

Chapter 2: Addressing the Problem

Introduction:

Many people believe the root causes of homelessness is personal matter. But this chapter will look at A) socio-economic and cultural factors that generate and perpetuate poverty and homelessness and B) compare people's belief system and national policies with other nations. Other chapters (Dissertation, chapter 4 and Project, chapter 3) will present additional root causes of homelessness.

A. Social Analysis

Definition of Home and Homelessness

Home: A physical place, a decent permanent residence is our home. Our body is a home for our mind/heart/soul/spirit to dwell in, which is also a home for our identity, peace, self-esteem and pride reside. Our heart/soul is a home for God to dwell in. (I Cor. 3:16-17) God/Jesus is also our spiritual home. Our souls reside in them. Housing, food, cloth, good health, job and income, that we call "basic necessities of life," are the source of our physical, emotional and spiritual home. Therefore, physical, emotional and spiritual homes are intertwined, and neither of them can stand alone.

Physical Homelessness is well defines by the Stewart B. McKinney Act (1994):

. . . lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence and; has a primary night time residency that is: (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations. (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. The term "homeless individual" does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of Congress or a state law.¹

The education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act includes more details:

The term "homeless child and youth" (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence . . . and (B) includes: (i) children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings . . . (iii) children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and (iv) migratory children . . . who qualify as homeless

¹ National Coalition for the Homeless. 2201 P St NW. Washington, DC 20037. 202.462.4822. Fax: 202.462.4823. Email: info@nationalhomeless.org ; website: www.nationalhomeless.org

for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). McKinney-Vento Act sec. 725(2); 42 U.S.C. 11435(2).²

Emotional Homelessness:

When a person is so abused, hurt, broken, and deserted by their families, friends and society and when economically they are so poor that they lose the meaning and purpose of life and being drowned in a “no-good” self image, hatred, rage and a destructive life style, affecting both themselves and others, they can become emotionally homeless.

Spiritual homelessness:

While I support the Christian belief that those who have no faith in God/Jesus Christ are spiritually homeless, I add other dimensions of spiritual homelessness; often abused children grow up identifying God with their abusive parents and run away from their parents and God and can become spiritually homeless; economic poverty can become the root cause of people’s spiritual homelessness; when people suffer from economic hardship that results in hunger, homelessness, illness, hopelessness, despair, depression, alcoholism and drug addiction, and social alienation they often feel that God punishes and deserts them. Consequently, their life style and behaviors can become destructive to themselves and sometimes to others and easily walk away from God and become spiritually homeless. They might also believe the Church and God side with their oppressors when the Church is chasing them away from the house of God. Therefore, the behavior of the church can lead them to spiritual homelessness also.

Political and economic tyrants not only impose spiritual homelessness on others but also they can become spiritually homeless; when they worship power, wealth and greed and then are in the position to exploit the poor; when they generate wars that kill and injure innocent people and violate God’s intention for shalom for all people; God may exit from their souls and the tyrants become spiritually homeless. Even “saved” believers who worship God but are apathetic toward the needs of suffering others can become spiritually homeless. (Matt. 25: 31-46) Thus, these oppressive political and economic tyrants and abusive parents, spouses or partners or any other kinds of abusers and/or oppressors, including even churches, can become spiritually homeless when they impose spiritual homelessness on others.

In short, economic hardship and physical, emotional and spiritual homelessness are all interwoven with one another and affect one another as a chain response.

Capitalism and its Impact:

² National Homeless.
Other federal agencies, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), interpret the McKinney-Vento definition to include only those persons who are on the streets or in shelters and persons who face imminent eviction (within a week) from a private dwelling or institution and who have no subsequent residence or resources to obtain housing. This interpretation of homelessness serves large, urban communities, where tens of thousands of people are literally homeless. However, it may prove problematic for those persons who are homeless in rural areas, where there are few shelters. People experiencing homelessness in these areas more likely to live with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing: National Coalition for the Homeless and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development <http://www.hud.gov/webcasts/index.cfm>

The economic system we are living under is called “capitalism,” which first was spelled out in 1776 by Adam Smith in England in his inquiry into the “Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations” and later adopted by the U.S. Smith had two major goals: First, for the “good of the nation” he wanted to reduce government interference and replace it with greater individual freedom. Second, he wanted to see England enjoy the great increase in output that he felt would result from a division of labor. Smith developed capitalism on the assumptions that 1) people are selfish; 2) people are basically lazy and will work only if forced or paid to do so; 3) people love to trade, and to bargain with each other while trading; and 4) people take better care of that which is their own. The last point is basic to capitalism and forming the rationale for the private ownership of resources.”³

Korten accuses that “capitalists are destructive of life, democracy, and ethical values that are the essential foundations of a civil or civilized society because capitalism is an extremist ideology that advances the concentration and rights of ownership without limit, to the exclusion of the needs and rights of many who own virtually nothing.”⁴

Bacevich gives history: “At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. had ascended to the status of sole superpower and empire in the world. The whole purpose of the American Empire was preserving U.S. interest and expansion of an American Imperium. Central to this strategy is an economic growth by open markets,”⁵ “all to satisfy the expectation of American people for ever-greater abundance.”⁶ Therefore, capitalism produced corporations and consumerism.

Corporations:

Such economic expansionism created Global Corporations. On one hand, they brought great achievements to this world in the past century: the jet airplane, automobiles, computers, microwave ovens, electric typewriters, photocopying machines, televisions, cell-phones, cloth dryers, air-conditioning, freeways, shopping malls, fax machines, birth-control pills, artificial organs, and chemical pesticides to name only a few. Many people benefit from them throughout the world. On the other hand, it brought the enormous impact of producing devastating poverty and destruction to the people in poor countries and to nature.⁷

Consumerism:

One of the basic assumptions of modern economics is scarcity; there is never enough to go around because there is no limit to human wanting. The desire to have more and accumulate more led to the creation of corporation giants and eventually the sacrifice of

³ Henry Rempel, *A High Price for Abundant Living* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 39.

⁴ David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (Bloomfield/San Francisco: Co-published by Kumarian Press and Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2001), 8.

⁵ Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷ Korten, *Corporations Rule*, 27-29.

the corporations' moral conscience to meet the demands of stockholders. For ever-more profit led to ever-expanding production and ever-increasing consumerism.⁸

Originally, 'to consume' meant to destroy, to pillage, to subdue, and to exhaust. As late as the early 1900s, the medical community and the public referred to tuberculosis as 'consumption.' Consumption only metamorphosed into a positive term at the hands of twentieth-century advertisers who began to equate consumption with choice. We over-consume, indulge our every appetite, and waste the Earth's largesse. We put a premium on unrestrained economic growth, reward the powerful and marginalize the vulnerable. We are consumed with protecting our self-interest. Sadly, our self-interest is slowly metamorphosing into pure selfishness. We have become death culture.⁹ No matter what the level of material comfort or standard of living, Americans want more. We want to shop more and spend more to acquire an ever-expanding list of necessities and "must-have" items.¹⁰ Our new disease is "shopping disorder," a form of addiction includes compulsive shopping, competitive shopping, and revenge shopping.¹¹

The Economic Policy that Benefits the Rich and Produces and Perpetuates Poverty
American style capitalism has been so effective [for the wealthy] that it has brought an unprecedented wealth. At the turn of the 21st century, the U.S. was home to 276 billionaires, over 2,500 households with a net worth exceeding \$100 million, 350,000 individuals with a net worth of \$10 million, and in total, 5 million millionaires.¹²

Income grew for the wealthy. The number of U.S. households that earn more than \$100,000 a year or have a net worth of more than \$500,000 grew to 16.7 million in 1998, up from 11.7 million in 1996. The number of "super rich," those worth more than \$5 million, has grown 46 percent each year in the past five years.¹³ Between 1977 and 1999, the average after-tax incomes of the top fifth of American families rose by 43 percent. By contrast, the average income of the middle fifth of families rose by a meager 8 percent over the same twenty-two-year period. The income of poor families actually fell 9 percent. At the very top, the incomes of the wealthiest one percent of the population rose by a whopping 115 percent after adjusting for inflation.¹⁴ In 1997, the ratio between the income of the top chief executive officers of American corporations and the wage of the average production worker was 254 to 1.¹⁵ "In the U.S., virtually every economic policy initiative introduced during

⁸ M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 12.

