

Jobless and Clueless: America's Delusional Democracy

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When Americans who are the most victimized by our cruel economy still believe in something that is demonstrably no longer true, they are deeply delusional. They desperately want to believe in something once great about American society. The reality is that upward economic mobility has been destroyed, replaced by widely observable downward mobility. Some of the mostly younger jobless that have embraced the Occupy Wall Street and related Occupy efforts know the truth.

Consider the results of a [new survey](#) of unemployed adults this month:

"More than half of those polled said that they had experienced emotional or mental health problems like anxiety or depression because of their lack of work, and nearly half said that they had felt embarrassed or ashamed not to have jobs."

"More than a third said that they had had more conflicts or arguments with family and friends because of being jobless."

"Threats of foreclosure or eviction were reported by a fifth of the unemployed, and one in eight said that they had moved in with relatives or friends."

"More than half said that they lacked health insurance."

"A fifth said that they had received food from a nonprofit organization."

"Nearly two-thirds said they would probably not have enough money to live comfortably during retirement. More than half said that they had taken money out of savings or retirement accounts."

"7 in 10 of those receiving unemployment benefits said that they feared their benefits would run out before they could find new jobs."

So far, all those results paint an unsurprising profile of unemployed, suffering Americans.

Now, consider the result that blew my mind, the reason I am writing this, because more people need to understand something critical about delusional thinking that ultimately makes getting deep, sorely needed reforms of our government and political system extremely difficult. Without that our economy will stay awful, unfair, promoting even more economic inequality.

"Two-thirds of those surveyed said that they still believed it was possible to start out poor in

this country, work hard and become rich — only a little lower than the three-quarters of all Americans” not in the unemployed category who held the same view and were surveyed at the same time. In fact, considerable research in recent years has consistently found that upward mobility in the US is no longer a hallmark of the society. Indeed, there is more upward mobility in [Canada and a number of European countries](#) than in the US . Moreover, the jobless more than most should be able to comprehend the ugly reality that downward economic mobility is now a large part of American society.

No surprise that the cover story on the new Time magazine is What Ever Happened To Upward Mobility? The basic theme of the article is that the US is no longer an “opportunity society.” In other words, our country is no longer a place where everyone, if he or she works hard enough, can get ahead. But despite this reality, conservatives and Republicans love to publicly proclaim that the US still offers everyone upward economic mobility.

Those two-thirds of the unemployed will probably pay a steep price for their false optimism about their country. They are likely to fall prey to the political propaganda of either Democrats or Republicans. If they are delusional about the American Dream, are they also delusional about other things that may stand in the way of them getting a job? Rather than feel ashamed or embarrassed about being jobless they should get some feedback from others so they can fix their thinking.

As [Ezra Klein noted](#): “Americans are in the odd position of fervently believing in upward mobility while not actually having very much of it. Europeans, conversely, don’t really believe in economic mobility but have plenty of it.”

Those jobless with this delusional thinking, refusing to think critically, judge the facts and come to a hurtful conclusion, are not the ones I expect to be participating in or supporting the Occupy Wall Street protesters, about three-quarters of whom now disapprove of Mr. Obama’s performance as president. Though the Occupy protesters speak of the rich 1 percent, that is a big underestimate. As [Anne Applebaum](#) correctly noted “Despite all the loud talk of the ‘1 per cent’ of Americans who, according to a recent study, receive about 17 per cent of the income, a percentage which has more than doubled since 1979, the existence of a very small group of very rich people has never bothered Americans. But the fact that some 20 per cent of Americans now receive some 53 per cent of the income is devastating.” Becoming part of even that larger group of rich Americans is now more difficult than ever.

Do unemployed have the right kind of jobs to aspire to the top one percent of income earners? Consider the [jobs that account for the top one percent](#); the top four categories account for nearly 70 percent: corporate and business management not in the financial sector, medical, financial industry executives, and lawyers. This also shows how difficult it is to somehow negatively impact the one percent by protests by the Occupy movement.

In our delusional democracy with its delusional prosperity thinking that hard work, great ideas and superior performance will get you into the top one percent is self-delusion, even getting into the top 20 percent is a long shot. The economic system is too rigged against economic justice. Sure, every once in awhile someone starting out poor or average becomes superrich, but that is like winning a super lottery. Best to stop believing in the rags-to-riches myth, unless the system is reformed.

A [new report](#) by a German foundation examined the nation members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, essentially the world's democracies. The US ranked terribly low for poverty and poverty prevention as well as income inequality. Only Chile , Mexico and Turkey were ranked lower than the US . What a story.

The US two-party plutocracy has allowed the rich and powerful to buy the political system. Except for the rich, the results are dreadful. This is why 89 percent do not trust that government will do the right thing. The best solution is what you find at the getmoneyout.com website, a constitutional amendment to get money out of politics.

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