Jamaica, Poverty and The National Poverty Eradication Programme: A Policy Introduction

Includes:
Final Report

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Completed for:
Jamaican Self-Help
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Department: International Development Studies
Course Code: IDST 371H
Course Name:
Term: Summer/Fall 2005
Date of Project Submission: October, 2005

Project ID: 641

Call Number:
Jamaica, Poverty and
The National Poverty Eradication Programme:
A Policy Introduction

Presented to:
Trent Center for Community Based Education
And
Jamaica Self-Help
PART 1: Section A

Jamaica: Country Brief

*Introduction*

Jamaica is the third largest island located in the Greater Antilles region of the Caribbean. On August 6, 1962 Jamaica won full independence within the British Commonwealth. Deteriorating economic conditions in the 1970s brought about violence and instability causing a serious decline in the tourism industry. In 1980, the democratic socialist party was voted out of office and Jamaica now finds itself run under a political system of parliamentary democracy.

*Demographics*

In 2003, Jamaica’s total population was estimated at 26 million, 52.2 percent of which were found living in urban centers. The capital city, Kingston, is the center for commercial production as well as the seat of government. It has a population of approximately 716,000. Jamaica’s 1991 census showed its ethnic composition to be made up of 90.5% Black with historically African lineage. The remainder of the population is made up of minority groups such as: East Indian, Chinese and White. The total fertility rate (as expressed in number of births per women) saw a substantial drop from 5 during the years of 1970-1975 to 2.6 from 2000-2005. This drop is significant because it coincides with the National Population Policy’s target to achieve a stable population at zero growth.

*Economy*

Historically, Jamaica has been known to have an open economy. The national currency is expressed in Jamaican Dollars and its principle sources of export and foreign exchange are tourism, bauxite, alumina, agriculture, and light manufactured goods. Tourism is most significant due to its substantial foreign exchange revenue, employment generation and its linkages to agriculture, manufacturing, entertainment
and sports. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita expressed in US$ was at 3,083 in 2003. In 2000/2001 the World Bank reported Jamaica’s Gini Coefficient to be 36 (where 0 equals perfect equitable income distribution and 100 represents total income concentration), one of the most equitable countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. During this period, Canada was reported to have a Gini Coefficient of 32.

*Human Development*

According to the United Nations, Jamaica is currently ranked at 98 out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index compared to Canada who is ranked fifth. Due to Jamaica’s heavy debt load, many resources are diverted away from development projects and towards debt service payments. In March 2001, Jamaica’s total public debt reached a crippling J$380.4 billion (US$8.3 billion) and in 2003, Jamaica’s total debt service (as a % GDP) was estimated at 10.1.

*Poverty*

The incidence of poverty in Jamaica is highest in rural areas. According to 2001 statistics, 24.1% of rural populations were living in poverty compared to 7.6% in the Kingston Metropolitan Area. Levels of inequality in Jamaica are also high, where the wealthiest 20% of the population accounts for 45.9% of national consumption compared to the poorest 20% who account for only 6.1% of national consumption.

*Social Challenges*

Jamaica currently faces a number of social challenges. The capacity of the government to fund and deliver adequate social services is inhibited by Jamaica’s substantial external debt. In addition to debt, crime in Jamaica is also taking a toll on the economy. According to some sources, combating the crime problem in Jamaica costs 4 percent of total GDP, including health expenses, public and private spending on security, and lost production. The growing number of HIV/AIDS cases is another social challenge in Jamaica. The disease, which is spreading most rapidly among young heterosexual females, has detrimental effects on national productivity.
PART 1: Section B

The Road to Poverty in Jamaica

*Introduction*

“...Where contradictions are deepening with Neoliberal reform, and where conditions seem, objectively to be very ripe for active alliances of the oppressed and excluded, the frustrated energy is instead fuelling a social implosion characterized by spiraling crime, violence, fear, and perhaps most importantly, anti-social behavior.”

(Weis, p2).

The Structural Adjustment Programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have had fundamental effects on the economic and social environments of many developing countries worldwide. SAPs have been widely accused of forcing indebted countries to open up their economies to free market capitalism, often resulting in the perpetuation of high unemployment, debt accumulation, and spiraling social service provisions. This very situation has been largely responsible for Jamaica’s current and historical problem of poverty.

As result of some of the negative consequences of the adjustment programmes, political elites have attempted to prevent further economic pitfall by insulating themselves and by disengaging the poor, so as to avoid upsetting the balance by challenging the existing order.

