

Hunger in America

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It's hard giving thanks when you're hungry. It's harder living in the world's richest country. It's harder still knowing government officials don't care. It's hardest of all wondering how you'll get by.

More below on growing hunger and deprivation. It's increasing in America at a time trillions of dollars go for warmaking, corporate handouts, and other benefits for rich elites.

Giving thanks predated the republic. In 1621, Plymouth Pilgrims did so. They had nothing to do with originating the idea.

Native Americans did. They gave thanks for annual fall harvests. They did it centuries before settlers arrived.

On November 26, 1789, George Washington proclaimed the first national thanksgiving day.

He called it "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favours of Almighty God."

In 1863, Lincoln used the occasion to boost Union Army morale and patriotic fervor.

He "invite(d) (his) fellow citizens to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens."

He "fervently implore(d) the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of he nation and to restore it to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity, and union."

He didn't live long enough to see it. Government officials today exploit Thanksgiving. They promote the illusion of US exceptionalism, moral and cultural superiority.

Social inequality, moral degeneration, and police state lawlessness reflect today's reality. Constitutional rights don't matter.

War on humanity persists. Corporate crooks go unpunished. Democracy is a convenient illusion. Powerful monied interests run things.

Ordinary people are hugely deprived. Growing needs go unaddressed. Government officials able to make a difference don't care.

Thanksgiving has many disturbing ironies. Presidents annually issue a "pardon." It spares a preselected turkey's life. It does so by proclamation. This year two were spared.

It's unclear precisely when the tradition began. Lincoln did so. Thanksgiving day 1963 was November 28. Kennedy was assassinated six days earlier. Before his death, he let one turkey live. "We'll just let this one grow," he said.

Nixon began sending turkeys to a petting farm near Washington. He did so after a White House photo-op ceremony. No formal pardon was given.

GHW Bush was the first president to do it. On November 14, 1989, he said a preselected turkey was "granted a presidential pardon as of right now."

Obama issued annual presidential pardons. On Wednesday, he spared two turkeys.

"The office of the presidency, the most powerful position in the world, brings with it many awesome and solemn responsibilities," he said. "This is not one of them."

"Tomorrow, as we gather with our own friends and family, we'll count ourselves lucky that there's more to be thankful for than we can ever say and more to be hopeful for than we can ever imagine."

A November 27 [White House press release](#) said in part:

"On Wednesday, November 27, 2013, President Obama will pardon the National Thanksgiving Turkey in a ceremony on the North Portico."

"The President will celebrate the 66th anniversary of the National Thanksgiving Turkey presentation, reflect upon the time-honored traditions of Thanksgiving, and wish American families a warm, safe, and healthy holiday."

"After the pardoning, the turkeys will be driven to George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens."

"The National Thanksgiving Turkey will be on display for visitors during 'Christmas at Mount Vernon,' a traditional program through January 6."

"The turkeys will then travel to their permanent home at Morven Park's Turkey Hill, the historic turkey farm located at the home of former Virginia Governor Westmoreland Davis (1918-1922) in Leesburg, Virginia."

Jaindl's Turkey Farm in Orefield, Pennsylvania, gave President Obama's family two dressed turkeys that will be donated to a local area food bank."

They need much more than that nationwide. Hunger in America is real. Millions are affected.

Official numbers understate a growing crisis. Congress ignores it. Food stamps were cut when they're most needed. Further cuts are planned.

On December 31, millions will lose extended unemployment benefits unless Congress renews them. Both parties show little inclination to do so. Bipartisan complicity reflects indifference.

On July 28, [AP headlined](#) "Exclusive: Signs of Declining Economic Security," saying:

"Four out of 5 US adults struggle with joblessness, near poverty or reliance on welfare

for at least parts of their lives.”

It’s a disturbing “sign of deteriorating economic security and an elusive American dream.”

“Survey data exclusive to The Associated Press points to an increasingly globalized US economy, the widening gap between rich and poor, and loss of good-paying manufacturing jobs as reasons for the trend.”

Government data fall short of explaining things. Conditions are much worse than official reports.

Most Americans struggle to get by. Impoverishment or close to it affect them. So do millions experiencing hunger.

Franklin Roosevelt instituted the first Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It began in May 1939. In 1941, he pledged freedom from want.

On January 11, 1944, he delivered his last State of the Union address. He proposed a second bill of rights.

“This Republic had its beginning, and grew to its present strength, under the protection of certain inalienable political rights,” he said.

“They were our rights to life and liberty.”

“As our nation has grown in size and stature, however – as our industrial economy expanded – these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness.”

His solution was “economic bill of rights.” He wanted one guaranteeing:

- employment with a living wage;
- freedom from unfair competition and monopolies;
- housing;
- medical care;
- education; and
- social security.

Imagine if he’d lived long enough to implement it. Imagine this type America today. Hunger, homelessness, unemployment and poverty wouldn’t be major problems.

State-sponsored class war exacerbates them. Growing millions need help. They face increasing hardships.

Force-fed austerity harms America’s most disadvantaged. Their numbers are far greater

than most people think.

Half of US households are impoverished or bordering it. Growing millions struggle to get by. They haven't enough to live on.

Most households with one or more workers live from paycheck to paycheck. They have little or no savings.

They're one missed pay day away from being unable to handle daily expenses. They risk hunger, homelessness and deep poverty.

They live in the world's richest country. It spurns its most disadvantaged. Doing so swells their numbers. They suffer out of sight and mind.

