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Bringing Work to Life

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Welcome

Welcome to our latest quarterly issue of Bringing Work to Life.

Our recent book: *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, (Praeger, 2014), describes why, when, and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional, entrepreneurial career path from more than one source of income: <http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781440831584>

This complements our three previous books:

Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing, (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013), which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on principles of social justice:

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Business-Behaving-Well,676586.aspx>

Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development (Praeger, 2010), which describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=C3236C>

Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization (Praeger, 2003), which describes leadership approaches to integrate individual needs with organizational needs for the benefit of both:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781567204360>

This newsletter contains two articles: *Work, Play, and Meaning*, and *Social Trends*.

Work, Play, and Meaning

As pointed out in *Affiliation in the Workplace* visions of the future of work have ranged from the apocalyptic to a technology induced nirvana of prosperity. Such



Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal*, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized support to individuals in career guidance and coaching.

Ron is author of *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, which describes why, when and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional, entrepreneurial career path from more than one source of income; editor of *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations

extreme possibilities also emerge in thinking about how technology and automation may affect jobs and society (Eduardo Porter, *Jobs Threatened by Machines: A Once 'Stupid' Concern Gains Respect*, New York Times, June 7, 2016). Whether the path forward is positive and we enjoy increased personal fulfillment and strengthened communities, or whether we permit further worsening of inequality, so that a few prosper and the vast majority suffer, will depend on our collective will to create a just society. If that collective will falters our society, as we know it, is in jeopardy. If, on the other hand, we bend the arc toward growing social justice then we, and future generations, can look to integrating work, play, and meaning in new, positive ways. Let us explore that.

In reflecting on our connection with work, Betsy Brewer, as referenced in *Affiliation in the Workplace*, framed the question of why we work in the context of the interior processes of discovering meaning (what), being (who) and doing (how), and identified four work relationships to the external world:

- A job: based on material rewards, a transaction
- An occupation: involving greater meaning, but doing dominates
- A career: requiring personal initiative, but needing collective approval
- A vocation: calling in the service of a greater good

There is no implication that one relationship is better than another or that one should precede another. Moreover, we may move from one form of work relationship to another throughout our lives. I have found that clients frequently seek to move closer to the vocation or career forms of relationship as their work lives unfold. Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” This captures well the depth of meaning we often seek in our work. And we frequently see similar depth of meaning and feeling expressed in our leisure pursuits. For example, the intensity of emotion that accompanies support for a sports team, the spiritual tranquility that accompanies creative or pastoral endeavors, or the communal spirit that accompanies team activities. So work and play have personal meaning and strong emotions in common. What other aspects of play which, if created in work, can create similar feelings of well-being? Let me suggest they include the following:

- Choice
 - Determining our own course of action
- Autonomy
 - Expressing ourselves
- Flexibility
 - Embracing change and surprise
- Respect
 - Receiving positive feedback
- Tangibility
 - Seeing meaningful results
- Novelty
 - Exercising our curiosity
- Familiarity
 - Re-engaging with happy past endeavors
- Pleasure

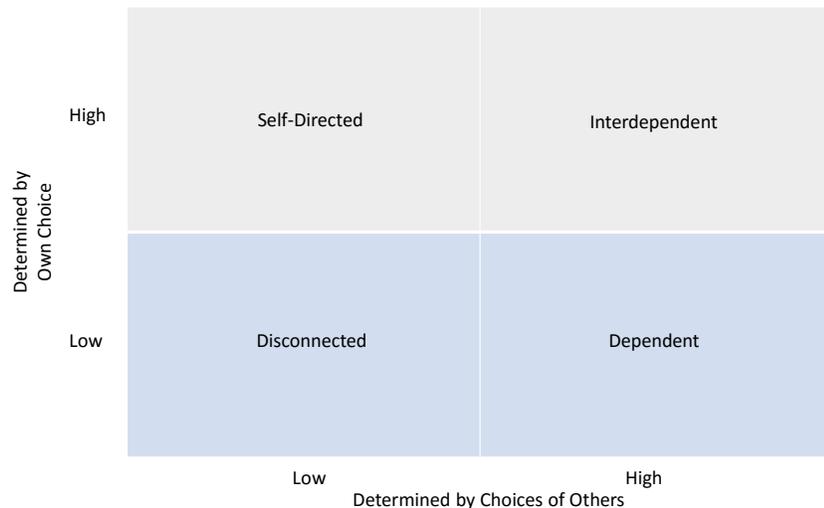
to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on real-world examples from contributing authors, and principles of social justice; editor of *Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development*, a book that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations; and author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in chemical engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in career development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in chemical engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

- Experiencing enjoyment
- Community
 - Transcending ourselves to bring joy or value to others

These attributes naturally accompany a nontraditional, entrepreneurial career path, which is self-directed, and is at the intersection of our passion/interests, skills, and external needs as described in *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path*. It is one reason why such a path is so appealing.

