**Poverty - Stories & Illustrations**

**In 2011, 1.65 million American households -- including 3.55 million children -- were living on less than $2 per person per day, placing them below the World Bank's average poverty line for developing countries. (WashingtonPost.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, May 24, 2013)**

**Almost 40 percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 60 will spend at least one year earning less than 150 percent of the poverty line. But most Americans will eventually recover: Just 11.6 percent will spend five years or more impoverished, and only 6.1 percent of Americans spend five or more consecutive years in poverty. (TheAtlantic.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 29, 2013)**

**My husband and I were checking into the penthouse of a ritzy hotel when he exclaimed, "Gee, I wonder what the poor folks are doing today." The hard-working bellboy quickly responded, "Carrying your bags, sir." (Susan F. Norris, in Reader's Digest)**

**Chewing gum was another thing that sold well during the Great Depression. A 1930s report claimed the average American family bought two packs of gum a week. Maybe that is how you can make your fortune. Find something to sell that is so cheap it is the only thing poor people can afford. (L. M. Boyd)**

**The share of children living in poverty in the U.S. rose to 23 percent in 2011, mostly because of their parents' long-term unemployment, according to a new study. In 2005, only 19 percent of children lived in poverty. (Associated Press, as it appeared in The Week magazine, July 5-12, 2013)**

**Because poor people could not afford real silk, they tried to make other cloth look silky. Women would beat on cotton with sticks to soften the fibers. Then they rubbed it against a big stone to make it shiny. The shiny cotton was called “chintz.” Because chintz was a cheaper copy of silk, calling something “chintzy” means it is cheap and not of good quality. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 142)**

**How culture feeds into the poverty trap: Why are some countries wealthy while others seem doomed to eternal poverty? asked Robert Samuelson in The Washington Post. For a long time, most economists argued that any society could "nurture economic growth by adopting sound policies." But now economist Gregory Clark has mounted a strong argument that culture is the determining factor. In his new book, A Farewell to Alms, "Clark suggests that much of the world's remaining poverty is semi-permanent." Some societies, he says, simply lack the "bedrock values" that lead to growth and rising living standards. He notes that in the early 1800s, China, Japan, and England all enjoyed political stability, low taxes, and open markets. Yet England -- not China and Japan -- was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. What made England different? Clark says it was that country's "middle-class values of patience, hard work, ingenuity, innovativeness, and education." Other societies, he says, are "dominated by tribal, religious, ideological, or political values" that can impede economic development. Historians might take issue with some of Clark's assertions, but there's no disputing his broader point: "Culture counts." (The Week magazine, November 16, 2007)**

**The befuddling effect of poverty: The strain of worrying constantly about making ends meet depletes poor people's brainpower, making them more likely to make bad decisions that can perpetuate the cycle of poverty. In fact, Princeton University researchers conclude in a new study, just feeling poor can quickly knock 13 points off a person's IQ. To determine how financial worries affect thinking, the researchers posed various problems to middle- and low-income shoppers at a New Jersey mall. The study subjects were asked to make decisions about how they'd spend their money when facing emergency expenses. When the expenses were large, the cognitive performance of the poorer shoppers fell dramatically -- by an equivalent of 13 IQ points or a lost night's sleep -- while the better-off shoppers' scores remained the same. "Picture yourself after an all-nighter," study co-author Sendhil Mullainathan tells The Washington Post. "Being poor is like that every day." Researchers also ran cognitive tests on farmers in India before their harvest, when they were financially strapped, and afterward, when they were flush with cash; they, too, scored worse when they had less money. "There's been this perception that the poor function less well," said Eldar Shafir, the other co-author of the study. "(But) when you don't have enough (money), it occupies your mind and takes away bandwidth that you could use for other things." (The Week magazine, September 20, 2013)**

**Contrary to economists’ expectations, the global recession has not increased extreme poverty. The proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day fell in every developing region between 2005 and 2008, according to the World Bank, and data from 2010 show the declining trend continuing. *(The New York Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 23, 2012)***

**Who really controls Washington: The conventional wisdom is that Washington is controlled by corporations and the rich, said Robert Samuelson. But federal spending proves that this wisdom is wrong. Over the past three decades, annual spending on the top 10 federal programs for the poor and the near-poor – such as Medicaid, food stamps, and Pell Grants – soared from $126 billion (in inflation- adjusted, 2011 dollars) to $626 billion. Today, the average poor person receives $13,000 in federal aid – up from $4,300 in 1980. Programs that transfer wealth to the middle classes are even more massive, with Social Security consuming $725 billion last year and Medicare $560 billion. All told, Uncle Sam spends nearly $2.1 trillion on social programs – 60 percent of all federal spending. That’s not ignoring “the will of the people” to favor the rich. In fact, “the real Washington is in the business of pleasing as many people as possible,” which is why our budget deficit has ballooned out of control and our tax code is such a mess. Fixing what’s wrong would require simple common sense and some shared sacrifice. Sadly, our system rewards both parties for taking “the path of least resistance.” *(The Week magazine, May 11, 2012)***