⁹ Jeremy Rifkin, *European Dream* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin Group, Inc., 2004), 379.

¹⁰ Ichiro Kawachi and Bruce P. Kennedy, *The Health of Nations—Why Inequality Is Harmful to Your Health* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 191.

¹¹ Ibid. 78.

¹² Source: *Generous Giving, Inc.-Wealth Accumulation*. 820 Broad St., Suite 300, Chattanooga, TN 37402. Fax: (423) 755-1640. www.generousgiving.org

¹³ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 5-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5-6. According to the King County Journal, Americans lavished \$32.4 billion on their pets in 2003. The luxuries for these animals include warm-water therapy for animal spas, doggie day camps, birthday parties for dogs, pet gift baskets, clothing; fur care, pet sunscreens, anti-aging creams, nutrients,

recent years seems to be designed to widen these inequalities still further. As a nation we seem to be hooked on policy proposals to balance the budget, trim the income tax, roll back capital gains and estate taxes, liberalize individual retirement accounts, and pull the plug on welfare and the earned income tax credit.”¹⁶

The Washington Post reports that the 2005 Federal Budget benefits the wealthy. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed a five-year, \$14 trillion budget for fiscal year 2006. The budget includes significant cuts in domestic programs—including \$35 billion in entitlement cuts and \$212 billion in domestic discretionary program cuts over five years—while making room for substantial tax cuts that are likely to benefit primarily wealthy households.¹⁷ The White House's announcement makes it the fourth straight year in which the budget deficit was expected to grow. As recently as last July (2004) the administration had predicted that the deficit, \$412 billion last year, would fall this year to \$331 billion.¹⁸

Consequently, our economic system and policy have brought unprecedented poverty and homelessness and an ever-widening disparity between the rich and poor in the United States. 80 percent of the total households in the U.S. struggle to make ends meet with 15 percent of the wealth, causing 35.9 million people to suffer in poverty. Of those 15.3 million (43%) are living in deep poverty.¹⁹ 3.5 million people experience homelessness each year, with a growing number of families with children and the working poor rapidly joining the homeless population.²⁰ “More than one in four American working families now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially. Too many jobs pay poor wages and provide no benefits, and that American workers are poorly prepared and supported to move into better paying jobs.”²¹

Children’s plight:

paw balm to soften feet dried out by hot sidewalks, and Doggles to protect the eyes of pooches who hang out car windows, plus services after death, e.g. Pet Haven Cemetery & Cremation services, caskets, urns and headstones for pet’s final resting places, and grief counseling for those left behind. Source: King County Journal, *People Are Spending More and More for Pets These Days [emphasis mime]*, November 29, 2004, C3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷ Washington Post, April 28, 2005.

¹⁸ New York Times, January 26, 2005

¹⁹ September/October 2004 report of the *Washington Office* of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Catherine Gordon, International Hunger Issues. Presbyterian Washington Office 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Suite 410 Washington, DC 20002, 202-543-1126, fax 202-543-7755. E-mail crace@ctr.pcusa.org www.pcusa.org/washington.

²⁰ *National Homeless*.

²¹ “Working Hard, Falling Short,” which was released on Oct. 12, 2004 *Working Poor Families Project*, a national initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller foundations.

Over 20 percent of children in the United States live in low-income, if not outright impoverished, families who have no health insurance. One million children in the U.S. are presently homeless.²²

Bush's policies are criticized because they hurt our children's welfare; this administration's tax cuts and vastly increased spending are further manifestations of its lack of care for children. Not only will our children be responsible for our national debt, but they are hurt by this administration's attempt to cut the low-income, welfare-to-work child care program, to cut state funding to prevent child abuse, to increase the interest rates of student loans, to eliminate the federal lead testing program for children in substandard housing, and to undermine the nation's clean air and clean water laws that attempt to protect the environment for our children's future. All the while, nothing is being done to check the rash of gun violence in our nation's schools.²³

Wallis laments:

Kids killing kids is not just a crime problem; it is a parable of pain that points to illness in our cultural soul. The most painful and dangerous sign of the crisis is what is happening to our children. When our children become our poorest citizens; our most at-risk population; the recipients of our worst values, drugs, sickness, and environmental practices; our most armed and dangerous criminals; the chief victims and perpetrators of escalating violence; an object of our fears more than our hopes, then their plight has become the sign of our crisis. When children talk about their favorite kinds of caskets instead of bikes or cars, it is a sign that we can no longer ignore. *Social oppression and cultural breakdown are the twin signs of our age.* One has to do with structural injustice and the other with the collapse of values.²⁴

Consequently, current economic policy results in constant shortage of funds for traditional social services such as mental health, child welfare, subsidized health care, food stamps, and housing, which have always been under-funded and fraught with systemic flaws making the services difficult for the average person to adequately access.

Table 1 2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines²⁵

²² Danna Nolan Fewell. *Children of Israel* (Abingdon Press, 2003), 20. Twenty percent of the nation's two-year-olds have not been immunized. A conservative estimate of child victimization indicates that over 825,000 children in the U.S. suffer each year from physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, neglect or medical neglect. In the U. S. a child dies from a gunshot wound every two hours, and homicide has become the third leading cause of mortality of children between the ages of five and fourteen.

²³ Ibid., 22.

²⁴ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Co., 1995), 8-10.

²⁵ Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 33, February 18, 2005, pp. 8373-8375.
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/05poverty.shtml>

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States & D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$ 9,570	\$11,950	\$11,010
2	12,830	16,030	14,760
3	16,090	20,110	18,510
4	19,350	24,190	22,260
5	22,610	28,270	26,010
6	25,870	32,350	29,760
7	29,130	36,430	33,510
8	32,390	40,510	37,260
For each additional person, add	3,260	4,080	3,750

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s annual survey of hunger reports that approximately ten million U.S. households are “food insecure” at some points during the year. Over three million of these households experience hunger at some point during the year. On any given night, 562,000 American children go to bed hungry.²⁶

The Tax Policy that Benefits the Wealthy

In 1997, Congress cut the top tax rate on capital gains for the highest-income taxpayers by 28% and added countless special relief rules favoring one set of tax payers over another.²⁷

One of the causes widening the gap comes from our tax system. A system that does not tax people annually on the appreciation of their assets expands the wealth gap between the rich and all others unless the rich are taxed heavily in other ways.²⁸ Multimillion-dollar loopholes for certain industries and classes of individuals, combined with onerously high tax rates for the great mass of taxpayers, were endangering public confidence in the entire federal tax structure.²⁹ Many believe that the system exacts excessive amounts from lower income households. Members of middle class often feel that they pay too much, and lower and middle-income taxpayers overwhelmingly feel that the rich pay too little.³⁰

In May 2001, President Bush signed into law a ten-year \$1.35 trillion tax cut. Independent analyses indicate that 40 percent of the benefits of the Bush tax cut will accrue to the richest one percent of tax payers. The bottom 80 percent will receive less

²⁶ David Hilfiger, M.D. *Urban Injustice* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 33.

