

Poverty, Class & Inequality Division

news

From the Chair ...

Poverty, Class, Inequality, and the State University
John C. Alessio

Welcome to the PCI Newsletter. It has been a year since the last issue, and I apologize for taking so long to get this issue out. I kept hoping I would get some essays or book/paper excerpts from you, but it didn't happen. Alternatively, a brief discussion of your progressive academic or applied programs would have been great. Okay, so you are overwhelmed. I know what that feels like, and I know how busy you are because we are very busy here as well. I am grateful to those of you who sent me your announcements, and I hope the exposure will benefit you in some way.

This has been the most difficult year in my professional career. As dean of a large college I found myself completely occupied with matters related to my budget. I had to cut positions and cut operating budgets – some that were quite small before the cuts. Minnesota State Mankato approached budget reductions in a planned and thoughtful way, so we are probably ahead of most campuses in terms of being in a position of early recovery. Nonetheless, this has been a very difficult and painful process. Furthermore, recovery in all states will only happen if state budgets and current dispositions toward public education change.

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Final Call for Nominations!

We have only one nomination for the chair of the PCI Division. The SSSP rules require that there be at least two nominees in order to select a division chair. Please nominate someone, and yes, you can absolutely nominate yourself! Thank You!



SSSP-PCI Student Paper Winner!

Congratulations to Sabrina Pendergrass, who is this year's award winner of the Poverty, Class, and Inequality's (PCI) Student Paper Competition of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP). Her paper is titled, "Making Moves: Social Stratification and the Socioeconomic and Symbolic Dimensions of Black Reverse Migration to the South." Ms. Pendergrass will receive a small cash award, complimentary SSSP annual dues, meeting registration, and a banquet ticket for the annual conference, where she will be recognized at the SSSP banquet for this outstanding paper.

A special thanks to Yvonne Luna and her committee for the successful completion of the paper selection process. The abstract for Sabrina's paper can be found on the next page.

H.R. 4247 Introduced in Washington, D.C.

Award-Winning “Making Moves” Abstract

Here is some information on important legislation and a link to news coverage.

The H.R. 4247 Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act was introduced in Washington D.C. on December 9, 2009. Child advocates, including Dr. Mary Hollowell in the education department at Clayton State University, are lobbying to have this act signed into law. Hollowell’s new book, *The Forgotten Room: Inside a Public Alternative School for At-Risk Youth*, documents the practice of school seclusion and prescribes solutions. The title, *The Forgotten Room*, stems from her discovery of a solitary confinement cell in a Georgia public school. Poor and disabled students are the primary victims of school seclusion.

<http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2010/01/02/clayton-professor-describes-forgotten-rooms-and-children-in-alternative-schools/>

Mary Hollowell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Teacher Education Dept.
Clayton State University
2000 Clayton State Blvd.
Morrow, GA 30260
W 678-466-4820

Making Moves: Social Stratification and the Socioeconomic and Symbolic Dimensions of Black Reverse Migration to the South

Sabrina Pendergrass
Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology
Harvard University

Abstract

This paper analyzes how people define opportunity during the internal migration process and how social stratification shapes those definitions. I focus on the reverse migration of African Americans to the urban South. I draw on in-depth interviews with one hundred and twenty-seven African Americans who were born and raised outside of the South, but moved to Charlotte, NC after 1990. I identify three key socioeconomic factors respondents cite in their decision-making process—jobs, cost of housing, and neighborhood quality. Yet, I find that migrants’ narratives about improving their material status also include their desire to improve their symbolic status. The salience of certain socioeconomic factors and symbolic distinctions vary by class and gender within the sample. In turn, I argue that stratification relates to migration through material resources, but also through how migrants define their moral worth, share these models with their children, and affirm group identities.

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www.stcloudstate.edu/socialresponsibility

Contact: jrandzejewski@stcloudstate.edu or jzuo@stcloudstate.edu

(320) 308-4109 or (320) 308-2136

From the Chair ...