**The Vatican’s reprimand of American nuns: “Nuns rock,” said Nicholas Kristof. The female clergy of the Catholic Church are “among the bravest, toughest, and most admirable people in the world,” truly embodying the teachings of Christ in their selfless work with the young, the poor, and the sick. Yet the Vatican recently delivered a stinging rebuke to American nuns, chastising them for focusing on poverty and social justice, rather than joining the male hierarchy’s obsession with abortion and gay marriage. “What Bible did that come from?” Jesus commanded his followers to feed the poor and embrace the outcast; he said not a word about homosexuality or abortion. Who is more Christ-like: the pampered pope in his white silk cassock and red Prada slippers, or the nun working the line in the ghetto soup kitchen? Nuns are tough, too. In my world travels, I’ve seen heroic nuns face down warlords, pimps, and bandits. One nun, Sister Rachele Fassera, even shamed 200 armed soldiers of African warlord Joseph Kony’s army into releasing a group of kidnapped girls. “So Pope Benedict, all I can say is: You are crazy to mess with nuns.” *(The Week magazine, May 11, 2012)***

**The poorest 25 percent of Americans spend 16.1 percent of their income on food, while the wealthiest 25 percent just 11.6 percent. The wealthiest, however, spend five times as much money as the poorest on dining out. *(Bloomberg Businessweek, as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 22, 2013)***

**In climbing out of poverty, geography matters. A new study found that the poor are more likely to become upwardly mobile in the Northeast, the Great Plains, and the West, especially in such cities as New York and Seattle. The poor are most likely to stay poor in the Southeast and the industrial Midwest. *(The New York Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, August 2, 2013)***

**The global poverty rate, measured by how many people live on less than $1.25 a day, has halved from 43 percent in 1990 to 21 percent in 2010. Economic growth in China, India, and other developing nations has driven that reduction in poverty. *(The Economist, as it appeared in The Week magazine, June 14, 2013)***

**There were huge Indian tribes – the Mandans, Arikaras, Hidatsas – that settled and farmed the Plains. But they clustered in great, stable settlements so that the pox brought in by the colonials mostly wiped them out. That’s what let the poor little wandering tribes of Sioux take over. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The share of Americans who consider themselves lower class has grown from a quarter of the population four years ago to just under a third today, according to polling by the Pew Research Center. *(Los Angeles Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, September, 21, 2012)***

**A misleading gauge of poverty: Poverty in the U.S. isn't worse than it was 40 years ago, said Sheldon H. Danziger, even if government statistics might lead you to think so. The Census Bureau released new data this week indicating "that the poverty rate in America held stable between 2011 and 2012, at about 15 percent." That suggests that a far higher proportion of people live in poverty today than in 1973, when the official rate reached a record low of 11.1 percent. Not surprisingly, Republicans have seized on today's higher number, citing it as proof that the federal government has wasted billions of dollars "fighting a war on poverty that has been largely lost." But the census statistics are highly misleading; they measure only cash income, excluding the considerable benefits from many programs that help the poor, such as food stamps and the earned-income credit. "If they were counted, the rate would be closer to 11 percent." It's time we adopted a new poverty measure -- one "that incorporated all anti-poverty policies" and demonstrated the painful cost of cutting these programs. The "critics of the safety net" have it all wrong: It's not that anti-poverty programs have done no good, but rather that without them "poverty would be much higher." *(The Week magazine, September 27, 2013)***

**It takes a lot of money to support Mother Teresa’s vow of poverty. The Yugoslav born nun founded the charity in 1959 in an abandoned hostel donated by the city. The order, which was formally recognized by the Vatican in 1965, expanded and has 3,000 nuns working in 87 countries. The Missionaries of Charity care for the destitute and the dying on six continents. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 1, 1989)***

**Impoverished people of Peru, Massachusetts, didn’t know how they could survive in the early 1800s. So, according to historical footnotes, town leaders held a public auction and sold off the poor people as servants. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Lovey Howell: “You know, I really wouldn’t mind being poor, if it weren’t for one thing.” Thurston Howell III: “What is that, my dear?” Lovey: “Poverty.”**

**The number of people living in poverty in the suburbs has risen by 64 percent in the last 10 years, or twice the rate of urban poverty growth. An estimated 16.4 million Americans under the poverty line ($23,021 for a family of four) now live in suburbs, 3 million more than in cities. (CNN.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, May 31, 2013)**

**The biggest threats to humanity: Think climate change is one of the world's biggest problems? said Alex B. Berezow. Think again. Global warming doesn't even crack the top 10 of the planet's immediate concerns. Number 1 on that list: poverty. Nowhere near as "sexy" or "trendy" as climate change, it's still the single biggest threat facing humanity. Hundreds of millions of people go hungry every day, and 1.3 billion don't even have electricity. In the world's poorest countries, several of the leading causes of death remain infectious diseases, such as diarrhea, AIDS, and malaria. Scientists would tell you that the greatest threats to humanity are the "terrifying rise of multi-drug-resistant bacteria," which could render antibiotics useless, and a potential "Black Death" -- like pandemic from a mutated virus. Foreign policy experts worry about the possibility of nuclear terrorism. Economists fear a meltdown of the euro and a new global financial panic. Yes, climate change is a serious threat. But we have decades to adapt to whatever changes it brings. In the meantime, much of the world faces greater threats, even if the "average person in the Westernized world," is oblivious to them. (The Week magazine, July 19, 2013)**

Though Catholic priests take a vow of poverty, the Vatican presides over a closely held $6 billion empire, including the troubled Vatican bank, known as the Institute for Works of Religion, or IOR. *(The Week magazine, August 3, 2012)*

The ranks of the “working poor” are growing even as the recovering economy creates more jobs. Nearly a third of working families earn less than twice the poverty threshold – that comes to $45,622 for a family of four – and have to struggle to pay for basic needs. *(The Washington Post, as it appeared in The Week magazine, February 1, 2013)*

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