Let us look in more depth at the first item, namely choice, in examining the relationship of work and play. We can consider choice along two dimensions: the extent to which it is personally determined, and the extent to which our actions are determined by the choices of others, for example by a boss in a conventional work setting. This builds on the concepts of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument that considers conflict along the two dimensions of meeting our own needs and meeting the needs of others. The choice framework is also related to that of evolving forms of career relationship described in *Building Workforce Strength*.

With respect to choice we can represent the framework as follows:



Since play is self-directed it will mainly be in the upper left quadrant, sometimes in the upper right, interdependent, quadrant when it involves a group activity. A nontraditional career similarly will be in the top two quadrants. However, conventional work is likely to reside in the lower right, dependent, quadrant. Someone withdrawing from the world of work will be in the lower left, disconnected, quadrant. As societal inequality increases we constrain more people to the lower half of this diagram, with a decreased sense of personal fulfillment and choice. It is awful that those in poverty often find themselves in the lower left quadrant. Bending the arc of our society upward toward economic and social justice will help people move to the upper half of the diagram with more control over personal choices, increased personal fulfillment, and community engagement.

The implications of this framework are as follows on a personal, organizational, and community level:

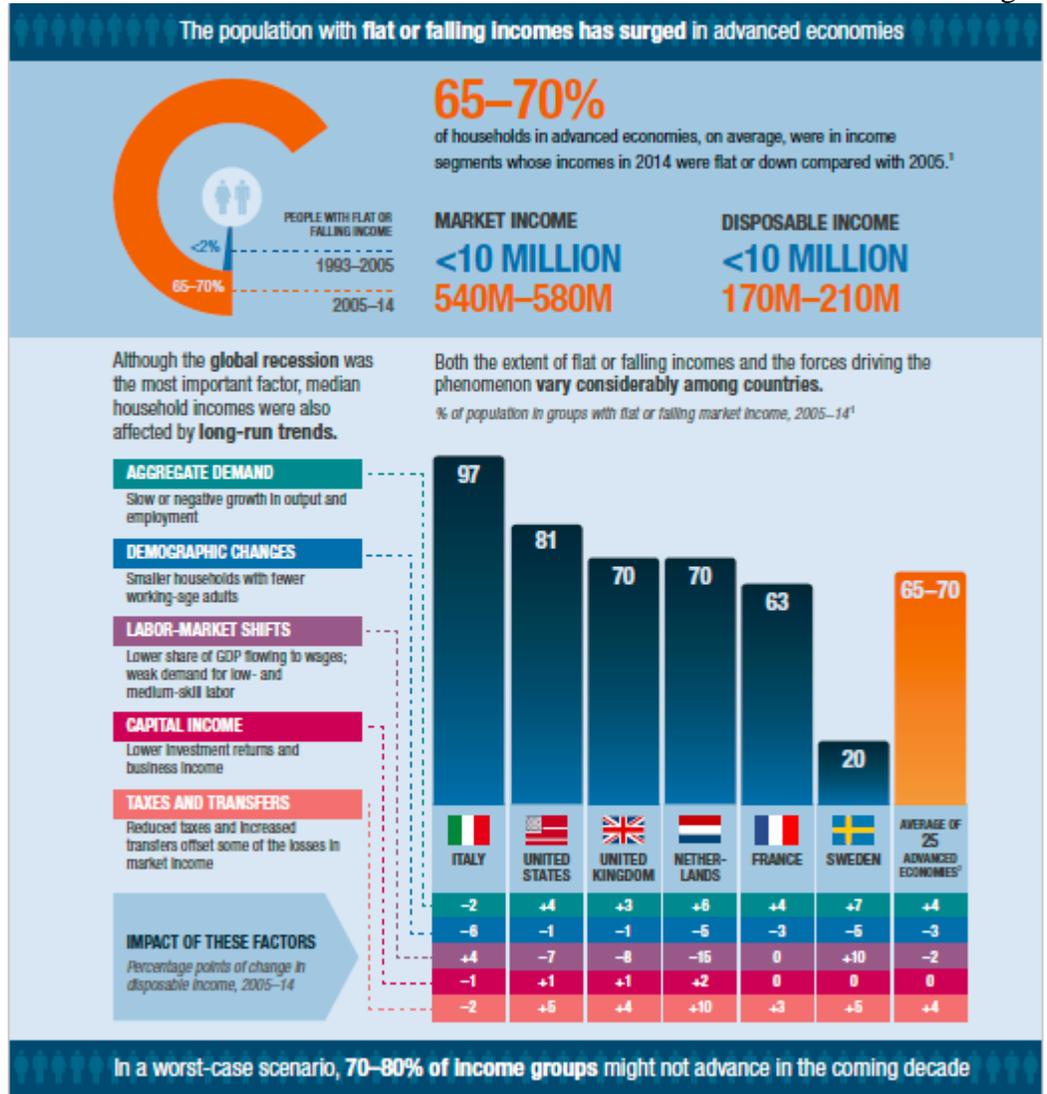
- Personal
 - Lay a foundation that supports personal choice, for example by:
 - Embracing educational opportunities.
 - Selecting career directions that honor personal attributes and aspirations, such as nontraditional, entrepreneurial career paths, or working in organizations that value personal development.
 - Avoid constraining personal choices
 - By not taking on excessive debt.
