

The theory of the culture of poverty suggests that poverty is the result of people's values or cultural norms. In a way, it suggests that people who are poor have different cultural values than.

Are you sure you want to delete this answer? Yes Sorry, something has gone wrong. The culture of poverty concept is a social theory explaining the cycle of poverty. Based on the concept that the poor have a unique value system, the culture of poverty theory suggests the poor remain in poverty because of their adaptations to the burdens of poverty. The term "subculture of poverty" later shortened to "culture of poverty" made its first prominent appearance in the ethnography *Five Families*: Lewis struggled to render "the poor" as legitimate subjects whose lives were transformed by poverty. He argued that although the burdens of poverty were systemic and therefore imposed upon these members of society, they led to the formation of an autonomous subculture as children were socialized into behaviors and attitudes that perpetuated their inability to escape the underclass. Lewis gave some seventy characteristics [], that indicated the presence of the culture of poverty, which he argued was not shared among all of the lower classes. The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging. They are like aliens in their own country, convinced that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs. Along with this feeling of powerlessness is a widespread feeling of inferiority, of personal unworthiness. This is true of the slum dwellers of Mexico City, who do not constitute a distinct ethnic or racial group and do not suffer from racial discrimination. In the United States the culture of poverty of the Negroes has the additional disadvantage of racial discrimination. People with a culture of poverty have very little sense of history. They are a marginal people who know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life. Usually, they have neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves elsewhere in the world. In other words, they are not class conscious, although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions. When the poor become class conscious or members of trade union organizations, or when they adopt an internationalist outlook on the world they are, in my view, no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may still be desperately poor. Lewis Although Lewis was concerned with poverty in the developing world, the culture of poverty concept proved attractive to US public policy makers and politicians. It strongly informed documents such as the Moynihan Report and the War on Poverty more generally. Despite decades of this criticism by prominent sociologists, anthropologists and other academics who argue that descriptions of the poor as being culturally unique have little explanatory power, the culture of poverty concept persists in popular culture.

Chapter 2 : Culture of Poverty - Anthropology - Oxford Bibliographies

The culture of poverty is a concept in social theory that asserts that the values of people experiencing poverty play a significant role in perpetuating their impoverished condition, sustaining a cycle of poverty across generations.

Early formulations[edit] Early proponents of the theory argued that the poor are not only lacking resources but also acquire a poverty-perpetuating value system. According to anthropologist Oscar Lewis , "The subculture [of the poor] develops mechanisms that tend to perpetuate it, especially because of what happens to the worldview, aspirations, and character of the children who grow up in it". Lewis , p. Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty Lewis struggled to render "the poor" as legitimate subjects whose lives were transformed by poverty. He argued that although the burdens of poverty were systemic and so imposed upon these members of society, they led to the formation of an autonomous subculture as children were socialized into behaviors and attitudes that perpetuated their inability to escape the underclass. Lewis gave 70 characteristics [] , that indicated the presence of the culture of poverty, which he argued was not shared among all of the lower classes. The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging. They are like aliens in their own country, convinced that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs. Along with this feeling of powerlessness is a widespread feeling of inferiority, of personal unworthiness. This is true of the slum dwellers of Mexico City , who do not constitute a distinct ethnic or racial group and do not suffer from racial discrimination. In the United States the culture of poverty that exists in the black community has the additional disadvantage of perceived racial discrimination. People with a culture of poverty have very little sense of history. They are a marginal people who know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life. Usually, they have neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves elsewhere in the world. In other words, they are not class conscious , although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions. When the poor become class conscious or members of trade union organizations, or when they adopt an internationalist outlook on the world they are, in my view, no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may still be desperately poor. Lewis Although Lewis was concerned with poverty in the developing world, the culture of poverty concept proved attractive to US public policy makers and politicians. It strongly informed documents such as the Moynihan Report as well as the War on Poverty , more generally. For Harrington, the culture of poverty is a structural concept defined by social institutions of exclusion that create and perpetuate the cycle of poverty in America. In , anthropologist Carol Stack issued a critique of it, calling it "fatalistic" and noticing the way that believing in the idea of a culture of poverty does not describe the poor so much as it serves the interests of the rich. The culture of poverty, as Hylan Lewis points out, has a fundamental political nature. The ideas matters most to political and scientific groups attempting to rationalize why some Americans have failed to make it in American society. This fatalistic view has wide acceptance among scholars, welfare planners, and the voting public. In sociology and anthropology, the concept created a backlash, pushing scholars to look to structures rather than " blaming-the-victim " Bourgeois Since the late s, the culture of poverty has witnessed a resurgence in the social sciences, but most scholars now reject the notion of a monolithic and unchanging culture of poverty. Newer research typically rejects the idea that whether people are poor can be explained by their values. It is often reluctant to divide explanations into "structural" and "cultural," because of the increasingly questionable utility of this old distinction.

Chapter 3 : Culture of Poverty in America | HuffPost

Kaaryn Gustafson: Early writings on the culture of poverty, for example those by Oscar Lewis and Michael Harrington, suggested that the culture of poverty was an effect, namely an effect of economic and social exclusion. Those writings suggested that people who faced few economic opportunities in society grew hopeless.

