

Handout

Can You Imagine...

1. A country that is the richest in the world with the highest Gross National Product, but where one out of four children is born into "official poverty," where one out of four of these "officially poor" children lives in a family where one or more parents work full time, year round, and where the "official poverty" line is set well below the actual cost of minimally adequate housing, health care, food, and other necessities.
2. A country that builds schools to educate all its children, but only provides resources for its preschool Head Start Program to enable 40% of the most needy 3-4 year olds to be ready to learn when they enter the school at age six. This is a country where children rank 21st among the 26 industrialized nations in eighth grade math scores.
3. A country that protects over 90% of its children from the diseases of measles, polio, and DPT (diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus) through immunization, but where almost 70 million people, including 11 million children (through 18 years) have inadequate or no health insurance, and where the infant mortality rate (number of deaths per 1000 prior to 1 year) for black children (15.1) is twice that for whites (7.6).
4. A country that grows enough food to feed all its people and millions more around the world, but where over 30 million (over 10%) are hungry and more than 50% of the food stamp recipients are children. This is a country where the number of people using food banks and emergency food shelves has increased substantially in recent years.
5. A country that is first in the world in defense spending and in military exports, but last among the 26 industrialized nations in protecting its children against violence. Where 1 in 680 is likely to be killed by gunfire before 20 years, a rate twelve times greater than the other industrialized nations, and where over three million children are reported to be abused and neglected yearly.

6. A country that has laws to ensure the right of all workers to organize and join labor unions and strike to achieve their goals, but where workers, such as farm and textile workers, have often been harassed and intimidated when they try to exercise these rights.
7. A country that claims that "justice is blind" and strives to ensure that everyone is fairly treated in its legal system, but where African-Americans, who comprise 14% of the population, make up 52% of those executed and over 40% of those under death sentence.
8. A country that has passed laws protecting its children from unfair, inhumane labor practices, but whose government has done little to block the importation of merchandise produced by exploited child labor and whose citizens purchase billions of dollars of products from elsewhere in the world that are manufactured in factories where children are abused and exploited.
9. A country that strives to provide social security for its senior citizens and has poverty rates for those over 65 years that are lower than for the population as a whole, but where the poverty for females over 65 years is double that for males over 65 years and where the percentage of African-Americans and Latinos over 65 years in poverty is over 2.5 times that for whites over 65 years.
10. A country that thinks of itself as a "land of opportunity" for all, but where 40% of Hispanic and African-American children and only 16% of white children are "officially poor," where full-time work at minimum wage pays below the official poverty line for a family of two and where two out of three workers who earn the minimum wage are women, where living standards are falling for younger generations despite the fact that many young households have two wage earners, fewer children, and better education than their parents.
11. A country that has a government department charged with the task of developing policies and programs to ensure that all are sheltered,

but where approximately 3/4 million are homeless on any given day and between 1.2 and 2 million people during any year and where approximately 20% of those seeking emergency shelter fail to secure it due to lack of resources.

CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT THIS COUNTRY IS THE USA?

Inspired by and based on "Imagine a Country" by Holly Sklar, in Z Magazine (July/August 1997).

Data Sources: Sklar, H. (1997). "Imagine a Country," Z Magazine (July/August); US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States (yearly). World Bank, World Development Report, NY. Oxford University Press, (yearly). Children's Defense Fund, State of America's Children (yearly). UNICEF, The State of the World's Children (yearly). Bread for the World, US Hunger and Poverty Report (1998)