 - Avoiding organizations that disproportionately reward those at the top.
 - Support our communities based on staying informed about emerging social, business, and workplace issues; engaging with those organizations that are socially responsible; and supporting public policy that benefits all.
- Organizational
 - Promote practices that support personal development as described in *Building Workforce Strength*.
 - Promote practices that honor the needs of all stakeholders and recognize the importance of individual, organizational, and community well-being as described in *Business Behaving Well*.
 - Seek to build a sense of affiliation with those in the workforce viewing workforce relationships as partnerships as described in *Affiliation in the Workplace*.
- Community
 - Pursue public policies that distribute resources equitably, gaining the benefits outlined in *Business Behaving Well*.
 - Support social and community causes that benefit all such as full access to healthcare through a single-payer, Medicare-for-all system in the United States, and strengthened education at all levels.

In taking these steps we move closer to a society that benefits all rather than a select few, that supports the exercise of personal choice rather than imposition of the views of others, and that enhances personal fulfillment through work and play, leading to an inclusive and vibrant community.

Parts of this article are based on concepts from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path* (Praeger, 2014), *Business Behaving Well* (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013), *Building Workforce Strength* (Praeger, 2010), and *Affiliation in the Workplace* (Praeger, 2003).

Social Trends

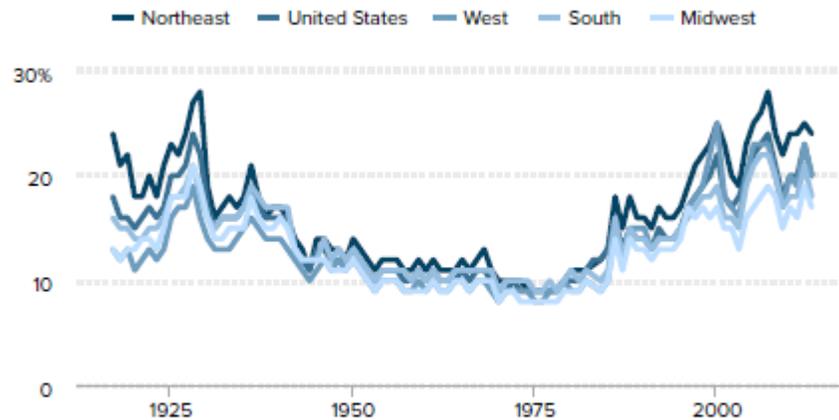
The population with flat or falling incomes has surged in advanced economies such as the United States from less than 10 million people between 1993 and 2005, to hundreds of millions of people between 2005 and 2014, as shown in the following figure:



Source: McKinsey Global Institute, *Poorer Than Their Parents? Flat or Falling Incomes in Advanced Economies*, July 2016.