The Index ranks Minnesota as the second highest state in the nation. Indicators of opportunity measured include the state of the local economy, access to education and community health and civic life. While perusing other information about disparities that contribute to poverty in the U. Income and education are among the most potent determinants of health. Simply stated, the rich are healthier than the middle class, who are in turn healthier than the poor. This statement leads me to believe that the same conditions that contribute to poverty in the rural southeast and the urban northeast also remains a challenge in Minnesota. The article confirms the suspicions of many of us in the poverty alleviation field, that the cycle of poverty is created and sustained by multiple issues feeding into one another throughout low-income communities in the U. We are also learning that there is great need to create focused interventions at the community level around several critical factors simultaneously to result in healthier, more prosperous, and more sustainable communities. The culture of poverty, i. This culture has perpetuated racism and has supported the ignorance or blinding of more affluent Americans from understanding the challenges that their neighbors experience. The culture of poverty exists for all members in a community but expresses itself quite differently based on the zip code that someone is born into. It is also clear that the conditions of poverty that create cyclical or intergenerational poverty must be surrounded and encircled by the efforts and strategies of community members, non-profits and their funder partners to help transform a culture of poverty into a culture of prosperity. There is a rich history of several efforts that have done this, so, why has this culture continued to grow in our country? Could it possibly be the lack of national imagination or the access to opportunity that moves someone beyond the experience of his or her parents? In a recent trip to Minneapolis, I noted several neighborhood-based interventions in process with non-profits, faith-based groups, individual residents, local government and philanthropy all poised to re-develop the north Minneapolis neighborhood. Some are targeting housing quality, affordability or zoning; others are investigating how to develop the large neighborhood as a new, gentrified haven; other are concerned about facilities offering recovery and rehabilitation for the homeless or recovering from substance abuse. Still, others are targeting crime prevention, youth development and economic development and new transit options. We heard few conversations about how these efforts result in permanent improvement for all current residents regardless of socio-economic standing, race or ethnicity. What if we could knit together, community-by-community, efforts to improve income, education, community health and civic life with integrated, adaptive leadership skills among local leaders from the poorest neighborhoods, businesses and local government? Working together, simultaneously with the same goal in mind -- opportunity for all -- might local wise men and women develop a critical break in the cycle of intergenerational poverty across the nation in our lifetime? Much of what The Declaration Initiative TDI is developing with communities experiencing intergenerational poverty is the ability to help create the connective tissue between philanthropy, government, non-profit, and the families experiencing its conditions. TDI is a movement to inspire the efforts of non-profits, families, philanthropy and government to focus on greatly reducing intergenerational poverty in the U. We intend to facilitate the implementation of: Permanent improvements not palliation. Comprehensive work on social, economic and health conditions that have been prioritized by poorest residents. Community centered, inclusive, integrated decision-making including donors, beneficiaries, non-profits and government. Outcome based evaluation capacity that sustains community engagement in determining results linked to the goal of ending intergenerational poverty in the poorest U. As we have travelled the nation and witnessed the work being done in neighborhoods, cities, and states during our planning phase, we have met with many committed individuals and organizations who are doing the hard, focused work in their communities. They too want to destroy debilitating conditions that breed the culture of poverty. This gives us hope that we can achieve the TDI vision.

Chapter 4 : Re-evaluating the "Culture of Poverty" - The Society Pages

More than 45 years later, the premise of the culture of poverty paradigm remains the same: that people in poverty share a consistent and observable "culture." Lewis ignited a debate about the nature of poverty that continues today.

In this, as in so much else, Ferguson has been no exception. Racists began blowing on this particular dog-whistle as soon as the murder of Michael Brown began to attract national attention. No doubt in the coming months it will only get louder. As the sheer scale and brutality of racial inequality in the US comes, however hazily, into popular focus, conservatives across the country will, much like Zionists suddenly concerned with the fate of the Syrian uprising, suddenly evince an intense preoccupation with the lives of black Americans. We will hear how welfare has made blacks dependent on the government, has broken up the black family, and has encouraged a culture of criminality and violence as evidenced by all that rap music. But the influence of the culture of poverty thesis extends far beyond the ranks of Republican officials, Tea Party activists, and Fox News talking heads – apparent, for instance, in the near-universal tendency to turn any discussion of the pervasive inequalities and discrimination suffered by African Americans into a moralizing sermon about the cultural pathologies of black people. He had taken to rapping in recent months, producing lyrics that were by turns contemplative and vulgar. He got into at least one scuffle with a neighbor. One can find any number of articles responding to the latest coded racism from the loud Republican of the moment, which point out how conservatives ignore the history of racial oppression and blame the black poor for their own suffering. Far more rare, however, is a direct confrontation with the description of black culture entailed by the culture of poverty narrative. This is ironic, because every aspect of that narrative has been subjected to withering criticism by social scientists over the last thirty years. Put more bluntly, they are lies. Take, for example, the claim that black youth inhabit a culture that venerates criminality, in which having been incarcerated is a matter of pride. This particular trope has seen heavy circulation in the last few years, trotted out to rationalize every death of a young black man at the hands of the police or vigilantes. Confronted with such deep-seated criminality, the pundits innocently ask, what else were the police supposed to do? Ethnographies of returned prisoners and their families reveal a very different world, one that coincides more with the commonsense notion that people who already face discrimination in the labor market would hardly celebrate events, like incarceration, that will make their lives even harder. Instead, he found a pervasive sense of shame. Families of those in prison hid the truth from even their extended family, and went to great lengths to conceal the fact from their social circles. Reading the stories he collects, one gets a sense of a suffocating stigma, a desperation not to be associated with the prison system in any way. There is no culture of criminality in black communities. Convenient as it may be to ascribe one to the victims of state violence, all of the evidence suggests that black families work incredibly hard to keep their members out of prison, and feel a profound sense of failure when they are unable to. Given the disproportionate consequences black youth face for their transgressions, this differential is hardly surprising. The disconnect between claims of a culture of criminality and the evidence presented by reality is not at all unusual when it comes to the various elements that make up the culture of poverty narrative. Its other facets are equally guilty of inverting the world in which we live. Consider three prominent claims made by the would-be augurs of black culture: All of these have been given voice across the political spectrum, from liberals to reactionaries, and all of them are patently false. The very fact, however, that the president felt the phenomenon was important enough to comment on suggests that he thought black attitudes on this question were skewed enough to warrant correction. Other commentators have been even bolder in their use of the theory, trotting it out to explain that black attitudes, and not white racism, are the cause of black-white educational disparities. Despite its ubiquity in popular discussions, however, acting white theory has come under sustained criticism from education scholars. Black students, just like their white counterparts, express a desire to do well in school, and report higher self-esteem when they succeed. In light of this body of research, the attempt to pin responsibility for educational inequality on black students themselves is beyond perverse. Black students, understandably, place a higher premium on education than white students, because they know they will pay a higher price for lacking it than

