, Lillian “Introduction: Food, Famine, and the Chinese State,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41.4 (1982): 687-707.

Pomeranz, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Selections TBD

Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent, and Roy Bin Wong. *Before and beyond divergence : the politics of economic change in China and Europe*. Harvard University Press, 2011. Selections TBD

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Conclusion.

Engerman, Stanley L., and Kenneth Lee Sokoloff. *Economic development in the Americas since 1500 : endowments and institutions*, NBER series on long-term factors in economic development. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Conclusion.

Rockman, Seth. *Scraping by : wage labor, slavery, and survival in early Baltimore*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Selection TBD

Stearns, *Documents,* “Work and Workers in the Industrial Revolution”

Mokyr, Joel. *The British industrial revolution : an economic perspective*. selection

Burnett [on women poverty & factory work in industrializing Britain

Weinstein, Barbara. *The Amazon rubber boom, 1850-1920*. Selections

Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (selections & photos)

Richard J. Reid, “’Pax Colonia?’ Empires of Soil and Service” in *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (2012)

Shipler, David K *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* Vintage 2005 selections

Ehrenriech, B *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (Holt: 2001, subsequent editions: 2008, 2011) selections.

Picketty, Thomas *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Belknap Press: 2014) selections

Books from which you may choose to write a book report

Sabra, Adam Abdelhamid. *Poverty and charity in medieval Islam : Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517*, Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization.(Cambridge University Press, 2000.)

Rockman, Seth. *Scraping by : wage labor, slavery, and survival in early Baltimore*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.)

Mokyr, Joel. *The British industrial revolution : an economic perspective*

Weinstein, Barbara. *The Amazon rubber boom, 1850-1920*. (Stanford University Press, 1983)

Shipler, David K *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* Vintage 2005

Ehrenriech, B Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting by in America (Holt: 2001, subsequent editions: 2008, 2011)

**Class Sessions**

I. **Introduction**: Why study the history of poverty? 2 classes

Defining Poverty

Readings: Beaudoin, Introduction

II **Pre-Industrial Poverty**

Pre-Modern Poverty 2 classes

* Who was poor

Read:

* + Beaudoin Ch. 1
  + Milansovic, Vignettes 1.3, 1.4 and 1.6
* Perceptions of poverty

Read:

* Sabra, A. *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* Ch 2
* Li, Lillian “Introduction: Food, Famine, and the Chinese State,”

Possible book report: Sabra, A. *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam*

Early globalization and poverty 3 classes

* Global trade networks: Who won? Who lost?
* Was Europe different from Asia?

For the topics above read:

* Beaudoin Ch. 2
* Pomeranz (selections)
* Rosenthal & Wong (selections)
* Colonizing the western hemisphere

Read:

* Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy* Conclusion
* Engerman, Stanley L., and Kenneth Lee Sokoloff. *Economic development in the Americas since 1500* Conclusion.

DISCUSSION SESSION

What was it like to be poor in Europe and the US before Industrialization?2 classes

Read:

* + Beaudoin Chapter 3
  + Rockman, S. *Scraping By* (selections)
* Charity
* Poor relief
* Whose responsible?
* What was it like to be poor?

Possible book report: Rockman *Scraping By*

DISCUSSION SESSION

III **Industry**  5 classes

Read:

Mokyr, Joel. *The British industrial revolution : an economic perspective*.

