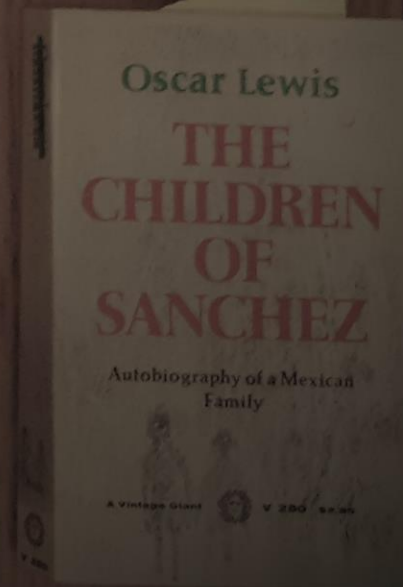
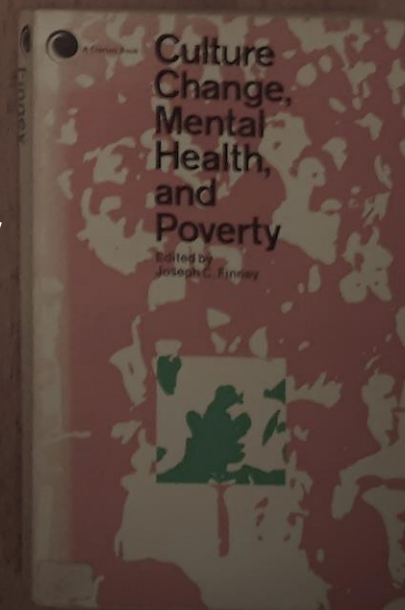
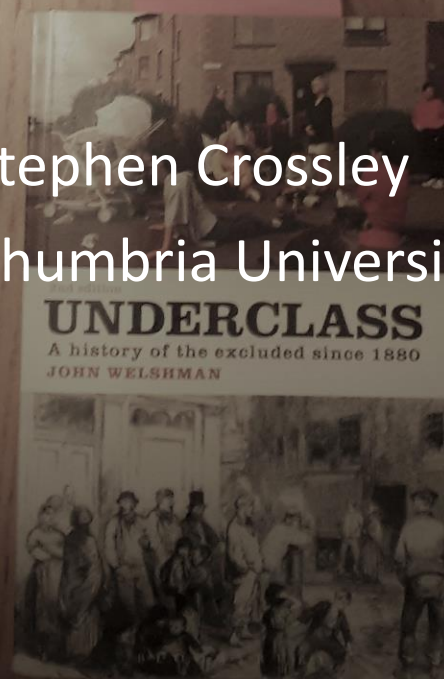
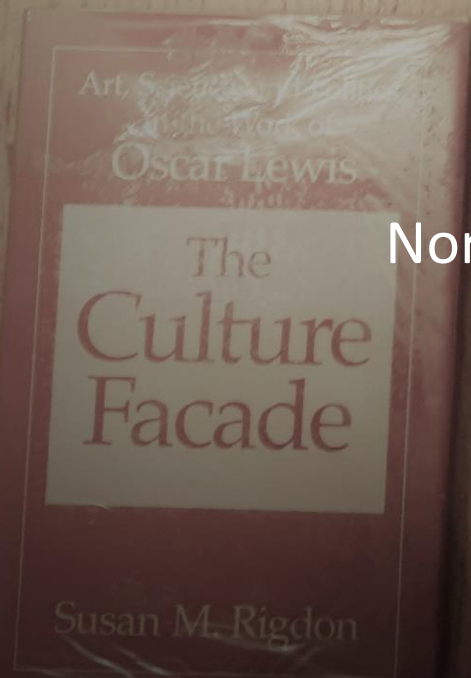
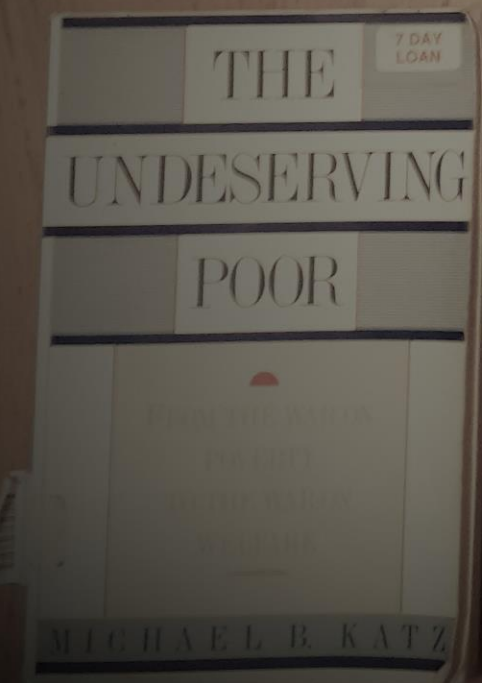
