Culture Of Poverty Essay, Research Paper

?Culture of Poverty?

The ?culture of poverty? was introduced or was popularized by Oscar Lewis while studying poor families in Mexico and Puerto Rican families San Juan and New York. The theory maintains that culturally based attitudes or predisposition such as ?present-mindedness? and ?obsessive-consumption? are the major barriers to economic mobility for many of the poor. Lewis? theory likewise implies that this is not a short-lived financial predicament for the poor, but a way of life bolstered by the hopelessness of accomplishing even minor economic goals.

Lewis argues that there are certain cultural characteristics among the poor in industrial capitalist societies. Lewis and others agree that poor people in such societies display certain characteristics and values that are not held by non-poor in those same societies. ?These characteristics are: the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected state in the life-cycle, early initiation into sex, free unions or consensual marriages, a relatively high incidents of abandonment of wives and children, a tend toward female or mother centered families, a strong predisposition toward authoritarianism, lack of privacy, verbal emphasis upon family solidarity which is only rarely achieved because of sibling rivalry, and competition for limited goods and material affection.?(Lewis 1965)

Lewis also believed the culture of poverty socialized the poor into political apathy, immediate gratification, broken families and passive responses of their economic plight, and he argued that the poor could not lose this debilitating culture even if they ceased to be poor.

Accordingly, the culture of poverty theory was investigated by social scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and found to be false. Poor people have the same culture, values, and social consciences as any other classification of people. It is thought that by virtue of distinct controlling factors and lack of opportunities the poor will have different behavior. The culture of poverty theory was essentially dead as far as social science was concerned. Thus, the vicious cycle theory was found to be true.

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