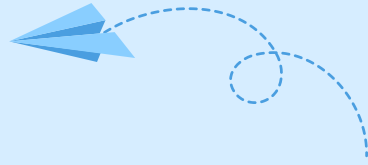




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| Section 1: The State of Inequality in the United States today

Social stratification is a common aspect in every society where people are ranked into various social classes based on their achievements and their ascribed talents. Whereas social stratification may be viewed as a measure of achievement, it is worth noting that, social stratification has brought about inequality in the society. In the United States inequality has hit skyrocketing standards, and the aspect has been largely attributed to policies set at institutional levels, which tend to aggravate inequality (Noah, 2012). The laws and policies adopted by the Federal Government, which govern the operations and systems of taxation, wages, working conditions and corporations, aid in enhancing inequality. It is vital for the governmental institutions to understand the consequences of the policies and laws they put in place to ensure they do not favor inequality. The wealth of the United States should be shared equally amongst the entire population. However, it is disturbing to note that one percent of the Americans own over 15 percent of the American wealth (Massey, 2008). In order to understand clearly the role of the institutions and the policies they implement in enhancing inequality, one must analyze these policies and their effects.

The income inequality in the United States is alarming, and it has come to the attention of many people. Although income inequality mainly affects the ordinary American citizens, they seem not to feel the impact because of the social mobility. Various factors have been proposed, as the key causes of income inequality in the United States. However, the policies



adopted by the Government and other institutions influence income. The Republican Government adopted policies which allowed heavy government spending. The Federal Government adopted extremely high spending policies, which accounted for over 18 percent of gross domestic product (Heckman & Krueger, 2005). The taxation policies adopted to fund this high spending brought about income inequality in the United States. The essence of taxation is to take money from one group of people, and hand it over to another. The disparity in the taxation policy for different income earners has been blamed for income inequality in America. The taxation rate for poor and middle class people in the United States has rendered them incapable of moderating their income with the rich. Their income is taxed at the source, giving them no relief, which has enhanced the inequality. The tax rate for the rich in the US has dropped from 50 percent to less than 25 percent in the last 30 years (Dadush & Dervis, 2012). This has put them at an advantaged position to continue being at the top class, both socially and economically.

Policies adopted by the political systems in the United States favor the employers, while oppressing the workers. There is a wage disparity, which leaves the workers with little income. The wage policy adopted by the Federal Government sets the minimum pay critically low, which gives advantage to the rich employers. Consequently, the rich employers continue to gain more and more profits, thus expanding the inequality between the upper class and the low class citizens (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2007). The trade and immigration policies adopted by the Federal Government have left the low wage earners at the competition of

international levels, while largely protecting high wage earners. This is a clear indication of how inequality is created.

| Section 2

The key concern for the American economy has been to counteract the inflation which has been rocking the economy. One of the fundamental approaches to curbing inflation has been raising the interest rate. While it is common knowledge that all individuals should be equally subjected to the high interest rates, the low and middle-income earners are critically affected. The rules and policies, put in place to counteract inflation, majorly affect the poor people in the United States. In the efforts of curbing inflation the less educated workers are prone to losing their jobs. Unemployment has been high since measures and policies to control it were implemented. The less educated workers have been scarified through low employment and low wages in an effort to counteract inflation (Dalphin, 1999). This effect has enhanced inequality amongst the American people. People with prestigious jobs are never laid off, and their high wages are protected. The Federal Reserve board and the central bank of the United States have adopted policies to counteract inflation, which have led to massive unemployment and low wages (Ryscavage, 1999). It is evident that the less educated people in America comprise low and middle level class people, and thus unemployment affects them critically. Unless such policies are reviewed, the low-income earners will continue to be oppressed, and inequality will be prevalent amongst the American population.



Finally, the public health policy has failed to control the cost of health services. There has been a healthcare cost explosion in the United States untypical for any other country. This has been a key factor in enhancing inequality amongst the American citizens. While it is the responsibility of the government to provide healthcare services to the people, the Federal Government of United States has left the responsibility to the private sector. The American Federal Government lacks a universal health coverage policy, and leaves the responsibility to private insurers (Danziger, 1994). The private insurers are struggling with running the services with high administrative costs. This has forced them to raise ineffectively the health care cost. Considering that health care provision is almost the same per head, it is evident that the burden will be more cumbersome to low and middle income earners, than to the rich. It is noteworthy that with the rising health care cost, all the wages of low and middle-income earners will be absorbed by healthcare. Such healthcare policies are responsible for the skyrocketing inequality amongst the American people.