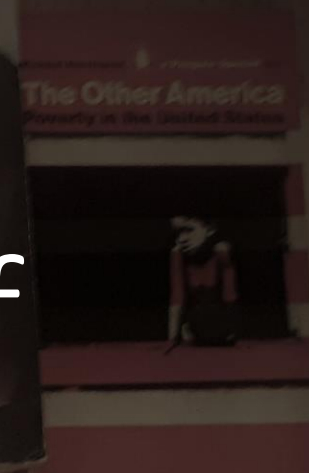
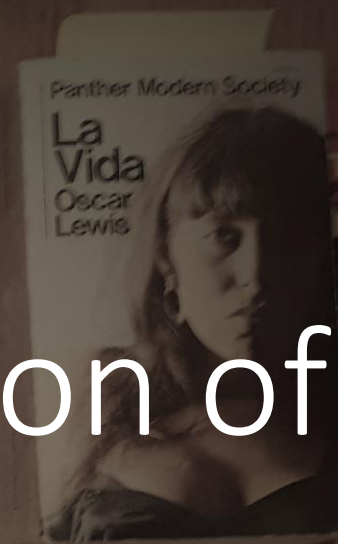
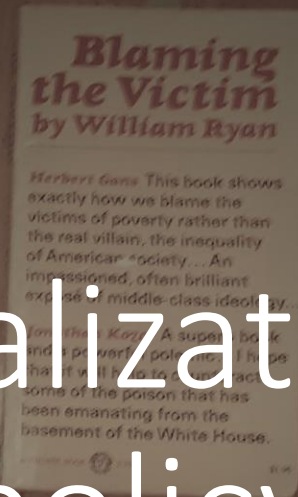
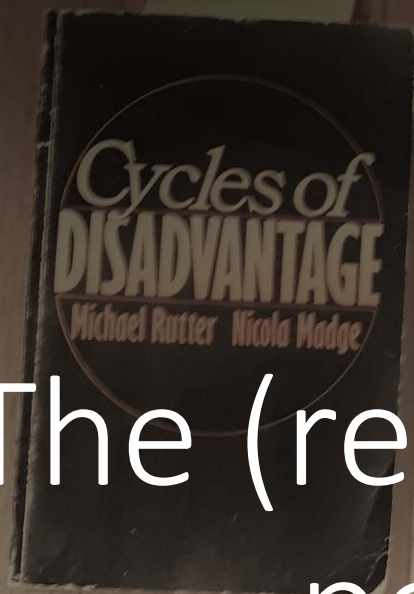