²⁷ John O. Fox, *If Americans Really Understand the Income Tax* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Foreword, xi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

than a third of the benefits, while the bottom 20 percent will get less than one percent.³¹

Adam Smith's capitalism projected that there will be five hundred poor people for every rich person."³² Korten names such a gap, "Growing islands of great wealth in poor countries and growing seas of poverty in rich countries."³³

Racism is a significant cause of poverty and homelessness:

Discrimination against African Americans and other people of color remains a powerful strand in the web that traps ghetto residents in poverty. The intensity of the endless history of discrimination was a major factor in creating the ghetto environment. *Past* racial discrimination is still powerfully embedded in *current* social, political, and physical structures, and thus remains a potent cause of contemporary inner-city poverty. Studies of hiring practice show that employers are reluctant to hire young, black men from the inner city. There is the tendency to exclude inner-city residents based on the belief that the ghetto is unlikely to produce acceptable employees and view them not only as uneducated, but also as unstable, uncooperative, and inherently dishonest. Deliberately or not, employers screen out black, inner-city applicants. The continuing severe segregation of African Americans from the rest of society is undoubtedly the single most important cause of urban black poverty. The ghetto itself is the problem.³⁴

Health Care:

During the last three years, during which Mr. George W. Bush has been President, 5.2 million people have lost health insurance and 4.3 million have fallen into poverty.³⁵ The health care situation will inevitably worsen. The number of uninsured will continue to increase. The underinsured will become much more visible as employers accelerate their health care cost shifting to their employees. This trend will start to wake up the middle

³¹ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 189. Nutrition programs that are threatened by budget cuts at a time of rising hunger and poverty reflects mistaken priorities: military expenditures, along with \$2 trillion in tax cut extensions that benefit mainly the very wealthiest people, at the expense of programs that help low-income people care for their families and build better futures. Put simply, war and tax cuts are threatening our country's progress against hunger and poverty. (Bread For the World Newsletter, September 2005).

³² Rempel, *High Price*, 41.

³³ Korten, *Corporations Rule*, 118. Bakke supports Korten by saying that economic policy widens gap between cities and suburbs: In the U.S., the Mortgage Act and the Highway Development Act of 1947 led to the massive freeway and motorway systems, and a government subsidized exodus from the cities to the suburbs and beyond. Tax concessions are given more often for new buildings than for renewal of buildings in old communities. A prosperous family moving to its "Garden of Eden" sees its move as an individual issue, but the policies that made the move possible are anti-community, creating suburbs and tearing up communities in the cities. Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1987), 31-32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

³⁵ Newsletter of Presbyterian Washington Office of PC (USA), September-October 2004.

class, those who have never been unemployed or uninsured, who now will be facing large medical bills for the first time.³⁶

Homeless people die early: A study by Public Health of Seattle and King County, WA, examined the cause and manner of death for 77 homeless people in King County in 2003, and reported:

The most of them died prematurely and suffered from numerous treatable health problems. The average person died at age 47 and had three medical problems. Some homeless people had as many as eight problems, the study says. Roughly two-thirds had a history of alcohol or substance abuse, more than half had a cardiovascular disease and a quarter had a mental-health problem. The most common cause of death was acute intoxication, followed by cardiovascular disease and homicide. More than half of the deaths occurred in the out of doors. Some died without a physician's presence. Health Care for the Homeless advocates recommend reducing the number of deaths, expanding outreach programs, a continuing annual review of homeless deaths in the county, and a holistic approach to helping the homeless. Homeless advocates have seen a rise in the homeless health problems, e.g. the rate of diabetes among homeless people is higher than for those who are not homeless. Homelessness continues to rise, but ever-tightening county and city budgets and rising health-care costs mean the county isn't able to do much to expand programs.³⁷

Neither government nor the public value the homeless as worthy of investment. Thus, the federal budget to help the poor is categorized as "discretionary," meaning it can be slashed or increased at the discretion of the policy makers whether cutting funds for the poor is detrimental to their survival or not. The survival of the poor seems to be neither the concern nor the priority of the policy makers.

Araya-Guillen indicts capitalism as idolatry:

Capitalism is a system of economic idolatry. Idolatry occurs when humankind deposits its faith and life in something that is not God, but a creation of its own hands, the idol. In the economic "logic" of capitalism, the idolatry of capital occurs: When capital is given priority before human beings and the satisfaction of their basic needs or when economic laws, a human creation within social history, became an end in themselves. . . In capitalism human beings and their needs must adapt themselves to the economic laws of the market; the market and its laws do not adapt themselves to the basic needs of the majority of human beings. Outside the market there is no salvation; there is only chaos and hell on earth. As long as capital is converted into an idol and the laws of the market are absolutized, the triumphant economic "rationality" does not respond to the right to life of the majorities. The poor are excluded. Their death is not even news. The life of the poor and the life of nature are sacrificed as a necessary payment in order to participate in the new sacred economy.³⁸ . . . These gods have concrete names: "Western Christianity," "free market,"

³⁶ Health Care for All-Washington, 2004.

³⁷ Seattle Times, December 14, 2004, B1.

³⁸ Victorio Araya-Guillen, "The 500th Anniversary of the European Invasion of Abya Yala: An Ethical and Pastoral Reflection from the Third World," in *The Portion of the Poor*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 139-140.

“accumulation of capital,” “maximum profit,” “structural adjustment,” “economic growth,” and “national security.” Everywhere their worshippers comply with their demands.³⁹

One group of Christians might support the conservative views that the economic system we have now is the best of all in the world because it piles up more wealth for the wealthy in order that they may do better business, hire more people and enhance economic growth. However, the critical view concludes that we have fallen into a bondage of wealth, the control of mega corporations, and consumerism and have become worshippers of wealth and God side by side, and have lost sight of the oppressive poverty and homelessness in our midst. Such life style and behavior appears to cause us to fall into our own homelessness from God.

2) Cultural Values

The system of capitalism has created social values that are very individualistic, profit-centered, success oriented. In order to be successful, one needs to be self-made, to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and forge a life for themselves. We live in an “I-centered culture,” taking care of myself, my family and my needs. Somehow we have convinced ourselves that individuals are responsible for their poverty.

Because our culture and our government place such a high value on individual competition, achievement and self-sufficiency, the American public has learned to value human beings on the basis of how much they can make. And therefore, poverty does not fit into that picture. We devalue and dehumanize the poor and homeless who cannot care for themselves. A majority of the population, the rich and the poor alike, seem to accept the reality in which U.S. society is structured with some rich, some poor, and some are homeless with this disparity accepted as a norm without much questioning. Thus such a value system affects on policy making. The American citizens have developed a greater tendency than others to take a view that large income differences are needed for the country’s prosperity and thus view inequality as the engine of growth.”⁴⁰

Further, racism, classism, gender and sexual discrimination treat homeless people as a throw-away population and not worth spending funds for. As a result, citizens have developed NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) and refuse to embrace the homeless in their midst. There is no social solidarity with one another. We do not have real community except small ones of a few caring and like-minded. Homelessness is loss of community. Many homeless are rather criminalized just because they have no homes.

³⁹ Ibid., 143. "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies . . . a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed." Dwight D Eisenhower, 34th US President, 1953.

⁴⁰ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 86.

The Dictionary of Feminist Theologies: states, “Culture is the totality of any given society's way of life. It comprises a people's total social heritage, including languages, ideas, habits, beliefs, customs, social organizations, traditions, arts, symbolisms, crafts and artifacts. Every individual is a product of a particular culture, some of whose traits are acquired spontaneously from the cultural environment and others through a deliberate system of education and conditioning. Letty M. Russell & J. Shannon Clarkson, eds. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 63.

