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


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


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 puts her money (or lack thereof) where her mouth was and puts 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.


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.


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.


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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 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.


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.

Shipper, David K. The Working Poor: Invisible in America. New York: Vintage, 2005. Shipper 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.


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


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


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.
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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: Harper Trophy, 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.


VIDEOS/DOCUMENTARIES


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


“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/


“Voices of Cabrini.” A film by Ronit Bezalel. Facets Multimedia, 1999. (30 min.) Documentory 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


WEB SITES


1 in 4 families is low-income, study finds” www.aecf.org/initiatives/fes/workingpoor/workingpoor/media/ilinois_article2.pdf A report by Barbara Rose from the Chicago Tribune.

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_minwagef aq From the Economic Policy Institute.


Jobs with Justice www.iwj.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.

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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.”