

North America – Not Just a Land of Milk and Honey

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When someone speaks the words 'North America', chances are that most of the world thinks of 'prosperity,' or 'the land of plenty,' but in some cases perhaps less flattering terms, including 'exploitation,' 'waste,' or 'resource draining' come to mind. Although these things are all true to varying degrees, the word 'poverty' can also be applied not only to third world countries, but also to large sections of North America. According to the Census Bureau, as of 2005 1 in 8 Americans, or 37 million, are living below the poverty line.

Like their third world counterparts, Americans who live in the ghettos and slums of large cities like Cleveland, OH and Detroit, MI – as well as those who eek out a living in the rustic, sometimes vaguely primeval rural locales like the San Joaquin Valley, CA or much of Appalachia, are often overcome with feelings of hopelessness brought about by negative social and political labels, as well as by a lack of funding for programs and/or jobs to assist them in the never ending struggle to rise above simply trying to sustain mere survival.

One of the leading causes for poverty in North America is a lack of education. Although we are closer, perhaps, to making education available to everyone than we've ever been, there is a deficiency in the quality of instruction and in support among peers that is necessary for education to flourish. What does this really mean? It means that our teachers and curriculums are failing – miserably in many cases – among those kids who are not lucky enough to have a stable home life or positive peer groups to bolster their success. The sad reality is that many kids do not have a quiet, supportive home life. As a result, schoolwork suffers and teachers are not equipped to pick up the pieces. Instead, poor children often slide through the ranks, only to be thrust out upon graduating into a society that never really expected them to succeed in the first place. Rather than be made into productive members of society, these unfortunate souls often continue doing what they were brought up seeing others do. Sadly, it's the only way they've been shown. Without fun and exciting curriculums, combined with challenging school programs that kids can look forward to rather than dread, it seems this vicious cycle may never change.

What wealthy business owners and political officials may not realize is the negative effect these uneducated, unproductive and very poor members of society will eventually have on the entire economy, and perhaps even on democracy as we know it. Without the new ideas and helping hands that skilled labor brings to the workforce, employers are forced to draw from an increasingly stagnant pool of prospective employees. The divide between the rich and the poor is growing steadily and with it we are losing the ability to find common ground. More and more, those living in poverty are regaled at expensive dinner parties and in conversations among wealthy individuals on the golf course as being a 'drain' on their version of society. The poor are dehumanized almost to the point of being laughable, yet the wealthy rarely stop to consider the amount of wasted talent and inevitable problems that will arise from a society with a great divide separating the rich from the poor.

In order to keep North America from slipping further down this precarious and slippery slope, it is imperative that greater emphasis be placed upon a fair and equitable system that allows the talents of each person to be nurtured and guarded as the precious gifts they are – gifts that should be counted invaluable to sustain and develop progressive social and economic growth.