The Rich, the Poor and the Homeless

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Where do the rich get their money?

✔ 1994: 68,000 households with income over $1,000,000
  ✔ Less than one third of their income comes from wages and salaries
  ✔ Charitable donations avg. < 4% of income

Sources of income of families making over $1 million, 1994

- Wages & salaries (30.6%)
- Sales of assets (27.2%)
- Partnerships (26.4%)
- Interest & dividends (14.1%)
- Other (6.3%)

The rich get richer

- 2004: average CEO pay = $9.6 million
  - Mean salary is up 15% from $8.3 million in 2003 (BW)
  - Mean worker salary is up 2.9% to $33,176 (BW)
  - Military contractor CEO salaries up 200% since 9/11 (UFE)

- CEO pay has increased faster than the avg. worker
  - Gap is growing: 107X in 1990, 431X in 2004
  - Avg. worker salary would be over $110,000 if pay had increased at CEO rate since 1990
  - Minimum wage would be $23.03 instead of $5.15

- Top five executive salaries in 2004 (BW)
  1. Terry S. Semel, Yahoo!, $120.1 million
  2. Lew Frankfort, Coach, $58.7 million
  3. C. John Wilder, TXU, $54.9 million
  4. Ray R. Irani, Occidental Petroleum, $37.8 million
  5. Paul J. Evanson, Allegheny Energy, $37.5 million
Exec pay to worker pay ratio

Avg. Executive to avg. production work pay ratio


107 132 201 195 180 269 348 455 516 525 428 301 281 431
How do corporations get money?

✓ Capitalism according to Adam Smith: If each person follows individual self interest, others will benefit (“invisible hand”)
  • Making profit may result from producing/selling valuable products or services
✓ However, corporations can increase their profit or value through (1) speculation, (2) fraud and/or (3) corporate welfare (“rent-seeking”)
✓ Speculation: corporations can manipulate stock prices (and executive salary(stock options)) through mergers, internal reorganizations, lay-offs, etc. that damage long-term profitability
✓ Sunbeam’s reorganization under “Chainsaw” Al Dunlap in mid-1990s illustrates speculation that hurt workers, communities and the company’s profitability
  • McMinnville, TN, factory employed 700 workers to produce hair clippers and earned $40 million per year. The product line was moved to Mexico, where productivity and quality plummeted.
  • However, closing 18 factories and cutting workforce in half caused stock to rise from $12 in 1996 to $53 in 1998. By 2000, the stock had fallen to 10¢.
  • According to Krier (2005), this type of speculative management (as opposed to production management) is routine.
✓ Growing gap between execs and workers is one result of management strategy that awards execs for inflating stock prices by decreasing labor costs
The early 2000s saw numerous corporate scandals resulting from speculative management.

Enron

- Enron executives engaged in complicated schemes to create the illusion of profit where none existed and avoid taxes. During 2000, the top 200 executives averaged $7 million in pay.
- Enron also contributed to an electricity shortage in California; energy traders bragged about it on tape (“All the money you guys stole from those poor grandmothers in California?” “Yeah, Grandma Millie man.” “Yeah, now she wants her f-----g money back for all the power you've charged right up, jammed right up her a— for f-----g $250 a megawatt hour.”).
- The scandal resulted in 34 criminal charges, the loss of employees’ pensions and the destruction of Arthur Andersen.
- There have been 16 guilty pleas and 5 convictions to date. Ken Lay (chairman) and Jeffrey Skilling (CEO) are awaiting trial.

WorldCom overstated its earnings by $11 billion. CEO Bernie Ebbers and others were convicted of fraud and other charges.

Similar scandals have been uncovered at Adelphia, Tyco, and Global Crossing

These scandals involved efforts to make money through speculation, not production.
Economists use the term “rent-seeking” to describe manipulating economic environment, e.g., through government action, to produce value for the company, such as through tariffs, tax breaks, exclusive licensing, creating barriers to entry. Often called “corporate welfare.”

- This can harm other corporations and consumers because markets are “less free.” Rent-seeking creates higher prices and poverty, especially in developing nations.
- The 2003 federal government budget included $90 billion in corporate welfare or $842 per U.S. household.
- Federal corporate welfare costs five times welfare for the poor.
- Wal-Mart: 2004 study found over $1 billion in state and local government subsidies. The 2005 federal transportation bill allocates $37 million to improve road to Wal-Mart HQ in Bentonville, AR. Public assistance for Wal-Mart workers may also cost billions.
- U.S. government spends over $1.6 billion annually buying and storing sugar to inflate prices. This results in U.S. consumers paying an extra $1.9 billion annually for sugar and costs developing nations $1.5 billion (Cato).
Poverty definitions

- **Absolute poverty**: inability to afford the minimal requirements for sustaining healthy existence (p. 355)
- **Relative poverty**: individual’s economic position compared to the living standards of the majority in society (p. 355)
- **Poverty line**: amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs, according to the federal government (p. 355)
- **Poverty rate**: percentage of people whose income falls below the poverty line (p. 357)
The poverty line (1960-2002)


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Below the poverty line


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Races of the poor, 2002

- White, non-hispanic: 45.0%
- White, hispanic: 22.9%
- Black: 24.9%
- Other races: 7.2%

Source: U.S Census Bureau. Historical Poverty Tables
Homelessness

✔ Who is homeless?
  • Estimates of homelessness range from 750,000 to 2 million (2000)
  • 1995 survey of homelessness: 46% homeless men, 13% single women, 36.5% families with children, 3.5% children on own

✔ Individualistic explanations of homelessness
  • Substance abuse
  • Mental illness (Snow et al. found only 15% were mentally ill)

✔ Structural explanations
  • Residential dislocation (lack of low-income housing, housing inflation)
  • Economic dislocation (unemployment, low-paying jobs)

✔ Best explanations connect structural to biographical
Pathways to the street

Snow and Anderson’s *Down on Their Luck* (1993)

Method: participant observation and analysis of shelter and government documents in Austin, Texas

Connects structural factors and individual-level factors

Structural factors: residential dislocation & economic dislocation

Biographical determinants of homelessness

- Voluntarism (homeless as lifestyle choice): not supported by evidence; only 6.3% of homeless gave this explanation
- Disabilities and pathologies: also not supported; Snow & Anderson view individual pathologies as adaptations to homeless, not cause of it
- Lack of family support: most commonly mentioned biographical factor (66.6%); S & A claim it’s also the most important biographical factor
- Bad luck: may result in homelessness among the economically marginal

Homeless job experience (Texas, 1980s)

- **Last job**
  - General laborer (construction, warehouse loading, oil field): 30.7%
  - Service (dishwashing; janitorial; nursing home): 21.5%
  - Factory work and vehicle operation: 20.6%
  - Craft/skilled work (building trades; mechanics): 19.3%
  - Sales and clerical: 5.7%
  - Military: 2.2%

- **Median hourly wage**: $4.90

- **Median duration of job**: 6.5 months

- **Reason for job termination**
  - Laid off/job ended: 44.3%
  - Fired: 9.1%
  - Quit: 21.0%
  - Other: 25.6%