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty defines “criminalization” in general terms as, “The practices of local jurisdictions in legislating against basic life-sustaining activities such as sleeping, sitting, or storing personal belongings in places where people are forced to exist without shelter.” In addition, criminalization can include, “The selective enforcement of other laws like loitering or public intoxication against people who appear to be homeless.”⁴¹ Hall suggests:

Our culture of apathy toward the suffering needy might also come from the North American’s inability to suffer. We have to be happy all the time. We cannot tolerate any of our own pain and also anyone else’s. We rather want to ignore them. However, three types of consequence of the incapacity to suffer may be noted:⁴² The *First*, in the North American way of handling death, terminal illness, or great personal loss we cover up negative experiences. The symbolic images of success have replaced the wounded Jesus and the tormented saints. A *second* consequence of the incapacity to suffer is the inability of so many in our society to enter imaginatively into the suffering of *others*. We appear incapable of absorbing at the level of feeling, compassion, or sympathy the plight of the world’s hungry, politically oppressed, or war-ravaged—including the degradation and dehumanization of minorities within our own midst. The suspicion is that we may be the *cause* of the suffering of others. The *third* consequence of our cultural incapacity to suffer is perhaps the most alarming of all. It may be called the search for an enemy. For it belongs to the psychic state of a people which cannot consciously confront its own suffering, and driven to look elsewhere for the source of its trouble. Just as individuals who are ill but cannot face their illness often seek to locate the cause of their malaise outside themselves, so societies which will not or cannot confront their own internal problems manifest an extraordinary need to blame their condition on external agencies.⁴³

Some Christians leaders and members might view that the job of the church and Christians is to focus on spiritual care for themselves and in society individual success is everyone’s prime goal and they love that freedom. However, those who hold critical view can say that individually we are wonderful, caring and loving Americans.

But collectively we seemed to slip into a culture that values power, wealth, success, and comfort as our highest priorities, over everyone’s freedom from want. We seem to feel okay about leaving the poor and homeless way behind us, marginalizing them. In such a culture we have lost the sense of justice. The Christian Church too appears to have become the captive of this culture rather than a challenger, reformer and liberator. The Golden Rule, “love God and love your neighbor” seems to be awakened in sermons but asleep in action. As a result, the Church has joined the political culture of apathy toward the poor and walked away from the real mission of dismantling the root causes of homelessness.

⁴¹ The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. 1411 K Street NW, Suite 1400 Washington, DC 20005. Phone: (202) 638-2535 Fax: (202) 628-2737 <http://www.nlchp.org/>

⁴² Douglas John Hall, *God & Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

B. Compare the U.S. and European Way of dealing with Poverty

When we compare poverty and people's perception of it in the U.S. and European countries, many different views are contrasted:

We Americans have largely convinced ourselves that not only will we always have the poor with us, but also nothing can really be done about it. It is just part of the human condition, we tell ourselves, that more than 10 percent of Americans—even in the best of times—are desperately, even hopelessly poor and living in a kind of misery unimaginable to the rest of us.⁴⁴ There are more poor people living in poverty in America than in the sixteen European nations: 17 percent of all Americans are in poverty or one out of every six people. By contrast 5.1 percent of the people of Finland are in poverty, 6.6 percent in Sweden, 7.5 percent in Germany, 8 percent in France, 8.1 percent in the Netherlands, 8.2 percent in Belgium, 10.1 percent in Spain, 11.1 percent in Ireland, and 14.2 percent in Italy.⁴⁵

Measured by the transition rate out of poverty between one year and the next, economic mobility was worse in the United States (13.8 percent) than in France (27.5 percent), Germany (25.6 percent), Ireland (25.2 percent), the Netherlands (44.4 percent), and Sweden (36.8 percent) in the mid 1980s. Measured against the same countries, U.S. low-wage workers are less likely to move into higher-wage jobs.⁴⁶

22 percent of all the children in the U.S. are living in poverty. U.S. childhood poverty now ranks twenty-second, or second to last, among the developed nations. All fifteen highly developed European nations have fewer children in poverty than the U.S. There are currently 11.7 million American children under the age eighteen living below the U.S.-defined poverty line.⁴⁷

Cause of Deep Economic Disparity

How did America slip to the bottom of the rankings among developed nations—and far below Europe—on income inequality and poverty? The answer to that question may lie in our perception of why some people become rich while others remain poor. We Americans have, by and large, adopted a *laissez-faire attitude* about business and commerce. If we just provide everyone with the opportunity to go to school, allow the free market to rule, and make sure the government does not interfere too much in its workings, the motivated and talented will rise to the top on their own accord. And those that are not motivated and/or lack talent will not do well. America was always meant to be a land of “equality of opportunity” but not a land of “*equality of results.*”⁴⁸ [*Emphasis*

⁴⁴ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 107.

⁴⁵ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 40.

⁴⁶ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 66.

⁴⁷ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

mine] This explains the American's general apathy toward the poor and homeless.

The survey of the Pew Global Attitude Project shows the same: The survey asked people in America, Europe, and elsewhere why some people are rich and other poor. Two-thirds of Americans believe that success is not outside of their control. Americans believe that people who do not succeed in life fail because of their own shortcomings, not because of society. By Contrast, 68 percent of the people in Germany believe the exact opposite. In Europe, a majority in every country-with the exception of the U.K., the Czech Republic, and Slovakia- believe that forces outside of an individual's personal control determine success. Other surveys support the Pew finding. Asked why people are wealthy, 64 percent of Americans say because of personal drive, willingness to take risks, and hard work and initiative. Why do others fail? Sixty-four percent say because of lack of thrift, 53 percent say lack of effort, and 53 percent say lack of ability.⁴⁹

The World Values Survey found that 71 percent of Americans believe that the poor have a chance to escape from poverty while only 40 percent of Europeans believe that is the case. Americans associate poverty with black America, even though there are more whites living under the poverty line. But in terms of percentages, a far larger proportion of the black community lives below the poverty line. In 2002, the U.S. Census reported that 8 percent of whites and 24.1 percent of blacks are below the poverty line.

Many white Americans think that black Americans are lazy, at best, or worse, genetically incapable of rising above their circumstances. Some observers have suggested that one of the reasons Europeans, unlike Americans, are more willing to believe that the poor are poor through no fault of their own but rather because of social factors is because, until recently, their poor were not racial minorities but, rather, white Caucasians, and therefore, the majority was able to identify and even empathize with their plight. White America cannot afford to believe that the American way of life might, in some way, be to blame for the destitute conditions many black Americans find themselves in.⁵⁰

Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century forces beyond the control of individual African Americans led to high rates of joblessness, loss of social organization in the community, a collapse of public education and medical care in the ghetto, and little abatement of discrimination and racism. In this context, ghetto-related behaviors can be seen as understandable response, some of which may in certain areas be evolving into cultural patterns. These responses perpetuate and aggravate the poverty of the urban poor in a vicious cycle that currently shows few signs of abating.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid. 41

⁵⁰ Ibid.,42.

⁵¹ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 46. Single-parenthood is profoundly associated with poverty. While less than ten percent of married-couple families live below the poverty line, more than two-thirds of families headed by never-married women (of any race or ethnicity) are poor. Fully half of all families headed by a mother of any race or ethnicity who have never been married have incomes of less than \$10,000. The rate of single parenthood among inner-city black families has grown alarmingly in the last forty years. In Chicago's ghetto areas, for instance, more than five out of six parents aged between 18 and 44 are single. Nationally, more than two-thirds of African American babies are now born to single mothers. Women head over half of all black families and half of them have never been married. We are witnessing the "feminization of poverty." Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 47.