This is fueled by extreme inequality in the United States, reaching levels previously only seen before the great depression of the late 1920s and 1930s as shown in the following figure:

Share of all income held by the top 1%, United States and by region, 1917–2013



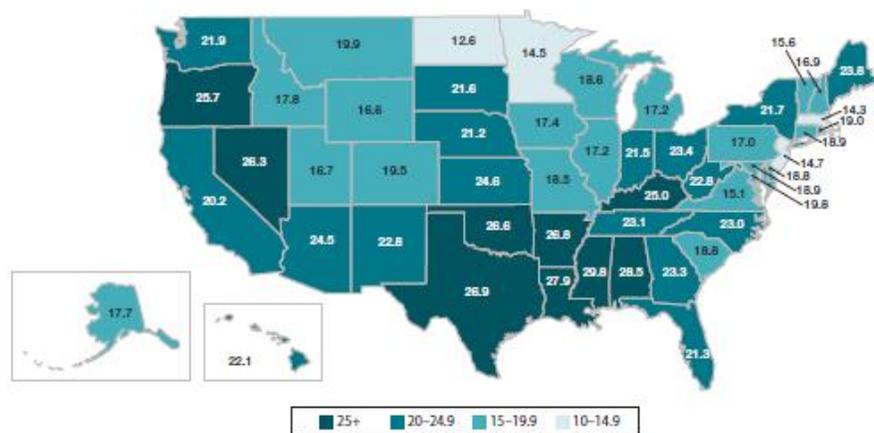
Note: Data are for tax units. Tax data from 1983 to 1985 were unavailable, hence the gap in regional figures. Income includes capital gains income.
Source: Authors' analysis of state-level tax data from Sommeiller (2006) extended to 2013 using state-level data from the Internal Revenue Service SOI Tax Stats (various years), and Piketty and Saez (2012)

Source: Estelle Sommeiller, Mark Price, and Ellis Wazeter, *Income Inequality in the U.S. by State, Metropolitan Area, and City*, Economic Policy Institute, June 16, 2016.

As a result, today some states now have almost 30% of children living in food insecure households as shown in the next figure:

Percentage of children living in food-insecure households by state, 2012–14 average

Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi have the highest rates of food insecurity, with almost 30 percent of children living in a food-insecure household.



Source: Sources: CPS December-FBS 2012-14.
Note: Because of data variability due to the relatively small sample sizes available in a single year in each state, we average food insecurity rates across a three-year period, 2012-14.

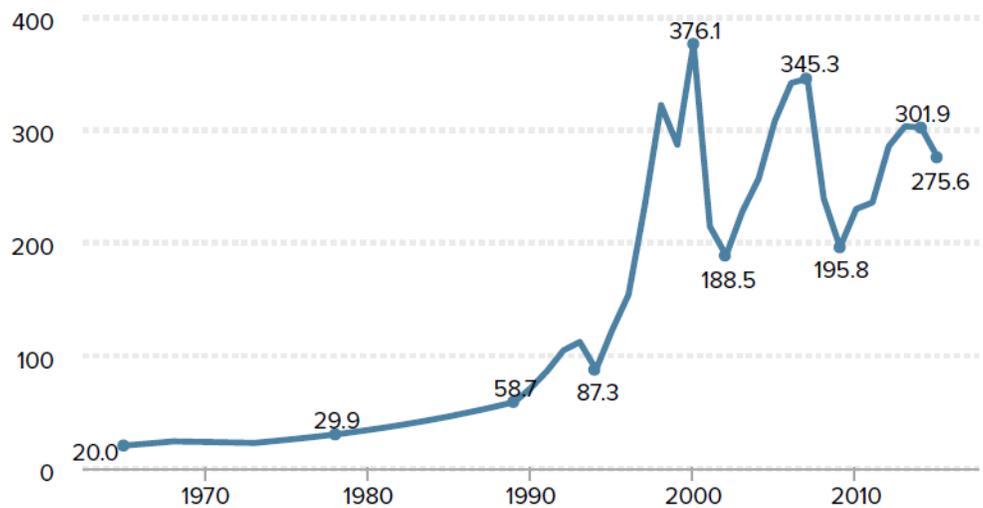


Source: Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Lauren Bauer, and Greg Nantz, *Twelve Facts about Food Insecurity and SNAP*, The Hamilton Project, Economic Facts, April 2016.