While it is paramount to note that policies and laws adopted by institutions in America have contributed to inequality, other factors should not be forgotten as well. Trade, corruption, immigration, and race have all contributed to this vice of inequality. However, if the Federal Government were to adopt appropriate policies to protect the low-income earners, inequality would be contained. The Federal Government should ensure that, despite inflation, people remain employed. Health care is a key service which the Federal Government

should provide always. It should not leave such sensitive sectors to private practitioners. The wages paid to low income earners should be commensurate with the amount of profits their employers are making. Besides, minimum wages should be reviewed periodically to ensure balanced distribution of resources. Lastly, taxation policies should be reviewed as well to ensure that every American is taxed according to what he/she earns. Therefore, it can be conclusively said that the policies in place are to be blamed for the inequality in the United States.

| Section 3

It is evident from the arguments and points put forward by Alexander that racial caste is still prevalent in the United States. Whereas the American legal system is expected to adhere to color blindness, there are indications that it has been used as a tool for racial discrimination. According to Alexander, racial caste in America did not end, but it was redesigned in a deceiving way that it is hard to be noted. Alexander is largely concerned with the high number of people being incarcerated or already jailed. 25% of the world prisoners are held in the United States (Massey, 2008). The majority of prisoners are black people and African Americans, who are termed as felons. According to the former litigator, the majority of the black Americans who have been found with criminal records are permanently imprisoned. Few who are lucky have been subjected to low class status, where their access to opportunities is limited.



Alexander asserts that, while racial discrimination may have ended in 1960s, the US criminal justice system continuously uses the war on drugs as a tool for discrimination (Garnbna3, 2012). Much of the focus has been put on a few individuals like Barrack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, who have made economic and social strides and are at the top class. This has made people to forget the ordinary black Americans who have been relegated to a racial caste. However, the techniques, used to discriminate people based on race, have been redesigned to avoid racial explicit attributes (Massey, 2008). She asserts that the criminal justice systems are being manipulated by the political systems in power as tools for racial control. According to her, the criminal justice system laws are replacing the Jim Crow laws, which had replaced slavery. She is calling upon the civil rights societies and human right activists to raise alarm over the incarceration rates in America. The United States' criminal justice system enhances inequality based on race. The opportunities of African Americans and the whites are not equal , and the legal system is a tool to enhance the vice (Garnbna3, 2012).

Devar Pager, professor of sociology, argues that the incarceration of individuals reduces their chances of getting employment, loans, political participation, and housing. According to the professor, the majority of American prisoners are jailed twice for one offence (Pager, 2007). These people suffer from the stigma of incarceration after they are released. A research she conducted on the chances of whites and blacks getting employment opportunities depicts a high rate of discrimination against black people. Black people with criminal records have the slightest

chances of getting job in America (Garnbna3, 2012). The black men in America have been considered as more delinquent than white men. Since job opportunities for black men are scarce, they turn back to crime (Pager, 2007). This creates a vicious cycle, which has labeled the black men as criminals. This form of inequality in the justice system and in the job market has generated the social classes currently prevalent in America.

Alexander and Devar's arguments are a clear indication of the inequality that is prevalent in America. Unequal access to opportunities for white people and black people enhances the inequality. The criminalization of the black men in America has denied them the opportunity to raise the social class, since there are no such opportunities (Massey, 2008). They have minimal chances of getting employment, political participation, housing, and access to loans. This affirms Massey's point of offering competitive advantage to certain classes or groups of classes. The inequalities postulated by Alexander and Devar also affirm the ineffective policies and systems that affect equal distribution of opportunities and access to markets. Some classes of people have unlimited access to the job, political, housing and loans markets than others. The policies adopted by the criminal justice systems in America are also to be blamed for the inequality, which exists between whites and blacks.



| Section 4: Karl Marx and the Social Class

Karl Marx talked largely on social inequality in the society and the way the rich or the capital owners oppressed the poor or the workers. According to Marx, social classes characterize a capitalist society. People are divided between the owners of capital and the workers (Levine, 2006). Owners of capital have property whereas the other group provides the required labor in the production process. The capitalists exploit the labor power and continue to expand their capital base.

The proletariat or the working class represents the people who own no capital or property and must continually work for the capitalists. They work at exploitative terms and low wages to sustain their families. This theory by Marx is a clear foundation of the understanding of the inequality, which exists today in the United States (Levine, 2006). In the minds of the capitalists, their key objective is to ensure continuously that the proletariats do not acquire any property and that they continue to work for them.

The desire to maintain the working class at their low class is a key in enhancing inequality in the United States. The capitalists must produce the goods, since demand is there, and they need labor (Levine, 2006). While it may be viewed as crucial for the working class to uplift themselves and own property, the capitalists would oppose any measure to ensure such an achievement does not happen. Therefore, it is clear that the state of inequality in the United States is a vice which requires all entities to join hands and eliminate it.

