The American Dream: Myth or Reality?

An Overview of Poverty in America

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The American Dream?

“Success is the American Dream we can keep dreaming because most people in most places, including thirty million of ourselves, live wide awake in the terrible reality of poverty.”

Ursula K. LeGuin

The American Dream represents the/our ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity traditionally held to be available to every American.

Economic inequality which exists prevents this dream from becoming a reality because of the differences between the have and the have-nots.
Poverty in America

The idea of poverty is complicated, for it could include:

• state or condition of having little to no money, goods, or resources

• being “poor” when it comes to value or possessions.

• Suffering from economic inequality and/or the characteristics of the culture of poverty

Approximately 15%, or 1 out of every 6 people in the United States are living in poverty (2012).
Causes of Poverty

- Lack of financial literacy
- Lack of a living wage
- Lack of equal education
- Culture of poverty
- Unemployment/loss of job
- Recession/Economic problems
- Institutional racism and classism
- Catastrophe or crisis
- Other?
Consequences of Poverty

• Health problems (short and long term)
• Continued culture of poverty
• Homelessness
• Stereotyping and classism
• Lack of power or voice
• Psychological problems
• Continued invisibility…
The Invisible Poor

• According to Michael Harrington, in *The Other America*, the poor are invisible for a number of reasons including:
  
  • Poverty is off the beaten track
  • Beauty of areas masks poverty
  • Misconceptions that exist
  • Clothes and appearance
  • Not a priority to those around them
The Invisible Poor

• Politically absent and/or inactive
• The poor are the “wrong age to be seen”
• Little media attention
• General lack of knowledge
• Because they are working, other people believe that poverty cannot possibly be an issue – a concept known as the working poor.
The Working Poor

Defined as those that are trying to make ends meet but still face hardship and live on the edge of poverty. Possible characteristics of the working poor are as follows:

1. Living **paycheck to paycheck**
2. Work in the **service-based economy** (blue collar jobs)
3. Maintain a “**culture of poverty**”
4. Suffer from **food insecurity**
5. Fail to make a **living wage** as a result of the **minimum wage** (7.25)
Questions for Review

• How would you define poverty? Has it changed over time?
• What are the causes and consequences of poverty?
• What obstacles do the working poor in this country face?