

Unit 6 Poverty and Work

Text A

Preparatory Work

(1)

Research field: urban renewal and its problems, immigrants and community, national news media study.

Major publications: His first book, *The Urban Villagers* (1962), described Boston's diverse West End neighborhood, where he mainly studied its Italian-American working class community. His 1967 book *The Levittowners* was based on several years of participant-observation in New Jersey's Levitt-built suburb in Willingboro, observing how a set of new homeowners came together to establish the community's formal and informal organizations. He has published several studies of the news media and the entertainment media, the best known being *Popular Culture and High Culture* (1974, 1999). In it, he challenged the conventional wisdom that high culture aesthetic standards were universal, arguing instead that cultural tastes reflect educational levels and other aspects of class. In his writings on poverty, Gans offered rigorous, often scathing criticism of the weaknesses of such concepts as "the culture of poverty," and the "underclass," most notably in *The War Against the Poor* (1995).

(2)

Unintended consequences: In the social sciences, unintended consequences (sometimes unanticipated consequences or unforeseen consequences) are outcomes that are not the ones foreseen and intended by a purposeful action. The term was popularized in the twentieth century by American sociologist Robert K. Merton. Unintended consequences can be grouped into three types: unexpected benefit, unexpected drawback, and perverse result ("backfire").

Reference group: A reference group is a group to which an individual or another group is compared. Sociologists call any group that individuals use as a standard for evaluating themselves and their own behavior a reference group. Reference groups are used in order to evaluate and determine the nature of a given individual or other group's characteristics and sociological attributes. Robert K. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires. Reference groups act as a frame of reference to which people always refer to evaluate their achievements, their role performance, aspirations and ambitions.

Role model: A role model is a person whose behavior, example, or

success is or can be emulated by others, especially by younger people. The term “role model” is credited to sociologist Robert K. Merton, who coined the phrase during his career. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires. An example being the way fans (oftentimes youth) will idolize and imitate professional athletes or entertainment artists.

Self-fulfilling prophecy: A self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to become true, by the very terms of the prophecy itself, due to positive feedback between belief and behavior. Robert K. Merton is credited with coining the expression “self-fulfilling prophecy” and formalizing its structure and consequences. In his 1948 article *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, Merton defines it in the following terms: “The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come true. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.” Self-fulfilling prophecy are effects in behavioral confirmation effect, in which behavior, influenced by expectations, causes those expectations to come true. It is complementary to the self-defeating prophecy.

Manifest function and Latent function: Manifest and latent functions are social scientific concepts first clarified for sociology by Robert K. Merton. Merton appeared interested in sharpening the conceptual tools to be employed in a functional analysis. Manifest functions are conscious, deliberate and beneficial, the latent ones the unconscious, unintended and beneficial, and dysfunctions are unconscious, unintended and harmful. Latent functions are those that are neither recognized nor intended. A latent function of a behavior is not explicitly stated, recognized, or intended by the people involved.

(3)

Poverty: Poverty is general scarcity, dearth, or the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. It is a multifaceted concept, which includes social, economic, and political elements. Poverty may be defined as either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the lack of means necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Relative poverty takes into consideration individual social and economic status compared to the rest of society.

Nouveau riche: Nouveau riche (French: ‘new rich’) is a term, usually derogatory, to describe those whose wealth has been acquired within their own generation, rather than by familial inheritance. The

equivalent English term is the “new rich” or “new money” (in contrast with “old money”). Sociologically, *nouveau riche* refers to the man or woman who previously had belonged to a lower social class and economic stratum (rank) within that class; and that the new money—which constitutes his or her wealth—allowed upward social mobility and provided the means for conspicuous consumption, the buying of goods and services that signal membership in an upper class.

Hierarchy: A hierarchy is an arrangement of items (objects, names, values, categories, etc.) in which the items are represented as being “above,” “below,” or “at the same level as” one another. In sociology, it often refers to the hierarchical class system caused by social stratification.

Affluence: Affluence refers to a state where one is rich enough to buy things for pleasure. It often refers to the 1950s and 1960s where most people in Western Europe and the United States were getting well-off.

Social mobility: Social mobility is the movement of individuals, families, households, or other categories of people within or between social strata in a society. It is a change in social status relative to others’ social location within a given society. While most social mobility is upward in Western countries some is downward.