white students will. Yet the aspirations of black students, however well-documented, fail to make any impact on discussions of race and education in national media. The story is, if anything, even nastier when it comes to marriage and the family. Lamentations over the decline of the black family, in particular, are something of a national ritual in the United States, and have been for decades. In the inner city, we are told, there is a culture of single parenting, and having children with multiple partners. Once again, this narrative is profoundly mistaken. Historically, as Herbert Gutman pointed out decades ago, black Americans have placed a tremendous value on maintaining family structures, and have actually had a lower divorce rate than white Americans. Both, however, see a transformation in black attitudes as central. But social scientists working on family structures, however, have found that variables like the ratio of employed men to women are far stronger predictors of what families look like than attitudes are. Attitudes towards marriage also display no great divergence between black and white Americans. Most black Americans value marriage highly, though, as is the case with whites, men tend to value it more highly than women. This last datum is particularly ironic, given the pervasive scapegoating of black men for supposedly abandoning their children after conception. With this in mind, the recurrent political fantasy of addressing inequality in the US through marriage promotion programs aimed at the black poor in particular is a sick joke. The irony, of course, is that his preferred alternative is predicated on attempting to sell something to African Americans that they have been trying for literally centuries to buy at a price higher than he could possibly imagine. This conceit has suffered perhaps more thorough rebuttal than any other component of the culture of poverty. Since the s, social scientists have produced study after study demonstrating that poor and unemployed black Americans have basically the same attitudes towards work as the rest of country. One waits in vain for such results to generate a moral panic over the decline of a work ethic in white communities. When it comes to the notion of welfare dependency, the verdict is much the same. However, the demands of childcare, combined with a lack of job opportunities, ensured that leaving was difficult for most. Other studies have found similar results, with welfare being largely stigmatized in black communities. In fact, a number of studies have found that people on welfare, black Americans included, feel that people take advantage of the system and receive benefits when they should not. Here, the constant demonization of people on welfare has had an effect on welfare recipients themselves. The distance from the popular portrayal of black communities content to remain on the dole could not be clearer. All of this is to suggest that the constant projections onto some kind of collective black psyche obscures the fact that African Americans and white Americans are motivated by much the same things. Indeed, belief in a black culture of poverty has become so entrenched that it is accepted without question for the most part. The prevalence of those assumptions are inseparable from the dominance of a politics that rejects structural solutions for the social disparities and entrenched discrimination facing African Americans, in favor of an emphasis on community self-help and personal responsibility. Thus, we find ourselves in a situation in which public discussion of problems related to high rates of joblessness, child poverty, infant mortality, and many negative social indicators among African Americans is largely restricted to exhortations for a transformation of behavioral norms and attitudes. Not full employment but individual initiative and a commitment to advancement through low-wage work and job training will boost chronically low employment levels. Not a substantial program of redistributive reforms but incentives to encourage entrepreneurship will boost the resources of the black community. Not strengthened anti-discrimination measures or equal access to health care but altered lifestyle choices, better parenting, and the influence of positive role models will reduce health disparities and improve social outcomes for black kids. Implicit in all this is the idea that if African Americans have failed to overcome the racial stratification of American society, the reason is to be found “at least in large part” in the cultural and psychological character of the black community. It is, for instance, not uncommon for conversations that are ostensibly addressing issues like mass incarceration and police violence to devolve into criticism of the dressing habits of young black men or the hedonism and violence in rap lyrics. The double standard at work here should be obvious: The upshot is that even sympathetic observers tend to interpret concerns about deprivation and social disorganization through the prism of cultural or psychological damage. As a consequence, responsibility for these issues is commonly attributed to such causes as a lack of self-regard among African-American males, their purportedly nihilistic and myopic worldview, or

their orientation on short-term, narrowly self-interested gain over long-term ambition and social uplift. While homicide rates have declined precipitously across the US over the past two decades, the devastating number of shooting deaths suffered by black residents in cities like Chicago has received national attention in recent years. Confronted with the destructive effects of gun violence, many observers have interpreted it as a reflection of deep-seated social pathologies — the inverse of the racism of the US criminal justice system. And yet, the culture-of-poverty narrative leads us away from that perspective, and exacerbates the widespread tendency to view social inequality through the lens of personal responsibility and cultural predispositions. Given that the culture of poverty argument today is most strongly associated with the Right, it is surprising to learn that its provenance actually comes from the other end of the spectrum. The concept itself comes not from the Right, which was then still mired in explicitly biological racism, but from liberals cognizant of the injustice of inequality, but too attached to ideas of black deficiency to jettison them entirely. As American liberalism has moved steadily rightward since the 1960s, versions of the culture-of-poverty thesis have gained increasingly traction. Hubert Humphrey, running for president in 1964, promised to hire a teacher for every policeman Richard Nixon wanted to hire, and build a house for every jail George Wallace wanted to build. By the 1980s, this sort of commitment had nearly disappeared from American liberalism, leaving culture of poverty arguments hegemonic. The importance of the culture-of-poverty approach is that it allows for recognition of the accumulated history of racism and inequality, but posits the ongoing effects of these as mediated through black cultural pathologies. It therefore permits American liberals to identify with opposition to racism while pushing them towards policy solutions geared towards the transformation of black people, and not American society. Today, these ideas are given voice by all manner of actors residing left of center on the political spectrum. In his eulogy for Martin Luther King Jr., Sharpton lectured the assembled audience on the need for greater personal responsibility in the black community: Sharpton and Cosby are hardly alone among black Americans in identifying with versions of this narrative. A recent survey, for example, revealed that black men both tend to value education and work highly, yet thought that other black men spent too much time thinking about sports and sex. So pervasive is this ideology that people who know it to be false of themselves are willing to believe it of others. The argument can also take a more nationalist register, as in the contention that slavery damaged black American culture so profoundly that the resulting cultural deficiencies, often identified as a lack of community or self-respect, explain aspects of black inequality today, from educational disparities to economic impoverishment. When it comes to race, however, this retreat has had particularly pernicious effects. When liberals or black nationalists agree that black crime contains some larger meaning about the state of the black community, they make the work of racist ideologues easier. They reinforce the basic point that black crime must be agonized over as a barometer of the cultural values of the race, while white crime may be treated as a normal aspect of a complex society. In doing so, they give succor to those who seek to block any attempt at addressing the real causes of racial inequality, while rendering half-hearted and tenuous those attempts still being launched from within American liberalism itself. What it does succeed in doing is providing an explanation of reality that salves the consciences of the powerful and their supporters. Unfortunately, in an era when collective action by the oppressed is still far too sporadic and ephemeral, these kinds of explanations have sunk deep roots, into both layers of left-liberal opinion and oppressed groups themselves. Yet what the social science literature demonstrates is that however secure the culture of poverty seems as a hegemonic explanation for racial inequality, it ultimately rests on what are, at the end of the day, nothing more than lies. As the uprising in Ferguson has highlighted the connection between American imperialism and militarism on the home front, it is worth remembering that cultural explanations of structural processes have never been a purely domestic affair. Life is cheap in the Orient. We should view cultural explanations of inequality with the same contempt.

Chapter 5 : The Myth of the "Culture of Poverty" | Paul Gorski | Inflexion

Best Answer: The culture of poverty concept is a social theory explaining the cycle of poverty. Based on the concept that the poor have a unique value system, the culture of poverty theory suggests the poor remain in poverty because of their adaptations to the burdens of poverty.