The (re)culturalization of poverty policy



Stephen Crossley
Northumbria University

Culture...

...is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'

(Williams, 2002: 76)

'nothing is more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods'

(Herder, no date, in Williams, 2002: 79)

The plan

- Discuss the development of the 'culture of poverty' theory
- Discuss the immediate response (in the US) and the longer-term influence (primarily focusing on the UK)
- Explore the political and policy utility of cultural explanations of poverty

Culture...

‘a design for living which is passed down from generation to generation’
(Lewis, 1961: xxiv)

‘the total way of life of a people ... the social legacy individuals acquire from their group ... a way of thinking, feeling and believing ... a store-house of pooled learning... learned behaviour’

Kluckholm (1949)

A 'culture of poverty'

*Poverty becomes a dynamic factor **which affects participation** in the larger national culture and creates a **subculture** of its own. One can speak of the **culture of the poor**, for it has its own modalities and **distinctive** social and psychological consequences for its members*

(Lewis, 1959: 2)



A 'culture of poverty' ...

*The culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization, a term signifying the absence of something. It is a culture in the anthropological sense in that it **provides human beings with a design for living**, with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function.*

(Lewis, 1966: 19)



A 'culture of poverty' ...

The way of life which develops among some of the poor under these conditions is the culture of poverty. It can best be studied in urban or rural slums and can be described in terms of some seventy interrelated social, economic and psychological traits.

(Lewis, 1968: 49)



Traits...

Economic
 Unemployment and underemployment
 Low wages
 Miscellany of unskilled occupations
 Child labor
 Absence of savings
 Chronic shortage of cash
 Absence of food reserves in the home
 Frequent daily food purchases in small quantities
 Pawning
 Borrowing from local money lenders at usurious rates of interest
 Spontaneous informal credit devices
 Use of secondhand clothing and furniture
 Constant struggle for survival
Social & Psychological
 Crowded quarters
 Lack of privacy
 Gregariousness
 High incidence of alcoholism
 Violence
 Violence in training of children
 Wife beating
 Early initiation into sex
 Free unions
 Abandonment of mothers and children
 Mother-centered families
 Predominance of nuclear family
 Authoritarianism
 Emphasis upon family solidarity (only rarely achieved)
 Local residence a kind of small community
 Stable residence
 Lifetime friendships
 Daily face-to-face relations with same people
 Extended family ties quite strong

Local community acts as a shock absorber for rural migrants to city
 Use of herbs for curing
 Raising of animals
 Political apathy
 Belief in sorcery and spiritualism
 Cynicism about government
 Hatred of police
 Limited membership and participation in both formal and informal associations
 Critical attitude toward some of beliefs and values of dominant classes
 Mistrust of government and those in high position
 Cynicism which extends even to the church
 Members attempt to utilize and integrate into a workable way of life the remnants of beliefs and customs of diverse origins
 Strong feeling of marginality
 Strong feeling of helplessness
 Strong feeling of dependency
 Feeling of inferiority and personal unworthiness
 Little sense of history
 Not class-conscious
Others
 Strong present-time orientation with little ability to defer gratification
 Resignation and fatalism
 Male superiority (machismo)
 Corresponding martyr complex among women
 High tolerance for psychological pathology
 Provincial and locally oriented
 Marginal to national institutions (social security, labor unions, banks, etc.)
 Low level of education and literacy

Critiques

*The phrase is a **catchy one** and **has become widely used and misused**. Michael Harrington used it extensively in his book *The Other America*, which played an important role in sparking the national anti-poverty program in the United States. However, he used it in a somewhat broader and less technical sense than I had intended.*

(Lewis 1968: 47)

Lewis' later view

'I'm afraid some people take certain constructs or models like the subculture of poverty more seriously than I do' (1967)

'I never intended the model of a subculture of poverty as a summary of the substantive data presented in my recent books' (1968)

Impact (in the U.S)

Poverty in the United States is a culture, an institution, a way of life ... There is, in short, a language of the poor, a psychology of the poor, a world view of the poor. To be impoverished is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates society.

(Harrington, 1962: 23-24)

The Other America
Poverty in the United States
by Michael Harrington



The book that sparked the
War on Poverty

 a Penguin Special 95c

Impact (in the U.K.)

