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Policies of Poverty

Challenging an issue in society can be a difficult task which involves a purpose and position, as well as methods and materials to support one's cause. When analyzing a writer's work, Dr. Joseph Harris, an English professor at Duke University, insists, "You need to both give a [a text] its due and to show what uses you want to make of it" (Harris 15). In his personal report, *Breadline USA*, author Sasha Abramsky embraces the battle of hunger in the United States by writing extensively about how and why it is occurring in this nation. Abramsky specifically concentrates on the governmental failures regarding the issues of hunger and poverty in chapter three, "Trickle-Up Poverty". Abramsky takes initiative to expose this information in order to educate his readers, the nation, as well as himself about the topic so that appropriate action may take place, rather than history repeating itself. Noting his position directly to the reader, Abramsky comments, "Why it [the government] neglected to act and restore dignity to these broken—or breaking—lives, is a sorry story of conservative economic analysis...of ideology serving as a blinder to the facts on the ground" (Abramsky 90). Abramsky condemns the United States government for failure to appropriately control the issue of poverty, homelessness, and in particular, hunger. Abramsky disapproves of the actions of past presidents by exposing their mistakes. In a nation with such a strong reliance on governmental programs and policies, citizens should not have feelings of anxiety of whether or not the programs will work.

There have been disagreements throughout the years of politics on the issue of how money should be distributed in the United States. Tax cuts for the wealthy is a well-known debate between political republicans and democrats in this nation. Republicans state that tax cuts for the wealthy is reasonable. Republican Ronald Reagan uses the “trickle-down” as an explanation to how money would flow in an ideal situation. The theory is that if a majority of money is placed in the hands of the wealthy at the top of the economic chain while cutting taxes for them, then the money would adequately land into the lower classes through time in a manner similar to a domino effect (94). Unfortunately this ideal situation hit a blunder and the adverse effect emerged, hence the title of chapter three, “Trickle-Up Poverty”. In reality, Abramsky blames the destruction of the nation’s economy on governmental failures. He also examines the economic effects of governmental failure emphasizing, “The pain crept up the economic ladder, eating away at the financial security of tens of millions of people” (94). The author is countering the issue of the failures of our government by challenging the success of Reagan’s policies. Abramsky forwards that the governmental errors in aid programs has been an ongoing conflict within our nation, therefore causing agony among the American people. The low inflation problem leads to governmental aid programs failure to run properly, lowering the value of our currency, then further causing in a greater struggle for not only people in poverty, but also people just above in the lower class (94). United States citizens are forced to work in order to survive the government’s policies because of the underestimations of inflation. The value of the dollar plummeted, causing wage rates to be kept lower, making it more difficult for minimum-wage workers to earn a sufficient living income (94). This conflict causes thousands of Americans to be forced to work multiple jobs in order to survive the difficult economic times our country is facing.

One would believe that historical events would impact how decisions would be made in the future based upon their results. However in many cases, things that occurred in the past often repeat themselves in some form years following. Abramsky investigates this subject with detail in chapter three when mirroring modern problems of hunger and poverty to those that existed years ago. The government began taking action on poverty and hunger starting in the early twentieth-century. Abramsky reports, “For two decades, from the early 1930s onward, the government had been in the business of feeding at least some of the country’s hungry” (82). One of the first actions taken by the government to battle hunger was the 1964 Food Stamp Act, signed by President Lyndon Johnson (84). The purpose of this act was to protect and provide a more fulfilling life for the American poor. Initiating this act therefore committed the government’s involvement with the hungry. Unfortunately, the food stamps program has had several complications. The application process to obtain these vouchers is rather lengthy, frustrating, and can also be discouraging to many. Many question this program asking, are food stamps even worth it? Abramsky investigates this issue briefly as he points out

A single person on food stamps in mid-2008 received an average of twenty-six dollars per week and a maximum of forty dollars in vouchers, far less to meet their basic nutritional needs that most middle-class Americans spent on their frivolous Latte Factors (87)

The “Latte Factor” is a term Abramsky uses to explain the amount people spend on incidental food purchases, usually for pleasure and are not crucial for survival (18). Using statistics from programs fighting the war on hunger, Abramsky forwards the fact that it is criminal for the government to provide such a service, yet as many as 40 percent of eligible recipients reap the benefits (87). Abramsky would agree that if the government truly wanted to give Americans

facing hunger an adequate life, programs should be made with the goal of supporting healthy lifestyles, rather than having just enough food to get by.

Another comparison that Abramsky recognizes between the past histories in America to the present is the similarities of living situations during crippling economic periods. During the Great Depression, poverty-stricken communities, “Hooverilles”, were built by the homeless and sarcastically named after President Herbert Hoover, who was criticized for leading American’s into this time of economic hardships (79). Even soldiers from World War I were forced to live in such an area because the government failed to pay military-service bonuses at an earlier date that would have been used for by soldiers’ families in order not to go hungry (80). Sadly, many of our nation’s soldiers and families were let down by the Hoover administration and felt impact of the government’s mistakes as some went days without food. My heart breaks to think the problem of hunger still exist to this day and that we did not learn from our past. Modern day Hooverilles can be seen across the nation in small villages referred to as “tent cities”. Abramsky exposes these deprived areas in abandoned lots, fields, and railways as “tightly packed rows of small tents... [with] the appearance of refugee camps on the edge of war zones” (95). Hundreds of people, who struggle with their personal finances, reside here, living out of suitcases, and their main source of food is a food pantry nearby. Abramsky’s comparison to these situations to a war suggests that perhaps these citizens are victims of an ugly and avoidable war, a war caused by our government’s neglects. The author forwards an interview done by BBC reporters in March 2008 in agreement to personal evidence of the negative effect of hunger. A tent city member told the reporters what made them get to this point, and it came down to “feeding my family or keeping the house” (95). I do not believe that it is fair to allow an internal

war in the United States to occur, when the people in charge of this nation acknowledge hunger in America and do not do more to prevent and solve it.

With a new president at the White House, President Barack Obama offers hope and change; one can only anticipate when that day will come. In 2008, Obama passionately declares, "We've got rising food prices here in the United States. My top priority is making sure that people are able to get enough to eat" (Obama). Hunger cannot be solved in one day; it takes time just like any other conflict the United States had to face in the past. What is not just is the fact that each day a child, a mother, or even a whole family is suffering from something so preventable if only the government could appropriately manage this issue. Abramsky agrees and yearns to solve this war on poverty and hunger by spreading the message to the public of the failures of governmental policies and actions. In his book, *Breadline USA*, Abramsky exposes these faults in depth in chapter three, "Trickle-Up Poverty".

Works Cited

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