Economics The belief that poverty stems from individual deficiencies is old. With the emergence of the concept of inherited intelligence in the 19th century, the eugenics movement went so far as to rationalize poverty and even sterilization for those who appeared to have limited abilities. They are meant to suffer, indeed must suffer, because of their moral failings. They live in a deserved hell on earth. Ironically, neo-classical economics reinforces individualistic sources of poverty. The core premise of this dominant paradigm for the study of the conditions leading to poverty is that individuals seek to maximize their own well being by making choices and investments, and that assuming that they have perfect information they seek to maximize their well being. When some people choose short term and low-payoff returns, economic theory holds the individual largely responsible for their individual choices—for example to forego college education or other training that will lead to better paying jobs in the future. In a Cato Journal article, economists Gwartney and McCaleb argue that the years of the war on poverty actually increased poverty adjusted for noncash transfers among working age adults in spite of unprecedented increases in welfare expenditures. They [welfare programs] have introduced a perverse incentive structure, one that penalizes self-improvement and protects individuals against the consequences of their own bad choices. Their economic model would solve poverty by assuring that the penalty of poverty was great enough that none would choose it and welfare would be restricted to the truly disabled or otherwise unable to work. A less widely critiqued version of the individualistic theory of poverty comes from American values of individualism—the Horatio Alger myth that any individual can succeed by skills and hard work, and that motivation and persistence are all that are required to achieve success see Asen, Self-help literature reinforces the belief that individuals fail because they do not try hard enough. He goes on to say that anyone can succeed by an easy formula—focused goals and hard work. This is the message of hundreds of self-help books, articles, and sermons. By extension, this literature implies that those who do not succeed must face the fact that they themselves are responsible for their failure. While scientifically it is routine to dismiss the individual deficiency theory as an apology for social inequality Fischer, et al, , it is easy to see how it is embraced in anti-poverty policy which suggests that penalties and incentives can change behavior. This theory is sometimes linked with the individual theory of poverty or other theories to be introduced below, but it recently has become so widely discussed that its special features should not be minimized. This theory suggests that poverty is created by the transmission over generations of a set of beliefs, values, and skills that are socially generated but individually held. Individuals are not necessarily to blame because they are victims of their dysfunctional subculture or culture. American Sociology has long been fascinated by subcultures of immigrants and ghetto residents as well as the wealthy and powerful. Culture is socially generated and perpetuated, reflecting the interaction of individual and community. Technically, the culture of poverty is a subculture of poor people in ghettos, poor regions, or social contexts where they develop a shared set of beliefs, values and norms for behavior that are separate from but embedded in the culture of the main society. Oscar Lewis was one of the main writers to define the culture of poverty as a set of beliefs and values passed from generation to generation. He writes, Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself. By the time slum children are six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic attitudes and values of their subculture. Thereafter they are psychologically unready to take full advantage of changing conditions or improving opportunities that may develop in their lifetime. Scientific American, October quoted in Ryan, The culture of poverty theory explains how government antipoverty programs reward people who manipulate the policy and stay on welfare. This theory of poverty based on perpetuation of cultural values has been fraught with controversy. No one disputes that poor people have subcultures or that the subcultures of the poor are distinctive and perhaps detrimental. The concern is over what causes and constitutes the subculture of poverty. In other sub-cultural situations the

cultural portrayal of the poor is more sympathetic. For example, many liberal scholars understand the cultural problems that Native Americans face trying to assimilate middle class value systems.

Chapter 6 : Culture of poverty - Wikipedia

Culture of Poverty. Dominant, or Idealized Culture. Time Horizon: Short. Long. Investment strategy. Do not save or invest (welfare recipients are prevented from saving).

Defeat in her eyes, Janet drops into a seat next to me with a sigh. But my hope is fading. No wonder the kids are unprepared to learn. I observed powerful moments of teaching and learning, caring and support. And I witnessed moments of internal conflict in Janet, when what she wanted to believe about her students collided with her prejudices. Like most educators, Janet is determined to create an environment in which each student reaches his or her full potential. And like many of us, despite overflowing with good intentions, Janet has bought into the most common and dangerous myths about poverty. Chief among these is the "culture of poverty" myth—the idea that poor people share more or less monolithic and predictable beliefs, values, and behaviors. For educators like Janet to be the best teachers they can be for all students, they need to challenge this myth and reach a deeper understanding of class and poverty. Lewis based his thesis on his ethnographic studies of small Mexican communities. His studies uncovered approximately 50 attributes shared within these communities: Despite studying very small communities, Lewis extrapolated his findings to suggest a universal culture of poverty. More than 45 years later, the premise of the culture of poverty paradigm remains the same: But just as important—especially in the age of data-driven decision making—he inspired a flood of research. These studies raise a variety of questions and come to a variety of conclusions about poverty. But on this they all agree: There is no such thing as a culture of poverty. Differences in values and behaviors among poor people are just as great as those between poor and wealthy people. In actuality, the culture of poverty concept is constructed from a collection of smaller stereotypes which, however false, seem to have crept into mainstream thinking as unquestioned fact. Poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics. Although poor people are often stereotyped as lazy, 83 percent of children from low-income families have at least one employed parent; close to 60 percent have at least one parent who works full-time and year-round National Center for Children in Poverty, In fact, the severe shortage of living-wage jobs means that many poor adults must work two, three, or four jobs. According to the Economic Policy Institute, poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier counterparts. They are more likely to work multiple jobs, to work evenings, to have jobs without paid leave, and to be unable to afford child care and public transportation. It might be said more accurately that schools that fail to take these considerations into account do not value the involvement of poor families as much as they value the involvement of other families. Poor people are linguistically deficient. What often are assumed to be deficient varieties of English—Appalachian varieties, perhaps, or what some refer to as Black English Vernacular—are no less sophisticated than so-called "standard English. Poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol. Poor people are no more likely than their wealthier counterparts to abuse alcohol or drugs. Chen, Sheth, Krejci, and Wallace found that alcohol consumption is significantly higher among upper middle class white high school students than among poor black high school students. In other words, considering alcohol and illicit drugs together, wealthy people are more likely than poor people to be substance abusers. The Culture of Classism The myth of a "culture of poverty" distracts us from a dangerous culture that does exist—the culture of classism. This culture continues to harden in our schools today. It leads the most well intentioned of us, like my friend Janet, into low expectations for low-income students. It makes teachers fear their most powerless pupils. And, worst of all, it diverts attention from what people in poverty do have in common: The most destructive tool of the culture of classism is deficit theory. In education, we often talk about the deficit perspective—defining students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Deficit theory takes this attitude a step further, suggesting that poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies Collins, Deficit theorists use two strategies for propagating this world view: The implications of deficit theory reach far beyond individual bias. This application of deficit theory establishes the idea of what Gans calls the undeserving poor—a segment of our society that simply does not deserve a fair shake. If the goal of deficit theory is to justify a system that privileges economically advantaged students at the expense of working-class and poor students, then it appears