There is vast differences in how most Americans and Europeans perceive the notion of equality of opportunity; the twin issue of income disparity and poverty. While Americans encourage private effort to alleviate poverty we are, for the most part, unwilling to commit our tax money to the task. If the rich are rich because they are smarter and work harder, and the poor are poor because they are lazy and without ability, then nothing the government does is going to make much a difference. And besides, it would send the wrong message—namely, that those who worked hard and made something of their lives ought to then sacrifice some of their hard-earned income to compensate those who did not work hard and lacked the ability to succeed. American political opinions seem to be shifted far to the right of most other industrialized countries. To give a pertinent example, the political scientist Sidney Verba (1987) surveyed the opinion of “stakeholders” of three countries—Sweden, the U.S.A., and Japan. The post tax pattern of income distribution in Sweden was considerably more egalitarian than either Japan or the U.S.⁵²

Davis and More asserts that in order to attract the top talent into the top positions, we need to pay them more—a lot more. . . Whereas we have grown quite accustomed to seeing winner-take-all markets in professional sports and Hollywood movie stars’ paychecks, Frank and Cook contend that they have become much more widespread across the rest of American society, contributing to widening income disparities. Thus, we see features of winner-take-all markets in banking, law firms, consulting, journalism, medicine, publishing, corporate management, and even academic institutions.⁵³

However, “winner-take-all markets,” in their extreme form, can lead to the paradoxical *misallocation* of talent. Such market can be wasteful. We now have a more competitive society, a more consumerist society, and these forces influence families. Raising kids becomes like product development. Such market has resulted in an escalation of defensive spending. By the year 2005, nearly 30 percent of the nation’s college graduates will be working as file clerks, assembly workers, or some other occupation that does not require higher education.⁵⁴

Social Welfare Policies:

The term “welfare” properly means *any* form of institutional or state assistance to people in need. Local relief payments, disability payments, medical assistance, cash aid to families, food stamps, housing vouchers, and assistance to the elderly are all examples of state-financed welfare. Welfare also includes health insurance and pensions offered by employers, and similar elements of what might be called “the private welfare state.” In the current political debate, however, the term “welfare” has popularly been limited to the form of federally/state public assistance given to single mothers and their families, previously known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). In 1996, under what is now called Welfare Reform, AFDC was dismantled and the money bundled in

⁵² Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 162.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-97.

“block grants” and given over to the state governments for the administration of a new program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).⁵⁵

As a matter of policy, American society has generally tried to confine private charity and governmental assistance to the “deserving,” while insisting that the “undeserving poor” improve their character as a condition for receiving relief. The debate over who is to be helped will largely ignore the structural causes of poverty. Any regulations and policies designed to seek out the undeserved end up brutally punishing those who have no other resource. A current example of this attitude that punishes the needy for fear of making the program too attractive is the level of TANF benefits, which are so low that no one could survive on them.⁵⁶

Other developed nations of Western Europe and Canada have taken a very different approach to social welfare. While we are busy screening out the “undeserved” they generously include everyone because their emphasis is on social insurance, not public assistance. In most of these nations, every family with children receives an allowance of some sort, so a special program directed only at needy families is less necessary. In the U.S., the emphasis is on assistance to the needy; in most other industrialized nations the emphasis is on a social contract. In return for participating in society to the extent an individual is capable, the nation guarantees everyone a certain basic standard of living.⁵⁷

For example, in Finland:

All families, regardless of income, receive family support allowances from the Finish government for each of their children up to the age of seventeen. A single mother receives an additional \$44 a month per child. A single mother is also guaranteed at least \$107 a month in child support from the child’s father. Unlike in the United States, where few poor single parents receive child support, in Finland the government guarantees payment by taking responsibility for collecting child support payments and supplying the mother any unpaid balance if the state is for any reason unable to collect from the father.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 67-69. Welfare has perhaps most commonly been used as a mechanism for political mobilization. Particularly in local politics, public officials have frequently sued public assistance as a reward for political support. Since 1960, welfare benefits have been used in the attempt to make up for past racial injustice., 68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 69-71. People have cognitive limitations, emotional disorders, psychiatric disorders, and physical disabilities or illness that render them unable to work in the usual jobs. There are people whom society needs to support—either temporarily while they get back on their feet or permanently—if they do not sink into destitution. We have designed our system to make sure that no “undeserving poor” get public assistance. This is the essential heartlessness and destructiveness of welfare reform. We consign hundreds of thousands of families to extreme poverty and close the door behind us. Welfare reform, then, has been very good for some, very bad for others, and a very dangerous experiment in the unknown for still others., 100-101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 109. The pre-child allowance increases with every additional child, in part because of government policy to encourage a higher birth rate. A family receives approximately \$90 a month for a first child, but \$31 a month for a third. A family with three children, for instance, would receive \$330 a month in total child support payments.

All Finns, regardless of income, are also eligible for allowances for almost any kind of adult education, be it university classes, vocational or job training, continuing job-related education, or retraining for a new profession.

While the numbers work out differently elsewhere, family support in other industrialized countries is similarly generous. In Finland, France, Sweden, and several other countries in Europe, maternity allowances pay an amount almost equal to regular salaries for up to a year. In fact, the U.S. is the only industrialized country that does not have universal preschool, family assistance, and parental leave programs.⁵⁹

The U.S. is only one of three industrialized countries in the world that does not mandate maternity or paternity leave. Even worse, a majority of Americans are not even eligible for unpaid family leave. In Europe, paid maternity leave extends from three and a half to six months. In Sweden, mothers get sixty-four weeks off and 63 percent of their wages. In Germany, France, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Spain, paid maternity leave is 100 percent of salary for at least three months. American working fathers and mothers would be shocked to hear how well parents fare across the Atlantic.⁶⁰ Therefore, the European approach to addressing inequities and improving the quality of life of people is in family benefits.

According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), while the U.S. devotes only 11 percent of its GDP to redistributing income by way of transfers and other social benefits, the European Union contributes more than 26 percent of their GDP to social benefits. The U.S. is particularly stingy when it comes to helping the working poor. The legal minimum wage in the U.S. in the 1990s was only 39 percent of the average wage, whereas in the European Union it was 53 percent of the average wage. In the United States, unemployment benefits are also less generous than in the European Union. Where we really see the difference between the American and European unemployment insurance benefits are approximately half of one's previous salary, which about the same amount as in the United States, but almost everyone who loses a job receives it (in the United States less than half do), and an unemployed worker can receive those benefits for up to two years, compared to six months in the United States.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 110. In addition to these benefits, available to everyone regardless of income, there are two programs specifically designed for the economically needy. The first is assistance with rent up to 80 percent of the monthly payment, depending on one's income and the rental cost. Renters can choose housing wherever they can find it, preventing the kind of economic ghettoization that is common in the U. S. The names of those receiving such assistance are confidential, thereby avoiding stigma. Finally, there is a catchall benefit that social workers can authorize for people who still fall through the cracks. The amount one should need to live on is determined by a schedule that factors in family size, cost of living in the area, and any special needs. If all of one's income, including salaries, allowances and supports, is less than the determined amount, the social worker may, on a case-by-case basis, authorize an extra allowance to bring one up to the predetermined level, i.e. approximately at the poverty level., 111.

⁶⁰ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 43.

⁶¹ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 110.

In addition, tuition is free at all Finish schools for everyone. Students (including full-time adult students) also receive a living support of \$260 a month as well as rent support, two-thirds of monthly rent up to a maximum of \$150 a month. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 110.

Health Care Policies

There is no better index of the well-being of a society than a nation's health. Americans have come to believe that we have the best overall health-care system in the world. Although many Americans lament the fact that millions of their fellow citizens cannot afford private health-car insurance and are not eligible for public assistance, we nonetheless believe that Americans still enjoy a health-care system second to none. Unfortunately, the facts do not support the belief.⁶²

WHO ranked the countries of the world in terms of overall health performance, and the U.S. fell into thirty–seventh place. When it came to evaluating the fairness of countries' health care, the U.S. ranked still lower, to fifty-fourth, or last place among the OECD nations. Sadly, the U.S. and South Africa are the only two developed countries in the world that do not provide health care for all of their citizens. More than forty-six million people in America are currently uninsured and unable to pay for their own health care.⁶³

One aspect of social insurance common to all other Western industrialized nations is universal health care. In Finland, for example, the system is a mixture of public and private medicine. (Cold-war stereotypes to the contrary, Finland's economy is capitalist, as are the economies of the other Western industrialized nations.) Physicians work thirty-seven hours a week as state employees, either in public clinics or hospitals, but are allowed to have private practices as well, which most do. Any individual may use the public clinics for a nominal fee of approximately \$15 a year. Necessary hospitalization costs several dollars a day. Finns may also decide to sue the private system, in which case the state will pay approximately two-thirds of charges for covered services. In other Western countries the mechanism for providing coverage varies. In Canada, for example, physicians are in private practice and the state acts a single large insurance company that physicians then bill for services. England, on the other hand, has a completely socialized system of medicine in which all physicians are state employees. In each country, however, all citizens receive basic health care as a right. In Finland, health care is also available to anyone with permanent resident status.⁶⁴

A study found that the poorest individuals had three times the risk of dying compared with the riches. Nevertheless, the risk did not stop there, but extended well into the middle-class range of incomes.⁶⁵ No wonder the homeless die young—average longevity of the homeless population is 48.