Meanwhile CEOs of large companies continue to earn several hundred times the compensation of typical workers as shown in the next figure:

CEOs make 276 times more than typical workers

CEO-to-worker compensation ratio, 1965–2015

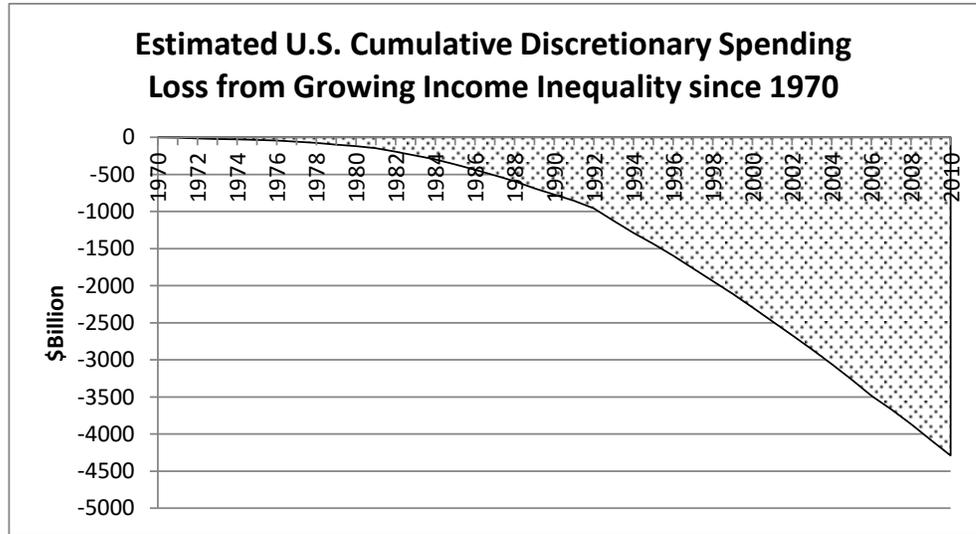


Note: CEO annual compensation is computed using the "options realized" compensation series, which includes salary, bonus, restricted stock grants, options exercised, and long-term incentive payouts for CEOs at the top 350 U.S. firms ranked by sales.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Compustat's Execucomp database, the current Employment Statistics program, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis NIPA tables.

Source: Lawrence Michel, and Jessica Schneider, *Stock Market Headwinds Meant Less Generous Year for Some CEOs*, Economic Policy Institute, July 12, 2016.

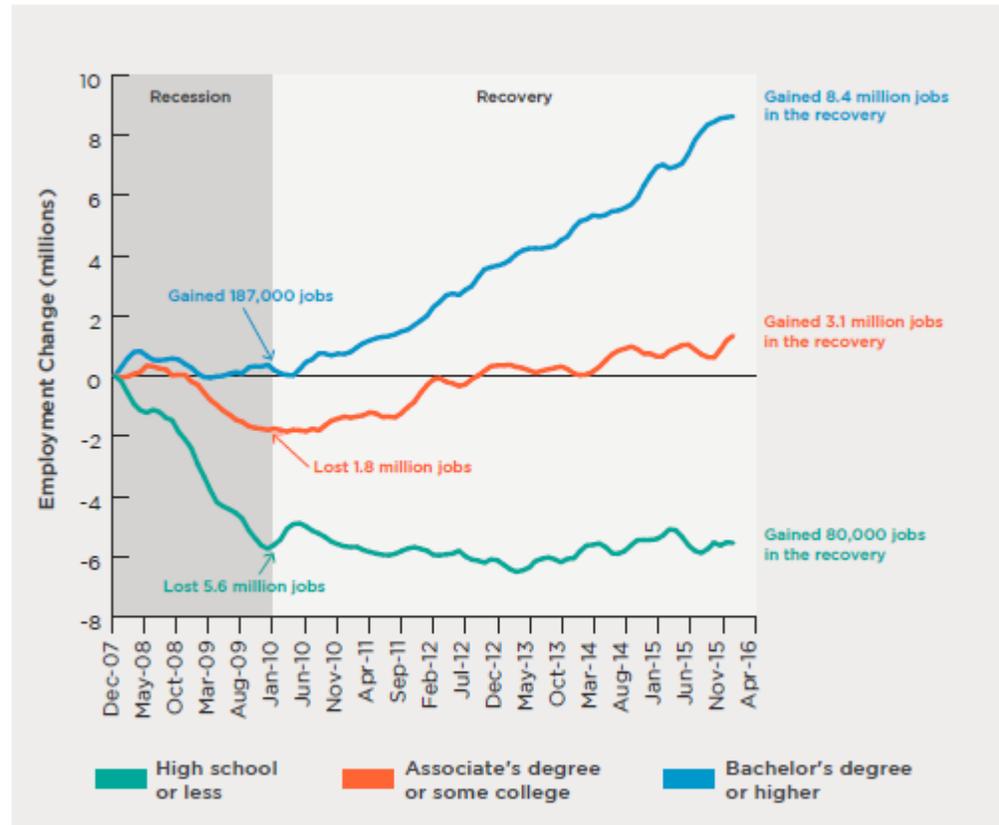
This excessive inequality, built around a reverse Robin Hood approach of taking from the poor to give to the rich, is ethically reprehensible and it creates social, emotional, and practical problems as outlined in *Business Behaving Well*. Excessive inequality leads to many social ills such as childhood poverty that we saw earlier, and it compromises happiness for many. Using tools of mathematical modeling described in *Business Behaving Well*, some principles of which we explored in our last newsletter, we have shown that more than \$4 trillion of discretionary spending was lost from the U.S. economy from 1970 to 2010, most since the early 1990s, just due to growing inequality, as shown in the following figure:



