

“Throughout the nation men and women, forgotten in the political philosophy of the Government, look to us here for guidance and for more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of national wealth... I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people. This is more than a political campaign. It is a call to arms.”

-Franklin Roosevelt

Recently, I was reading a study on children living in poverty when a gentleman sitting next to me politely looked at me and said, “That’s an uplifting topic.” I acknowledged the weight of the subject matter, and he asked me what I did for living. We spent the next few minutes talking about poverty and its impacts on kids and families. In my opinion, poverty has always been the ghost that haunts student achievement. Poverty is often masked by behavior issues, excessive absences, and apathy. After reading the book; *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, I decided to better understand what the poverty landscape looks like in this country and the effects on public schools.

I began my education with the United States Census Bureau. Here are some of the facts I found:

46.7 million Americans are living in poverty, there has been a 2.3% (check stat) increase in the national poverty level since 2007, and two groups have seen an increase in their poverty rates - those with a bachelor’s degree and married couples. As I read articles and stories on poverty, I began to better understand poverty in America. I found a report completed by The Condition of Education in 2015. The reports states that in 2013 approximately 10.9 million school-aged students between 5-17 years old were in families living in poverty; poverty rates ranged from 9% in New Hampshire to 33% in Mississippi; 39% of African American students lived in poverty; 45% of children living in mother-only households were in poverty, and single father households account for 29% children living in poverty. USA Today released an article on the number of poor children rising and the impact on learning. In the article they site other studies which state the following: Nearly half of all U.S. public school students live in poverty, and poverty - not race, ethnicity or where you attend school - is the best predictor of college attendance and completion. *Educational Leadership* in March of 2013 had a section dedicated to help support teachers who are in classrooms with students of poverty. The article is located on my webpage.

In her book *The American Way of Poverty: How the Other Half Still Lives*, Sasha Abramsky addresses the impacts of the recent recession, the economic free fall brought on by the collapse of the housing market, and the financial meltdown that followed. She captures the stories of people who once were in solid financial shape - they owned houses, had decent employment, and were on the ‘lower rungs’ of the middle class ladder. As I read their stories, it became apparent how fragile their financial situations were. A few months out of work due to their company downsizing, variable rate mortgage increases, and little money saved, many of these people found themselves homeless. Those who were upwardly mobile found themselves in a downward spiral brought on by the fiscal collapse.

The book speaks to diminishing foodbank supplies due to a greater need and neighborhoods with boarded up buildings because the inhabitants just abandoned homes they could no longer afford to live in. Abramsky examined New Orleans post Katrina and points out how many of the poor left behind in neighborhoods were unable to escape due to lack a of transportation, and how many of those neighborhoods were overlooked when the plan to revitalize went into action.

I felt the author did a nice job describing the growing job market in a way that makes you understand how low wage jobs with limited benefits have created a class of 'working poor' who make just enough in wages to make them ineligible for government benefits, but not enough to survive on. The ability for people to access government benefits has been made more difficult to navigate which often scares people away from applying, and physical and mental health issues of the poor are going un-serviced.

As I read this book I begin to realize that the American poor have lost a voice in our country, the working middle class is struggling, and more young children today are living with the stressors of poverty in their young lives.

It was President Franklin Roosevelt who led this country after a devastating depression. He stood in front of a nation and noted that a third of the nation was ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished. Today we are facing poverty rates much like those of the Great Depression. Who will be the voice to address the facts? Can our current political structure produce a leader who will step forward, like President Roosevelt did, and develop the blue print for a 'New Deal II.'

At the end of most evenings I glance at the news feeds on Yahoo News as way to catch-up on the day's events. To my surprise I read that Warren Buffet believes the economy is doing just fine. He feels the upper middle class is living today much better today in his neighborhood than John D. Rockefeller Jr. did even with his wealth and power. According to Buffet, our upper middle class can purchase and take for granted such things like transportation, entertainment, communication, and medical services - all of which Rockefeller Jr. couldn't. He spoke of a population growth of .08% per year, and a 2% GDP growth which equates to 1.2% per capita growth. While that doesn't sound impressive, he went on to say, in a single generation of 25 years, that will lead to a real 34.4% GDP growth per capita. To be honest, I'm not sure how all the numbers add up, but I don't claim to be an economist.

I am an urban school superintendent; I see with my own eyes the rate of homelessness expanding in our city. I see and hear more about students and their families struggling to make ends meet. I see the expansion of food pantries opening in church halls and other meeting locations to help offset hunger. I am aware of our younger staff working several jobs to help support themselves. I am aware of more young adults in their twenties living at home with parents in part due to the high cost of rental properties and student loans. I am aware that hard work over many years has provided me with solid employment, but also recognize how fragile the balance is. I'm not an economist, but from what see, what I read, and what I believe for many living in this country, poverty is an everyday way of life.

If I could ask Mr. Buffet one question it would, "In the population increase of .08%, how many are born into poverty vs. upper middle class?"

Thank you for choosing Malden to work in.