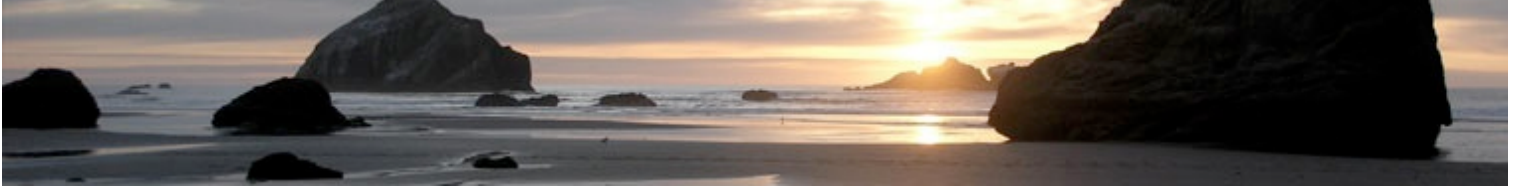


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Poverty In America

7 02 2012



By [Timothy D. Naegele\[1\]](#)

Presidential candidate Mitt Romney made one of the dumbest and most insensitive comments that I have ever heard from an American politician since I became involved with politics:

You can choose where to focus. You can focus on the rich; that's not my focus. You can focus on the very poor; that's not my focus. My focus is on middle-income Americans.

He went on to explain that “[w]e have a safety net for the poor.” And “[i]f there are people that are falling through the cracks, I want to fix that.”[\[2\]](#)

However, the fact that America's poorest citizens theoretically have access to food stamps, Medicaid and housing vouchers[\[3\]](#)—which Romney cited—does not constitute much of a “safety net” at all. Some Americans, such as senior citizens, are too proud to accept any governmental assistance (other than Social Security and Medicare benefits) or handouts. They have worked all of their lives; and to find themselves in poverty is embarrassing and deeply depressing. They and others are often turned away or sanctioned by the government bureaucracy that can be brutal and cruel, especially to people who are truly in need.[\[4\]](#)

Those Americans who had moved into our “Middle Class” will lose their homes and everything else, which is happening already. The idea that colleges and professional schools were guaranteed pathways to success will also evaporate.[\[5\]](#) Our society and that of other countries will be upended. And yes, there will be “class warfare,” which Barack Obama and his surrogates are fanning already. Leave aside the fact that he will add more debt than all 43 prior presidents combined, demagoguery is in season and full swing.

When I worked in the U.S. Senate as a young lawyer with its Senate Banking Committee and later headed the Senate staff of Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass)—the *first* African-American in the Senate since Reconstruction following our Civil War, with Obama being the third—the senator and I met with Mitt’s father who was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (1969-1973)[6], and I was very impressed with him. At that time, I was working on the passage and implementation of the Housing and Urban Development Acts of 1969 and 1970, which included the “Brooke Amendment” relating to public housing; and the national “Housing Allowance” program, which morphed into the Section 8 housing program that has helped millions of Americans. The senator, George Romney and I talked about these programs at length.

On behalf of Senator Brooke, I also established a summer program for disadvantaged kids in Massachusetts, in conjunction with the Pentagon, which involved underutilized military facilities within the state (*e.g.*, the Boston Navy Yard, Otis Air Force Base) and served approximately 100,000 kids during its first year alone. Indeed, the senator and I traveled to Massachusetts with then-Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in his private plane to review the program and its progress.

In making my observations, I am *not* singling out Mitt Romney for condemnation. I have believed in Mitt for a long time now, and will vote for him—in no small part because I share most of his positions with respect to the economy and national security issues. However, lots of politicians and other successful Americans are “tone deaf” when it comes to the needs of the poor. They do not relate to them at all, and they cannot understand them. To be poor is a sign of failure in our success-oriented and driven society. Our advertising touts beautiful bodies and fancy cars and materialistic dreams. In no way are the poor glorified, much less given dignity. Shame is heaped on them, which is wrong.

