

Poverty: The Plight and the Fight, Poverty Immersion Experience
Facilitated by Liz Theoharis and Willie Baptist, Scholar-in-Residence
Sponsored by the Poverty Initiative
2 credits

Course Description:

We have all heard the statistics: 45 million people have no health insurance; 3 million jobs have been eliminated in New York City since 9/11; soup kitchen visits are up 150%. What are religious leaders and other people of conscience to do in the face of growing poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and misery?

This course will explore the reality of poverty in New York City and across the United States and offer tools for overcoming and eliminating poverty. A hands-on and experience-based course, the Poverty Immersion Experience will include dialogue with leaders of local and national poor people's organizations, human rights trainings and documentation in poor communities, Bible studies, video showings, and poverty reality tours. Significant time will be spent discussing the theological implications of building a movement to end poverty, led by poor people and the role of religious communities in building a social movement.

The aim of the course is to learn from leaders of poor people's organizations, explore poverty and anti-poverty efforts in New York City and beyond, gain skills organizing around issues of health care, housing, education, food and living wage jobs; explore models for developing leaders who are committed to ending poverty; study lessons for community organizing and movement building from social movements in history and develop long-lasting relationships with low-income leaders and other religious leaders involved in a budding social movement to end poverty.

Trips will be made to Philadelphia, PA where students will be hosted by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, New Jerusalem Laura, the Youth Health Empowerment Project and the Underground Railroad Temple University Depot; to Atlantic City where Poor Voices United, the Rescue Mission Homeless Shelter, and Local 54 HERE will serve as hosts; and to Upstate New York where leaders of the Ithaca Workers Rights Center and the Tompkins County Living Wage Campaign will host discussions and sponsor poverty reality tours for class participants. In New York City, students will be hosted by Picture the Homeless in East Harlem, Ron Cassanova from the NY State Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign and Artists for a Better America, Frances Moses from Bridges, and the Broadway Community Incorporated (BCI).

Course Requirements and Criteria for Evaluation:

This course is designed for people who are interested in developing concepts and skills for organizing a movement to end poverty, for hands-on learning of the reality of poverty, and for getting to know New York City and neighboring cities and small towns. Students are required to attend and actively participate in class, read the assigned articles, and keep a daily journal. The journal is due on Friday, January 28, 2005. It should be dropped off into FE 226 Pit Box #73. The main assignment for the course will be participation in one of four small working groups that each student will join the first day of class. These working groups include: The Truth Commission, the Arts and Culture Committee, the Worship and Liturgy Committee, and the Video Documentation and Publications Committee. Each student will be required to carry out the plans made in each of these working groups. Each group will present their work on Thursday, January 20th in class. Students will be evaluated based on their participation and writing.

Course Readings:

Students will read selections from the following books. The articles/chapters will be handed out in class. Students should consider the readings when doing their journal entries.

Casanova, Ron, *Each One Teach One: Up and Out of Poverty*, New York: Curbstone Press, 1996

Duchrow, Ulrich, *Global Economy; A Confessional Issue for the Churches?* Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987

Rifkin, Jeremy, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, New York: Putnam's Sons Publishing, 1995.

Schlosser, Eric, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, New York: HarperCollins, 2002

Schwartz-Nobel, Loretta, *Growing Up Empty: the Hunger Epidemic in America*, New York: HarperCollins, 2002

Class Schedule

Monday, January 10

Introduction to the course, syllabus and objectives.

Root Causes of Poverty: Who is Poor?

Film screenings of *Philadelphia Story* (BBC) and *Drug War Reality Tour* (GNN)

Tuesday, January 11

Day trip to Philadelphia, PA where we will be hosted by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU), the Youth Health Empowerment Project (Y-HEP) and the Underground Railroad Temple University Depot. We will get a Poverty Reality Tour of Kensington and engage in conversation about KWRU's local and statewide organizing campaign.

Wednesday, January 12

Group reflection on Philadelphia visit

Bible Study on poverty and its social impact

Afternoon visit to Picture the Homeless (PTH), East Harlem, NY where we will learn about homelessness in NYC and efforts of the homeless to organize themselves.

Thursday, January 13

Group reflection on PTH visit

Economic Human Rights Documentation: The Many Problems of Poverty and the Response of the Church

Film screening of *Copy This Tape* (Media College Productions)

Guest presenters: Tara Colon, KWRU and Noelle Damico, University of the Poor School of Theology

Friday, January 14

Class will start at 12noon – Visit to BCI at Broadway Presbyterian Church and presentation on hunger and homelessness near Morningside Heights. Video presentation of *Takeover* (Skylight Pictures) and discussion of history of Tompkins Square Park Tent City and the New York Union of the Homeless. Visit to Riverside Church. Discussion of the use of video documentation in organizing.

8pm-10pm - Night visit to the Battery Park area with local organization, Bridges, to pass out food and other necessities and to learn about homelessness firsthand.

Guest presenters: Ron Casanova, Artists for a Better America and NY PPEHRC and Peter Kinoy, Skylight Pictures and Media College of the University of the Poor. The host for Bridges run is Francis Moses.

Tuesday, January 18

Group reflection on BCI and Riverside visits and MLK weekend

Getting the Message Out: Using Arts, Culture and Images to Organize

Film screening of *Teen Dreams* (Skylight Pictures)

Guest presenters: Davina Lopez, Grace Lewis, Union Theological Seminary and Frank Cardone, Geoclan

Wednesday, January 19

Day trip to Atlantic City, NJ where we will be hosted by Poor Voices United. Video Presentation of *Health Crisis USA* (Media College Productions) and tour of wealth and poverty contrasts in the area.

Thursday, January 20

Group reflection on Atlantic City trip

The Demographics of Poverty: Poverty in American towns, cities and rural areas

Class evaluation and small group presentations

Film screening of *Is Walmart Good for America?* (PBS Frontline)

Friday, January 21

Day trip to Ithaca/Cortlandt, NY where we will be hosted by the Ithaca Worker's Rights Center, the Tompkins County Living Wage Coalition as well as professors from SUNY-Cortlandt and Cornell University. We will get a reality tour of small town and rural poverty, learn about organizing low-wage workers, and have a discussion of the role of academics in the movement to end poverty.