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Poverty in Chicago

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Poverty in Chicago

Cover Page Footnote

Expensive condos and luxurious high rises adorn Chicago's gold coast. Ritzzy restaurants cater to the affluent and Michigan Avenue's pricey department stores attract only those waving Visa and MasterCard. However, behind the glamour there is a growing population that remains trapped in poverty. Many reasons contribute to poverty in Chicago—and they all seem linked together in a chain that's almost impossible to break.

in order to relocate in the inner city. They have been successful in making a profit and bringing jobs to the inner city. When working becomes routine for even one resident that person shows the neighborhood that success in the inner city is not impossible. Soon other residents would adapt a lifestyle in which employment is central. The trick is keeping good role models in the inner city and not letting success be strictly for the suburbs.

It is very important that we rebuild the horrible American ghettos and make them habitable. The inner cities of this country must no longer be ignored. Instead of saying, "Oh, isn't it a shame", it is up to us as a nation to form communities where pride and dedication-rather than laziness and despair-form the most admirable role models.

Poverty in Chicago

by

Laurel E. Martin

Expensive condos and luxurious high rises adorn Chicago's gold coast. Ritzy restaurants cater to the affluent and Michigan Avenue's pricey department stores attract only those waving Visa and MasterCards.

However, behind the glamour there is a growing population that remains trapped in poverty. Many reasons contribute to poverty in Chicago-and they all seem linked together in a chain that's almost impossible to break.

A few decades ago, cities were rich with development symbolized by numerous industrial and manufacturing jobs available to blue collar workers. Wages were sufficient to support a family and a middle class lifestyle. This offered an attractive scene for immigrants and minorities who came to Chicago to find a better life.

However, a wave of deindustrialization eventually flew across the Midwest. Industries moved to the sunbelt, or even out of the country in search of cheaper labor. Other businesses relocated to the suburbs in hopes of avoiding the city's high costs. The jobs that were left in the city required extensive skills, education, and experience-things inner-city dwellers did not have. A mismatch was created between available jobs and the qualifications of those looking for work. People were caught in urban entrapment. They were stuck in **the** city without jobs or the income to move to where the jobs had relocated.

A depreciation in land values followed urban entrapment as businesses and financial institutions that once catered to city neighborhoods closed down or moved to higher income areas. Landowners couldn't afford the upkeep on their property and the tax base spiraled downward.

The city's shrinking tax base played a pivotal role in the

decline of Chicago's once excellent public schools. With understaffed schools and underpaid teachers, survival-not learning- became the main objective. Without strong schools, poverty will remain a way of life for large numbers of Chicagoans.

With the widening gap between the classes, there also has been an increase in the "under-class phenomenon." Violence, gang activity, vandalism, and homicide are on the rise. People without rewarding jobs or stable lives resort to these activities to find a sense of success or accomplishment.

Decreased land values, lower education levels, and increased crime rates are discouraging businesses to relocate in Chicago. If inner-city neighborhoods could attract investment, they would be on the road to recovery. The lack of reinvestment in poor neighborhoods leaves them trapped in a vicious cycle.

The solutions to Chicago's poverty are complex. It's easy to point out what is wrong in the city, but harder to say how to fix it. Three key reforms would help end poverty in Chicago:

* **Welfare Reform.** We need 'to make the welfare system "user friendly." Existing welfare programs give lip service to helping the poor, while encouraging parasitic tendencies since any earnings are 100 percent taxable. The welfare system should encourage steps toward getting people out of poverty-not hinder them. A workfare-type program could link people with jobs and salaries and perhaps even inspire private enterprise. A negative income tax would encourage people to get jobs instead of relying solely on welfare, a burden to taxpayers.

* **Education Reform.** The education system in Chicago needs drastic change. New investments in teachers, schools, computers, books, and science equipment need to be a priority. Administrative cuts in the school system and a redistribution of the tax base would fund sorely needed improvements. Improved education would allow more people to competitively enter the workforce and help end the vicious cycle of poverty.

* **Investment Policy Reform.** Banks, other financial institutions, and businesses need to reinvest in Chicago's neighborhoods to improve them and to help create jobs, giving people the power of the purse-a power critical to reducing the "under class phenomenon." As more businesses return to the city and find a better educated workforce, poverty would begin to wane.

Poverty cannot easily be ended. Many people benefit from Chicago's poverty, but the problem can not be ignored. With the present system, there is no end in sight. Moreover, it is causing it to grow. The end to poverty will come only with a reworked welfare system, a new priority placed on education, and a reinvestment in inner-city neighborhoods.