Milansovic Vignette 3.7

Stearns, *Documents,* “Work and Workers in the Industrial Revolution”

Burnett [on women poverty & factory work in industrializing Britain

Weinstein *The Amazon Rubber Boom* (selections)

* Industrialization
* Creating Workers and capitalists
* Poverty where industrialization happened
* Imperialism & Poverty in resource-providing settings (the “second globalization”)

Possible book reports: Mokyr; *The British industrial revolution : an economic perspective* or Weinstein *The Amazon Rubber Boom*

DISCUSSION SESSION

**Take-home midterm essay**

IV. **Modern Poverty**

Read:

* Beadoin Ch. 5
* Milansovic Vignettes 1.5, 2.1 & others
* Richard J. Reid, “’Pax Colonia?’ Empires of Soil and Service” in *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
* Martha Chen, et al., “Women, Work, and Poverty” (UNIFEM, 2005)
* “'White' Names Give Job Seekers an Edge,” from *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*
* Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (selections & photos)

[Additional readings on race; rural]

The State and the Poor 3 classes

* Transfer of responsibility; bureaucratization
* Social and political movements
  + Socialism
  + Communism
  + Capitalism
* Welfare vs poverty
* How did the state treat poor people?

Categories of poor people 3 classes

* Women & children
* Race/ethnicity
* Rural

DISCUSSION SESSION

Globalizing the problem of poverty 2 classes

Read:

Beaudoin Ch 6

Milansovic Vignettes 2.7, 3.9

[Additional short readings]

* The third world
  + Absolute vs relative poverty
  + After World War II, how was poverty different in the developing world than in the developed world?
  + What were the political consequences of elevating the problems of poverty and decolonialism to a global level?
* Developmentalism
  + Imposed “solutions”?
  + Failure?

V **Poverty & Inequality in Our World**

Global Inequality 1 classes

Read:

* Beaudoin Conclusion
* Milansovic Essay III, Vignettes 2.2, 2.3, 3.4 & 3.6

How unequal is the world & why does it matter?

Poverty in the US: absolute & relative 1 classes

Read

* Milansovic Vignette 3.3
* Shipler, David K *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* Vintage 2005 selections
* Ehrenriech, B *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* selections

Possible book reports: Shipler, David K *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* or

Ehrenriech, B. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*

Poverty for the rest of *your* lifetime 2 classes

Read

* Picketty *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* Chapters 6 and 12 and Conclusion.

DISCUSSION SESSION

VI Conclusion

Due: Final Reflection Essay

**Take-home final essay**

Explanations for assignments & each grade component

Group project: Lead one session of class discussion

We will divide the class in to groups, one for each section and each group will review the main issues that we have discussed in the class & most importantly, the issues from the readings that we have not discussed [or very little] & lead class discussion:

* Raise questions for class mates to consider & discuss; especially where you want to challenge the readings
* Each group will meet with me during my office hours, or another agreed upon time, to go over your plans for the session. This meeting should be at least 2 days before your presentation.

For your session, you may use whatever tools you wish (powerpoint presentations, divide the class into smaller groups to consider individual questions, additional short readings, videos…)

Book report: 2-4 page report on a full reading from one of the books listed below, due before the beginning of class on the day that we discuss the selected readings from that book (as noted in the syllabus.) You should not summarize the book; instead answer the questions:

* What is the book about?
* What do you learn about poverty – both as a concept and as it is experienced in a particular time and place – as a result of reading the book?
* What questions does the book raise in your mind?

**Book report and group discussion project should be from different sections of the syllabus.**

Final “Reflection Essay”: 1-2 page informal essay answering the questions: How has your thinking about poverty changed as a result of this course? What new or remaining questions do you have about poverty?

Midterm and final take-home essays**:** You will be given a choice from 2 or 3 broad questions. Your answer to the question you choose should be a formal essay (3-5 pages for the midterm; 4-7 pages for the final.) I will evaluate the essays based on: comprehensiveness (your coverage and understanding of readings and class discussion) and communication skills (writing style and technique.) You will have at least one week to write the essays and plenty of time to ask questions about the course material, questions and essay requirements. (The final essay will be due during the final exam period, at the time an in-class exam is scheduled to end.) You will also receive substantial written feedback on your midterm essay.

Participation: Over and above attendance, I assess participation by your engagement with the course material: questions that you ask and/or answer in class, participation in small break-out group discussions, responsiveness to any Sakai-based discussions, etc.