After brief ‘flirtation’ with social democratic reforms in the 1970’s, Jamaica embarked on a prolonged and intensive relationship with the IMF/World Bank. Structural adjustment has since created a spiraling crisis characterized by enormous debt accumulation, intensified social inequalities, and the creation of obsolete productive sectors (i.e. agriculture and manufacturing)—all of which have provoked a spread of crime and violence. Here is a brief account of Jamaica’s journey with the IMF and World Bank.

*Mid 1970’s*

1976 ~ Prime Minister Michael Manley and his ‘democratic socialist’ ideals win election. During this time, Jamaica suffering from high cost of imports resulting from the 1972-1973 oil-price shocks. Manley refuses balance of payment
support from the IMF and implements his own leftist policies. Jamaica’s narrow, dependant economy (reliant solely on bauxite, sugar and tourism) found itself vulnerable to the 1970s global recession and succumbed to a rising trade imbalance. The Manley government borrowed from private overseas markets, which ultimately caused external debt to increase by 150% between 1973 and 1976. Rising energy costs meant reduced competitiveness of their import-dependant manufacturing sector. Oversees bauxite markets narrowed in response to falling global prices. Tourism took a hit due to the spread of US propaganda claiming that Jamaica had close ties to Fidel Castro’s non-aligned Cuba. Elites panicked and sent their capital abroad, further weakening production and investment and increasing the need for borrowing.

*1977*

In April, Manley begins negotiations with the IMF for payment support. IMF was later accused of setting unrealistic conditionality targets, which, when weren’t met in 1978, the IMF began, a very strict adjustment programme (see Glossary for definition of Structural Adjustment Programmes). Changes included price liberalization, interest-rate adjustments, currency devaluation, and cuts to social spending.

“As occurred throughout so much of the Third world, IMF and World Bank loan conditions did not solve Jamaica’s payments imbalances but rather set it on the infamous treadmill of debt, Washington dictated policy reform, rising imbalances and interest costs, and more borrowing with stricter conditions.” (Weis, p.6).

*Early 1980s*

Edward Seaga from the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) defeats Manley. Between 1982 and 1984, and on top of more IMF stabilization loans, Seaga signed three Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs). IMF conditions encouraged:

- Loosened controls on investment
- Liberalized interest and exchange rates (leading to interest rate hikes and devaluation of currency)
- Selectively cut tariffs and non-tariff barriers
- Abolished of state services and subsidies
- Reduced real wages
- Opened up Export Processing Zones (EPZs) or ‘Free Zones’

**Results:**

By 1984 unemployment rates were raised, economic growth grew stagnant, trade deficit tripled between 1981-83 causing serious problems for Jamaica’s payment problems. State support for agriculture was reduced and was not balanced by the expected surge of private investment. In addition to this, debt-servicing requirements were reducing investment in health care, education, low-income housing and infrastructure. Eventually, costs of living rose, pushing 200,000 people out of Jamaica and mainly into North America. The informal sector also developed in the areas from large-scale drug dealing to small scale vending.

Between 1977 and 1995, Jamaica signed **twelve** IMF Programmes and at one point became the IMF’s heaviest borrower relative to its quota (at 430%).

*1990*

Two decades after Jamaica signed its first loan agreement with the IMF, its GDP showed no increase. Furthermore, Jamaica’s aggregate economic output was below 1972 levels and physical and social infrastructure was failing. Jamaica’s total external debt reached a shocking US$4.4 billion—one of the highest per capita load worldwide.

*Today*

Jamaica’s debt is now approximately 150 percent of its GDP, and since 1999, debt service payments have gobbled up 100 percent of the government’s core budget income (i.e. taxes, grants, import duties, proceeds from selling state assets). Interest payments on debt account for 16 percent of total GDP alone.
Tourism now accounts for half of Jamaica’s non-remittance, foreign exchange income. This heavy dependence on a sector so vulnerable to natural disasters and international traveling trends has many critics concerned. Furthermore, the real winners of the development of this sector are local elites and foreign interests who dominate the profits while the majority of employees are underpaid and lack real skill development.

Bauxite remains Jamaica’s largest exported product, but employs relatively few. Environmental damage and peasant land access problems remain problematic.

