

POVERTY AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN 20th CENTURY US HISTORY

HIST 179J/HSHM S461

Yale Summer Session 2024

Instructor: Molly Harris (she/her)

molly.harris@yale.edu



Herbert Block, "There's money enough to support both of you - Now does that make you feel better?" Library of Congress, August 1, 1967.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar explores the connections between public health and poverty in American life and politics, with a particular focus on social programs intended to improve health and welfare. We will examine the social, political, legislative, and regulatory histories of the welfare state during the twentieth century, ultimately considering how these histories shaped the contemporary health and welfare apparatus and our current moment. Students will critically consider the meanings of “sickness,” “health,” and “poverty” in this course. Further, the seminar will acquaint students with federalism and theories of “the state,” as well as provide them an understanding of the mechanics of the US welfare system; the ways it shaped and was shaped by constructions of gender, race, disability, and class; and how it has overlapped with the carceral state. Readings throughout the course will urge students to consider how poverty and health are measured, who they are measured by, and what it has meant to be poor and/or unhealthy in the United States during the twentieth century. The course is organized chronologically, with each session corresponding to one of three thematic categories: federal institutions, local politics, and public-private partnerships.

“Poverty and Public Health in 20th Century US History” is a reading-intensive course designed for undergraduate students who have an interest in US history. While a prior introduction to US history is helpful, no prerequisite is required. Any student excited about the topic and willing to sharpen their analytical, investigative, and reading skills is welcome. Our course readings and discussions will provide students with both a detailed understanding of the historical ties between health and poverty and a structural overview of the United States during the 20th century.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will:

- Engage with secondary sources on topics relating to public health and welfare in US history;
- Critically synthesize bodies of work and become familiar with the concept of “historiography,” applied to both course readings and final papers;
- Locate, identify, analyze, and contextualize diverse primary sources, including interviews, photographs and film, political ephemera, texts, and speeches;
- Practice public speaking in a supportive environment;
- Conceptualize and articulate new questions for future research.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSESSMENTS

Completing all assignments is required in order to receive credit for the course. You will receive written feedback on all assignments, which you are expected to incorporate into your final paper. Expectations for all assignments will be discussed at length in class. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Seminar Participation - 20%

Students are expected to make regular, substantive contributions to seminar discussion. Active participation includes careful, proactive reading, thoughtful engagement with course themes and materials, and enthusiastic participation in peer review exercises. **Attendance is mandatory** in all Yale Summer Session Courses. Students are expected to be in the classroom and prepared to begin when class starts.

Class Presentation - 10%

Beginning in **Meeting #2**, each student will be required to offer short, informal remarks on one of the assigned secondary source readings once during the session. Presentations should include a brief biographical background on the author of the source, a synthesis of the reading’s central argument and evidence, how the source fits into a literature, and 2-3 discussion questions. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes in length, and will take place at the start of class on the day the reading is assigned. The primary aims of the presentation are to give you an opportunity to synthesize scholarly writing and practice public speaking in a safe environment.

Please plan to meet with the instructor once prior to the presentation in order to discuss your ideas and any questions you may have about the reading on which you are presenting.

Short Paper 1: Book Review – 20%

One of the two short papers you will write for this seminar is a book review. You may choose to write about any book from **Meetings #2 through #7** on our syllabus. Reviews should not

exceed 1,200 words and are to be **turned in at the start of class on the day we discuss the book you have selected.** You are welcome, but not required, to write a review of a book you are presenting on. For examples of academic book reviews, please consult the *Journal of American History*, *Modern American History*, and the *American Historical Review*.

Short Paper 2: Primary Source Analysis - 20%

The second short paper will take the form of a primary source analysis. Identify an archival collection that is relevant to American welfare history, housed either online or in a Yale library. Choose between one and three (*a hard upper limit*) documents that are of interest to you. In 500 or so words, put your document(s) in historical context, explain its meaning, and identify some of the questions it raises. When formulating your questions, consider how the document might be used in a research project. **Due at the beginning of Meeting #4.**

Final Paper - 30%

Your final paper may take one of two forms:

1. Historiographical Essay

The purpose of a historiographical essay is to analyze the ways historians have examined and made sense of a given topic. Rather than summarizing the historical facts of the topic, the bulk of the essay should be devoted to articulating the parameters of the scholarly debate around the topic. The essay identifies the key scholars who have written on the topic and synthesizes their arguments. Most importantly, the essay *explains the connections between the arguments.*

Think of the historiographical essay as an extended, and sharply analytical, literature review. The essay should demonstrate the author's familiarity with the body of literature — not only the books that comprise it and the scholars who have contributed to it, but how and why the parameters of the debate developed. The paper must include an analysis of the nature of the sources scholars have used in their research and a brief section outlining possibilities for future research.

