

Bridging the Economic Gap Between the Rich and the Poor

Today 4,000 people are dying from poverty. Tomorrow, another 4,000 will die. This cycle will repeat every day until a change is made. Within a year, 1.5 million people will die from poverty. Of that 1.5 million, half are children under the age of 5. That is 1,500,000 different people who deserved to live without having to worry about making ends meet. There are a multitude of explanations for the increasing barrier between the poor and the rich such as education, prejudices, inflation and so much more.

It is generally known that lower-income communities, mainly constructed of black and brown individuals, are the least funded by the government. With extremely low funding, the education of students in these areas is also very inadequate, making it very difficult for students to find subjects that peak their interests or even feel safe coming to school altogether. With low funding, teachers cannot create a safe and functioning learning environment for their students and fall under the pressure of having to pay for classroom supplies whilst still getting underpaid and overworked. With an ever-increasing demand for teachers in schools, it should be almost common sense to make sure that teachers have all the supplies necessary to properly teach a classroom full of excited students. Amidst the short supply of teachers, students' education is at risk, and with 38% of jobs requiring some form of a high school diploma, the government is setting up our youth for failure in their adult lives. To fix this increasing dilemma, the government should increase teacher salaries as well as school funding, so students can see school as a positive learning environment. Following an increase in funding, schools in lower-income neighborhoods will have more opportunities for their students.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed, and it prohibited any form of discrimination against people with disabilities in the workplace. To this day, nearly 1 in 10 working disabled people report some form of discrimination in the workplace. In addition to facing discrimination in the workplace, disabled individuals may have their disability benefits taken away if their earnings exceed \$1,350 (\$2,260 if they are blind) a month. Punishing disabled people for earning an unlivable wage, by refusing them disability benefits, further makes it more difficult for lower-income individuals to climb up the economic ladder. In order to solve this problem, the government should increase the earning limit from \$1,350 to a more

reasonable salary and strengthen the ADA act so even fewer individuals are discriminated against.

Following the same line of thought, racism and misogyny are also very prominent forms of discrimination that make it difficult for some individuals to make a decent wage. In a recent study conducted by the University of Chicago and Massachusetts Institution of Technology (MIT), individuals applying for a job with a white-sounding name were 50% more likely to be contacted for an interview than their black counterparts. One in four black and Hispanic people report facing racial discrimination at their place of work. In addition to racial discrimination, one in four women reported having faced some form of discrimination in the workplace due to their gender in a recent study organized by Pew Research Center in 2017. This continuous prejudice against individuals based on their appearance makes it more difficult for certain individuals to excel in the workplace and even have the opportunity to earn well-paying jobs. Though racial and sexist prejudices may never fully go away, we can help decrease them through education and inclusivity. Educating young adults about preconceived prejudices and privileges that certain individuals hold over others can help decrease the injustices that happen in the workplace and also increase opportunities for oppressed groups, therefore aiding in bridging the divide between lower-income individuals and the rich.

Inflation is presumably one of the most commonly acknowledged answers to the age-old question of why is there an increasing divide between the rich and the poor. As reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the dollar has had an average inflation rate of 2.52% from 2009 to 2022, this suggests that \$1 in 2009 is now worth \$1.38. In comparison with the consumer price index, the federal minimum wage has not budged and still stays at \$7.25. Currently, there are 1.1 million workers with wages at or below the federal minimum wage. The minimum wage is not livable due to the high rate of inflation and the growing housing crisis. Furthermore, inflation has a greater negative impact on the middle and lower class due to the fact that these are typically individuals who may need to budget their money due to the increasing prices of goods. This is also leading to a disappearing middle class that is typically used to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. To solve this problem, the government should increase the federal minimum wage so it has a positive correlation with the high rate of inflation. By taxing the wealthy at a reasonable rate, the government could use said money to fund underrepresented communities and lower-income communities with better education and more programs. By increasing the opportunities given to lower-income individuals, you are creating a

world of equal opportunities where a child who has to budget their money to make it to the ends meet has an equal chance to succeed as a child born into generational wealth.

To be simply put, the question, “How can economic justice and the conflict between the rich and the poor be adequately addressed?” cannot be answered unambiguously due to the multitude of continuous obstacles that were overlooked by the government for decades.

Nonetheless, there is an abundance of solutions for this ever-growing problem, most of which are focused on building a better economy and providing a better education for the youth of today.

This breach between these two opposite economic groups is widening and our solutions will all be long and rigorous processes that will benefit future generations, but it cannot start without us.