


The Poor and the Homeless

April 9, 2008

<http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134>

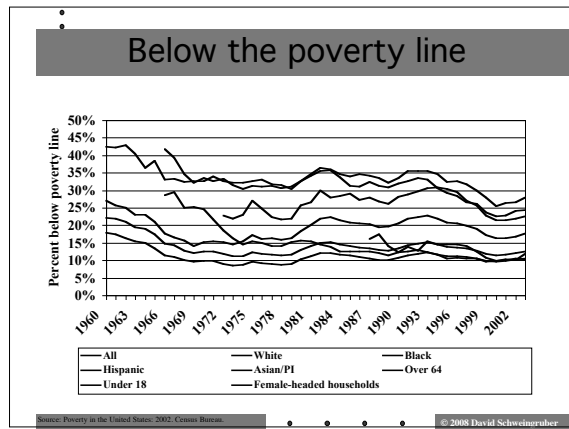
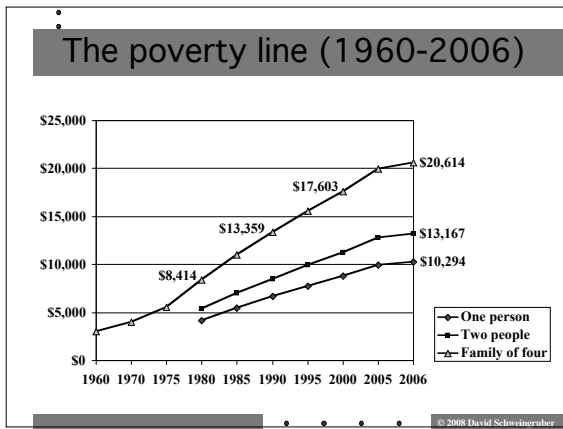


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Poverty definitions

- ✓ Absolute poverty: inability to afford the minimal requirements for sustaining healthy existence (p. 355)
- ✓ Relative poverty: individual's economic position compared to the living standards of the majority in society (p. 355)
- ✓ Poverty line: amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs, according to the federal government (p. 355)
- ✓ Poverty rate: percentage of people whose income falls below the poverty line (p. 357)

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Homelessness

- ✓ Who is homeless?
 - Estimates of homelessness range from 750,000 to 2 million (2000)
 - 1995 survey of homelessness: 46% homeless men, 13% single women, 36.5% families with children, 3.5% children on own
- ✓ Individualistic explanations of homelessness
 - Substance abuse
 - Mental illness (Snow et al. found only 15% were mentally ill)
- ✓ Structural explanations
 - Residential dislocation (lack of low-income housing, housing inflation)
 - Economic dislocation (unemployment, low-paying jobs)
- ✓ Best explanations connect structural to biographical

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Pathways to the street

- ✓ Snow and Anderson's *Down on Their Luck* (1993)
 - Method: participant observation and analysis of shelter and government documents in Austin, Texas
- ✓ Connects structural factors and individual-level factors
- ✓ Structural factors: residential dislocation & economic dislocation
- ✓ Biographical determinants of homelessness
 - Voluntarism (homeless as lifestyle choice): not supported by evidence; only 6.3% of homeless gave this explanation
 - Disabilities and pathologies: also not supported; Snow & Anderson view individual pathologies as adaptations to homeless, not cause of it
 - Lack of family support: most commonly mentioned biographical factor (66.6%); S & A claim it's also the most important biographical factor
 - Bad luck: may result in homelessness among the economically marginal

Source: Snow & Anderson, 1993, *Down on Their Luck, U of California*

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Homeless job experience (Texas, 1980s)

- ✓ Last job
 - General laborer (construction, warehouse loading, oil field): 30.7%
 - Service (dishwashing; janitorial; nursing home): 21.5%
 - Factory work and vehicle operation: 20.6%
 - Craft/skilled work (building trades; mechanics): 19.3%
 - Sales and clerical: 5.7%
 - Military: 2.2%
- ✓ Median hourly wage: \$4.90
- ✓ Median duration of job: 6.5 months
- ✓ Reason for job termination
 - Laid off/job ended: 44.3%
 - Fired 9.1%
 - Quit: 21.0%
 - Other: 25.6%

Source: Scott & Anderson, 1993, *Down on Their Luck*, U of California

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