to be working marvelously. In our determination to "fix" the mythical culture of poor students, we ignore the ways in which our society cheats them out of opportunities that their wealthier peers take for granted. We ignore the fact that poor people suffer disproportionately the effects of nearly every major social ill. They lack access to health care, living-wage jobs, safe and affordable housing, clean air and water, and so on Books, "conditions that limit their abilities to achieve to their full potential. Perhaps most of us, as educators, feel powerless to address these bigger issues. But the question is this: Are we willing, at the very least, to tackle the classism in our own schools and classrooms? This classism is plentiful and well documented Kozol, For example, compared with their wealthier peers, poor students are more likely to attend schools that have less funding Carey, ; lower teacher salaries Karoly, ; more limited computer and Internet access Gorski, ; larger class sizes; higher student-to-teacher ratios; a less-rigorous curriculum; and fewer experienced teachers Barton, Here in Minnesota, several school districts offer universal half-day kindergarten but allow those families that can afford to do so to pay for full-day services. Our poor students scarcely make it out of early childhood without paying the price for our culture of classism. Deficit theory requires us to ignore these inequities"or worse, to see them as normal and justified. What does this mean? Regardless of how much students in poverty value education, they must overcome tremendous inequities to learn. Perhaps the greatest myth of all is the one that dubs education the "great equalizer. What Can We Do? The socioeconomic opportunity gap can be eliminated only when we stop trying to "fix" poor students and start addressing the ways in which our schools perpetuate classism. This includes destroying the inequities listed above as well as abolishing such practices as tracking and ability grouping, segregational redistricting, and the privatization of public schools. We must demand the best possible education for all students"higher-order pedagogies, innovative learning materials, and holistic teaching and learning. But first, we must demand basic human rights for all people: Of course, we ought not tell students who suffer today that, if they can wait for this education revolution, everything will fall into place. So as we prepare ourselves for bigger changes, we must Educate ourselves about class and poverty. Reject deficit theory and help students and colleagues unlearn misperceptions about poverty. Make school involvement accessible to all families. Continue reaching out to low-income families even when they appear unresponsive and without assuming, if they are unresponsive, that we know why. Respond when colleagues stereotype poor students or parents. Never assume that all students have equitable access to such learning resources as computers and the Internet, and never assign work requiring this access without providing in-school time to complete it. Ensure that learning materials do not stereotype poor people. Fight to keep low-income students from being assigned unjustly to special education or low academic tracks. Make curriculum relevant to poor students, drawing on and validating their experiences and intelligences. Teach about issues related to class and poverty"including consumer culture, the dissolution of labor unions, and environmental injustice"and about movements for class equity. Teach about the antipoverty work of Martin Luther King Jr. Fight to ensure that school meal programs offer healthy options. Examine proposed corporate-school partnerships, rejecting those that require the adoption of specific curriculums or pedagogies. Most important, we must consider how our own class biases affect our interactions with and expectations of our students. And then we must ask ourselves, Where, in reality, does the deficit lie? Does it lie in poor people, the most disenfranchised people among us? Does it lie in the education system itself"in, as Jonathan Kozol says, the savage inequalities of our schools? Or does it lie in us"educators with unquestionably good intentions who too often fall to the temptation of the quick fix, the easily digestible framework that never requires us to consider how we comply with the culture of classism. Do the differences make a difference? An empirical evaluation of the culture of poverty in the United States. *American Anthropologist*, 63, " Why does the gap persist? *Educational Leadership*, 623, 8" Culture and poverty in Appalachia: A theoretical discussion and empirical analysis. *Social Forces*, 532, " Miseducating teachers about the poor: *Teachers College Record*, Poverty and schooling in the U. The funding gap Many states still shortchange low-income and minority students. *Sociological Perspectives*, 284, " Understanding differences in alcohol use among high school students in two different communities. *Language and class in minority education. Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 194, " The literate lives of urban children.

Chapter 7 : Culture of Poverty - New York Essays

The culture of poverty theory states that living in conditions of pervasive poverty will lead to the development of a culture or subculture adapted to those conditions. This culture is characterized by pervasive feelings of helplessness, dependency, marginality, and powerlessness.

Roundtable October 14, Despite its great wealth, the United States has long struggled with poverty. The phrase was originally coined by Oscar Lewis, who believed that children growing up in poor families would learn to adapt to the values and norms that perpetuated poverty. The children would replicate these in their own lives, creating a cycle of intergenerational poverty. His claims were harshly criticized by many black and civil rights leaders, among others, for explaining black poverty as a product of black culture rather than deeper structural inequalities. The debate about its relevance has re-emerged with controversial comments by politician Paul Ryan, as well as numerous editorials in the Atlantic, The New York Times, and elsewhere. How has the culture of poverty debate evolved over the years? There has been some evolution, but it has probably been less in the political sphere than among social scientists. Both positions are quite old, dating at least to the 1960s. Those who study poverty rarely think about cultural questions in this way, instead tending to focus on basic structural factors, such as the quality of schools or the availability of jobs, as explanations for poverty. Few social scientists have attempted to understand poverty through these alternative conceptions. Many of those who do focus on questions such as the impact of poverty on culture or cultural practices, rather than the impact of culture on poverty. Early writings on the culture of poverty, for example those by Oscar Lewis and Michael Harrington, suggested that the culture of poverty was an effect, namely an effect of economic and social exclusion. Those writings suggested that people who faced few economic opportunities in society grew hopeless. In many ways, the early discussions of the culture of poverty were a call for action, a demand that the United States, a country that prides itself in economic opportunity, take notice of the many who could not realize those opportunities. In the 1970s, the culture of poverty became associated with African Americans living in concentrated pockets of poverty in urban areas. Since then, the idea that social and economic well-being ought to be measured by how few people are using government programs and not by the well-being of American families themselves has come to guide government programs. For example, the success of the federal welfare reforms passed under President Bill Clinton has been measured by the dramatic decline in the number of families receiving cash benefits. What is forgotten is that the number of American families living in poverty has risen since the welfare reforms. Why have culture of poverty arguments been so persistent? The term is easy to reinvent from year to year. Since the Civil Rights Movement, almost everyone in the USA has come to believe that all citizens deserve equal opportunity and most have come to believe that all have equal opportunity. Most of us believe that our values are actually implemented. The idea of equal opportunity for all supports the idea of a culture of poverty. I limit myself here to a discussion of African Americans. African Americans do less well than otherwise comparable whites on many measures of performance; poor people do less well, by definition, economically, but they also do less well educationally and are incarcerated at higher rates whatever their actual criminal activity. Social scientists are, however, less likely to believe that equal opportunity is in place, which immunizes many of them from falling into this trap. This simplistic account of poverty—one that suggests that certain populations have developed settled social and economic sub-cultures outside the mainstream—blinds us from the historical contingencies and the political decisions that have led to a high rate of poverty relative to most wealthy nations. The current understanding of the culture of poverty suggests that poverty is intractable and dismisses that idea that policy changes can lower the rate of poverty in the United States or address the concentration of poverty in certain populations such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and recent Asian immigrants; the disabled; and the parents of young children. How has the idea of a culture of poverty affected politics and society? These arguments result in policies that seek to change blacks. Such arguments miss the nature and consequences of contemporary discrimination. While there is plenty of overt discrimination, disparate treatment, the more important form of discrimination in the USA today, is disparate impact. This is where

