

[Why are hunger and poverty on the rise in the U.S.? A basic explanation from FOOD FIRST...and a sensible solution you can be part of]

Should America be measured by its 3.5 million millionaires ...or by its 30 million hungry?



The percentage of children living below the poverty line rose 49% from the 1970s to the 1990s
(Source: Boston Globe, 9/28/94)

The volatile stock market has soared beyond any reasonable expectation. So has hunger among Americans—up 50% since 1985. What's going on here?

For twenty-three years, the Institute for Food and Development Policy—Food First, co-founded by *Diet for a Small Planet* author Frances Moore Lappé, has studied hunger in the world's poorest countries. Now we're uncovering the same dynamics of suffering operating here at home.

We want to share our findings with you because effective action must be grounded in understanding, no matter how much the analysis might be at odds with conventional wisdom. There is something we can and must do about hunger in America, the wealthiest nation on Earth. Before we tell you what that is, though, here's some background.

☛ Growing income disparity explains the increase in hunger. We have seen this same phenomenon in Third World countries—a high-consumption elite, a struggling and shrinking middle-class, a growing Hunger Class.

Now the same thing is happening in the United States, a fact obscured by rosy official economic reports that lump rich and poor together.

What does the Pledge of Allegiance sound like on an empty stomach?

The second thing to know about hunger is that public policy does have a real, concrete effect, for both good and evil.

☛ If the public refuses to tolerate widespread hunger, we can act through government to provide relief measures, as the U.S. has done many times since the Great Depression of the 1930's. But if hunger is hidden, government may cut back on food assistance programs and make the problem worse. That's exactly what has happened in the U.S. since 1985 (the latest cutback was called "welfare reform").

☛ The growing number of hungry people in America should make anyone question triumphal official reports on the national economy. Clearly, the economy has twisted, disparities have deepened, inequalities widened. "Prosperity" has become an excuse for ignoring growing poverty.

☛ Sure, there are more millionaires than ever in the U.S. But for every new millionaire, there are countless new hungry people for whom \$100 or \$200 a month in Food Stamps is the only safeguard against malnutrition, even starvation.

Another is that the richest have sealed themselves off. Gated communities, private security guards, tank-like luxury SUV's with tinted windows—all these allow the more fortunate to bypass the reality of hunger in America.

☛ The price of hunger, including its costs in educational performance and public health, is excruciating. But instead of publicly investing the relatively little needed to prevent hunger, the wealthy spend more and more, privately, to shield themselves from the results of hunger.

☛ American public policy violates the UDHR. In fact, one government official recently admitted that the U.S. would refuse to support the right to food because "welfare reform" would then be in violation of internationally-accepted human rights standards.

☛ Key economic indicators have proven inadequate and misleading when it comes to the growing hunger problem America faces. We need a new standard to measure our nation's economic and social policies. Rather than invent one, sign on to our campaign—**Economic Human Rights: The Time Has Come!**—to make the U.S. government live up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to food.

Right now, the millionaires in the Senate decide who gets to eat in the U.S. Let's be consistent in our support of human rights by supporting the most basic human right of all here at home.

☛ For details, mail the coupon below or visit our web site at www.foodfirst.org. Or, sign on the dotted line right now and add your name to the thousands we're gathering nationwide.

Hunger is growing. Take action now by joining this important new human rights campaign.

Join us on Capitol Hill
(2359 Rayburn HOB)
September 23rd, 1998
9:30-11:30am
for historic hearings on basic human rights in America.

[1]

The rich get richer, the poor go hungry.

Analysis of key indicators reveals that America's boom decade has left the nation with a profile similar to the "developing" world.

Incomes have expanded, but have also been redistributed upward.

Numbers of hungry Americans are comparable to the Middle East and North Africa combined.

7.5	8.9	37 million	30 million
1970	1990	Middle East & North Africa	America

THE RICHEST 20% OF AMERICANS EARN 8.9 TIMES MORE THAN THE POOREST 20%.

(Source: 1990-UNDP, 1994, 1970s figure from UNRISD, Discussion Paper #37, 1992) (Source: FAO, The Sixth World Food Survey, 1996, Rome, 1996)

Hunger is caused by poverty, not scarcity.

The first thing to know is that hunger is not an accident, in the U.S. or anywhere else. There is no scarcity of food in the world. Certainly there's no shortage here in America.

The other thing to remember about hunger is that the well-off in every country never go hungry, even in a famine; the poorest do.

☛ According to a study prepared for the U.S. Congress, more than thirty million Americans—one in nine—are hungry, unable to buy food for themselves and their families for some part of each month. Twelve million (40%) of America's hungry are children.

☛ The number of hungry people in America has increased by half since 1985. This coincides with the longest uninterrupted run of prosperity in modern American history. The explanation?

While the economy has expanded, fewer Americans have benefited. Most new wealth has gone to the top-most tier of Americans. Yes, unemployment is low—but the working poor can no longer make ends meet.

[2]

America's income disparity ranks among the world's worst.

The richest 20% of Americans earn 8.9 times more than the poorest 20%. This is on par with Honduras, Jamaica, and Kenya, and about twice as bad as Japan, India, Bangladesh, and Rwanda.

Income inequality (income gap) of selected countries. Ratio of income going to richest 20% of population vs. poorest 20%.

9.1	8.9	8.7	8.1	
KENYA	USA	HONDURAS	JAMAICA	
5.6	4.7	4.3	4.1	4.0
GERMANY	INDIA	JAPAN	BANGLADESH	RWANDA

(Source: UNDP, Human Development Report, 1994, New York)

☛ Because the mass media is aimed at the people with the highest disposable income, we see pictures of hunger overseas, but not our own. Perhaps that's a reason why the growth of the Hunger Class has been ignored politically.

[3]

An economy for millionaires.

Formerly broad-based, America's economy has not "turned around." It has been turned over. The richest 1% owns more than the poorest 92% combined. The economy now caters to a globalized elite whose lives are sealed off from national social and economic consequences.

CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH IN THE U.S.

19%	40%
1976: PERCENT OF U.S. ASSETS OWNED BY RICHEST 10%	1996: PERCENT OF U.S. ASSETS OWNED BY RICHEST 10%

(Source: Top Heavy: The Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America by Edward Wolff, New Press, New York, 1996)

To end hunger in the U.S., we should subscribe to global standards of minimal human rights.

The U.S. prides itself on protecting individual rights, what we usually think of as "human rights." But we may be the only country in the world that blames the individual for being too poor to eat, and pretends there are no political solutions to economic injustice. As a result, we tolerate wider income disparities and deeper levels of deprivation than any other advanced industrial nation. For our children's sake, this must stop.

☛ Along with universal human rights like free speech and religious tolerance, minimal standards of social and economic human rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations half a century ago this year. These include the right to food.

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In this time of U.S. economic prosperity, I'm confident that America can meet any international human rights standard. Food, housing, medical care and a livable wage should be every person's basic human right. It is time for the U.S. government to guarantee economic human rights to its people and live up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send me more information.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of:

___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$75 ___\$100 or \$_____

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www.foodfirst.org