⁶² Rifkin, *European Dream*, 79. Dr. Hilfiker was shocked to discover that well over a third of his young inner-city patients were anemic. Average hemoglobin levels were significantly lower than his rural patients. He suggests that hungry children are less able to cope with the difficulties of their environment. School performance suffers, with the expected consequence on future earning power. The stress of simply being poor has been documented to be a real health risk. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 33-34.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁴ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 108. Congressman James McDermot, a physician from the state of Washington, has repeatedly introduced a proposal in the House of Representatives for a “single-payer plan” that would provide universal coverage to all Americans without increasing total health care costs for the country. Sixty to eighty members of the House have usually signed on to this bill., 122-123.

⁶⁵ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 62.

Crimes and Incarceration Policies

The U.S. incarceration rate is high compared to that of the European Union. More than two million Americans are currently in prison. That's nearly one quarter of the entire prison population in the world (U.S. make up less than 6 percent of the world population). While EU member states average 87 prisoners per 100,000 population, the United States averages an incredible 685 prisoners per 100,000 population.⁶⁶ In the year 2,000, roughly one out of every three black males between eighteen and thirty-four years of age was under the active supervision of the criminal justice system: Under arrest, awaiting trial, awaiting sentencing, on probation, in jail or prison, in half-way houses or other mandated programs, or on parole.⁶⁷

Violent crime levels are generally higher in the U.S. than in Europe, but it is also true that both our "propensity to incarcerate" and the length of an average sentence for less serious, non-violent crimes like drug possession or burglary are greater in the U.S. than in other Western industrial countries. Prison sentences in the U.S. are three times those in European countries for these lesser crimes. Paradoxically, for violent crimes like murder or armed robbery, our sentences—with the notable exception of capital punishment—are closer to those in Europe.⁶⁸

The U.S. also spends far more money on fighting crime and administering civil justice than any of the European countries. In 1999, more than \$147 billion went into police protection, court administration, and prison maintenance, or 1.58 percent of that

⁶⁶ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 82. Over the last twenty-five years, "law and order" has become a politically potent slogan. In the early 1980s, both state legislatures and Congress started to write into law not only lengthier sentences for various crimes, but also "mandatory minimum" sentences. The result has been a substantial increase in the average length of time served in prison. At both federal and state levels, "three strikes" laws have been passed that mandate sentences of twenty five years to life for the third felony offense. In states, like California, these three-strikes can be for relatively minor offenses, including drug possession. More people there have been sentenced under the three-strike law for simple marijuana possession than for murder, rape, and kidnapping combined and more for drug possessions generally than for all violent offenses. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 35

⁶⁷ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 36. In Washington, D.C., half of all young black men are currently in the criminal justice system. In nearby Baltimore, it is even worse. These figures include only those currently in the system. If we also count those who have previously been in the system and have now been released, the numbers are even higher. We tend to punish the kinds of crime committed by the poor more severely than similar ones committed by affluent people. Compare, for example, shoplifting and "fudging" on an expense account. Each is a nonviolent crime against business. Since neither source of income is usually reported to the Internal Revenue Service, each is a federal crime. Yet the shoplifter is much more likely to be prosecuted than the executive manipulating his expense account.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37. "The war on drugs" has been the major cause of the increase in incarceration of black inner-city residents. "Declared" in the early 1980s, the emphasis of this war nationwide has been on law enforcement and the incarceration of drug offenders, not on prevention and treatment. It has also concentrated drug law enforcement on inner-city areas and instituted harsher sentencing policies, particularly for crack cocaine. This war has in truth been largely a war on the poor; between 1985 and 1995 the number of black state prison inmates sentenced for drug offense rose by more than 700 percent. Once in the criminal justice system, African Americans are usually treated more harshly than other racial groups. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 38. Despite the fact that two-thirds of crack users are white or Hispanic, 86 percent of all offenders sentenced in federal court for crack offenses are African American. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 39.

year's total GDP.⁶⁹

Between 1997 and 1999, the average rate of homicide per 100,000 people in the EU was 1.7. The U.S. rate of homicide was nearly four times higher, or nearly 6.26 per 100,000 people. More terrifying still, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the rate of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearm-related deaths exceed those of the other twenty-five wealthiest nations in the world, including fourteen wealthiest European countries. The homicide rate for children in the U.S. was five times higher than for children in the other twenty-five countries combined. The suicide rate among U.S. children was two times higher than all of the suicides combined in all the other twenty-five countries measured.⁷⁰

Our national statistics on homicide still far outstrip other industrialized nations. The annual toll of homicides in Britain (population 58 million) have fluctuated between 700 to 800 in recent years, which puts it in a league with Chicago, a city of less than 3 million. The American response to our homicide crisis has been to incarcerate everyone. But there are limits to the number of new prisons we can build with strapped tax dollars.⁷¹ There are also enormous hidden costs in our race to incarcerate, costs hidden because they are charged to the ghetto. Keeping half of the young black men under the supervision of the criminal justice system has devastating consequences.

For those actually incarcerated, of course, employment is impossible. One must give up any job one had to go to jail. Most of those on probation or parole are legally allowed to work, but when a criminal record is added to low educational attainment and limited job experience, work proves even harder to come by. Licensing requirements prohibits the formerly incarcerated from some forms of work. It will be hard for them to find work and they find it impossible to climb out of poverty. Soon they give up looking. And they are no longer "attached to the labor force," and so, in a final irony, they are not even counted among the unemployed, effectively lowering the real unemployment rate. If those incarcerated were counted, the overall unemployment rate for black men would increase by about two-thirds. Many states, in a further gesture of exclusion, prohibit felons from voting, temporarily or permanently. Anyone with a felony conviction for a drug offense is now prohibited from receiving a federal loan for education, making college an even more unrealistic dream.

Those who have criminal history have no place to put their feet down in our society. Therefore, they have to make prison or streets their permanent home. Imprisonment also deprives children of fathers, women of husbands and partners, and the community of human resources that could provide positive benefits, including the supervision of young people and other elements of informal social control. As more young people grow up

⁶⁹ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 77.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

⁷¹ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 135-136. With the deterioration of the social safety net over the last twenty years—government spending for almost every anti-poverty program has decreased—the prison has become our social policy; our employment initiative, our drug treatment program, our mental health policy, our anti-poverty effort, our program for children in trouble and our home for the homeless. Poverty is correlated with crime, but every extra dollar spent on local, state, and federal penal institutions is a dollar less to spend on the prevention and eradication of poverty. Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 40-41.

having parents and siblings and friends who are incarcerated, jail time is seen as a normal aspect of the life experience, and the deterrent effect of prison is diminished.⁷²

As Dr. Hilfiker suggests,

When we, as Americans, look at such a social welfare system, our first response is, “With benefits like that, who would want to go to work?” We wonder how many people are simply playing the system. From his interview of social workers Dr. Hilfiker discovered that less than one person in a thousand was abusing the system. A high-level administrator in Helsinki agreed that such abuse was rare. In Finland, there is no racial or economic segregation. Rich and poor live in the same neighborhoods; their children go to the same schools. As consequence, the disparity in services like education, police protection, or trash pickup provided to rich and poor, so prominent in the U.S., is largely absent. The result of this system is that Finland has little poverty as we in the U.S. would define it. There are certainly inequalities, but low-income people’s income is generally not allowed to fall below poverty levels. Even the most needy, then, would not be “poor” by our definition.⁷³

Finland is a small country, but much larger countries like Germany and France have programs that provide similar social insurances for the needs of children, as well as for illness, maternity, retirement, and unemployment. While there is certainly poverty in these countries, it does not reach the level of destitution familiar to us here, and children tend to be the best-off demographic group, not the poorest, as in the United States. But not all developed countries are as homogenous as Finland. Canada, Germany, and England all contain diverse populations yet manage to prevent destitution far better than the United States does.⁷⁴

Values System:

All of the above policies—social welfare, health care and incarceration—in the United States and Europe—appeared to be affected by people’s value system. When asked what values are extremely or very important to them, 95 percent of Europeans put *helping others* as the top of their list of priorities. 84 percent said they put a high value on being involved in *creating a better society*, putting financial success dead last of the eight values ranked in the survey.⁷⁵ [*Emphasis mine*]

⁷² Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 42.

