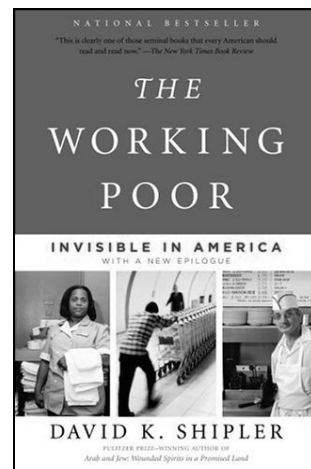


Carleton College Common Reading Fall 2005

On Thursday, September 8, 2005 you will participate in the seventeenth annual Common Reading Convocation and discussion at Carleton. Faculty, staff, students and alumni members of the community will come together to engage in meaningful dialogue about this year's selection: *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, by David Shipler.

We are especially pleased that the author will be our speaker at the convocation. To help you prepare for this experience, we offer the following questions for your consideration. In addition, we invite you to think about what questions you may wish to ask of David Shipler following the convocation.



* What degree of responsibility toward people in poverty is held by the government, by private industry, charities, or individuals? What is Shipler's perspective on this?

* Poverty both causes problems and results from them. Do you believe there is any way to break the cycle of poverty described in the book? Where would you begin? Do you think the suggestions Shipler makes in Chapter 11 are plausible? Why or why not?

* Shipler talks about the American belief that if you work hard enough, you can get ahead. He also references "the American Anti-Myth, which holds the society largely responsible for the individual's poverty." (pp. 6) When people fail to succeed in life do you believe it the fault of the individual or society or both or neither?

Do particular families, choices or experiences in *The Working Poor* resonate with your own? Did some stories affect you more than others? Why?

What is your response to Shipler's assertion that the kind of low-wage work performed by the working poor makes life comfortable, easy, and more affordable for middle class and upper middle class Americans?

Some relatives, social workers and teachers mentioned in the book were critical of poor people who spent money on "extras." What is your response? Are the relatives, social workers, and teachers too critical of their acquaintances who may indulge occasionally, or have they simply been hardened by the realities of their own experiences/observations?

As a society, we often attach certain stereotypes to people according to their socioeconomic class. What images of the working poor do (did) you hold? In what ways did Shipler work to reverse common stereotypes? How, if at all, were stereotypes reinforced?

What questions would you like to ask of Shipler?

*Adapted from: *Random House Academic Resources* (www.randomhouse.com)