As I struggled to find a meaningful topic to write about for this newsletter it occurred to me that my current predicament as a dean is quite pertinent to the concepts and causes of the PCI Division. The state university system for which I work used to be funded somewhere in the neighborhood of about 75-80% of operating expenditures. It is estimated that we are now down to about 48%, or approximately 60% of the amount previously provided by the state. The expectation is that the support will continue to decline – following states like Pennsylvania where the public support for state owned campuses is less than thirty percent.

The Minnesota state legislature offered the Governor a balanced budget that involved some modest tax increases, but the Governor vetoed the legislation and proceeded to unilaterally and allegedly illegally make cuts to the various state funded budgets, including higher education. He is being challenged in court as I write this essay. Our state university system, known as MnSCU, is overseen by a board of trustees appointed by the Governor. As might be expected, their appointment is influenced by the likelihood that they will vote on board issues the way the Governor wants them to vote. Consequently, the MnSCU universities have been told we cannot raise tuition beyond a relatively small percentage – an amount clearly insufficient to help us with our state imposed deficit. All things considered, we are clearly one of the best educational bargains in the country. We could raise tuition quite a lot and still be at a very reasonable university rate by today's standards. Please do not misunderstand me: I generally do not favor raising tuition. However, in the face of shrinking state support we are left with no choice if we hope to survive. The demand for our services is increasing -- not decreasing. Many people who

have recently lost their jobs want to return to school. Yet, we are cutting our teaching staff and programs in order to adjust to the Governor's reduced funding and tuition control. This is happening all over the country.

So is there a method to this madness, or are these activities all just irrational quasi-random behaviors guided loosely by strict fiscal no-tax conservatism? We are not the only public institutions being cut in Minnesota. There are others, and most deliver badly needed social programs. As an educator, and in the interest of space and time, I feel I should focus on the impact the Governor's decisions are having on universities, and how that impact affects the public interests.

A few days ago I happened to read an interesting article about the rapidly growing for-profit universities around the country. The link for that article is: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/04/07/enroll>.

Once I read that article Governor Pawlenty's plan no longer seemed like random thoughtless behavior. True to the right wing agenda, the Governor is squeezing out public education in favor of privatized education. He clearly wants the state system to shrink during a time when demand is growing. What is that about? All of the talk about keeping education affordable as a way of rationalizing controlling our tuition while cutting our budgets is a cover for clearing the way for privatized education – non-profit and increasingly for-profit schools. California is, perhaps, in the worst condition of all the states with respect to its budget and the magnitude of the cuts to public education. They are already in a stage where tuition increases are far too little too late. They are dramatically downsizing and have

been for some time now, as you can see from the protests represented in the following link:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/05/education/05protests.html>

You might ask, "What does any of this have to do with PCI?" As the availability of affordable public education decreases, fewer people with modest incomes and disadvantaged backgrounds will be able to attain a four year college degree. The private for-profit universities will be in greater demand and, while affordable now, will eventually be too expensive for many of those who would typically attend the public state universities. Of course, those of us at the state universities are responding by trying to do more with less. There actually are some short term changes we can make to assure reasonable access and maintain program viability. Those changes can carry us for a while but not indefinitely. As costs rise due simply to inflation and campus plant maintenance costs, and we have cut all we can cut, new money will be needed to prevent the shrinkage that the current Governor seeks. If that new money does not come, income and wealth gaps will once again accelerate as people without livable wage jobs find no means by which they can educate themselves into a better life.

Discussions with my dean colleagues seem to be turning more toward the idea that we should adjust to the cuts by setting higher standards and thereby elevating our status as an institution. This will bring us more students from higher income families and more donations from private wealth. Following the higher status strategy also systematically leaves out the poorer and otherwise disadvantaged people –.

Continued on next page ...

