

Poverty

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Thanks to television talk shows, newspapers, and the internet, the American public is well aware of the prevalence of teen pregnancies, drug addictions, and other misfortunes that exist in our country today. Despite this plethora of knowledge, the majority of America's population remains ignorant of the cause of these tragedies: poverty. Families living in poverty represent more than 12.6 percent of the nation's population, or roughly 37 million people (Poverty USA). The U.S. Census Bureau identifies 'families living in poverty' by comparing the total income earned to the number of people in the family (Poverty USA). This line is very strict; if a family earns even as little as one dollar more than the 'cut-off' amount, that family would be ineligible to receive government aid. This cut-off creates catastrophic problems in our society, such as criminal violence and a drain of the nation's economic resources. This issue is very important to me because my grandparents rose from impoverished beginnings. My interest has led me to attend seminars, personally speak with impoverished families, and volunteer at Soup Kitchens. I have noticed that although the government attempts to combat poverty through charity and Education Acts, these measures are temporary and ultimately ineffective. After much reflection, I would like to propose a new solution to this problem.

Most people are unaware that the government's strict qualifications for need-biased aid actually keep citizens in poverty. Understandably, disasters happen and families become in need of temporary aid. My great-grandfather was an alcoholic for many years, forcing my grandfather to depend on government aid. For many reasons, the government offers renewable subsidies to impoverished families. Although this system is

intended to *temporarily* aid the families, it is ineffective because it allows the families to reapply continuously for the same benefits on the condition that they remain unemployed (US Department of Labor). Some sociologists argue that this method creates a 'cycle of poverty' by allowing impoverished families to become continuously dependent on government aid (Cliff Notes). In addition, often these benefits are more favorable than the wages earned from working at a low-paying job. Therefore, rather than knowing satisfaction, these workers experience *worse* living conditions than when they were unemployed. Thus, they are encouraged to accept the government's aid and consequently their 'helpless' situation. This unfortunate reality has a degrading effect on our society because this constant taking while never contributing to the country's resources detracts from the Social Security benefits for the working class and forces people across America to pay taxes to support the unemployed lifestyles.

Perhaps most importantly, people remain in poverty because they are uneducated. Children make up 17.6 percent of the total poverty population (Poverty USA). According to American Humane, children living in poverty are more likely to be neglected than children not living with families below the poverty line. If 12.9 million of America's children are not receiving proper education or guidance, they will be forced to accept their adverse conditions. As Americans, we believe that education allows an individual to overcome the effects of poverty by providing the opportunity to become successful with a decent job. For this reason, education in America is free and compulsory. In fact, to improve a child's chances for success President Bush passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Although the Act is intended to improve the quality of education, it has severely restricted the curriculum for most children (McKenzie). The Act mandates the

federal government to take away federal funding for schools that do not meet the required standardized test result quota. As a result, the teachers are forced to prepare the children to pass a standardized test, while at the same time neglecting to teach them valuable knowledge not included in the test. This wanting education makes it very difficult for impoverished children to be accepted into a good university. Because they are not admitted into colleges, impoverished children are unable to obtain good careers and decent jobs. Ultimately, education in America does not offer a way out of poverty.

In an ideal world, all citizens would be educated but the reality is that only a few receive a worthy education and even less receive moral guidance (American Humane). I believe that morality is *essential* to maintaining a functioning society because it provides security and good faith. Many poor children grow up without parental guidance and thus are indifferent to the difference of right and wrong. For this reason, they may be more likely to be involved in theft, gangs, and rape. These crimes can devastate everybody in America's society from the homeless to wealthy.

Although the government may be responsible for the well-being of its citizens, ultimately I think it is the citizen's responsibility to improve society. As individuals, we can make the American public aware of the causes and extents of poverty. Writing to newspaper and television stations can make the American public realize that poverty is degrading society. We can also write to our senators and representatives in Congress to make them aware of our concern with the government's inefficiency. In addition, stressing moral values amongst families will encourage them to stick together and support each other. Developing a moral conscious can lead to less crime and divorce rates. In turn, this security will create a supportive

environment for the children and allow them to grow into better individuals. I would like to suggest offering morality and religion as school courses in public schools. In this manner, I would reform education. I would invest more money in education programs and teacher's salaries to allow for a better quality of education. This would allow for better resources and better qualified teachers. Finally, I would redistribute money to families that sent their children to school. This way, parents would become concerned about their child's attendance in school while at the same time receive money for their guidance. Understandably, this system may seem costly, but I feel the long-time rewards of an education outweigh its cost. My grandfather was able to work his way out of poverty because he earned an engineering scholarship. This is proof that an adequate education and a value of responsibility will allow an individual to work his way out of poverty. I am very grateful that he was able to work his way out of poverty because it has affected my parent's upbringing and ultimately mine as well. I have the ability to receive a greater education because of my parent's sacrifices and guidance. Although there is no easy solution to ending poverty, I hope to one day make a difference for families like those of my grandfather's.

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