⁷³ Ibid., 111- 112. Dr. Hilfiker suggests, “There is nothing intrinsic in this kind of social insurance that leads to lack of motivation or laziness. Given the proper support, most people will use the program appropriately. It is important to recognize, however, that the enormous physical and psychic damage already done to too many poor people in our country would demand much more intensive and expensive support for the first generation or two.” Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 114.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 113-114. Dr. Hilfiker suggests that while some European countries have limited their social programs in recent years, these cutbacks have been overemphasized in the American press. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Finland experienced several years of severe recession as commerce with its major trading partner all but collapsed and the official unemployment rate reached 22 percent. Despite this extraordinary stress on the safety net, however, there were no significant reduction in benefits. Over the past ten years, Dr. Hilfiker, after reading in the American press, checked with Finns about each “cutback.” However, either no one knew anything about it or the cutback was a minor tweaking of the system. The European safety nets remain largely intact.

⁷⁵ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 383.

In many respects, the European Dream is the mirror opposite of the American Dream. While the American Dream emphasizes unrestrained economic growth, personal wealth, and the pursuit of individual self-interest, the European Dream focuses more on sustainable development, quality of life, and the community relationship over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power.⁷⁶

Charity executives are puzzled why Americans do not seem willing to share more of their prosperity with the poor. Notwithstanding the outpouring of generosity demonstrated towards families of the victims of the September 11 tragedy, Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, Americans seem less attuned to the needs of the poor living just around the corner.⁷⁷ Individuals or society in general seem to hold the same attitude.

The Europeans want to live in a world where everyone is included and no one is left by the wayside. According to a Pew survey conducted in 2003, solid majorities in every European country say they believe it is more important for government to ensure that no one is in need, than it is for individuals to be free to pursue goals without government interference. Only in America, among all of the populations of the wealthy nations of the world, does a majority—58 percent—of the people say they care more about personal freedom to pursue goals without government interference, while only 34 percent say it is more important for the government to take an active approach to guaranteeing that no one is in need.⁷⁸

Even today, after a decade of widening earnings disparities, members of the American Labor movement are significantly less favorable toward government action than their European counterparts. Fewer than half of American union members are in favor of the government providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed, as compared with 69 percent of West German, 72 percent of British, and 73 percent of Italian unionists. Even the poor in America are inclined to vote against expanding the government's role in providing a decent standard of living for the poor.⁷⁹

Tax Policies:

We gather that the organization of such an egalitarian society in Europe which values everyone equally—economically and socially—are affected not only by their value system but also their value of the community as a home for everyone and their willingness to share the cost through their taxing policies.

In the U.S., average Federal and local taxation rates—exclusive of social security payroll taxes—are about 21 percent of income, and many Americans consider these rates

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁷ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 84.

⁷⁸ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 382.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 164.

high. Taxation rates in Finland and other Western nations range from 40 percent to 50 percent of income, although not all of the difference is due to social insurance programs.⁸⁰

Americans are hostile toward taxes because our struggle to maintain ground against the rising tide of income inequality *makes us feel less generous* toward the state.⁸¹

Of twenty countries, the U.S. pays the lowest tax. The American predicament is in distinct contrast to Europe, where by dint of maintaining higher levels of taxes, citizens tend to view themselves as directly benefiting from government programs—whether in the form of free health care, inexpensive college education, subsidized child care, or better maintenance of public facilities such as mass transportation. More equal societies will tend to have lower *private* transfer burdens—less private capital, less debt, and less conspicuous consumption. People are willing to pay higher taxes for social insurance. Public services come to be seen as collective assets—something from which the population at large benefits directly (for example, in the form of Canadian medical care, French trains and mass transit, and the German system of free universities).⁸²

TABLE 2
Government Tax Revenue as a Percentage of GDP, 1995

DENMARK	51.3	SWEDEN	49.7
FINLAND	46.5	BELGIUM	46.5
FRANCE	44.5	NETHERLAND	44.0
AUSTRIA	42.4	NORWAY	41.5
ITALY	41.3	GERMANY	39.2
NEW ZEALAND	38.2	CANADA	37.2
UNITED KINGDOM	35.3	SPAIN	34.0
SWITZERLAND	33.9	PORTUGAL	33.8
IRELAND	33.8	AUSTRALIA	30.0
JAPAN	28.5	UNITED STATES	27.9

Longevity:

Impact of Economic Disparity on Longevity:

Indexes of social health, as developed by Marc Miringoff and colleagues at the Fordham Institute for Innovation in Social Policy are: *Children's* infant mortality, child abuse, child poverty, *youth's* suicide, teenage drug abuse, high school drop outs, teenage births *adult's* unemployment, wages, health care coverage, elderly poverty, life expectancy, and all age's violent crime, alcohol-related traffic fatalities, affordable housing, and inequality.⁸³

⁸⁰ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 112-113.

⁸¹ Kawachi and Kennedy, *The Health*, 166-167.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 198.

Laissez-faire and unbridled competition threatens the health of us all. No society can indefinitely put off paying for the consequences of relentless competition, escalating consumption, plus all the social divisions and social exclusion that the American model of capitalism implies.”⁸⁴

The costs of our consumer culture are tightly linked with the societal price we pay for income inequality. The more unequal the distribution of income, the longer and harder families need to work to keep from slipping behind on the economic ladder. The greater the disparities in wealth and income, the greater the effort expended by producers of goods and services in catering to the spending habits of the rich.

A study of the relationship of income inequality to mortality rates across the U.S. found that greater inequality in the distribution of income was associated with rates of premature death from heart attack, cancer, murder, and infant mortality.⁸⁵ It is possible that *both* the poor and rich will experience worse health outcomes as a result of living in a society with more unequal distribution of income. For instance, if there is more violent crime in an unequal society, the rich who live there might be more likely to become victims of homicide than their counterparts who live in more egalitarian, less violent societies.⁸⁶

When we measure economic well-being and quality of life, the European Union begins to shoot ahead of the U.S. The criteria for determining a good quality of life is access to a housing, food, clothing, education, health care, adequate care for our children, and living in safe neighborhoods and communities. In most of these particulars, the European Union has already surpassed the United States of America. While the average life expectancy in the European Union—excluding the ten new countries—is 81.4 years for women and 75.1 years for men, for a mean life expectancy of 78.2 years, the U.S. life expectancy for women is 79.7 years and for men 74.2, for a mean life expectancy of 76.9 years.⁸⁷

Money will buy better health, but only up to a point. Beyond that point, further growth does not produce more health, and the relationship between income and life expectancy flattens out. In spite of being the richest citizens on the globe, Americans do not enjoy the highest longevity in the world. Across twenty-eight countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996, the range of life expectancies at birth ranged from a high of 83.6 years for Japanese women to a low of 65.9 years for Turkish men. If the level of affluence is the main determinant of health, we would expect Americans to rank near the top of this list. American men ranked twenty-second (72.7) and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 201.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 106. It reminds me of cartoon I saw; a boat in which a fat man and a poor skinny man were sitting on each opposite end. The side of a fat man was sinking. The skinny man’s side was gradually sinking too due to the weight of the other heavy side. The insight of the cartoon was that eventually both will die together. This is the consequence of our economic system, not only creating poverty but the wealthy eventually die with the poor. The wealthy become spiritually homeless and their souls will die and the poor become physically homeless and their bodies will die.

