

Leslie Huang, Danielle Chan, Jowyn Chan
Team Name: Sunflowers
Username: lhuange44
Email: lhuang57@binghamton.edu
Binghamton University

Day 28: Greener

If I could change the world, I would want to end poverty. As a first generation Asian American coming from a low-income household, I have spent my entire childhood living below the poverty line. How many times have I seen my parents return home at midnight, exhausted and worn out? How many times have I seen their expressions go hard when they see a new bill to pay in the mailbox? My parents' faces are darkened from the burning sun, with lines of sorrow and stress etched into their foreheads; my parents' hands are dry and rough, covered with calluses and cracked skin because they needed to make sure that there was food on the table every night, and that there would always be a roof over my head. This was the life that my parents had to live through when they immigrated to America 20 years ago, and this is still the same exact life that my parents have to live through because they chose to support my dreams of going to college.

But why does it have to be this way?

According to the United States Census Bureau, there are 39.7 million people in poverty, which is not statistically different from the number in 2016. The official poverty rate in 2017 was 12.3%, which was down 0.4 percentage points from 12.7% in 2016. Although the poverty rate in America is slowly decreasing, this is still a large, shocking number of people who live in one of the richest nations in the world. In fact, even where there is economic growth in the country, most of this growth is concentrated within the 1%, rather the low-income people. To order to fight against this disproportionate economic growth, we must improve opportunity structures in order to increase the income of poor people.

Some steps to take are:

1. Increase employment

There is so much work that can be done to improve the nation and yet there are no steps taken towards these improvements because they are seen as unprofitable by companies. However, if the government chooses to invest in these projects, such as infrastructure (fixing roads, improve mass transit) and vital services (better schools, health care centers), then this generates public benefits and jobs.


2. Sustain the social safety net

Strengthen existing programs, such as unemployment insurance, food stamps (SNAP), earned income tax credit (EITC), as well as new initiatives like child allowance and guaranteed income.

3. Paid family and sick leave

This would protect parents, especially mothers, who take time off to take care of their baby or a sick child from falling into poverty.

4. End mass incarceration
The U.S. holds almost one quarter of the world's prisoners. The war on drugs and police targeting of young, colored people of color have wreaked havoc on African American and Latino families, removing fathers from the workplace and their families.
5. Invest in high quality childcare and early education
Current funding for Head Start (ages 3-5) limits it to serve only 42% of eligible families, while funding for Early Head Start (birth to 3 years old) limits it to less than 5%. Studies have shown that higher quality childcare and education helps low-income children build the foundation for skills that enable better education, jobs, and learning.
6. Tackle segregation and concentrated poverty
Housing vouchers along with re-zoning enabling scattered site low-income housing would reduce segregation and concentrated poverty and give poor children of color better access to resources, schools and social capital they can use to get ahead.
7. Immigration reform
Undocumented workers face limited employment options and are easily exploited by employers. Their families are thus more likely to be poor. Children also live with the ever-present fear and anxiety that their parents may be arrested and deported at any moment – and are injured by trauma when they are.



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