When I was graduating from grade school in Los Angeles, my mother came to the ceremony in a wheelchair, and I was mortified. No other mothers were present like that. She had suffered the convergence of two debilitating illnesses, which robbed her of her beauty and almost killed her. By the time that I was entering high school, her right leg had been amputated, which stopped the onslaught of what she had gone through; and during the Vietnam War, she walked with an artificial leg and was named the “Woman of the Year” by the local chapter of the Red Cross—for her outstanding volunteer work.

What all of this taught me was that her faith in God had sustained her, and given her courage, hope, joy and great love.[7] And that stigmas and discrimination attach, especially in Southern California, to those people who are physically or mentally “challenged” or handicapped, the poor, and to those who are not “beautiful.” Hollywood has gone nationwide and worldwide since then, with a vengeance; and life-threatening illnesses and poverty are not part of the “American dream,” which has been embraced by people globally. As the U.S. economy declines more between now and the end of this decade—which will happen to an even greater extent in countries around the world—poverty, human suffering, misery and anger will increase dramatically.[8]

The core issues will be how Americans adjust to their poverty and hopelessness, which will be just as rampant in this decade as during the Great Depression of the last century that did not end until the onset of World War II, at the earliest. There are no easy solutions to losing one’s job, home, car and everything else. As State governments scramble to avoid bankruptcy, programs that might have helped the poor will no longer exist. For example, in California, State parks are being closed; and the nightly price for staying at those that remain open equals the cost of a cheap motel already. Where will the poor stay, especially if they have no family members who can—or are willing to—take them in? How will they afford food to eat, and find transportation to get from one place to another (*e.g.*, looking for work)? When inclement weather sets in, how will they survive?

The published numbers of “poor” do not begin to tell their tragic stories; and the human suffering will increase and become unfathomable during the balance of this decade, whether Romney is president or not. Pure economics will dictate this; and there is nothing that can be done governmentally, by any politician.[9] And yes, many of those poor will be “middle-income Americans” or those who had been members of our Middle Class. They will be devastated;

suicides and divorces will increase[10]; and families will be torn asunder. Mitt Romney and the wealthy of the United States—which includes Obama and most members of Congress—need to wake up now, and begin to demonstrate *real* compassion. The problem is that they have no earthly idea of what it is like to be poor.

In Greece today, parents are giving away their children because they cannot afford them. Kids are being dumped in streets or abandoned at shelters with notes attached to them, saying that one or both parents are at wits' end.[11] Poverty breeds inhumanity on a scale that is unknown to most Americans; and it also breeds crime (including massive Internet fraud[12]), which will increase in the United States as money for law enforcement declines and as our prisons are overcrowded and prisoners are released. Reality is crashing down with a thud like never before in our lifetimes.

As I wrote almost three years ago:

America and other nations are in uncharted waters; and their politicians may face backlashes from disillusioned and angry constituents that are unprecedented in modern times. Also, the limits of godless secularism and paying homage to the false gods of materialism may become self-evident.[13]

The chickens are coming home to roost, in spades; and the “good times” are ending for vast numbers of Americans and their counterparts around the world.

Others will remain rich, or attain great riches[14]; and I do not begrudge it to them at all. I do not envy or covet what another has. I have never done so. My parents taught me that, by their own words and actions. In my lifetime thus far, I have had lots of money, and none. I have friends with many millions, and one with several billions; and others who have nothing. I have treated them all the same—with love, respect, dignity and compassion.

I lived in a tent for months at a time—with water everywhere inside it, during the rainy season—because that was all I could afford. I have had two cars repossessed, as well as a boat. I have been evicted; and lost my dream house, as well as most of the possessions that were important to me, including priceless family items that had been handed down over generations. When I was in law school, I had a pair of shoes resoled so many times that I was told it could not be done anymore; and I have struggled to make ends meet for food.

I do not wish any of this on others. However, I realize that many Americans have experienced losses, pain and suffering that are far worse than I ever have; and this is true today of people abroad who are dying of wars, diseases and malnutrition, and are being forced into slavery and prostitution.[15] I have great faith in God, the United States, all Americans[16], and people everywhere. I believe we will survive like my mother did. However, we will be tested like never before.

