

Delve Deeper into "Waging a Living"

A film by Roger Weisberg

This multi-media resource list, compiled by Penny Talbert of the Ephrata Public Library in partnership with the American Library Association, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the upcoming P.O.V. documentary "Waging a Living" that premieres on August 29th, 2006 at 10 p.m. on PBS (check local listings at www.pbs.org/pov/).

The term "working poor" should be an oxymoron. If you work full time, you should not be poor, but more than 30 million Americans — one in four workers — are stuck in jobs that do not pay the basics for a decent life. "Waging a Living" chronicles the day-to-day battles of four low-wage earners fighting to lift their families out of poverty. Shot over a three-year period in the northeast and California, this observational documentary captures the dreams, frustrations, and accomplishments of a diverse group of people who struggle to live from paycheck to paycheck. By presenting an unvarnished look at the barriers that these workers must overcome to lift their families out of poverty, "Waging a Living" offers a sobering view of the elusive American Dream.

ADULT NONFICTION

Andersson, Fredrik et al. *Moving Up or Moving On: Who Advances in the Low-Wage Labor Market*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2005. Looks at low-wage earners over a nine-year period to discover what factors contribute to positive outcomes — from the perspective of worker and employer.

Appelbaum, Eileen et al. *Low-Wage America: How Employers Are Reshaping Opportunity in the Workplace*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2003. This study looks at the decisions made by employers in response to how economic pressures affect the lives of low income workers.

Bane, Mary Jo. *Putting Children First: How Low-Wage Working Mothers Manage Child Care*.

New York: Russel Sage Foundation Publications, 2004.

The childcare dilemma of many low-income mothers is examined in this book, which follows over 40 families trying to balance work and childcare.

DeParle, Jason. *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare*. New York: Penguin, 2004. Following the lives of three women, *New York Times* reporter DeParle tackles the issues of welfare reform through the realities faced by the working poor.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. This study, done with 162 single moms living in low-income situations, looks at why many women in this situation have children before marriage despite knowing the hardships that they will have to endure.

Edin, Kathryn and Laura Lein. *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 1997. The myth is that if people get jobs, they will get out of poverty. The reality, exposed by this study commissioned by the Russell Sage Foundation, is that the working poor are not better off, and sometimes worse off, than their counterparts on welfare.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2001. Ehrenreich put her money (or lack thereof) where her mouth was and put herself in the shoes of those she was studying — women working unskilled jobs. The result is an insightful look at welfare reform and those who must live by its rules.

Featherstone, Liza. *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle For Workers' Rights At Wal-Mart*. New York: Basic Books, 2005. An investigation of *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, along with interviews with female workers, leads Featherstone to criticize Wal-Mart for unfair labor

practices, often leaving full-time workers relying on public assistance.

Fernandopulle, Rushika and Susan Sered. *Uninsured in America: Life and Death in the Land of Opportunity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 120 uninsured Americans tell their tales of heartbreak and what the authors term the "death spiral" that often occurs due to lack of health insurance. While disturbing, this book sheds light on the alarming healthcare crisis in America and the people who have to suffer because they don't have insurance coverage.

Galbraith, James. *Created Unequal: The Crisis in American Pay*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Galbraith argues for a higher minimum wage and examines, through U.S. Department of Commerce data, the factors responsible for the current situation.

Hays, Sharon. *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Hays tells the story of welfare reform, where women are pushed into low-paying jobs, and discusses the hypocrisy of teaching traditional family values while, at the same time, requiring women to leave their children to work.

Johnson, Jennifer. *Getting By on the Minimum: The Lives of Working Class Women*. New York: Routledge, 2002. A look at the hurdles of working life for 60 white, married mothers from Baltimore ages 35-52. Utilizing the words of its interviewees, this book provides a real, honest look at working class women.

Keller, Bill. *Class Matters*. New York: Times Books, 2005. An intriguing study on contemporary American culture which utilizes storytelling as a way to compare and contrast examples.

Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Based on a study by Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods* examines

Delve Deeper into "Waging a Living"

A film by Roger Weisberg

childhood across socio-economic levels and reveals some interesting conclusions, including the fact that class, more so than race, determines how a child will be raised.

Luce, Stephanie. *Fighting for a Living Wage*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2004. Luce presents an analysis of various living wage movements throughout the country, expanding on their strengths and examining their failures.

Luce, Stephanie and Robert Pollin. *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy*. New York: New Press, 2000. The authors explore the legislature for the living wage initiative and present research to support their assertions to support this alternative.

Miller-Adams, Michelle. *Owning Up: Poverty, Assets and the American Dream*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002. Miller-Adams' approach is about assets. While many Americans are "getting by," the working poor do not have the resources to move up. In this book, readers are presented with four types of assets – economic, human, social and natural – and ideas on how these assets can be used to assist the working poor to develop security and stability.