2. Proposal for Further Study

The primary aim of the research proposal is to develop original questions for future research on the US welfare state. These questions should interest and excite you, and should be communicated such that your reader becomes excited about them, too. As important as the questions themselves are a) your explanation of how they fit into, and depart from, a body of literature; b) your justification for why they are important; and c) your interpretation of the source base and how you might use it to answer the questions you have posed.

The proposal should include an introduction; an explanation of the “puzzle” you hope to work through; a detailed set of the questions you will investigate to address the puzzle; an analytical literature review; and an overview of the source base. Please also identify the nature of the paper you are proposing (such as a senior essay or a shorter seminar paper).

Both formats require you to build on the skills you will have developed in this course: analyzing books individually and in the context of a body of literature; identifying and explaining a source base; and

developing and articulating innovative and feasible research questions. Whichever format you choose, you will be expected to submit **10-12 double spaced pages** and incorporate, in some way, at least one book from our course syllabus.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND COURSE MEETINGS

All readings are free and available online. The majority of secondary sources can be accessed through the Yale Online Library System. Primary sources, as well as any secondary sources not accessible digitally through the Yale Library, will all be available on Canvas. If you have any trouble accessing course readings, please contact the instructor.

Meeting #1 — Introduction: Measuring Poverty and Categorizing the Welfare Client

What does “poverty” mean? How is it measured? How does poverty affect health? Who has access to public assistance, and who decides? What does “expanding access to health care” accomplish? What do we as history students gain from studying poverty, public health, and the welfare state?

Secondary

- Arline T. Geronimus et al., “‘Weathering’ and Age Patterns of Allostatic Load Scores Among Blacks and Whites in the United States,” *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 5 (May 2006), 826-833.
- Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century US History*, Introduction and Chapter 1, “Origins: Poverty and Social Science in the Era of Progressive Reform,” 3-55 (2001).
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “[The Meaning of the Democrats’ Spending Spree](#),” *New Yorker*, April 6, 2021.

Meeting #2 — Immigration and Racial Formation in the Progressive Era City

What was “progressive” about the Progressive Era? What were the connections between immigration, eugenics, and health at the start of the 20th century? How did sickness shape constructions of race? Why were city governments so involved in public health and hygiene reforms? Who did local politicians and departments partner with to police hygiene and enforce public health codes? How did these local projects advance a national anti-immigration politics?

Secondary

- Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*, Introduction, 1-16, Chapter 4, “White Women, Hygiene, and the Struggle for Respectable Domesticity,” 105-119, and Chapter 8, “Healthy Spaces, Healthy Conduct,” 204-224 (2001).
- Marisa Chappell, “*Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* Twenty-Five Years Later: Theda Skocpol’s Legacy and American Welfare State Historiography, 1992-2017,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17, no. 3 (2018), 546-73.

Primary

- Selections from the Ellsworth Huntington Papers (MS1), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Meeting #3 — The New Deal and the Right to Good Health

How did the Great Depression affect public health and health care? Which New Deal agencies were involved in public health and health care initiatives? Who advocated for expanded access to care and who lobbied against it? Who was able to claim a 'right' to good health? How did organized labor, corporate management, and federal bureaucrats shape the health possibilities of the New Deal? What health inequities did New Deal policies produce, and how do they compare to the inequities produced and entrenched by the broader New Deal project?

Secondary

- Beatrix Hoffman, *Healthcare for Some: Rights and Rationing in the United States since 1930*, Introduction, Prologue, and Part I, "The Struggle for Health Care in the Great Depression," ix-38 (2012).
- Margaret Humphreys, *Malaria: Poverty, Race, and Public Health in the United States*, Chapter 4, "Making Malaria Control Profitable," 69-93.

Primary

- "Selected Letters between the United States Public Health Service, the Macon County Health Department, and the Tuskegee Institute, 1932-1972," in Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (2000).
- "Interview with Four Survivors, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Study, 1973," in Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (2000).
- "Testimony by Four Survivors from the United States Senate Hearings on Human Experimentation, 1973," in Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (2000).

