

America by the Numbers. No. 1?

The Balance Sheet of Poverty in America

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No concept lies more firmly embedded in our national character than the notion that the USA is "No. 1," "the greatest." Our broadcast media are, in essence, continuous advertisements for the brand name "America Is No. 1." Any office seeker saying otherwise would be committing political suicide. In fact, anyone saying otherwise will be labeled "un-American." We're an "empire," ain't we? Sure we are. An empire without a manufacturing base. An empire that must borrow \$2 billion a day from its competitors in order to function. Yet the delusion is ineradicable. We're No. 1. Well...this is the country you really live in:

- The United States is 49th in the world in literacy (the New York Times, Dec. 12, 2004).
- The United States ranked 28th out of 40 countries in mathematical literacy (NYT, Dec. 12, 2004).
- Twenty percent of Americans think the sun orbits the earth. Seventeen percent believe the earth revolves around the sun once a day (*The Week*, Jan. 7, 2005).
- "The International Adult Literacy Survey...found that Americans with less than nine years of education 'score worse than virtually all of the other countries'" (Jeremy Rifkin's superbly documented book *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, p.78).
- Our workers are so ignorant and lack so many basic skills that American businesses spend \$30 billion a year on remedial training (NYT, Dec. 12, 2004). No wonder they relocate elsewhere!
- "The European Union leads the U.S. in...the number of science and engineering graduates; public research and development (R&D) expenditures; and new capital raised" (*The European Dream*, p.70).
- "Europe surpassed the United States in the mid-1990s as the largest producer of scientific literature" (*The European Dream*, p.70).
- Nevertheless, Congress cut funds to the National Science Foundation. The agency will issue 1,000 fewer research grants this year (NYT, Dec. 21, 2004).
- Foreign applications to U.S. grad schools declined 28 percent last year. Foreign student enrollment on all levels fell for the first time in three decades, but increased greatly in Europe and China. Last year Chinese grad-school graduates in the U.S. dropped 56 percent, Indians 51 percent, South Koreans 28 percent (NYT, Dec. 21, 2004). We're not the place to be anymore.
- The World Health Organization "ranked the countries of the world in terms of overall health performance, and the U.S. [was]...37th." In the fairness of health care, we're 54th. "The irony is that the United States spends more per capita for health care than any other nation in the world" (*The European Dream*, pp.79-80). Pay more, get lots, lots less.

- “The U.S. and South Africa are the only two developed countries in the world that do not provide health care for all their citizens” (*The European Dream*, p.80). Excuse me, but since when is South Africa a “developed” country? Anyway, that’s the company we’re keeping.
- Lack of health insurance coverage causes 18,000 unnecessary American deaths a year. (That’s six times the number of people killed on 9/11.) (NYT, Jan. 12, 2005.)
- “U.S. childhood poverty now ranks 22nd, or second to last, among the developed nations. Only Mexico scores lower” (*The European Dream*, p.81). Been to Mexico lately? Does it look “developed” to you? Yet it’s the only “developed” country to score lower in childhood poverty.
- Twelve million American families—more than 10 percent of all U.S. households—“continue to struggle, and not always successfully, to feed themselves.” Families that “had members who actually went hungry at some point last year” numbered 3.9 million (NYT, Nov. 22, 2004).

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- The United States is 41st in the world in infant mortality. Cuba scores higher (NYT, Jan. 12, 2005).
- Women are 70 percent more likely to die in childbirth in America than in Europe (NYT, Jan. 12, 2005).
- The leading cause of death of pregnant women in this country is murder (CNN, Dec. 14, 2004).
- “Of the 20 most developed countries in the world, the U.S. was dead last in the growth rate of total compensation to its workforce in the 1980s.... In the 1990s, the U.S. average compensation growth rate grew only slightly, at an annual rate of about 0.1 percent” (*The European Dream*, p.39). Yet Americans work longer hours per year than any other industrialized country, and get less vacation time.
- “Sixty-one of the 140 biggest companies on the Global Fortune 500 rankings are European, while only 50 are U.S. companies” (*The European Dream*, p.66). “In a recent survey of the world’s 50 best companies, conducted by Global Finance, all but one were European” (*The European Dream*, p.69).
- “Fourteen of the 20 largest commercial banks in the world today are European.... In the chemical industry, the European company BASF is the world’s leader, and three of the top six players are European. In engineering and construction, three of the top five companies are European.... The two others are Japanese. Not a single American engineering and construction company is included among the world’s top nine competitors. In food and consumer products, Nestlé and Unilever, two European giants, rank first and second, respectively, in the world. In the food and drugstore retail trade, two European companies...are first and second, and European companies make up five of the top ten. Only four U.S. companies are on the list” (*The European Dream*, p.68).
- The United States has lost 1.3 million jobs to China in the last decade (CNN, Jan. 12, 2005).
- U.S. employers eliminated 1 million jobs in 2004 (*The Week*, Jan. 14, 2005).
- Three million six hundred thousand Americans ran out of unemployment insurance last year; 1.8 million—one in five—unemployed workers are jobless for more than six months (NYT, Jan. 9, 2005).
- Japan, China, Taiwan, and South Korea hold 40 percent of our government debt.

(That's why we talk nice to them.) "By helping keep mortgage rates from rising, China has come to play an enormous and little-noticed role in sustaining the American housing boom" (NYT, Dec. 4, 2004). Read that twice. We owe our housing boom to China, because they want us to keep buying all that stuff they manufacture.

- Sometime in the next 10 years Brazil will probably pass the U.S. as the world's largest agricultural producer. Brazil is now the world's largest exporter of chickens, orange juice, sugar, coffee, and tobacco. Last year, Brazil passed the U.S. as the world's largest beef producer. (Hear that, you poor deluded cowboys?) As a result, while we bear record trade deficits, Brazil boasts a \$30 billion trade surplus (NYT, Dec. 12, 2004).
- As of last June, the U.S. imported more food than it exported (NYT, Dec. 12, 2004).
- Bush: 62,027,582 votes. Kerry: 59,026,003 votes. Number of eligible voters who didn't show up: 79,279,000 (NYT, Dec. 26, 2004). That's more than a third. Way more. If more than a third of Iraqis don't show for their election, no country in the world will think that election legitimate.
- One-third of all U.S. children are born out of wedlock. One-half of all U.S. children will live in a one-parent house (CNN, Dec. 10, 2004).
- "Americans are now spending more money on gambling than on movies, videos, DVDs, music, and books combined" (*The European Dream*, p.28).
- "Nearly one out of four Americans [believe] that using violence to get what they want is acceptable" (*The European Dream*, p.32).
- Forty-three percent of Americans think torture is sometimes justified, according to a PEW Poll (Associated Press, Aug. 19, 2004).
- "Nearly 900,000 children were abused or neglected in 2002, the last year for which such data are available" (USA Today, Dec. 21, 2004).
- "The International Association of Chiefs of Police said that cuts by the [Bush] administration in federal aid to local police agencies have left the nation more vulnerable than ever" (USA Today, Nov. 17, 2004).

No. 1? In most important categories we're not even in the Top 10 anymore. Not even close.

The USA is "No. 1" in nothing but weaponry, consumer spending, debt, and delusion.

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