Today, Jamaica has the largest per-capita remittance economy in all of Latin America and the Caribbean. Jamaica’s remittance gains grew five times in the 1990s and surpassed tourism as the largest source of internal foreign exchange.
The Poverty Problem: A Historical Debate

The problem of poverty is one of the most hotly debated issues in history. Its subject matter is universally understood, affecting every country worldwide in either relative or absolute terms. Because of its global span and human impact, many academics, scholars and policy makers have struggled for centuries with definitions, causes and effects of poverty. This paper will serve to present an in-depth sample of various positions on the problem of poverty that have served to structure the current debate. Beginning with Thomas Malthus in the 18th century, this paper will explore Classical Marxism and its counterpart Critical Marxism with specific attention paid to the Culture of Poverty theory. It will continue by discussing the Neo-Classical model, the Social Darwinist theory, Amartya Sen’s Entitlement theory and will end with a discussion on the contemporary Neoliberal model for poverty. It is also important to pay some attention to the strengths and weaknesses of certain measurements of poverty in order to determine what they may reveal or conceal in their results.

I. Malthusian Model

The work of Thomas Malthus on poverty is compatible with the view that the victims of poverty are to blame for their condition and that the given societal ‘system’ is almost always acquitted. He is most well known by two particular works dubbed the 1st and 2nd Essays. The 1st refers to *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the Future Improvement of Society* ([1798] 1960) while the 2nd refers to *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or, a View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness* ([1872] 1960). In these essays, Malthus attempts to understand poverty scientifically as well as influence public policy surrounding it (Harvey & Reed, 1992). His earlier works engage with what he alludes to as the “constant
tendency in all life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.” (Malthus, 1992, p.14). While humankind will attempt to reproduce itself beyond its means of survival, the natural law that requires access to food for survival will always keep a check on population expansion. He discusses two types of checks that are responsible for keeping population at a level that can be sustained by nature: preventative checks or the ability of humans to predict disaster if they as individuals reproduce beyond their capacity to provide and positive checks, any cause which contributes to shortening the duration of natural life, for example, “severe labor, exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty…” (p. 23). Here Malthus defines ‘extreme poverty’ as a tool that acts as a natural check on population growth. For Malthus, poverty occurs either out of ignorance (in other words, in the absence of preventative checks) or out of immoral behavior. According to Harvey & Reed (1992), for Malthus “Poverty is caused by men and women having larger families than they can support. Therefore poverty’s cure, in part, rests on providing a moral education for the ignorant poor and their children, one which teaches them the virtues of prudence and foresight.” (p.275). In the same vein, Malthus (1992) urged the public to “on no account do anything which tends directly to encourage marriage; or to remove, in any regular and systematic manner, that inequality of circumstances which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family.” (p.289). For Malthus, it was the public’s responsibility to delay or altogether avoid marriage and restrain from sexual activity with one another so as to limit population growth. Ultimately, this argument translates into the Malthusian view that poverty is the fault of the immoral poor.

II. Classical Marxist Model

For Karl Marx, and unlike Malthus, the origins of modern poverty can be found rooted in the capitalist mode of production. Poverty is not the natural order resulting from overpopulation, but rather it is a “structural prerequisite grounded in the sociological contradictions of an historically specific mode of production.” (Harvey & Reed, 1992, p.277). Modern poverty for Marx is a purely necessary result of the
social relations of production, differing vastly from the Malthusian model on poverty that sees its origins in the natural order (and disorder) of things. Marx argues that capitalism is in a perpetual state of expansion. In order to sustain itself, capitalism must intensify exploitation and increase profits, all the while worsening the conditions of the working class in relation to the bourgeoisie. Eventually, an ‘epidemic of overproduction’ ensues whereby capitalism loses control over its own output, a process which Marx (1973) eloquently compares to “the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.” (p.78). At this point all means of subsistence i.e. industry and commerce, appear to be cut off. Famine and war reappear as a result of excessive developments in civilization, subsistence, industry and commerce. Furthermore, as capitalism progresses and becomes more efficient, fewer workers are required and larger portions of the working class fall to a state of unemployment. In Marx’s words, “Accumulation of capital is therefore a multiplication of the proletariat.” (1977, p.764). An increase in the production of capital necessarily means an increase in the number of ‘laboring poor’, and thus begins Marx’s ‘cycle of poverty’. Not only is poverty the primary result of this cycle but also it is an important prerequisite in order for the cycle to occur.

