

Matt Joram
Bro. Joe
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Why the Poor are Poor

The reasons why the poor are poor cannot truly be discussed in a short two-page paper. However, I am going to briefly give my views on the subject with the insight I have gained from doing Homeless Outreach, a service program here at La Salle. The idea for this reflection paper came from the reading guide on Acres of Diamonds, and the fill in the blank question: "The poor are poor because."

Before discussing this highly involved issue, I should first briefly describe Homeless Outreach. Since I came to La Salle, I have been involved with this service program, which goes downtown every Wednesday night to communicate with and try to understand the homeless of Philadelphia. We work with a nonprofit organization called the Philadelphia Committee to End Homelessness, also called PCEH. We go out each night and talk with the homeless on the streets. We encourage the homeless to visit PCEH, which will help them to get an identification card, a mailing address, a job, and hopefully in the long run a place to call their own. By doing this service, I have learned so much about the homeless community that makes up an amazingly large portion of Philadelphia.

From this I have learned that most homeless do not deserve to be on the streets. Many of them made one or maybe two mistakes and the consequence was that they lost everything and must now live on the streets. Think about it, everyone of us has made a few bad decisions and have made mistakes, but we are not poor and left to call the street our home. Some of the other people on the street did not even make a mistake; instead they just had bad luck. For example

while talking with one homeless lady, I was informed that only a few years ago her and her husband lived a rather nice apartment in the city. However, her husband died and to pay off the enormous hospital bills she had to sell everything she had and move onto the streets. What did she do wrong? Why does she deserve to live on the streets? The answers are that she did nothing wrong and she does not deserve to live on the streets. I could give countless other examples of very similar cases, but that would just take space which I do not have.

To answer the question, the poor are poor because of the unequal sharing of resources and the unawareness of most people. Both of these reasons go far beyond just the homeless in Philadelphia, they reach out all over the world. In the United States alone, we use about half of the world's resources and we barely account for one percent of the world's population. The rich of almost all countries never go hungry, always have a roof over their head, and always have money to spend on unnecessary items. If this wealth and the resources of the world were divided equally among all people no one would have to go hungry and everyone would have a roof over their head. There is more than enough food in the world and there are more than enough places to construct housing for people, these things are just not provided equally.

The other reason, the unawareness of most people, is one of the reasons why the world's resources are not being evenly distributed. People are ignorant to the fact that countless millions go hungry each day. Many choose to ignore the problem so that they do not feel bad, while others simply and truly do not even know there is a problem. One of the reasons the homeless continue to be on the streets and do not move into their own housing is because of the many stereotypes that plague them. The majority of people believe that the homeless deserve to be homeless. They believe that they are complete mess-ups in life and enjoy being on the streets. They look at them as bums and alcoholics and drug addicts. While some of these are true in

some of the homeless, not all homeless are this way and yet the stereotypes hurt them too. Most people will not stop to talk with a homeless person on the street. They do not care why they are homeless or what they are like as a person. Instead they just step over them or maybe if the homeless person is lucky, they give them their 'spare' change and keep on moving now that they have a good feeling inside. To end, there is no simple answer to why the poor are poor. However, to begin to combat this issue more, the awareness of others needs to be raised. Homelessness and the poverty of the world are very important issues to me and my dedication to Homeless Outreach is a testament to this.