Meeting #4 — Policing Poverty and the Price of Post-War Affluence

What do the phrases 'post-war liberalism' and 'post-war affluence' mean? How did liberalism and affluence shape and reshape each other during the post-war period? Who participated in post-war affluence? Who paid for it? What are the origins of the 'middle class,' and which New Deal policies helped to create it during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s? Why was housing policy so crucial to the accumulation of wealth after World War II? What are the connections between labor, liberalism, wealth, and the carceral state?

Secondary

- Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965*, Introduction and Chapter 1, "A New Postwar Paradigm for Welfare: From Comprehensive Social Welfare to Welfare Services," 1-40 (2006).
- Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*, 12-26 and Chapter 2, "Freedom from Fear: White Violence, Black Criminality, and the Ideological Fight for Law-and-Order," 27-67 (2014).
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Cancel the Rent," *New Yorker*, May 12, 2020.
- Tami J. Friedman, "Exploiting the North-South Differential: Corporate Power, Southern Politics, and the Decline of Organized Labor After World War II," *Journal of American History* (2008), 323-348.

Primary

- In lieu of an assigned primary source, please explore *Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America* and *Renewing Inequality: Family Displacements through Urban Renewal, 1950-1966*. Familiarize yourself with both digital history projects and come to class prepared to discuss segregation and displacement patterns in a city of your choosing.

Meeting #5 — The War on Poverty I: Medicaid, Medicare, and the Right to Good Health

What was the War on Poverty? What is Medicaid? What is Medicare? Who benefited from these programs, and who was left out? What is the relationship between Medicaid and Medicare and civil rights? What are the continuities between the New Deal and the War on Poverty? What was the radical health movement, and how radical was it? What kinds of institutions did the radical health movement advocate? Which of its demands did the federal government support?

Secondary

- Ezra S. Lichtman, “Do Their Own Thing’: Radical Health Care and the Fair Haven Community Health Center,” *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 10 (October 2021), 1806-1814.
- Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics*, Chapter 3, “Federalism, Health Care, and Inequity,” 33-59.
- Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*, Introduction, “Chapter 2: Origins of Black Panther Party Health Activism,” and “Chapter 3: The People’s Free Medical Clinics,” 49-114 (2013).

Primary

- [Address](#) by Rep. Gerald Ford (R-Mich) before the Medical, Dental-Hospital Bureaus of America, Inc., Meeting in Annual Convention, Thursday, September 12, 1967.

Meeting #6 — The War on Poverty II: Do All Roads Lead to the Federal Government?

What does ‘maximum community involvement’ mean in the War on Poverty context? How did community involvement play out? Who did the federal government accept as suitable representatives of any given community? How much autonomy did welfare activists have in the provision of services? Why was autonomy so crucial to the operation of local programs? In what ways was welfare organizing gendered, raced, and classed? What is the War on Poverty’s legacy in the realm of public health?

Secondary

- Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty*, Chapter 3, “‘Bad Luck and Lousy People’: Black Single Mothers and the War on Poverty,” 69-97, and Chapter 7, “‘We Can Do It Better’: Revitalizing A Community from the Bottom Up,” 208-244 (2005).
- Merlin Chowkwanyun, *All Health Politics Is Local: Community Battles for Medical Care and Environmental Health*, Chapter 3, “Los Angeles: Health Politics and the Fire Next Time,” 58-95 (2022).

Meeting #7 — Mass Incarceration and the Public-Private Welfare State

What drove mass incarceration? How did the state police poverty during the second half of the twentieth century? Who benefited from the expansion of the carceral apparatus? What are the connections between mass incarceration and public health? What rights do prisoners have within the carceral state? How should we understand the prison health care system as part of the welfare state? How are the welfare state and the carceral state mutually constitutive?

Secondary

- Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, Chapter 5, “The Battlegrounds of the Crime War,” 180-217 (2016).

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Globalisation and US Prison Growth: from Military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian Militarism,” *Race & Class* 40, no. 2/3 (1998/1999), 171-188.

Primary

- Mark Browning, “West Texas Prison: TDC Eyeing Expansion,” *Corsicana Daily Sun*, August 16, 1976.
- “Askew Signs Bill Banning Inmates at Hospital,” *Fort Myers News-Press*, June 25, 1976.
- Philip Hager, “High Court Upholds Inmate Right to Medical Treatment — But Rules 8 to 1 That Negligence by Prison Doctor is State Malpractice Issue, Not Federal Concern,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1976.
- **SKIM:** Columbia Human Rights Law Review, *A Jailhouse Lawyer’s Manual* (12th ed.), Chapter 3, “Your Right to Adequate Medical Care,” 706-735 (2020).