Banks, other corporate favorites and super-rich elites are disproportionately favored. America was never beautiful. It's less so than ever today. It's dark side reflects reality.

Obama is no Roosevelt. He's polar opposite. Anti-populism defines his agenda. Transferring America's wealth to its most well-off is official policy.

He wants vital New Deal/Great Society programs eliminated. He wants them privatized en route to doing so.

Throughout his tenure, he instituted numerous social benefit cuts. He's got more in mind. He's heading America toward third world status. He lies claiming otherwise.

Hungry Americans don't matter. Half or more are children. Many attending schools with hot breakfasts or lunches may get their only decent daily meal.

Most households receiving food stamps have at least one employed member. According to the Food Journal, they "typically include a child, elderly person or a disable person, and a gross income of \$744 a month."

Average rents nationwide exceed \$1,200 monthly. A tiny upscale Kansas City, MO 800 square-foot one bedroom apartment costs about \$1,000 a month.

Median rents in America's least expensive cities range from \$623 to \$730 on average. It's a far cry from much cheaper earlier times.

Households earning \$700+ a month struggle from day to day to get by. They need help doing so. Washington provides increasingly less during hard times.

Republicans and Democrats don't give a damn. Today's America is a let 'em eat cake society.

Growing millions are on their own sink or swim. Protracted Main Street Depression era conditions persist. Things are getting worse, not better.

Thanksgiving is no time for celebration. Not when hunger reflects daily reality for millions. It's been this way for years. Major media editors largely ignore it.

On November 25, 2009, a New York Times editorial headlined, ["A Thanksgiving Toast,"](#) saying:

“Sitting down with friends and family today, there will be thanks for the steady currents, flowing out of the past, that have brought us to this table....And there will be prayerful thanks for the future.”

In November 2010, dismissive Washington Post editors headlined [“Thanksgiving’s unchanging appeal,”](#) saying:

We’re “fortunate to be alive and fed and sheltered, and the proper response to our good fortune is not self-satisfaction but gratitude.”

Fact check

Poverty, homelessness and hunger are at Depression era levels. Feeding America (FA) is Chicago-based. It calls itself the nation’s “leading domestic hunger-relief charity.”

It serves the needy “through a nationwide network of member food banks.”

In February 2010, it issued a report titled [“Hunger in America 2010.”](#) In 2014, it plans updating it. Conditions now are much worse.

They were bad enough then. About 5.7 million Americans needed emergency food aid. It was over one-fourth more than in 2005.

It said one in eight Americans are food insecure. Around 14 million children were affected. It’s about 16 million now. They don’t get enough food to eat.

FA calls food insecurity “a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that varies along a continuum of successive stages as it becomes more severe.”

Food secure households lets them “access...enough food for an active, health life.”

“(T)he existence of so many people without secure access to adequate nutritious food represents a serious national concern.”

“More than one in three client households are experiencing very low food security – or hunger – a 54 percent increase” compared to data FA compiled in a 2006 report.

At the time, former FA CEO Vicki Escarra said:

“Clearly, the economic recession, resulting in dramatically increasing unemployment nationwide, has driven unprecedented, sharp increases in the need for emergency food assistance and enrollment in federal nutrition programs.”

“Hunger in America 2010 exposes the absolutely tragic reality of just how many people in our nation don’t have enough to eat.”

“Millions of our clients are families with children finding themselves in need of food assistance for the very first time.”

“It’s morally reprehensible that we live in the wealthiest nation in the world where one in six people are struggling to make choices between food and other basic services.”

On November 27, FA’s CEO Bob Aiken said in part:

“With the holiday season here and with many of us sitting down to a table full of food this Thanksgiving, it’s hard not to reflect on the 49 million people in our country who struggle with hunger.”

“And it’s especially hard not to think of those families who earlier this month saw their SNAP benefits cut, further straining their food budgets.”

“We’ve seen throughout our network of food banks the impact that these cuts are already beginning to have – with longer lines and an anticipated growth in need.”

“Our food banks are stretched and charity alone can’t make up for this cut to federal assistance.”

“And with the possibility of further cuts to the program via the farm bill, there is real concern that the need for food will not be met.”

“(W)e know hunger isn’t seasonal – it’s a year-round problem. It’s our job to make sure that we shine a light on this issue all year, not just around the holidays.”

In 2012, FA said [49 million Americans were food insecure](#). It affected 17.6 million households.

About seven million households experienced “very low food security.” Households with children reported “a significantly higher rate than those without children, 20 percent compared to 11.0 percent.”

Food insecurity persists across America. It’s in every county. It ranges from 2.4% in Slope County, ND to 35.2% in Holmes County, MS.

America’s national average is 14.7%. Ten states are significantly higher:

Mississippi: 20.9%

Arkansas: 19.7%

Texas: 18.4%

Alabama: 17.9%

North Carolina: 17%

Georgia: 16.9%

Missouri: 16.7%

Nevada: 16.6%

Ohio: 16.1%

California: 15.6%

Hunger in the world’s richest country is intolerable. It’s unconscionable. It persists. It’s worsening. It’s the shame of an uncaring nation.

Families without enough to eat aren't celebrating. They're struggling to find enough food to survive. Bipartisan complicity ignores them.

Anti-populism is official policy. Harder than ever hard times persist. Failure to address it reflects America's dark side.

Equity and justice aren't in its vocabulary. It bears repeating. Today's America is a let 'em eat cake society. Hard times keep getting harder.

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