*It may be concluded that the culture of poverty debate is largely academic ... It is unlikely that the thesis is relevant to the situation in Britain ... The **culture of poverty concept is inadequate for an analysis of British society.***

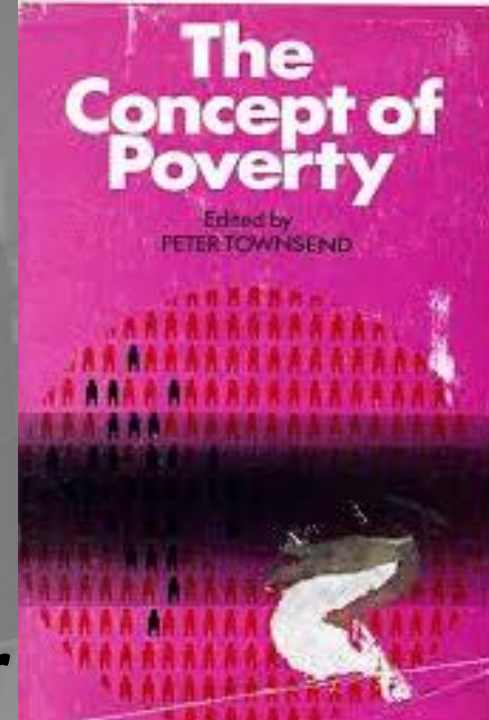
(Rutter & Madge, 1976: 30)

Cycles of
DISADVANTAGE
Michael Rutter Nicola Madge

Impact (in the U.K.)

The concept concentrates attention upon the familial and local setting of behaviour and largely ignores the external and unseen social forces which condition the distribution of different types of resources to the community, family and individual.

(Townsend, 1970: 41)



‘Dependency culture’

‘... any social security policy based on the notion of ‘dependency culture’ is likely to be counterproductive ... the notion obscures rather than assists our understanding of dependency’
(Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992: 122-123)

Dependency Culture
The Explosion of a Myth

Hartley Dean and Peter Taylor-Gooby



Underclass debates

The behaviour becomes self-defeating over time as those dependent on welfare benefits lose the personal discipline and esteem work brings, become unemployable and eventually slump into a fatalistic culture.

(Buckingham, 1996: 171)

*Losing
Ground*

American Social Policy
1950–1980

CHARLES MURRAY

Poverty policy

The idea of a group of feckless, feral poor people whose pathological culture and/or genes transmitted their poverty to their children, can be traced from the Victorian 'residuum' through theories of pauperism, social problem groups and multiple problem families to the underclass arguments of today. The problem of poverty was blamed on 'bad' genes before the Second World War and on 'bad' culture after the discrediting of the eugenics movement by the end of the War.

(Gordon, 2011: 5)

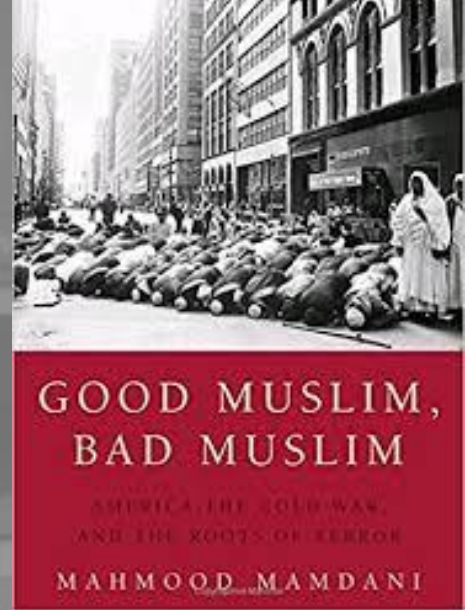
‘Culture talk’



‘Culture talk’

‘Culture talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence’

(Mamdani, 2004: 17)



‘Against Culture’

‘Culture operates ... to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy’

‘Culture is the essential tool for making other’

(Abu-Lughod, 1991: 141)



What 'culture' does...