ostensibly neutral structures and organizations, organizations that treat blacks and whites as if they were the same, generate adverse consequences for blacks. They result in policies that seek to change blacks rather than change organizational constraints and persistent discrimination. When blacks and whites perform different cultures, act out different cultural identities, there is no reason to think that the differences are intrinsically relevant to educational performance; however, they may well affect performance when taken in conjunction with how students who perform these cultural differences are regarded and dealt with in organizations. African Americans may have a different subculture than whites, but if they perform less well than whites, it is not because of that subculture, but because of how they are processed in organizations because of it. Photo by Alonzo via Flickr Creative Commons. This discussion is, of course, too simple. This perpetuates the illusion that those people—“the poor people who lack a real work ethic”—are poor for a reason, but that others, particularly hardworking members of the middle class, are invulnerable to economic risk so long as they are working hard enough. The persistence of the culture of poverty theory also distracts the public and lawmakers from celebrating the policy decisions that have been successful in ameliorating poverty. As a result, popular and governmental commitments to fighting poverty are slight. Does talk about the US as a post-racial society influence the rhetoric around the culture of poverty? Before the Civil Rights Movement, when discrimination against African-Americans was overt, liberal-minded people could explain differential performance between blacks and whites as due to overt discrimination. In post-Civil Rights Movement America, which some erroneously see as a post-racial society, the logic of this argument changes fundamentally. There is a paradox here. Participants in the Civil Rights Movement fought for the inclusion of African Americans, and derivatively others within the American Creed, for their inclusion as full citizens. The success of the Movement, the inclusion of African Americans, including the poor, within the egalitarian values dominant in American society, and given the reality of African Americans performing less well than whites in many areas, has resulted in the construction of a New Racism. What can sociologists contribute to the discussion of poverty policies? Social scientists concerned about social inequality should turn their attention to poverty, especially child poverty. Scholars can play a role in informing students and the public of the very fact that child poverty is widespread, can take opportunities to study the long-term effects of child poverty on families and society, and can use their skills to study the effectiveness of particular policies in reducing child poverty. More work needs to be done in tracing and examining the successes of government led-anti-poverty efforts, from the drop in poverty among elderly Americans to the documented, long-term effects of Head Start programs. We tend to focus on failures and ignore successes. Sociologists keen on historical and comparative work might promote awareness that the United States is an outlier and that policies common in other countries—“universal health care, paid family leave for workers with young children, and universal child allowances”—are effective in reducing poverty there. Sociologists might promote awareness that the United States is an outlier, that policies common in other countries—“universal health care, paid family leave for workers with young children, and universal child allowances”—are effective in reducing poverty. Finally, qualitative sociologists can serve an important function in carefully and critically documenting the experiences of the poor, particularly because there is little in the popular media about the experiences of the poor and poor people have little political access in a country where money is speech. While most Americans are overexposed to the lifestyles of the rich and famous, we rarely hear about how poverty affects daily lives and how it limits choices and life chances. I think three things are missing: First, a broader understanding of the many ways that anthropologists and others who study culture but not poverty have conceptualized culture, its impact on behavior, its response to intervention, and its limitations as an explanatory factor. Third, more dispassionate analysis. The one advantage of the new generation of scholars working on these questions is that they were not part of the highly acrimonious debate over culture during the 1970s and 1980s. The debate was so contentious and the rhetoric so heated that it has been difficult to address even basic empirical questions from a scientific perspective. This shows how far we need to go. For example, a lot of people assume that social scientists who examine the relationship between culture and poverty must have a particular political agenda. Some even believe that studying culture necessarily implies a particular political posture. Yet notice that entire academic disciplines—“most notably, anthropology”—are fundamentally devoted to the study of culture. The fact that

anyone believes that studying culture means rehashing that old idea shows how far we need to go. There are a number of conceptual distinctions we need to make before we can formulate effective policies. Social values regulate what is desirable; they constitute obligations. If folks do not find a good job desirable, if they do not feel the obligation to work, they will not seek out jobs when the opportunity to do so arises. If students do not value education, do not feel an obligation to do well in school, they will not orient themselves to educational opportunities. In contrast to these contentions, there is a lot of evidence that inner-city blacks share the dominant values of USA society, including the positive evaluation of hard work and a commitment to education. If this is correct, we would expect them, for example, to seek work when it is available, and they do so. There is a lot of evidence that inner-city blacks share the dominant values of hard work and a commitment to education. Often, an oppositional culture is understood to inhibit intrinsically educational or occupational success; it may be seen, for example, as devaluing educational success. This is an oppositional culture, but only in the sense that African-Americans do not want to sacrifice it. As an oppositional culture, it is fully compatible with the values dominant in United States society. If this analysis makes sense, our concern should be to construct opportunities for the inner-city poor to succeed, ladders of achievement that facilitate their success in school, that make it possible for them to find jobs that will support their families in dignity, and to reconstruct organizations in a way that makes it possible for African-Americans to share in organizational governance so that African-American cultural identities might be actualized to the benefit of all Americans. Mark Gould is in the sociology department at Haverford College. Mario Luis Small is a sociologist at Harvard University.

Chapter 8 : The Culture of Poverty.

The culture of poverty, i.e., the environment, institutions, individual behaviors, policies and practices of poverty in the U.S., have affected those who experience poverty as well as those who.