Laissez-faire: Laissez-faire is an economic system in which transactions between private parties are free from government interference such as regulations, privileges, tariffs, and subsidies. The phrase *laissez-faire* is part of a larger French phrase and literally translates to “let (it/them) do”, but in this context usually means to “let go”.

Charity: The practice of charity means the voluntary giving of help to those in need, as a humanitarian act. A charitable organization is a type of non-profit organization (NPO). It differs from other types of NPOs in that it centers on philanthropic goals as well as social well-being (e.g. charitable, educational, religious, or other activities serving the public interest or common good).

(4)

Employment (就业、雇佣): Employment is a relationship between two parties, usually based on a contract where work is paid for, where one party, which may be a corporation, for profit, not-for-profit organization, co-operative or other entity is the employer and the other is the employee. Employees work in return for payment, which may be in the form of an hourly wage, by piecework or an annual salary, depending on the type of work an employee does and/or

which sector she or he is working in. Employment is typically governed by employment laws or regulations and/or legal contracts.

Work (工作) : Work refers to a job that someone is paid to do. It involves the socioeconomic relationship between a worker and an employer, where the worker sells their labour under a formal or informal employment contract. These transactions usually occur in a labour market where wages are market determined.

Occupation (职业) : = job. This word is used especially on forms and in formal writing.

Profession (职业、专业) : A profession is a vocation founded upon specialized educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain. "Liberal professions" are, according to the European Union's Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC) "those practiced on the basis of relevant professional qualifications in a personal, responsible and professionally independent capacity by those providing intellectual and conceptual services in the interest of the client and the public".

Career (生涯、事业、职业) : A career is an individual's journey through learning, work and other aspects of life. There are a number of ways to define a career and the term is used in a variety of ways. The word career is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a person's "course or progress through life (or a distinct portion of life)". In this definition career is understood to relate to a range of aspects of an individual's life, learning and work. Career is also frequently understood to relate to the working aspects of an individual's life e.g. as in career woman. A third way in which the term career is used is to describe an occupation or a profession that usually involves special training or formal education, and is considered to be a person's lifework. In this case "a career" is seen as a sequence of related jobs usually pursued within a single industry or sector e.g. "a career in education" or "a career in the building trade".

Critical Reading

I. Understanding the text

1.

Positive Function	Example (You can use examples outside the text)
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1. Poverty ensures that a society's "dirty work" will be done.	Low-paid dirty jobs such as cleaning and garbage collecting are all done by the poor.
2. It subsidizes a variety of economic activities that benefit the affluent.	Baby-sitters can liberate career women or housewives for other interesting activities.
3. It creates jobs to serve or "service" the poor, or protect the rest of the society from them	The police and the prostitutes are good examples.
4. It prolongs the economic usefulness of the goods that others do not want.	The poor have to buy day-old bread, secondhand clothes, and deteriorating automobiles.
5. The poor serve as "deviants" to uphold the legitimacy of conventional norms.	The poor are often accused of being lazy, spendthrift, dishonest, and promiscuous in contrast to the middle class values of the opposite.
6. The poor participate in the uninhibited sexual, alcoholic and narcotic behavior for the rest of population who is more "decent".	It is believed that the poor derive more pleasure from sex and drugs than the middle class.
7. The poor serve as a direct cultural function when culture created by or for them is adopted by the more affluent.	Blues, country music, rock and roll are good examples.
8. Poverty helps to guarantee the status of those who are not poor.	Working class identity vs the poor
9. The poor aids the upward mobility of groups just above them in the class hierarchy.	Some groups moved upward by making money from the poor (house renting, drug selling etc. in the slums)
10. The poor help keep the aristocracy busy and justify its continued existence.	Settlement houses and charity affairs (sponsored by the super-rich people or aristocracy)
11. The poor can be made to absorb the costs of change and growth in American society.	They have helped to build cities but were pushed out their neighborhood to make room for "progress" in urban renewal projects.
12. The poor facilitate and stabilize the American political	They often provide the Democrats with a captive

process.	constituency (铁杆选民) that has no other place to go.
13. The role of poor has a significant political function to justify the ideology of the laissez-faire capitalist economy.	It is alleged that the poor remain poor because they are unwilling to work. Or they are inferior because they accept charity or welfare to survive.

2.

(1) Merton defines functions as “those observed consequences (of a phenomenon) which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given (social) system.” Instead of identifying functions for an entire social system, Gans identifies them for the interest groups, socio-economic classes, and other population aggregates with share values that “inhabit” a social system.