Meeting #8 — Environmental Justice

What is environmental justice? How should we think about environmental justice as a historical framework and a contemporary movement? Did environmental justice exist before the term was coined? In what ways has the state stifled the aims of the environmental justice movement? How has the state protected the environment, and what does it prioritize within these protections? How has federalism shaped the successes and failures of the environmental justice movement? In what political arenas are battles over the environment played out? Who does the federal government protect?

Secondary

- Ellen Griffith Spears, *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* (2014).
**NB: Rather than read a selection of chapters, we will split into three groups, each of which will be responsible for ~100 pages of the book. We will all read the introduction and epilogue. We will piece together the story Spears tells in our discussion.

Primary

- Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, Chapter 2, “Race, Class, and the Politics of Place,” 25-44 (1990).

Meeting #9 — History in Action: HIV/AIDS in the Age of Austerity

What is HIV/AIDS? Who contracted AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s? How were political responses to AIDS racist, homophobic, and classist? How did federal austerity shape the trajectory of the AIDS epidemic in the United States? Which institutions provided care to people with HIV and AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s? What made the scientific response to AIDS so political? What was the relationship between local community organizations, teaching hospitals, and the state during the early years of the AIDS epidemic? Where do we, as residents of New Haven, see the legacies of this history today?

Secondary

- Dan Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS*, Introduction, “The AIDS Capital of the World,” 1-16, Chapter 3, “Black Men Loving Black Men Is a Revolutionary Act: Gay Men of African Descent, the Black Gay Renaissance, and the Politics of Self Esteem,” 73-102, Chapter 6, “Stop Medical Apartheid from South Africa to Philadelphia: ACT UP Philadelphia and the Movement for Global Treatment Access,” Chapter 7, “The South within the North: SisterLove’s Intersectional Approach to HIV/AIDS,” and Conclusion, “Generations of Activism,” 165-226.

Primary

- Andie Rierden, “In New Haven, Taking Action Against AIDS,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1994.
- Frank Spencer-Molloy, “New Haven Test Site for AIDS Treatment,” *Hartford Courant*, January 31, 1992.

Meeting #10 — History in Action: Reproduction and the Politics of “Personal Responsibility”

What is reproductive justice? What was the relationship between reproductive justice and the welfare state at the end of the twentieth century? In what ways did the logics of eugenics shape welfare reforms during the 1990s? How did racist stereotypes about the “typical” welfare client emerge, and how did federal and state policies reproduce and reify these tropes? How and why did academic institutions like Yale and Yale-New Haven Health involve themselves in reproduction and welfare at the end of the twentieth century? How do late-twentieth century maternal welfare policies compare to those of the Progressive Era and post-war years? How do discourses of “personal responsibility” as they pertain to reproduction map onto the way we approached and experienced the covid-19 pandemic?

Secondary

- Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, Chapter 3, “From Norplant to the Contraceptive Vaccine: The New Frontier of Population Control,” and Chapter 4, “Making Reproduction a Crime,” 104-201 (1999).

Primary

- “Pilot Demonstration in Reaching Out to Teen-age Unwed Parent” (1966) and “The Resident’s Role in an Unwed Mothers Program” (1967), Philip M. and Lorna Sarrel Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, MS 1922.
- “The Infant Mortality Crisis: Why Our Babies Are Dying,” *EBONY* 44, no. 1 (November 1988), 188, 190, 192.

Meeting #11 — History in Action: Federalism and Public Assistance at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

What was the status of the welfare apparatus at the end of the twentieth century? How did “shortening the welfare rolls” enter the public consciousness as a political goal during the late 1980s and 1990s? What does it mean to be dependent, and how has the concept of dependency been raced, classed, and gendered? What is the state’s role in creating medical and other forms of debt? What is the state’s role in alleviating debt? How have private institutions like Yale-New Haven Hospital benefited from federal policies? How have these policies shaped the social and economic landscape in New Haven? What constitutes welfare in our contemporary moment?