Small examines the relations between culture and poverty. Their pluralist and supple view of culture allows them to untie the knot between culture and race that feeds conservative rhetoric. The anthropologist Oscar Lewis defined the concept of the culture of poverty as the set of norms and attitudes that have the effect of enclosing individuals in what was originally formed as a reaction to unfavorable external circumstances, but which, when transmitted from generation to generation, perpetuates the state of poverty regardless of how those circumstances change. This anthropological thesis was soon appropriated by conservatives in the United States, who imputed poverty in the major cities to the disorganization of the black family, suspected of producing a veritable culture of dependence on welfare. This appropriation had the counter-effect of banishing for decades any reference to culture in research on poverty. In effect, anyone who attributed poverty to cultural causes was accused of blaming the victim and of automatically dismissing any social policy. Today the journal *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* devotes a special issue to the relations between culture and poverty, which testifies to the revival of the theme of the culture of poverty among liberal researchers who nevertheless want to distance themselves from the conservative hijacking of this theme. Moreover, it tests the idea of a homogeneous culture of poverty against the many empirical studies and strongly deconstructs such a simplification. This reinvestment is accompanied by a call for qualitative sociology in the field of poverty studies, which has been until now dominated by economics and the quantitative social sciences. This anthropologist, whose monographs on poor families enjoyed worldwide success, defined the culture of poverty as a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are essentially different from those of the middle class, and which are adopted in reaction to circumstances that do not allow the poor to be integrated into society. Later on, children appropriate these ways of living and these attitudes, and so adaptation to external circumstances is transformed into a perennial lifestyle that prevents descendants from benefiting from a possible transformation of external circumstances. This thesis was the subject of passionate debates, because in proposing a definition of culture, it situated itself at the heart of theoretical issues that were bitterly disputed. However, it aroused much passion chiefly because of its political considerations. A Case for Public Action. He maintained that the social disorganization noted in the inner cities was due to the dissolution of institutions, foremost the family, in which now women increasingly held the prime role. The idea of a black ghetto sub-culture had already been appropriated by the conservative critique of the welfare state that had become dominant. Thus this culturalist interpretation of poverty was disseminated together with the conservative rhetoric of the Reagan era that was reaffirming American moral values. The culture of poverty became the culture of welfare inasmuch as the latter was being criticized. For the critics of welfare, benefit checks were being considered as their due by people who had lost any sense of social responsibility; welfare was encouraging them not to work and to have children outside of marriage. The idea of an urban underclass was adopted to describe and explain the stream of violent crimes and drug trafficking that had risen to unprecedented levels in the downtown ghettos in the s and s, before ebbing and shifting to the suburbs in the s. The publication of William J. It led a new generation to seize upon this issue, but now rethinking culture in a movement that converged with changes going on in the other social sciences, especially anthropology. Even though this current as the editors of the *Annals* state in their introduction is not structured and has not adopted a coherent research program, the results produced by various researchers are sufficiently significant to mark a reorientation in the problematics and themes in the field of poverty studies. However, their efforts bear on the scientific dimension alone, neutralizing the political dimension. On the first point, while research has identified various resistance strategies, the authors of the introduction stress that the issues remain open: On the second point how the poor escape poverty, the editors call for investigating variations and the heterogeneity of behaviors and decision-making processes among the poor. The Manichean opposition between the deserving and undeserving poor is re-examined by questioning the pertinence of

socially promoted values in the context of poverty p. For a plural approach to culture To better define the notion of culture, the authors propose using a set of concepts, and their introduction distinguishes seven concepts that would enable a better understanding of poverty by refining previous analytical categories. To apprehend anew the relations between poverty and culture, the importance of the values that conservative rhetoric use in order to ethnicize the poor, by showing that they lack any empirical validity, should first and foremost be put into perspective. The poor do not have fundamentally different values from the rest of society, but they do not always possess the repertoires of action and strategies that would enable them to put these values into practice. This perspective strongly pluralizes culture and highlights contradictions among various repertoires of actions with which everyone must deal. Important in a different way is the idea of a framework: The frameworks of interpretation of a neighborhood influence the participation of its residents. This insistence on frameworks shows the internal heterogeneity of poor neighborhoods in terms of behavior and results, and it invalidates the idea of a ghetto culture that is supposedly shared in a homogenous way by the inhabitants of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Apprehending poverty through the concept of framework makes it possible to break with a rigid view of the causal relation between culture and behavior; the notion of framework suggests that culture may make an action possible or probable, but never necessary. It extends into the idea of the narratives that in a certain way individualize the determination of behavior by cultural factors. If individuals act in function of socially constructed frameworks, they also do on the basis of the narrative they have elaborated on their own experience. The authors review the results of previous studies that showed that in the United States workers distinguish themselves strongly from the poor, due to the individualism that prevails there; this is less the case in France, partly due to the Catholic and socialist traditions that provide grounding for the republican idea of solidarity. The problem that results from national comparison is that the cultural categories of merit correspond to political differences in the struggle against poverty in the two countries. Here the concept of symbolic boundary plays the role of interface by proposing a cultural definition of the formation of social structures. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. However, whereas social boundaries are institutionalized, symbolic boundaries characterize the classification struggles by which the majority of groups try to maintain the privileges attached to their status. Finally, the concepts of cultural capital and institutions complete this theoretical apparatus by attaching the achievements of the first distinctions to the effects of social stratification. The transmission of tastes " and distastes " enables a reproduction of the advantages of middle class families. Pursuing such an analysis foregrounds a cultural mismatch between the tastes necessary for inclusion in the peer group and for integration in the school milieu. This dimension enriches the analysis of skill and spatial mismatches used by Wilson in his study of the unemployment of poor ghetto residents. Culture, poverty, and politics The first part of *Reconsidering Culture and Poverty* is the most important in terms of length, but also thanks to its new approach to culture on the basis of lived experience. It deals with various themes: The analyses respond to previous field studies of poor young men. Here I will concentrate on the two articles devoted to work, which demonstrate the plurality of possible approaches to an almost identical subject. These two contributions illustrate a re-reading of research traditions combined with the presentation of an empirical case study. Her study bears on the service personnel at the University of California at Berkeley where she teaches. On the basis of in-depth semi-directed interviews, she tries to understand the ways in which African-Americans and Hispanics put members of their group into relation with a potential employer " in other words, situations when strong ties play the role of weak ties. She shows that Latinos tend to help more, and more explicitly, the members of their group to get jobs. This relates to the fact that they belong less often than do African-Americans to networks with a significant number of unemployed persons. While this parameter could have " or even should have "worked in the opposite direction, the reason it does not is that black employees consider poverty in moral terms, meaning they have appropriated the dominant beliefs. Therefore they interpret such requests as attempts to save appearances by adopting in a purely external way an expression of being motivated to work. Assisting someone else is performed in a passive and selective manner. There is a major difference between the black ghettos and the barrio: This perspective, underpinned by groundwork that is well conducted and recounted, deepens rather than challenges the results achieved in