(2) According to Gans, functions result in benefits while dysfunctions (negative functions) result in cost. However, he argues that few phenomena are functional or dysfunctional for the society as a whole, and that most functions result in benefits to some groups and costs to others.

(3) Gans lists a number of functional alternatives for poverty, here are the major ones: Society’s dirty work would be done without poverty, either by automation or by paying “dirty workers’ decent wages. Nor is it necessary for the poor to subsidize the many activities they support through their low-wage jobs. Similarly, many of the professionals who flourish because of the poor could be given other roles. But this would drive up the costs and prices.

(4) Many of the functions served by the poor could be replaced if poverty were eliminated, but almost always at higher costs to others, particularly more affluent others.

(5) With increased affluence the poor would probably obtain more political power and be more active politically. With higher incomes and more political power, the poor would be likely to resist paying the costs of growth and change.

(6) Social phenomena that are functional for affluent or powerful groups and dysfunctional for poor or powerless ones persist. When the elimination of such phenomena through functional alternatives would generate dysfunctions for the affluent or powerful, they will continue to persist. Phenomena like poverty can be eliminated only when they become dysfunctional for the affluent or powerful, or when the powerless can obtain enough power to change society.

(7) Gans uses the postscript to clarify some misunderstandings on his views on poverty in this article after its initial publication and

defend functionalism for its merits. Gans points out his view on poverty very clearly: first and foremost, there are positive functions of poverty which have to be dealt with by antipoverty policy; second, he is trying to show that functionalism is not the inherently conservative approach often criticized, but that it can be employed in liberal and radical analyses.

II. Evaluation and exploration

Function	Function Summary	Evaluation
1	The existence of poverty ensures that society's "dirty work" will be done.	(no definite answers and open for discussion)
2	The poor's working at low wages subsidizes a variety of economic activities that benefit the affluent.	
3	Poverty creates jobs for a number of occupations and professions that serve or "service" the poor, or protect the rest of society from them.	
4	The poor buy goods others do not want and thus prolong the economic usefulness of such goods.	
5	The poor can be identified and punished as alleged or real deviants in order to uphold the legitimacy of conventional norms.	
6	The poor offer vicarious participation to the rest of the population in the uninhibited sexual, alcoholic, and narcotic behavior in which they are alleged to participate.	

7	The poor also serve a direct cultural function when culture created by or for them is adopted by the more affluent.	
8	Poverty helps to guarantee the status of those who are not poor.	
9	The poor aid the upward mobility of groups just above them in the class hierarchy.	
10	The poor help to keep the aristocracy busy, thus justifying its continued existence (for charity).	
11	The poor, being powerless, can be made to absorb the costs of change and growth in American society.	
12	The poor facilitate and stabilize the American political process (the working class votes).	
13	The role of the poor in upholding conventional norms (see fifth point, above) also has a significant political function (to justify the ideology of laissez-faire).	

(2)

The original title “No, Poverty Has Not Disappeared” is not as sharp and to the point as the present title “The Use of Poverty: the Poor Pay All” which highlights the function and nature of poverty, that is, the poor pay all in American society.

(3)

Suggestion: explore the issue from two different theories.

Functionalism explains poverty as the result of the poor being lazy or lacking marketable skills needed in the capitalist market while conflict theory (Marxism) argues that poverty is the result of

structured inequality in the capitalist socio-economic system.

(4)

Tentative alternative argument:

Since the well-off (middle class) and rich people pay higher proportion of their income as tax (which is much more than the income of the poor either in proportion or in absolute number), it's the middle class and the rich people in America who sacrifice their interest to maintain social stability, and the poor benefit from this system.

(5)

This accusation is not fair. People only notice the obvious crime in the street (theft and robbery etc.) but tend to ignore the white-collar crime (e.g. embezzlement) in the well-off class and corporate corruption (such as the case of financial crisis where the bankers who enjoy high salary and bonus ruined the American economy and brought disaster to the whole nation or even the whole world). Due to their money influence and connection with politicians, they can easily get away with their crimes without being noticed (the media are also influenced by or even owned by them).

(6)

Tentative explanation: the title and key word "function" easily indicate that the author is a functionalist and justifies poverty in American society. That's why the author tries to clarify his position on poverty that he explores the functions of poverty to arouse readers' attention so that something can be done about it. He never states in the text that poverty is good and should stay.