III. Critical Marxist Model & the Culture of Poverty

Similar to Classical Marxism, the critical Marxist paradigm holds that the root of modern poverty is found in the historical contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. Critical Marxism departs from the classical school in that it concentrates on the way in which the poor tend to reproduce their own poverty. This theory tackles the problem of modern poverty as if it were “an organic union of an economic superfluity that is imposed from above and a set of sub-cultural conventions that reproduce it from below.” (Harvey & Reed, 1992, p.187). Oscar Lewis first introduced this notion of a ‘culture of poverty’ in his book *The Culture of Poverty*, a work that has been both widely embraced and criticized by his academic peers. Lewis argues that poverty can be seen as a subculture that has its own structure and rationale for a certain mode of
living, which gets passed on through families to their future generations. For Lewis, poverty is not only explained through economic deprivation or social disorganization, but also by a ‘positive element’ that unites the poor with a common sense of identity. In the context of critical Marxist theory, the culture of poverty tends to flourish within societies that uphold certain characteristics. Some of these are: a cash economy with wage labor and production for profit, high unemployment and underemployment rates, low wages, and an appreciation in the dominant class for the accumulation of wealth and property. The culture of poverty exists as both an adaptation and a reaction to the poors’ marginalized position in society by the poor themselves. It also exists as a method of coping with feelings of hopelessness that result from the “realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society.” (Lewis, 1968, p.188). The culture of poverty was an important theory for understanding how poverty was perpetuated because it argues that the culture tended to instill itself in the psyche of young children who grew up exposed to it. These children would then become ‘convinced’ that they were not equipped to take full advantage of any increased opportunity that might present itself during their lifetime. The culture is thus passed on continually throughout generations. On the family level, the culture of poverty is manifested through traits such as: a lack of protected childhood, early sexual relations, free unions, a lack of privacy, competitions for limited goods and maternal affection. On the individual level, the culture of poverty is characterized by strong feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependence and inferiority (Lewis, 1968).

Lewis, in his 1963 article, stresses the difference between the impoverished and the culture of poverty. He clarifies that not all people deemed to be impoverished are necessarily descendents of a culture of poverty. For example, a middle class family who becomes poor does not automatically become members of the culture. In Lewis’ view, once a poor person becomes class conscious, joins a unionized organization or develops and internationalist outlook on the world, they can no longer be considered as members of the culture (Lewis, 1963). Oscar Lewis’s theory was widely embraced by anthropologists and sociologists who
attempted to understand the problem of poverty as a social construct. On the other hand, the theory’s tendency to legitimize gross generalizations of an ‘international poor’ was met with much criticism. His culture of poverty thesis cannot be categorized with approaches such as Malthus’ that blame the cause of poverty on the victim. Instead, through the reproductive capacities of the ‘culture’, poverty’s origins are rooted in a “flawed productive mode” (Harvey & Reed, 1992, p.279).

IV. Neo-Classical Economic Model

The Neoclassical conception of poverty is radically different from those discussed above. An explanation for this radical shift is found in an equally radical break from Classical economics and departure to Neo-Classicism. The Neoclassical economic paradigm moves away from defining economic activity in terms of class interaction and moves towards the individual. In Neoclassical theory, economic life is reduced to the buying and selling of commodities on the market. Market power of individuals is determined by the skills they possess that contribute to increased productivity (for example: education, ingenuity, understanding of supply and demand, etc.). Poverty is thus attributed to a lack of education and a lack of one’s ability to compete in market production. According to this school of thought, victims of poverty are blamed for failing to pursue the means that would better equip them to compete in the system (Harvey & Reed, 1992, p.280).

Marrying Malthus with Lewis, modern Neoclassicists offer that the poors’ culture prevents them from becoming economically and socially self-sufficient. According to this view then, the poor must not only be re-skilled, they must also be re-socialized. Consequently, an end to poverty is the responsibility of the poor themselves, not the economic system.