Mishel, Lawrence et al. *The State of Working America, 2004/2005*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2005. Prepared by the Economic Policy Institute, *The State of Working America* is a compilation of statistics and data about economic issues involving Americans.

Newman, Katherine. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Vintage, 2000. An in-depth look at America's working poor through the eyes of Harvard anthropologist Katherine Newman. Newman and her graduate students did this exhaustive study to get to the truth about the working poor.

Quadagno, Jill. *One Nation Uninsured: Why The U.S. Has No National Health Insurance*. New York: Oxford University Press,

2005. Health insurance, according to Quadagno, is "a social right, not a consumer product." The author tries to explain why the political landscape in America, and the behind-the-scenes bargaining, has not allowed a national health insurance program.

Rank, Mark Robert. *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. There is a belief in America that the poor are responsible for their own condition. Rank argues that the system itself is what is failing, not the people within it, and that we must all take responsibility for our democracy.

Shieler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. New York: Vintage, 2005. Shieler is able to provide perspective about how many Americans are just one minor glitch (a car breakdown, for instance) away from poverty. In this thoughtful book, the causes of poverty are examined, as well as the struggles of those living within it.

Shulman, Beth. *The Betrayal of Work: How Low-Wage Jobs Fail 30 Million Americans and Their Families*. New York: New Press, 2003. Shulman dispels some of the myths surrounding the working poor, presenting a look at the failing public policy in America.

Tait, Vanessa. *Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005. Tait examines America's labor movement – and how it can affect low-wage earners.

Trattner, Walter I. *From Poor Law to Welfare State, 6th Edition: A History of Social Welfare in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1994. Trattner presents an insightful glimpse into the ongoing developments which affect how the poor are treated within the American social system.

Wilson, William Julius. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Vintage, 1996. Wilson argues that high levels of unemployment and the disappearance of unskilled jobs have contributed to urban poverty

and the flight of skilled workers to the suburbs.

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Bunting, Eve. *A Day's Work*. Boston, MA: Clarion Books, 1998. The story of Francisco, who works as the translator between his grandfather, looking for work but unable to speak English, and Ben, who wants to hire a gardener.

Bunting, Eve. *Fly Away Home*. Boston, MA: Clarion Books, 1993. The story of a homeless father and son living in an airport.

Disalvo-Ryan, Dyanne. *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1997. The story of a young boy who goes with his Uncle Willie after school to a local soup kitchen to be a helper.

Gunning, Monica. *A Shelter in Our Car*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press, 2004. Zettie and her mother have moved to America for a better life, only to find themselves living in a car. This is Zettie's story of homelessness and the people who touch her life.

Hertenson, Jane. *Home Is Where We Live: Life at a Shelter Through a Young Girl's Eyes*. Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1995. Told from the perspective of a young, new resident, *Home Is Where We Live* is a touching story of a young girl in a Chicago shelter.

McBrier, Page. *Beatrice's Goat*. New York: Atheneum, 2001. Beatrice's family receives a goat and life changes. Before the goat, Beatrice could never have gone to school because of lack of money but now, with the goat providing milk for her family and to sell, Beatrice's dreams are realized.

Mills, Lauren. *The Rag Coat*. London: Little Brown, 1991. Minna cannot attend school because she does not have a coat. Soon, though, a group of mothers make her a quilted coat. At her new one-room schoolhouse, the children make fun of her coat – until she tells them about all the stories her coat contains – one for each scrap of fabric.

Delve Deeper into "Waging a Living"

A film by Roger Weisberg

Munoz Ryan, Pam. *Esperanza Rising*. Wallingford, CT: Blue Sky Press, 2002. When Esperanza's father is murdered, her mother moves the family to California – a new country and a new social class.

Savage Carlson, Natalie. *The Family Under the Bridge*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1989. Armand is a tramp in Paris, and not too fond of children. However, he meets some children who live under the bridge and soon they are like family.

Staley, Jay and Ruby K. Payne. *Think Rather of Zebra; Dealing with Aspects of Poverty Through Story*. Highlands, TX: AHA! Process, 1998. A wonderful collection of short stories adapted from classic tales, but taking place in urban settings.