From the Chair ...

people who did not come from the best high schools and thus did not score particularly high on the SAT exams. Under those circumstances the notions of “public” and “state” become suspect in association with the concept of “university”. We are rapidly losing our capacity to serve the general public and increasingly our primary connection with the state is simply our location.

Perhaps the greatest loss to the public as the great state universities – not only in Minnesota, but all over the country – reduce their availability to the general public, is the ability to create and sustain an informed citizenry. The state universities play a major role in public consciousness raising about the sources of social problems such as poverty, class struggle and inequality. Many of the private non-profit schools have played an important role in fulfilling this responsibility as well. I have been a student, faculty member, and administrator in some excellent non-profit private universities, as well as in state universities, and I know the important role many private non-profits have played in contributing to a broad-based liberal arts education. There are, however, many private non-profit colleges and universities that have very narrow and/or closed missions. Rather than broadening ones intellectual horizons, they systematically reduce them in some important ways. The private for-profit universities are almost guaranteed to be more narrowly defined – and consistently so. The state universities have been reasonably reliable protectors of academic freedom and the important life saving critical questions that come with that freedom. Those critical questions are most often found as part of the general education curriculum, but they also sometimes become central to progressive degree programs, including at the graduate level.

Only about 28% of the United States adult population receives a four year college degree. If increased numbers of those degrees are from universities that have very little broad based general education in the curriculum and very little in the way of critical analysis of corporate driven social reality, poverty will surely increase and inequality will as well. There will not be an informed critical mass of people who can keep state and national politicians reasonably honest about their “public” service.

We are in a time of great change. While we are seeing some positive changes at the federal level, the changes driven by state budget conditions (largely the legacy of the G.W. Bush trickle down Presidency) are not for the betterment of the general population and, for that matter, there is good reason to doubt that the changes will, overall, benefit the children and grandchildren of the wealthy. What good is wealth without a healthy social and physical environment?

In many ways we have been through all of this before. We sometimes have small glimmers of hope that things are improving, then we soon discover that a new twist has just been added to more or less dash those hopes. But those of us who have been working for peace and justice for a long time cannot afford to become cynical. We have to keep carrying those banners forward by working in whatever ways are available to us. I continue to be hopeful that we can save the great state universities. However, if we cannot do our work through public education, then possibly we can work through the media/internet – or through the political structure – or perhaps through our writings and our speeches. There are also many progressive non-profit organizations through which we can work. Just as the powerful free market laissez-faire capitalists continually find newer, cleverer, and sometimes more corrupt ways of increasing their wealth at the expense of others, we must continually find new ways of exposing the true reality. The elimination of poverty, class struggle, and inequality begins with a public awareness that these phenomena exist and an understanding of why they exist. I hope we in PCI can continue to serve that purpose -- whatever our means of doing so.



New Publications from Our Members ...

Irvine and Vermilya ...

Gender Work in a Feminized Profession: The Case of Veterinary Medicine

Leslie Irvine and Jenny R. Vermilya

Gender & Society, Volume 24, No. 1

Veterinary medicine has undergone dramatic, rapid feminization while in many ways remaining gendered masculine. With women constituting approximately half of its practitioners and nearly 80 percent of students, veterinary medicine is the most feminized of the comparable health professions. Nevertheless, the culture of veterinary medicine glorifies stereotypically masculine actions and attitudes. This article examines how women veterinarians understand the gender dynamics within the profession. The authors' analysis reveals that the discursive strategies available to women sustain and justify the status quo, and thus preserve hegemonic masculinity. Women use strategies previously used toward female tokens in non-traditional jobs, such as role encapsulation, and strategies previously used by male tokens in traditionally female jobs, such as distancing from the feminine. Through this discursive "gender work," women help to maintain the institutionalized inequality and the masculine ethic of the profession. Veterinary medicine illustrates the importance of considering organizational context in studies of feminization.

Yvonne Luna ...