⁸⁷ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 78-79.

American women the 19th (79.4) out of twenty-eight OECD countries for life expectancy in 1996 Japan shows the highest in both men's and women's life expectancy among 28 countries.⁸⁸

The U.S. and other wealthy countries with high levels of social inequality have lower general health than do more equitable societies, rich or poor. They dramatically demonstrate that growing inequalities threaten the very freedom that economic development is thought to bring about: freedom from want, freedom from ill health, freedom to exercise democratic choice, and freedom to pursue leisure and happiness.

Several other studies based on less developed countries have examined the relationship between the distribution of income and infant mortality rates. These studies found that countries with unequal income distribution have higher rates of infant mortality than countries with similar levels of national product per capita but more equal income distribution. The possibility that a poor person's level of well-being depends not just on their own income but on the levels of income of others in society challenges conventional economic assumptions involved in making welfare comparisons. This implies then that the absolute standard of living may be a poor measure of social welfare: When incomes are unequally distributed, the true welfare of the poor may be lower than measured income suggests.⁸⁹

Researchers also found that morale was actually higher among officers in the military, where promotion rates were very *slow*, compared with officers in the Air Force, where promotion was very rapid. This means that a person's level of well-being depends not just on their own level of income, but on everybody else's.⁹⁰

For example, in major-league baseball, the wider pay gaps may instill feelings of unfairness, promote dissatisfaction and resentment, and ultimately diminish individual performance. Wider pay dispersion creates disincentives against cooperation, especially in a game that frequently relies on teamwork. In sum, inequalities in compensation may lead to less cooperation, less team-oriented behavior, lower common goal orientation, and active erosion of social cohesion.

In manufacturing firms, wider pay dispersion has been found to result in lower product quality. In American manufacturing firms, the average compensation of a CEO can be up to 150 times that of the average worker, much higher than the salaries of their counterparts in Japan or Germany. Whereas American CEOs routinely lay off thousands of workers during economic downturn and reward themselves in the process for "increasing efficiency," their Japanese counterparts have been known to take voluntary pay cuts to preserve jobs. And therefore, inequality can be quite dysfunctional in terms of an organization's performance.⁹¹

Two American studies (by a University of Michigan team and a Harvard School of Public Health team) tested the relationship between income inequality and variation in

⁸⁸ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 45-48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-51.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 90-92.

premature death rate across the fifty U.S. states found: a highly significant correlation between the measure of inequality and premature death rates, which was present in both men and women, and in white Americans as well African-Americans. Even the Robin Hood Index that shows greater inequality in the distribution of income was associated with not just higher rates of overall mortality, but also rates of premature death from the heart attack, cancer, murder, and infant mortality.⁹²

More egalitarian distribution of income resulted in an increase in longevity, even though the average level of income remained same. It is possible that both the poor and rich will experience worse health outcomes as a result of living in a society with more unequal distribution of income. For instance, if there is more violent crime in an unequal society, the rich who live there might be more likely to become victims of homicide than their counterparts who live in more egalitarian, less violent societies.⁹³

Impact of Satisfaction with life on Longevity

Longevity is affected by our satisfaction with life. In what kind of society do people feel more satisfied with their life? Eight out of ten Europeans say they are happy with their lives.⁹⁴ However, Americans within every stratum of income were dissatisfied with what they earned. Sixty-four percent of Americans earning less than \$10,000 per year responded in a survey that they “could not afford to buy everything they need.” In the same survey, 42 percent of Americans earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000 said the same, as well as 39 percent of Americans earning \$75,000 to \$100,000.⁹⁵ Therefore, prosperity does not buy happiness. The absence of money can breed misery, but having it is no guarantee of happiness. Thus we can conclude that within societies, the lower our standing relative to others, the unhealthier we tend to be.⁹⁶

This phenomenon can be explained: As the consumption patterns of the rich become more normative, the more ordinary families need to spend to keep up with the average standard of living. The harder families work to pay for lifestyles beyond their means, the more pressure and stress they may experience spending less time in maintaining family and community ties.⁹⁷

One of the most focused definitions was presented by Leonard Sagan in his examination of the factors that influence health and wellness in the world’s various nations. His findings are:

People who live a healthy and long life are not self-indulgent or preoccupied with their personal identity or welfare. Rather they are committed to goals other than their own personal welfare. Goals may be global in scope or quite modest. Most important, however,

⁹² Ibid., 102-103.

⁹³ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁴ Rifkin, *European Dream*, 383.

⁹⁵ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

they are not egotistical in nature but will benefit others. Healthy people are compassionate; they have a strong sense of community. I believe that these qualities are in a state of decline in the U.S.—and it may not be a coincidence that evidence of worsening health is appearing at the same time that Americans are preoccupied with “self-realization.” When the California Department of Mental Health surveyed 1,000 Californians, they found that the healthiest ones cared most for others—and for themselves.⁹⁸

Impact of Human Companionship on Longevity

A number of studies showed that people in Japan—even though they smoke cigarettes, have high blood pressure, endure crushing stress, and live in polluted and crowded cities, factors characteristically considered to be factors leading to heart disease—live longer than we do. In fact, they enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world. Researchers finally decided that the Japanese are protected from ill health and death by their unusually close ties to friends, family members, and community. University of California San Francisco School of Medicine researcher Ken Pelletier believes the social aspect of human companionship is one of the most important factors in health.⁹⁹

A case study of the community of Roseto in eastern Pennsylvania: The residents of Roseto suffered less than half the rate of heart attack compared with that of surrounding communities. The researchers could come up with only one thing seemed to differ from people living in surrounding area: The men and women of Roseto expressed a striking degree of solidarity with their community. There was a strong tradition of helping one's friends as well as friends of one's friends. The social emphasis of the community was on interdependence, which could be traced all the way back to the time when the town had been settled by immigrants who originated from the same village in rural Italy.¹⁰⁰

In short, the reason European countries offer everyone a decent life is not because they are communist or socialist, as Dr. Hilfiker pointed out, or not because they are all Christians, but because they, as peoples, governments and nations, place their value on an egalitarian social system and are willing to share the cost in building an equal, livable society for “everyone” by paying higher taxes for common good. If the same capitalist system in Europe could do it and why can we not do it? We know how, have economic resources and good hearts. The only thing that will help us do will be our willingness and desire to do it and sharing the cost.

⁹⁸ Haefen, Karren, Frandsen & Smith, *Mind/Body Health* (Boston: A Simon & Schuster Co.), 487.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 277. Another research was conducted by Dr. Gunnar Biorck, who studied more than two hundred cardiac patients in the town of Malmo, Sweden. Biorck found that the patients gained physical and psychological strength in the hospital where teams of nurses and physicians were at close hand and where there was plenty of human contact. The most serious medical problems among Biorck's study patients occurred *after* the patients left the hospital—a time when “many patients feel deserted and very lonely.” When the social support drops off, the protection is often lost. In another Swedish study, 150 middle-aged men were studied for ten years to determine the effects of various factors on ischemic heart disease. The greatest factor in who lived and who died was not necessarily the presence of disease or the presence of risk factors, but social isolation. The men who had the greatest social isolation also had the poorest survival rates. Studies have shown that human interaction itself has a biological value, causes changes in blood pressure, heart rate, and blood chemistry, the changes that promote good health for the heart. Haefen, Karren, Frandsen & Smith, *Mind/Body Health*, 279-280.

¹⁰⁰ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of nations*, 155-156.

We Americans might not be so proud of our democracy because it appears not the superior one in the world because political democracy without economic democracy is not a total democracy for the wellbeing of all citizens. It seems that what the Europeans value and share is much closer to the policy of God in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament. One can lament that we are not as close to God's policy as the Europeans are. I hope this dissertation becomes a wake-up-call for all of us to look at our way of treating the poor in our midst and to create a just society for all, which then will bring us better health, happiness and longevity as the many researchers quoted above.