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[2] See http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/02/politics/campaign-wrap/?hpt=hp_t1

[3] As discussed later in this article, “housing vouchers” are an outgrowth of the national “Housing Allowance” program that I crafted as a young attorney with the Senate Banking Committee—which was complementary to the “Brooke Amendment,” and morphed into the Section 8 housing program that has helped millions of Americans.

[4] As I have written:

[L]awyers who are prosecutors are often less interested in fairness and justice than they are in winning at all costs, and exercising their raw power and hurting others in the process—such as those who are innocent but are convicted anyway.

See <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/the-american-legal-system-is-broken-can-it-be-fixed/>

And I added:

A federal official with reason to know told me that between 15-20 percent of the indictees in federal courts are probably innocent. Some are seniors who have been charged with cheating the Social Security program, and they are scared to death, so they agree to plea bargains rather than fight for their innocence.

See *id.* at n.8. This is truly frightening, and cruel. Also, those who are engaged in prosecutorial misconduct are “sheltered” by the government, which is a travesty unto itself. Aside from any civil remedies against them, such prosecutors should be prosecuted and disbarred.

See, e.g., <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-02-06/ted-stevens-prosecutors-justice-department/52922922/1> (“Taxpayers pay to defend prosecutors in Ted Stevens case”); see also <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/the-american-legal-system-is-broken-can-it-be-fixed/#comment-1700> (“Perhaps the best remedy for such abuses is to have the ‘guilty’ prosecutors incarcerated; and let justice be meted out with respect to them, by those in prisons”)

[5] See, e.g., <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/the-american-legal-system-is-broken-can-it-be-fixed/#comment-1977> (“Law School May Amount To The Worst Investment Of Her Life!”) and <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/are-colleges-dinosaurs/> (“Are Colleges Dinosaurs?”) (*see also* the footnotes and all other comments beneath the article)

[6] See, e.g., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_W._Romney#Secretary_of_Housing_and_Urban_Development

[7] See, e.g., <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2010/05/12/what-and-where-is-god/> (“What And Where Is God?”) (*see also* the footnotes and comments beneath the article)

[8] See, e.g., <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2010/09/27/the-economic-tsunami-continues-its-relentless-and-unforgiving-advance-globally/#comment-1960> (“Global Economy Could Endure Disaster For a Week”) (*see also* the article itself, as well as the footnotes and all of the other comments beneath it)

[9] See, e.g., http://www.americanbanker.com/issues/173_212/-365185-1.html (“Greenspan’s Fingerprints All Over Enduring Mess”) and http://www.realclearpolitics.com/news/tms/politics/2009/Apr/08/euphoria_or_the_obama_depression_.html (“Euphoria or the Obama Depression?”); *see also* <http://www.philstockworld.com/2009/10/11/greenspan's-legacy-more-suffering-to-come/> (“Greenspan’s legacy: more suffering to come”)

[10] See <https://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2011/07/14/divorces/> (*see also* the footnotes and comments beneath the article)

[11] See, e.g., <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2085163/Children-dumped-streets-Greek-parents-afford-them.html> (“Children ‘dumped in streets by Greek parents who can’t afford to look after them any more’”)


[12] See <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2010/01/31/lawyers-and-internet-scams/> (“Lawyers And Internet Scams”) (see also the footnotes and all of the comments beneath the article)

[13] See http://www.realclearpolitics.com/news/tms/politics/2009/Apr/08/euphoria_or_the_obama_depression_.html

[14] See, e.g., <http://www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2012/02/02/the-youngest-and-richest-people-in-america-from-mark-zuckerberg-to-sean-parker-photos.html> (“The 10 Youngest Richest, From Sergey Brin to Mark Zuckerberg”)



[15] See <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2009/12/28/human-trafficking/> (“Human Trafficking”) (see also the footnotes and all of the comments beneath the article)

[16] See <http://naegeleblog.wordpress.com/2010/02/26/america-a-rich-tapestry-of-life/> (“America: A Rich Tapestry Of Life”) (see also the footnotes and all of the comments beneath the article)

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