Luna, Yvonne M. 2009. "Single Welfare Mothers' Resistance." /Journal of Poverty: Innovations on Social, Political & Economic Inequalities (13/4), pp. 441-461.

Popular conceptions of welfare recipients are congruous with policy constructions that attribute responsibility for poverty to personal decisions and choices. This research investigates the ways welfare mothers resist these negative constructions. Resistance strategies are methods that the participants in this study used to minimize the pejorative constructions associated with a welfare identity. Focus groups with 64 single welfare mothers and personal interviews with eight of those women reveal two categories of resistance strategies--overt and covert. The less common type of resistance practiced by the women participants, perhaps because of risk of punishment, is overt resistance. This includes oppositional culture, fighting the system, and maintaining control in a McDonaldised welfare culture. Covert resistance strategies are avoidance, withdrawal, and dissociation.

Luna, Yvonne M. 2010. "Guiding Perceptions of Single Mothers on Welfare." Pp. 63-69 in /Sociological Inquiry (10th ed)/, edited by K.M. Mahmoudi and B.W. Parlin. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Peggy Wireman ...

My book, *Connecting the Dots: Government Community and Family*, is now available from Transaction Publishers as an e-book. *Connecting the Dots: A Community Action Guide* has also just been published as an e-book. The first book argues that America's problems are not from a loss of family values, but a shift in business practices and public commitments. It details why both government action and local programs are crucial for average Americans facing basic tasks: trying to earn an income, feed their families, maintain their health, find housing, handle everyday household chores, and care for their children. The Action Guide provides additional specific suggestions on what organizations can do. The sections: Building Community, Income, Housing, Health, Children can be purchased separately. These sections would provide a focus for student field work or research. For more details see connectingdots.us, which also contains blog postings relevant to recent events. I am also starting to Twitter @PeggyWireman. Comments and contributions welcome. Or e-mail me at wireman1234@sbcglobal.net.

Peggy Wireman also presented a paper at the last SSSP meeting called: "What do Sarah Palin, Don Imus and Barack Obama have in Common and What does it Say about the Body Politic?" Those interested in a copy should contact Peggy at wireman1234@sbcglobal.net.



New Publications from Our Members ...

Joan Acker and Colleagues ...

A new book by section member Joan Acker and co-authors Sandra Morgen and Jill Weigt was published in January 2010. Titled "Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Welfare Work, and Welfare Reform," (Cornell Univ. Press) the book analyzes data from a three-year study of welfare reform in Oregon, presenting the process and experience of reform from the perspectives of former recipients, welfare workers, and administrators. Changes in poverty and welfare provision since the study ended in 2000 are discussed and detailed proposals for reforming welfare reform are presented. Amid the present crisis, politicians do not discuss the pressing need for an adequate social safety net in the U.S. We hope that this book will contribute to revitalizing such discussions.

Timothy Black ...

When A Heart Turns Rock Solid The Lives of Three Puerto Rican Brothers on and off the streets

This provocative and compelling book examines how jobs, schools, the streets, and prisons have shaped the lives and choices of a generation of Puerto Rican youth at the turn of the twenty-first century. At the center of this riveting account – based on an unprecedented eighteen-year study – are three engaging, streetwise brothers from Springfield, Massachusetts: Fausto, incarcerated for seven years and in and out of drug treatment, an insightful and sensitive street warrior playing on the edges of self-destruction; Julio, the family patriarch, a former gang member turned truck driver, fiercely loyal to his family and friends; and Sammy, a street maven, recovering drug addict, father of four, straddling two realms—the everyday world of low-wage work and the allure of the drug economy—as he shuttles between recovery and relapse.