Secondary

- Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, Chapter 5, “The Welfare Debate: Who Pays for Procreation?” 202-245 (1999).
- Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics*, Chapter 7, “Policy Advocacy across a Fragmented Polity,” 134-161.
- Amy Zanoni, “Remembering Welfare as We Knew It: Understanding Neoliberalism through Histories of Welfare,” *Journal of Policy History* 35, no. 1 (January 2023), 118-158.

Primary

- Connecticut Center for a New Economy, *Uncharitable Care: Yale New Haven Hospital’s Charity Care and Collections Practices* (2003).

Academic Integrity Statement

Students are expected to use the Chicago Manual of Style in all course assignments. We will discuss the mechanics of citing in Chicago Style in class, and the instructor will provide students with resources on how to format footnotes and bibliographies. We will additionally discuss *why* we cite. Footnotes are not only a means for avoiding plagiarism. They are also a way to demonstrate which historians we are in conversation with and, ultimately, to push scholarly discourses further. Academic integrity goes beyond simply citing source material. It is a commitment to developing our own ideas and authorial voices, and to working out where those ideas fit into the body of literature we are studying this semester.

Any attempt to portray someone else's work, words, or ideas as your own constitutes plagiarism. This includes (but is not limited to) failing to attribute paraphrased ideas to their original author; insufficiently paraphrasing or omitting quotation marks around text taken directly from another source; submitting the same paper for more than one course; or submitting a paper that has been *substantially rewritten* by another person (this does not include incorporating feedback from peers, the Writing Center, or the instructor). The use of ChatGPT for assignments is strictly prohibited. Yale has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. If you have any questions or concerns about what that policy means in relation to your coursework, **please ask me**. This Poorvu Center resource is also helpful.

Guidance for Submitting Work

Please submit all assignments to Canvas in **.docx format**. If you use Google Docs, you can download your work as a Microsoft Word document by clicking "File: download: Microsoft Word (.docx)" in the toolbar.

Please aim to submit all work on time. **If you are unable to meet a deadline, be sure to contact me well in advance to ask for an extension. I will do my best to accommodate these requests.** If you email me the day an assignment is due, I may not be able to grant your request. That being said, I understand that life happens and I will try to accommodate last-minute requests *within reason*.

Email Policy

From Monday to Friday, I will respond to emails within 24 hours of receipt. If 24 hours have passed since you sent your message and you have not yet received a response, please feel free to send me a follow-up email.

Office Hours

I am always happy to meet with you to discuss your assignments, course material, or anything else relevant to our work together. I welcome all questions, big or small, about our course. While I

cannot commit to reading full drafts of work, I would be pleased to look over and discuss paper outlines and ideas in office hours. If you are unable to come to my scheduled hours, please let me know. We will arrange another time to meet.

Statement on Inclusion

As a community, Yale is committed to creating and sustaining an equitable learning environment so that all students can engage in this course as fully invested learners. Yale is committed to facilitating individual accommodations for all students with disabilities throughout the entire University, and to work to remove physical and attitudinal barriers. I share in this goal, and request that you – or Student Accessibility Services inform me – as soon as possible regarding any accommodations that will help you to succeed in this course.

Additionally, our course is a learning space in which I commit to work actively to address and eliminate all forms of bigotry, discrimination, and exclusion – including, but not limited to, racism, anti-Blackness, sexism, ableism, classism, and marginalization based on gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, or language. If you observe an instance of such behavior or attitudes, I encourage you to let me know immediately.

Finally, I recognize the emotional difficulties that this institution can foster. I also recognize that the resources provided to you through Yale Mental Health & Counseling may be helpful to some, but insufficient for others. While you are never required to disclose to me more than you are comfortable sharing, I am here to support you and your learning. If it is relevant to your work in this course and if you are comfortable doing so, you are always welcome to loop me in (with as much or as little detail as you feel is necessary) on how you are doing mentally and emotionally. If there are other ways that I can support you as you navigate these challenges, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Resources

Writing Support: Consider scheduling an appointment with one of your Residential College Writing Tutors or the Writing Center at [the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning](#). I am also happy to discuss questions about writing assignments in office hours.

Concerns about Sexual Harassment and/or Assault: You can contact me, the SHARE Center ([sharecenter.yale.edu](#); 203-432-2000), and/or the Title IX coordinators ([provost.yale.edu/title-ix/coordinators](#)). ***Please note that I am required to report any instances of sexual assault or harassment that I witness or that are disclosed to me.*** If you have questions about what it means for me to be a mandatory reporter, please ask.