(7)

Tentative explanation:

Functionalism justifies the inequality of a society (the gap between the rich and the poor) as a result of division of labor and market demand for marketable skills and considers it fair and reasonable. Marxism argues that poverty is the result of the total socio-economic system of capitalism which exploits the poor, thus causes inequality and poverty.

(8)

Tentative explanation:

Functionalist theory cannot fully explain China's poverty problem. It is true that poverty in China was largely caused by the poor's low level of education and lack of marketable skills in the market, it might also have been caused by other factors such as poor environment and lack of resources (esp. in Northwest China). Even so, China's socialist system enjoys a lot of advantages (the biggest one is the resourcefulness of governments of all levels), and over the past decades, China has drastically reduced its poverty population and set

the goal of getting rid of poverty by 2020 (through the program of accurate poverty alleviation).

Language Enhancement

I. Words and phrases

1.
(1) C&E (2) D&F (3) D&F (4) A&C (5) E&F
(6) C&F (7) B&F (8) C&D (9) B&D (10) D&F
2.
(1) interpret (2) fulfill (3) replace...with (4) eliminate (5) cut off
(6) facilitate (7) absorb (8) shun (9) survive (10) uphold
3.
(1) accused...of (2) free from (3) motivated by (4) adopted by (5) expanded into
(6) count (7) switch off (8) deprive...of (9) relegated to (10) compete with
4.
(1) as a touchstone of (2) deploring (3) encounter (4) has grown wider
(5) net loss (6) three fifths (7) aren't aware (8) points to

II. Sentences and discourse

1.
(1) Poverty also makes it possible for respectable professions and occupations to exist or expand. This is less often recognized, at least by the common sense wisdom.
(2) Society can find people willing to do these dirty jobs by paying them higher wages than if they do "clean" ones, or it can make some people to do them at low wages if they have no other choices.
(3) Much of the debate about the Negative Income Tax and the Family Assistance Plan is about their impact on the work incentive of the poor, which means if the wages they get from work are less than their income grants from the Tax and the Plan, they don't have the incentive to do the dirty work that is needed in society.
(4) The poor can be cited and punished as deviants by the mainstream classes for the purpose of advocating the rightful conventional norms.
(5) As a result, many people, including some social scientists, believe that the poor not only tend to indulge in uninhibited behavior but get more pleasure from it than affluent people.
(6) In American society, social mobility is an important goal for many people who need to know where they stand, and the poor serve as a reliable and relatively permanent benchmark for status comparisons.

2.

- (1) According to statistics and surveys, once thrown into prison a large proportion of prisoners were dehumanized through cell mates' harassment or guards' abuse.
- (2) This summer, the country's southern region suffered from persistent high-temperature climate.
- (3) Practicing the mass line means listening to the opinions of the mass in order to identify their real needs.
- (4) Ocean resources are indispensable to a country that aspires to realize its dream of enriching its people and strengthening its power.
- (5) The Chinese Dream is to revive our nation and to rejuvenate our country.
- (6) China's education laws ensure every child's equal right to the 9-year compulsory education.
- (7) Being highly subsidized, the agricultural products of the European Union enjoy competitive price advantages.
- (8) One of the main problems in our country's manufacturing industry is that it imitates more and innovates less.
- (9) Since the demographic dividend is being used up, more and more factories find it difficult to recruit new workers.
- (10) Since the border conflict, the relationship between the two countries has deteriorated drastically.
- (11) It is alleged that the vice mayor of the city was detained yesterday by the police for receiving huge amount of bribes.
- (12) He has devoted his whole life to help and raise abandoned babies.

3.

将贫困与正面功能相联系乍看似乎不可思议。当然，大家都知道贫民窟的房东和高利贷者从现存的贫困中获利，但是他们被视为邪恶的人因而其行为被列作贫困的负面功能。然而，鲜为人知的，至少鲜为普通人的常识智慧所认识的，是贫困使一些体面高端的职业生存和扩展，例如，监狱管理学、犯罪学、与社会福利有关的工作、以及公共卫生学。近些年来，贫困为专业和半专业的“与贫困做斗争的人”提供了工作，也为新闻工作者与社会科学家，包括本文作者，提供工作，后者为公众对贫困问题兴趣的重现提供其所需要的资讯。

4.

(2) (4) (1) (3)