1. Creates and sustains a behavioural focus
2. Creates a 'customary difference' or 'class distinction'
3. Undermines the case for structural action
4. Portrays 'our' culture as largely benign and 'desirable'





BEGGING:
WATCH YOUR
MONEY GO
UP IN SMOKE

Begging funds the misuse of drugs [#givesmart](#)

Image by Ashton Doyle

BEGGING:
WATCH YOUR
MONEY GO
TO A FRAUD

Beggars aren't what they seem [#givesmart](#)



BEGGING:
WATCH YOUR
MONEY GO DOWN
THE DRAIN

Begging funds the misuse of alcohol [#givesmart](#)



I'm not judgmental, but I've spent a lot of time in poor communities, and I find it quite hard to talk about modern-day poverty. You might remember that scene in Ministry Of Food [one of Oliver's television shows], with the mum and the kid eating chips and cheese out of Styrofoam containers, and behind them is a massive fucking TV. It just didn't weigh up.

What 'culture' does...

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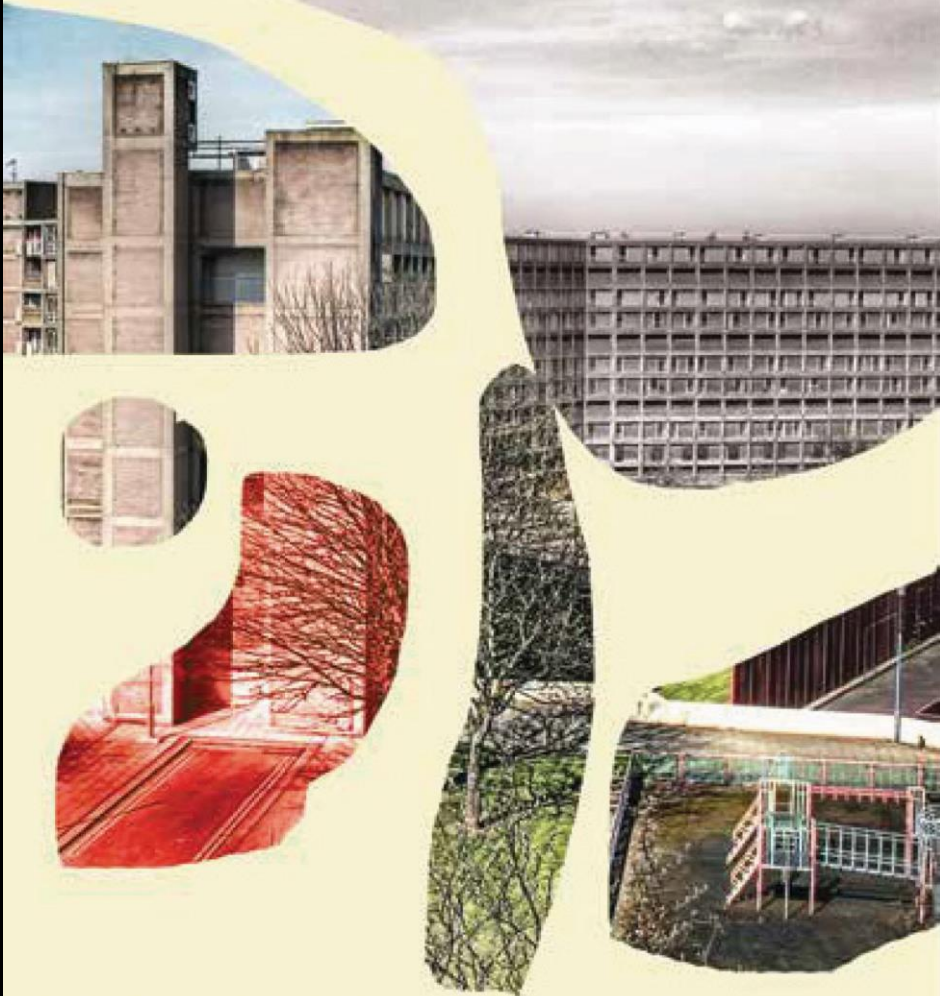
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STEPHEN CROSSLEY

In Their Place



The Imagined Geographies of Poverty

TROUBLEMAKERS

The construction of 'troubled families' as a social problem

Stephen Crossley

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