Timothy Black spent years with the brothers and their parents, wives and girlfriends, extended family, coworkers, criminal partners, friends, teachers, lawyers, and case workers. He closely observed street life in Springfield, including the drug trade; schools and GED programs; courtrooms, prisons, and drug treatment programs; and the young men's struggle for employment both on and off the books. The brothers, articulate and determined, speak for themselves, providing powerful testimony about the exigencies of life lived on the social and economic margins. The result is a singularly detailed and empathetic portrait of men who are often regarded with fear or simply rendered invisible by society. With profound lessons regarding the intersection of social forces and individual choices, Black succeeds in putting a human face on some of the most important public policy issues of our time.

"This is sociology and ethnography at its finest: as graphic as a documentary and as spellbinding as a novel. In a time of widespread economic troubles, Black reminds us dramatically of how much worse the permanently poor have it every day of their lives." —Herbert J. Gans, author of *Imagining America in 2033: How the Country Put Itself Together After Bush*

"When a Heart Turns Rock Solid will break your heart, and it won't—and shouldn't—let any of us off the hook. This important new book about poor people in America is an enlightened and anguished indictment of structural violence." —Alisse Waterston, author of *Love, Sorrow, and Rage: Destitute Women in a Manhattan Residence*

"This observant and thoughtful book is the result of half a lifetime of keen observation and boundless empathy for a world most of us know only from statistics. It is a must-read!"
—Frances Fox Piven, author of *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* and *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*

"This is a vivid and poignant portrait of everyday reality for poor Puerto Rican men, bringing them alive as real human beings with hopes, fears, mistakes, setbacks, and successes. Ultimately revealed is a coercive society much more concerned with policing and prisons than with people whose lives are trashed by age-old processes of class and racial oppression."
—Joe R. Feagin, Ella C. McFadden
Professor of Liberal Arts, Texas A&M University and author of *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*

Timothy Black is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Hartford, where he directs the Center for Social Research.

Bonnie Berry: New Book Series Editor

Announcing a New Book Series Solving Social Problems



Series Editor: **Bonnie Berry**, Director of the Social Problems Research Group, USA

Solving Social Problems provides a forum for the description and measurement of social problems, with a keen focus on the concrete remedies proposed for their solution. The series takes an international perspective, exploring social problems in various parts of the world, with the central concern being always their possible remedy. Work is welcomed on subjects as diverse as environmental damage, terrorism, economic disparities and economic devastation, poverty, inequalities, domestic assaults and sexual abuse, health care, natural disasters, labour inequality, animal abuse, crime, and mental illness and its treatment. In addition to recommending solutions to social problems, the books in this series are theoretically sophisticated, exploring previous discussions of the issues in question, examining other attempts to resolve them, and adopting and discussing methodologies that are commonly used to measure social problems. Proposed solutions may be framed as changes in policy or practice, or more broadly as social change and social movement. Solutions may be reflective of ideology, but are always pragmatic and detailed, explaining the means by which the suggested solutions might be achieved.

If you would like to submit a proposal for this series, please email:

the Series Editor, **Bonnie Berry**: solving@socialproblems.org

or the Commissioning Editor, **Neil Jordan**: njordan@ashgatepublishing.com

www.ashgate.com/sociology

Dear Members,

I am the new series editor for *Solving Social Problems* (Ashgate Publishing) and am soliciting book proposals on that topic. As the Announcement above explains, I am asking for proposals on (among other social problems) poverty, class, and inequality.

If you or your colleagues have a proposal in mind, do let me know and I would be delighted to take a look at it.

In Solidarity,
Bonnie

Bonnie Berry, PhD
Director, Social Problems Research Group
2804 East Bay Drive
Gig Harbor, WA 98335

New Publications from Our Members ...

Robert and Carolyn Perrucci ...

America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring

By Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci
Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009

This book is the latest effort in a long-term project by the authors to understand the most significant transformation of American society since the Industrial Revolution. First identified in the early 1980s when many major corporations began closing their facilities in the United States and transferring production abroad to countries that provided lower production costs, the practice has accelerated and continued for over 30 years. The result has been the loss of millions of high wage jobs, often unionized and in manufacturing, increased job insecurity, and wage stagnation. The center of the “new economy” shifted from manufacturing to finance, from producing cars and household items to creating new schemes for financial investments.

