

## Being Poor:

I am not poor. It seems like everyone who tries to write something about being poor is not poor. It takes too much energy to simply get by when you're poor. There isn't time to write about it. That's why, every once in a while, some of the rest of us, the privileged, should think about it and talk about it and write about it and maybe even do something about it.

I call us privileged, dear reader, because it was by blind luck alone that we were born in this bountiful country. We could just as easily be on the streets in Delhi as in the kitchen in Houston. You and I had nothing to do with our births. It is neither a credit to us nor a debit to us that we were put here. It just is.

The same is true for the poor of our planet. It is neither to their credit nor their detriment that they were born into dire circumstances. They had no choice either. Just like us.

You and I live in an advanced, successful, prodigious economy. We share that with most of Europe, parts of South America, Japan, S. Korea, Australia and a dozen or so other places. These various places have very large middle classes. Lower middle, upper middle or middle middle, it doesn't much matter. It is the more or less comfortable middle classes that drive the Consumer Economies. The middle class buys the vast majority of what is manufactured, served and advertised. The rich and super rich buy only a small percentage of all goods and services.

When we shop we shop largely by price. Yes, we look for quality and style but when it comes down to the final choice between equal or nearly equal products we'll go with the less expensive one. It just makes sense. We do. Japanese folks do. Australians do. The most successful economies in the world are driven by folks who spend just like you and me. We have a lot and we spend a lot.

The two most important factors in making goods and services more attractively priced are cheap natural resources and cheap labor. Cheap resources come from the poorest places in the world. Africa, Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Latin America supply the world with cheap, critical resources. The citizens of these countries, almost all of them, receive no profit at all from the sale of these resources.

Cheap labor comes from anywhere on the planet where there are poor people. You and I wouldn't work for poverty wages because we are not poor. It doesn't matter whether it's in a sweatshop in Chicago or a factory in Bangladesh. The people who have to work for poverty wages are the poor. The simple truth is that our magnificent Consumer Economy is based on the fact that a large portion of the world is poor. This large portion of the world has no choice but to sell their resources cheaply and their labor at a level just above slavery. Without the poor we don't have our comforts. Simple.

We are happy consumers because, in large part, the poor make it possible.

You can go through the whole list from the food you buy at a supermarket to the shoes you wear. From the truck you drive to the stock you own. You and me, we are buying the things that poor people make, mine, grow and service for us.

If living off the sweat of poor people makes you a tad uncomfortable there are things you can do. If it doesn't make you uneasy you should read something else. Here are things to do. You can buy locally grown food. What can't be local, like coffee and tangerines can be bought from Fair Trade sources. You can fill your 401k and IRA with funds that buy shares in ethical businesses and are still very profitable. You can cut down on your trips to Wal-Mart, which has convinced us that cheap goods are a constitutional right.

All of this is fairly obvious. It will cost more. No doubt about it. Paying a fair price for resources and wages means goods and services will cost more. It's a choice. We start paying what things cost in a decent world or we keep paying prices that are supported on the backs of the world's poor.

I know, I know. People in an Indonesian Nike factory are happy to make the money they make. Allow me to continue the analogy. Put you and me in a place without food and drinkable water and we'd slop with the hogs. Lousy conditions beget lousy outcomes.

One more thing. Please check out the Hunger Project. Go to their website at [www.thp.org](http://www.thp.org) This Organization is achieving measurable, positive results by targeting conditions that will bring real change. They don't do famine, adoption or missions. They help people change their conditions so that they can change their lives.

They show people how they can gain and wield power. They begin to change lives this way. People learn that many of their village traditions and customs are vehicles for keeping a small elite atop the heap. When people know that their desperately poor lives are perpetuated by people in power, when they know the powerful peoples' aim is to keep themselves wealthy and powerful, the poor begin to make changes. When you give them the means to make the changes the possibilities are limitless.

There really is an end to poverty. We can be a crucial piece of that victory. What we need to do is to decide.