V. Social Darwinist Model

Similar to the Malthusian doctrine, Social Darwinism explains poverty as the result of a wider societal infliction. While Malthus would argue that poverty is caused by careless population growth, Social Darwinists would argue that poverty is the result of losing in the race of ‘survival of the fittest’. The idea
behind this theory stems from Charles Darwin’s theory on biological evolution. This claim holds that through a process of natural selection, species either die off or thrive in their natural surroundings, depending on both the ‘strength’ of their biological traits as well as their ability to adapt to their environment. Herbert Spencer, a philosopher, economist and sociologist, is responsible for extending Darwin’s theory beyond biology and into sociology (Asma, 1993). Spencer wrote about the progressive development of society from an ‘undesirable’ to a ‘desirable’ condition. As pointed out by Asma, the crucial point of importance in the social Darwinist paradigm is that the poorer classes of civilization represent a biologically or inherently inferior group of individuals. The poor is a group that is “doomed to sink because it cannot swim.” (Asma, 1993, p.11). Under this theory, poverty is part of the process of ‘social differential’ and ‘social decay’ that determines the evolution of society.

VI. Amartya Sen & The Entitlement Model

Unlike the Social Darwinist perspective that sees the evolution of poverty as a linear process during which only the fittest survive to live a life free from poverty, Amartya Sen’s analysis proposes that explaining poverty is not such a simple task. Diagnosing poverty and identifying the poor are complicated processes when done effectively. Sen spent much of the eighties developing an unprecedented investigation into the causes and explanations of famines as a means for deconstructing the concept of poverty. From a Malthusian perspective, famines are necessary results of overpopulation, and for many others, the basic cause of famine is not necessarily rooted in poverty but in the failure to provide enough food for the given population. For Sen, it is possible for poverty to exist without the incidence of starvation; however, starvation necessarily implies the existence of poverty (Sen, 1981b). A family in Canada, for example, may be regarded as ‘impoverished’ relative to the average Canadian family, though they may always have enough food to avoid starvation. However, a family in any country that experiences starvation is necessarily and absolutely considered poor. For Sen, famines are important because unlike starvation, they cannot be
understood by periodic or sudden bouts of decline in food supply due to tangible reasons such as drought. The food availability approach commonly associated with Thomas Malthus falls short of explaining why, in the presence of famines, only some members of a population are affected while others are not. Sen argues that famines often occur in areas where food is available and thus are important tools for shifting the focus onto food access as opposed to strictly food availability. It is this shift in focus that makes Sen’s work on ‘entitlements’ so revolutionary.

This ‘entitlement’ approach concentrates on “each person’s entitlement to commodity bundles including food, and views starvation as resulting from a failure to be entitled to any bundle with enough food.” (Sen, 1981a, p.453). A person’s ability to command a commodity or good depends on what she owns, what exchange possibilities are offered to her, what is given to her free as well as what is taken away (Sen, 1981b). Consider Sen’s example to illustrate this approach,

“…A barber owns his labor power and some specialized skill, neither of which he can eat, and he has to sell his hairdressing service to earn an income to buy food. His entitlement to food may collapse even without any change in food availability if for any reason the demand for hairdressing collapses and if he fails to find another job or any social security benefit.”

(Sen, 1981b, p.155)

Starvation or famine occurs then, when individuals or nations’ entitlements aren’t sufficient enough to provide them with enough food to survive. Sen’s analysis is both significant and momentous in that it stresses the causes of unequal income distribution and discusses them in terms of poverty. Also, Sen’s approach goes further than placing the blame on the poor by asking questions regarding why the poor are found in their predicament and examining the plausible explanations. He goes further to discuss the inadequacies of certain poverty measures in measuring income distribution and poverty gaps by giving the example of the Headcount measure (H). The Headcount measure, still widely used today among development economists and policy-makers, measures absolute poverty by quantifying ‘the poor’. It does this by simply counting the number of people whose annual income falls below a given ‘poverty line’ and expressing poverty as the ratio of the
number of identified poor to the total number of the population. While this measure may be useful in tracking changes in the proportion of the population living in poverty, it does conceal certain aspects of poverty that are important to consider. Sen draws attention to two weaknesses in this measure. First, (H) doesn’t account for the distance from which the poor fall from the line (otherwise known as the ‘poverty gap’ or the distance between the rich and the poor) and second it does not consider the distribution of income among the poor. Under this measurement, Sen argues, “The starving wreck counts no more than the barely poor.” (Sen, 1981b, p. 157) and thus H fails to measure the extent to which the poor are poor. Another set of measures of absolute poverty that do address the question of income distribution is the Lorenz Curve and the Gini coefficient. The Lorenz curve maps out income distribution on a graph where the horizontal axis represents the cumulative percentage of the incomes of the poor and the vertical axis represents the cumulative percentage of the population (Blackwood & Lynch, 1994). The Gini coefficient is then used to measure the ratio of the area between the Lorenz curve and the diagonal line and the total area between the diagonal line and the horizontal axis. While this measure attempts to reveal the problem of income distribution it tends to conceal aspects such as the incidence of disproportionate income levels that may affect the averages used. Numerous methods and equations for measuring both relative and absolute poverty have been created, some more inclusive and holistic than others but due to space limitations, the discussion of these various methods must be restricted. It is important, however, to note that a significant trend has developed away from strictly using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measurement for wealth and towards using a wider variety of factors such as educational attainment, population health as well as GDP (this is the case for the Human Development Index (HDI)). On the whole, Amartya Sen has made a significant contribution to the way in which we critically evaluate poverty and its measurements. Most importantly, Sen’s contribution has set a larger trend encouraging a more inclusive and incorporative understanding of the causes and characteristics of poverty.