As more and more high-wage blue collar and white collar jobs were lost to offshoring and technological change, it became apparent that the U.S. class structure was also being reshaped into a polarized system with a prosperous privileged class, a disappearing middle class, and an insecure working class. Income and wealth disparities reached historic levels, accompanied by declining opportunities for a better life within and across generations.

The authors argue that the cumulative impact of this transformation over the past 30-40 years has been the loss of hope for a better future, the decline in trust for mainstream institutions, and the declining support for government programs that provide support for those who live on the fringes of mainstream society. The far-reaching effects of economic change, technological change, and organizational change extended to all levels and sectors of the workplace, family life, and community life. Thus, *the crisis of hope, trust, and caring*, which are viewed as essential for a healthy human being and a healthy society.

Solutions to the current crisis that are presented in the book are guided by the view that hope, trust, and caring are part of an integrated whole, and that solutions to the problem of hope must be designed carefully so as not to erode trust while increasing hope. The authors try to avoid the pitfalls of some current mainstream solutions that breed divisions rather than unity among Americans.

Some early reviewers write:

“Essential reading for the new Obama administration and for all Americans in the current crisis. This book connects the breakdown in trust with the corporate global policies that have stripped Americans of their jobs and dreams. Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci exemplify the sociological imagination we need for the twenty-first century.” CHARLES DERBER, Boston College.

“Hope, trust, and caring—three indispensable ingredients for a secure and democratic society. Perrucci and Perrucci argue that these ingredients have been eroded by institutional restructuring and an ever-growing cultural crisis over the last thirty years. Analyzing employment, educational, community, and familial experiences as they vary by class, race, age, and gender, *America at Risk* proposes an agenda that places hope, trust, and caring at the center of social life. It is highly readable and accessible.” VICKI SMITH, University of California, Davis

“*America at Risk* is the culmination of two lifetimes of rigorous research and nuanced thought about the multiple crises facing the United States today. As Perrucci and Perrucci fit together the jigsaw pieces of the socioeconomic devastation we are now facing, a portrait emerges of the policies that set in motion the fast-acting processes that have robbed our society of its economic vitality. In developing this portrait they direct our attention to perhaps the most dire consequences of this decay—the severe erosion of hope, trust, and caring at the ground level among ordinary citizens.” MICHAEL SCHWARTZ, Stony Brook University.

2010 PCI Sponsored Sessions

Global Intersections: Inequalities, Conflict and Environmental Justice

Andrzejewski, Julie R.

[JRANDRZEJEWSKI@STCLOUDSTATE.EDU]

Political Economy and Inequality

Alessio, John C. [JOHN.ALESSIO@MNSU.EDU]

Health Policy and Inequality

(Papers in the Round)

Bell, Sue [sue.bell@mnsu.edu]

Inequality at Work

Dozier, Raine [RAINE.DOZIER@WWU.EDU]

Social (In)Justice: Resisting and Negotiating Poverty

Luna, Yvonne [YVONNE.LUNA@NAU.EDU]

Wesely, Jennifer K. [JWESELY@UNF.EDU]

(co-organizers)

Social Justice, Social Policy, and the Working Poor

Welch, Lisa [LWELCH@neriscience.com]

Animals and the Environment: Inequalities and Social Justice Theory

Nocella, II, Anthony J. [nocellat@yahoo.com]

Is Poverty a Social Justice Issue?

THEMATIC

Hunter, Vicki L. [VICKI.HUNTER@MNSU.EDU]

New Labor, Union Movements and Social Justice

Alessio, John C. [JOHN.ALESSIO@MNSU.EDU]

Jason, Kendra [kjason@ncsu.edu]

(co-organizers)

Persistent Inequalities: Considering Intersectionalities

Guidroz, Kathleen [guidroz@msmary.edu]