twenty-five years of research on black unemployment from the perspectives of the sociology of networks and of social capital. Moreover it exposes the mechanisms of statistical discrimination within the very ethnic group that it affects the most. These mechanisms perpetuate the stigmatization and exclusion from which blacks suffer. Young is interested in the concept of framing. He details the way in which low-paid workers interpret and present the images of their social reality and then review the literature on the culture of poverty. Young believes that the way in which disadvantaged African-Americans make sense of opportunities has been neglected in favor of a binary moral logic: His framing perspective help distance the study of the cultural dimensions of poverty from its normative and moralizing dimension. Unsurprisingly, those who have been to school give more importance to gratifications linked to autonomy and expressivity. The elasticity and changing nature of the very notion of framework spring from this analysis, going beyond the pluralism of representations within a group considered a priori as homogenous. The second part, composed of two articles, focuses on the relations that are shaped between culture and poverty in the conception and implementation of public policies. Its resolutely communicational approach to culture belongs to the normative perspective of Amartya Sen and the sociology of recognition. Summarizing research on the relation between social ideas and policies, the author finds that they share this common trait: While this point is important, the author says it does not address two key issues: For example, mentioning the reform of AFDC Aid to Families with Dependent Children and its transformation into TANF Temporary Assistance for Needy Families , Guetzkow recalls that its promoters not only described the poor as undeserving but also represented them as victims of a security net whose generosity had supposedly pushed them into dependency. From this perspective, it was an act of compassion toward these poor people to impose strict temporal limits on aid benefits. In the s, it was the crumbling of the community that was held responsible for poverty, but the psychological problems encountered by blacks were seen as connected to their limited opportunities to become integrated into the mainstream. The poor were seen as unarmed and desperate victims of economic transformations and of discrimination; society was responsible for their fate; those who wanted to escape could not do so. Those who did not want to escape were victims of a context that prevented them from developing values convergent with those of the rest of society. By contrast, in the neo-liberal period it was individuals themselves who were held responsible for their poverty, and the values that would allow them to make good choices were simply lacking. The dissolution of the family was considered to be the result of government action, because generous benefits produced dependency on social assistance – meaning that it produced maintenance of poverty in addition to other evils deficits, slowed growth, etc. In the s and s, then, welfare itself and no longer poverty became the problem, the sickness to be cured. Increasing illegitimate births among black teenaged girls were the index of a culture of dependency whose intergenerational reproduction was feared although nothing attested to this. The final part, composed of an article by William Julius Wilson and reflections by political actors who look back on their contributions, returns to the articulation between structure and culture in the understanding of – and the fight against – poverty. For him, structural factors prevail. And it is all the more essential to reaffirm this because the United States is distinctive in its belief in the individual responsibility of the poor. This explains the American preference for explaining poverty by cultural factors, which social science arguments should be careful not to feed. If cultural factors were indeed the most important, the inhabitants of neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated would not have been able to benefit from the economic boom of the s. But they did and urban poverty considerably diminished. Properly understood, the specific effects linked to the fact of living in a neighborhood where poverty is concentrated which should not be confused with the effects of individual variables – are not merely structural. This kind of environment also lessens cognitive and verbal competences. Discrimination and its reproduction over time exposes individuals to psychological states that analysts may wrongly consider as norms inasmuch as they seem to govern behavior – resignation, for example. The psychological effects of racial discrimination and economic status are condensed in behavioral models that in turn reinforce the difficulty of integrating into mainstream society. In this collection the diversity of themes and approaches, going from micro dimensions and the impact of cultural factors to a plurality of methods, is remarkable. Its breadth enables a dialogue between qualitative cultural sociology and the results from quantitative research. It affirms the autonomy of qualitative sociology and assures its insertion

into a field of research on poverty that on the far side of the Atlantic has been largely dominated by studies using quantitative methods. Finally, the editors have given space to contributions that nuance the analytic framework they are offering: Stephen Vaisey returns to the differences in educational aspirations in various groups, and Wilson works on cultural factors from the perspective of an articulation between culture understood as norms and values and structural factors. These contributions allow the reader to evaluate the limits of the proposed paradigm, and they open up new fields of research. Possible comparative applications This anthology is principally aimed as an intervention in the American debate on poverty but it also offers renewed analyses of culture within European sociology. This reintroduction of concepts from the sociology of modernity in order to detach the object under study the relation between culture and poverty from any national sociology offers various advantages for comparisons.

Chapter 9 : The Culture of Poverty | The Borgen Project

The culture of poverty theory is a social theory that tries to explain the cycle of poverty. culture of poverty theory was discussed academic circles in the s. Culture of poverty theory tries to explain why poverty exists despite anti-poverty programs.

Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty. The culture of poverty theory states that living in conditions of pervasive poverty will lead to the development of a culture or subculture adapted to those conditions. This culture is characterized by pervasive feelings of helplessness, dependency, marginality, and powerlessness. Furthermore, Lewis described individuals living within a culture of poverty as having little or no sense of history and therefore lacking the knowledge to alleviate their own conditions through collective action, instead focusing solely on their own troubles. Thus, for Lewis, the imposition of poverty on a population was the structural cause of the development of a culture of poverty, which then becomes autonomous, as behaviors and attitudes developed within a culture of poverty get passed down to subsequent generations through socialization processes. Critics of the culture of poverty theory have pointed out several flaws within both the theory itself and the ways in which it has been interpreted and applied to society. The culture of poverty assumes that culture itself is relatively fixed and unchanging—that once a population exists within the culture of poverty, no amount of intervention in terms of the alleviation of poverty will change the cultural attitudes and behaviors held by members of that population. Thus public assistance to the poor, in the form of welfare or other direct assistance, cannot eliminate poverty, since poverty is inherent in the culture of the poor. Following this reasoning, the culture of poverty theory shifts the blame for poverty from social and economic conditions to the poor themselves. The theory acknowledges past factors that led to the initial condition of poverty, such as substandard housing and education, lack of sufficient social services, lack of job opportunities, and persistent racial segregation and discrimination, but focuses on the cause of present poverty as the behaviors and attitudes of the poor. Much of the evidence presented in support of the culture of poverty suffers from methodological fallacies, particularly a reliance on the assumption that behavior derives solely from preferred cultural values. That is, evidence of poverty itself, including rates of unemployment, crime, school dropout rates, and drug use, are assumed to be the result of behavior preferred by individuals living within conditions of poverty. The culture of poverty theory presumes the development of a set of deviant norms, whereby behaviors like drug use and gang participation are viewed as the standard normative and even desired behaviors of those living in the ghetto. An alternative explanation is that individuals behave in ways that are nominally illegal, like participation in the underground economy or participation in gangs, not because they wish to do so or are following cultural norms, but because they have no choice, given the lack of educational and job opportunities available in their neighborhoods. In other words, individuals living in the ghetto may see themselves as forced to turn to illegal methods of getting money, for example by selling drugs, simply to survive within the conditions of poverty. The culture of poverty theory has had a tremendous impact on U. The Case for National Action. This sense of powerlessness led to, in essence, a culture of dependency. The related notions of a culture of poverty and a culture of dependency have become the foundations for antipoverty legislation, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, enacted in and reauthorized in as a part of welfare reform. This and other programs rely on the assumption that behavior generates poverty, citing the need to end the dependence of the poor on government benefits and promote work and marriage as social norms. Among scholars, sociologists in the field, and government policy makers, the debate as to whether poverty stems from social, political, and economic conditions or from entrenched behaviors on the part of the poor themselves, continues. The Culture of Poverty: David Dietrich Pick a style below, and copy the text for your bibliography.