VIDEOS/DOCUMENTARIES

"Bread and Roses." A film by Ken Loach. Lions Gate, 2001. (110 min.) The story of L.A. janitors, who earn as little as \$6 an hour without benefits and their attempt to unionize.
www.amazon.com/

"Fast Food Fast Women." A film by Amos Kollek. Lot 47 Films, 2001. (95 min.) Documentary examines the working conditions of women working in four fast-food restaurants in eastern Kentucky.
www.amazon.com/

"Norma Rae." A film by Martin Ritt. 20th Century Fox, 1979. (110 min.) A naive textile worker, widow, and mother in the South becomes empowered by standing up for her rights in the workplace.
www.amazon.com/

"Roger & Me" A film by Michael Moore. Warner Brothers, 1989. (91 min.) A devastating look at the victims of downsizing in the midst of the 1980s economic boom.
<http://whv.warnerbros.com/WHVPO RTAL/Portal/homepage.jsp>

"Ruby in Paradise." A film by Victor Nunez. October Films, 1993. (114 min.) A young woman moves to a Florida beach town and

tries as best she can to earn a living, in the process learning about the strength within herself.
www.amazon.com/

"Salt of the Earth." A film by Herbert Biberman. Independent Productions, 1954. (94 min.) Portrays the measures taken by a largely Hispanic union to improve working and especially living conditions for the poverty-stricken workers.
www.amazon.com/

"Store Wars: When Wal-Mart Comes to Town." A film by Micha Peled. Bullfrog Films, 2001. (59 min.) PBS documentary examines the populist spirit that engulfs a small Virginia town when retail giant Wal-Mart comes knocking.
www.bullfrogfilms.com/

"Voices of Cabrini." A film by Ronit Bezael. Facets Multimedia, 1999. (30 min.) Documentary follows the residents of Chicago's best-known public housing development as their homes are marked for destruction, leading to concern about the city's promise to replace Cabrini with equally affordable housing.
www.facets.org/asticat

"Women: The New Poor." A film by Bea Milwe. Women Make Movies, 1990. (28 min.) Divorced women and single mothers who lack skills and opportunities for economic self-sufficiency represent the alarming feminization of poverty in the U.S.
www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c193.shtml

WEB SITES

"Working Hard, Falling Short" A National Report
www.aecf.org/initiatives/fes/workingpoor/workingpoor/working_hard_new.pdf
A report by the Working Poor Families Project. (Oct. 2004.)

Profile of the Working Poor in 2003
www.bls.gov/cps/cpswp2003.pdf
From the U.S. Department of Labor.

Children in Working Poor Families
www.childtrendsdatbank.org/pdf/74_PDF.pdf
From ChildTrends Databank.

"Executive Excess 2001: Layoffs, Tax Rebates and the Gender Gap"
www.ips-dc.org/projects/execexcess2001.htm
A report from the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy. An annual look at how CEOs' compensation compares to that of their workers.

"1 in 4 families is low-income, study finds"
www.aecf.org/initiatives/fes/workingpoor/workingpoor/media/illinois_article2.pdf
A report by Barbara Rose from the Chicago Tribune.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/NEW/WS/5yr-11prog01/index.htm>
An extensive study detailing the long-term effects of mandatory welfare-to-work programs on recipients and their children.

Minimum Wage Laws in the States - August 1, 2005
www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm
An interactive U.S. map which gives information on the current minimum wage for each state.

FAQ's about the Minimum Wage
www.epinet.org/content.cfm/is_sueguides_minwage_minwagefaq
From the Economic Policy Institute.

Poverty Guidelines - 2003
www.aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/03poverty.htm
A report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about the poverty guidelines and thresholds during the year 2003.

Jobs with Justice
www.jwj.org/index.htm
Founded in 1987, Jobs with Justice's mission is to improve working people's standard of living, fight for job security, and protect workers' right to organize.

Delve Deeper into "Waging a Living"

A film by Roger Weisberg

The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU)

www.kwru.org/kwru/abtkwru.html

KWRU is a multiracial organization of, by and for poor and homeless people.

National Workingrights Institute

www.workrights.org/

A non-profit organization dedicated to securing the rights of workers in the workplace.

Service Employees International Union

www.seiu.org/

The SEIU is an organization dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society.

Women Work!

www.womenwork.org/

The National Network for Women's Employment strengthens families and communities by supporting, advocating and advancing women's economic self-sufficiency.

The Center for Community Change

www.communitychange.org

Helps low-income people build powerful, effective organizations through which they can change their communities and public policies for the better.

The Center for Law and Social Policy

www.clasp.org

Conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children.

The Center for Policy Alternatives

www.stateaction.org

A progressive public policy and leadership development center serving state legislators, state policy organizations, and state grassroots leaders.

The Economic Policy Institute

www.epinet.org

A nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that seeks to broaden the public debate about strategies to achieve a prosperous and fair economy. Includes economic snapshots, unemployment insurance calculator

and a link to Datazone (national data from The State of Working America: 2002-2003).

The Institute for Research on Poverty

www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/

IRP is a national, nonprofit and nonpartisan university-based center for research into the causes and consequences of poverty and social inequality in the United States.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition

www.nlihc.org/

The National Low Income Housing Coalition is "dedicated solely to ending America's affordable housing crisis."