

Economic injustice

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Economic Justice Between Classes

We live in a country today misrepresented by its own peoples' perception.

The

consensus that we live in the greatest nation in the world is not so much a feeling of nationalism as it is a forgone conclusion in the minds of millions of Americans. What a great many of these millions do not realize is that they are the victims of a government set up by our founding fathers to uphold a class system based on a very unproportional distribution of wealth. As the old saying goes, you need money to make money, and this is never more true than it is in the United States, the land where the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor. Howard Zinn asks, "What is economic justice?" There is no clear answer, except to say economic justice simply does not exist.

Founding Fathers Promise Equality

One might ask when all this came about. The nation started under the greatest of pretexts. A nation of democracy, equality, and freedom. But freedom from what?

Taxation without representation? Or maybe just taxation. The argument has been made that our country was started by land and slave owning men who did not want to pay their taxes. But the truth is the nation was started by a group of very wealthy men, who did not intend for "all men are created equal" to apply to the distribution of wealth.

True, times were very different then. But many ideas and laws from the late 18th century that have no place in the 21st century still apply in situations today. Look no

further than the recent election. An old system of choosing the nations leader by electors, created in fairness to southern slave-owners who counted

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each of their " possessions" as two-fifths of a person, is preventing the nation from electing the majority's choice as president. The debacle that is now being called " Indecision 2000" should be a wake up call to Americans living under laws past in another age for a much different nation.

No one denies that poverty is a problem in the United States, and even more so globally. Lack of sufficient food, decent education, proper housing, and sufficient medical coverage are all very apparent. The constitution guarantees life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, while these basic necessities of life are being denied to millions of families in the United States.

The Laissez - Faire Approach

Some are actually arguing government aid will increase the problem. People too reliant on government aid will become dependent and unable to function on their own. This is a valid point, but not the answer. There are plenty of dishonest people out there. No one can deny that. Many people are looking for a free ride, and many are all ready taking advantage of welfare and social security. But is this enough of a problem to deny the millions of hard working Americans with families the chance to improve their lives? It is sometimes hard to remember that there are good, honest people left in the world these days, but is punishing the bad so important that the good be left resourceless, unable to improve their live even through honest hard work? If people spent half the time they spend rooting for cops busting j-walkers on TV and volunteered instead, our problem could be almost solved. Someone has to take the initiative, instill a more sympathetic view in America today, and do it fast.

The New Class Structure

The Class structure of the United States has become increasingly lopsided in recent years. Ideally, the middle class makes up the majority of the population. Filled with nuclear families, registered voters, and average citizens with moderate salaries and traditional American lifestyles, the middle class is supposed to control the bulk of the power in a government by the people, of the people, and for the people. However, that is simply not the case in America today.

The new class structure today is much different, crooked, lopsided, and horribly disproportionate. It is " a class of extremely rich people; another class of quite prominent people; another class of men women and children living in desperation and misery within sight of colossal wealth" (Zinn 148).

Bill Gates has Company at the Top

First we have at the top, not the rich, but the super-rich. Dominated by the illustrious CEOs of the major corporations, these people, although small in number, control the bulk

of the wealth and power in the United States today. People marvel at the astronomic wealth of the Bill Gates and Ted Turners, and magazines are printed ranking people of

wealth as if they were hit songs on Casey Casem's Top 40. Tycoons have been around since the days of Rockefeller and Ford, yes, but never in the abundance that they are in today. There are 298 billionaires in the Unites States alone, and the number is increasing with every passing month (Forbes). The number of millionaires in the United States is increasing exponentially. With today's skyrocketing stock market and increasing

entrepreneurial opportunities via the Internet, it has never been easier for the average middle class American to become rich.

The New Middle Class: Three Cars and Two Houses?

It used to be a house, two cars, and 1.8 children. But the traditional American dream has put on some weight in the past few years. The trend isn't too hard to see. Look around most high school campuses at 3 PM and you'll see the teachers leaving in their mid 80's Hondas and Toyotas, while the children speed off in Lexus's, BMWs, and Mercedes. Spoiled kids? Sure. But this is an undeniable trend that is part of something bigger.

A lot of average people are making a lot more money these days. The supposedly middle class parents, have enough money after making the payments on their second house and maybe a couple European vacations to buy their kids a \$40,000 car to take to their \$50,000 school. In the 1950's, a well off family would have a television in their living rooms. In today's society it takes a little more to keep up with the neighborhood standards.

So who cares if there are spoiled kids and rich parents in today's society? Does it matter? The answer is yes. The money has to come from somewhere.

The Poor: The New Majority

By 1998, almost 35 million Americans were living under poverty level (U. S. Bureau of the Census). That is a lot. Statistics get worn out with the public real fast, and sometimes it takes a minute or two of actual thought to realize the enormity of the numbers. Perhaps a bigger problem are the

millions of families just above poverty level, struggling to keep their homes, their jobs, and any small possessions they may have earned. As long as the current trend continues, it is likely just a matter of time before they will join the other 35 million just below them.

About 95% of the benefits of economic growth over the last 25 years have gone to the richest 5% of the population (Henwood 2). That leaves 5% for the bulk of the population. By the time those benefits are rationed out, over 100% has gone to the upper half of the population. So who is left to pay the difference? Perhaps the biggest problem with poverty is that is a black hole of sorts. The less you have, the more you are sucked in. This is a daily threat for millions of hard working families. To add to the problem, many of these families live in towns adjacent to the executive fathers and soccer moms of the children driving cars that could alone get the poor families out of their hole considerably. This can only add to the feeling of desperation that consumes far too many of these families.

So what has the government done to help the poor? Not enough, obviously. But when closer examined, some of the efforts the government has made do not seem to add up.

Take minimum wage, a primarily lower class issue. In 1938, Congress passed the Wages and Hours Act setting minimum wage at \$. 25 per hour for workers engaged in interstate commerce. It has since unsteadily increased the minimum wage to reflect inflation. In 1950, the minimum was increased to \$. 75 an hour, and has since been increased 16 times. During the 1980's, a period of great economic prosperity, the government waited 9 years to <https://assignbuster.com/economic-injustice/>

increase minimum wage from \$3.35 an hour.

Despite all this., the minimum wage has been ever increasing. However, when cross - referenced with the rate of inflation, the minimum wage rate has actually gone steadily downward since the early 1970's. Is this a product of the government unable to keep up with the economic growth of the 20th century? More likely a government with other things on its mind than its own starving population.

A Global Problem

This lopsided distribution of wealth becomes distorted beyond recognition when put on the global scale.

Fig. 1. Distribution of Global Income By Class, 1963.

Figure 1 shows in 1963, the poorest 20% of the world's population accounted for 2.3% of the global income, while the richest 20% accounted for 70% (UNDP 1). This is an alarmingly inproportionate rate, but it is not getting any better.

Fig. 2. Distribution of Global Income By Class, 1998.

Figure 2 shows that by 1998, the poorest 20% of the world's population accounted for 1.2% of the global income, while the richest 20% accounted for a whopping 89% (Baker 6). The Lower Class is barely a blip on the radar, while the upper class is clearly in control.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It seems the wealth could not be more unevenly distributed, and no traces of economic justice even exist. People living in poverty need some kind of

hope, some sign that their government has not forgotten them. The truth is, there are plenty of people who do care, and there are many efforts to help. The discrepancies are simply too big to go unnoticed, and a change is inevitable. As for right now, the trend continues. The rich get super-richer, the poor get poorer

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