VII. The Neoliberal Model
The rise of Neoliberal economics can be traced back to the historical Bretton Woods conference, headed by figures such as John M. Keynes and Harry Dexter White. Neoliberalism emphasizes the importance of economic growth through minimal government interference and free market enterprise. Economists of this school would argue that the liberalization of markets encourages efficient economic organization, which inevitably leads to the alleviation of poverty and an improvement in the standard of living. The best way to achieve economic growth is to forfeit protectionist policies and adopt an orientation toward the capitalist economy (Nuruzzaman, 2005). The major global institutional arms of Neoliberalism are the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For the World Bank, poverty is defined in terms of income and consumption levels. According to Nuruzzaman (2005), the World Bank focuses on, “the inability of people to generate sufficient incomes to purchase the basic necessities for daily life.”(p. 3). The Bank has devised a two-part strategy for reducing poverty. The first part engages in building a climate for investment, jobs and sustainable growth. The second deals with “investing in poor people” and “empowering them to participate in development” (World Bank, 2005).

In September of 1999, the IMF created a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) with the purpose of “making the objectives of poverty reduction and growth more central to lending operations in its poorest countries” (IMF, 2005). Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) are implemented by these institutions in heavily indebted poor countries to serve as tools to attract investors as well as set favorable economic (Neoliberal) conditions in order to receive more credit in the future.

While the concept of poverty under these economically oriented institutions deals mainly with a country’s individual responsibility to eradicate their own poverty, institutions such as the United Nations take a more comprehensive approach that involves both social and economic factors when defining poverty. Recently, we have seen the emergence of a global strategy to reduce poverty facilitated through campaigns, conferences and Programmes such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Summit for
Social Development, and the most recent Make Poverty History Campaign. In September of 2000 leaders and policy makers around the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (among other socially-oriented goals) by the year 2015.

VIII. Conclusion

In order to truly understand a given subject matter, argument, or event, it is always most important to explore its history. Only by unraveling the ideologies, social contexts and key figureheads that influence a particular matter at a particular time can we fully understand all of its dimensions. The problematization and conceptualization of poverty has been a consistently pressing issue from the time of Thomas Malthus to today’s time of heightened global interaction. Many academics, scholars and policy-makers have attempted to uncover the poverty problem from various perspectives. As a result, over time the concept of poverty has evolved significantly. Thomas Malthus boldly defined poverty as the result of human’s inability to control population growth. Overpopulation coupled with limited food supply would inevitably result in famine and poverty. The Classical Marxist paradigm shifted Malthus’ concept to embrace the economic realm by defining poverty as inherently rooted in the capitalist mode of production. From classical Marxism stemmed critical Marxism, which emphasized the existence of a culture of poverty. This paradigm suggests that characteristics associated with poverty tend to get passed on and internalized from generation to generation. With the rise of neo-classical economics came an emphasis on individual capabilities. Poverty became symptomatic of an individual’s incapacity to compete in the market. Herbert Spencer entered the discourse and boldly characterized poverty as a state in which the ‘weaker’ members of society fall to during a process of ‘Social Darwinism’. Amartya Sen significantly altered the notion of poverty by taking a human development approach that focused on entitlement issues. He became one of the first academics to ask questions surrounding income distribution and access to resources. While some more contemporary conceptualizations of poverty still tend to define poverty in economic terms (i.e. Neoliberal institutions such
as the WTO and the IMF), many are beginning to realize that human development issues such as health, education, gender equity, and access to opportunity are all extremely important contributors to quality of life and are crucial to understanding the broader context of poverty.
References


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