Source: Ron Elsdon, *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing* (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013).

Furthermore, the economic meltdown we experienced beginning in 2008 is a natural consequence of this level of inequality. There are a number of approaches needed to reverse such inequality including appropriate progressive taxation. One path that can help address inequality is provision of educational opportunities driven by individual aspirations and societal needs not by the greed of those running for-profit “educational” institutions. Education enhances job accessibility in the United States as shown in the following figure, which undelines the importance of ensuring affordable access to it:

Figure I. Workers with a Bachelor's degree have added 8.4 million jobs in the recovery, but workers with a high school diploma or less added only 80,000 jobs after losing 5.6 million jobs in the recession.

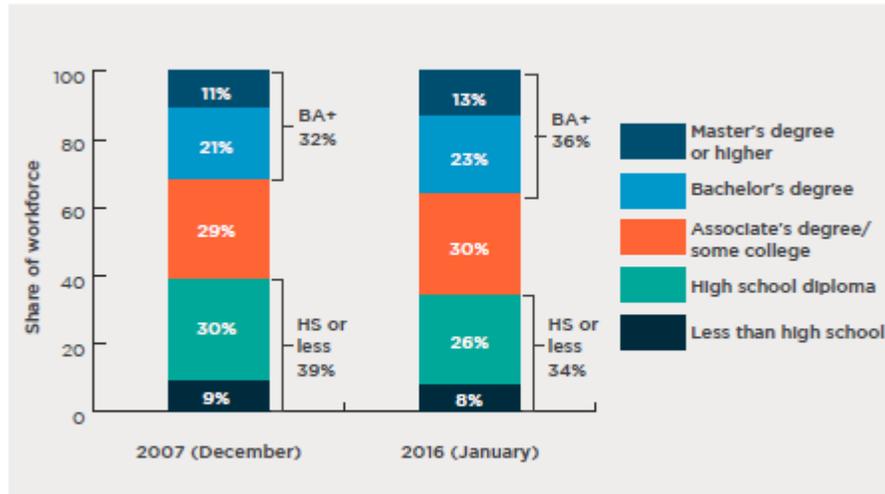


Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of *Current Population Survey (CPS)* data, 2007-2016.
 Note: Employment includes all workers age 18 and older. The monthly employment numbers are seasonally adjusted using the U.S. Census Bureau X-12 procedure and smoothed using a four-month moving average.

Source: Anthony Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gulish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, 2016, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

And in the following figure we see progress in access to advanced education in the United States, though for many this has involved taking on much debt:

Figure 2.2. Workers with a Bachelor's degree or higher now make up a larger share of the workforce (36%) than workers with a high school diploma or less (34%).



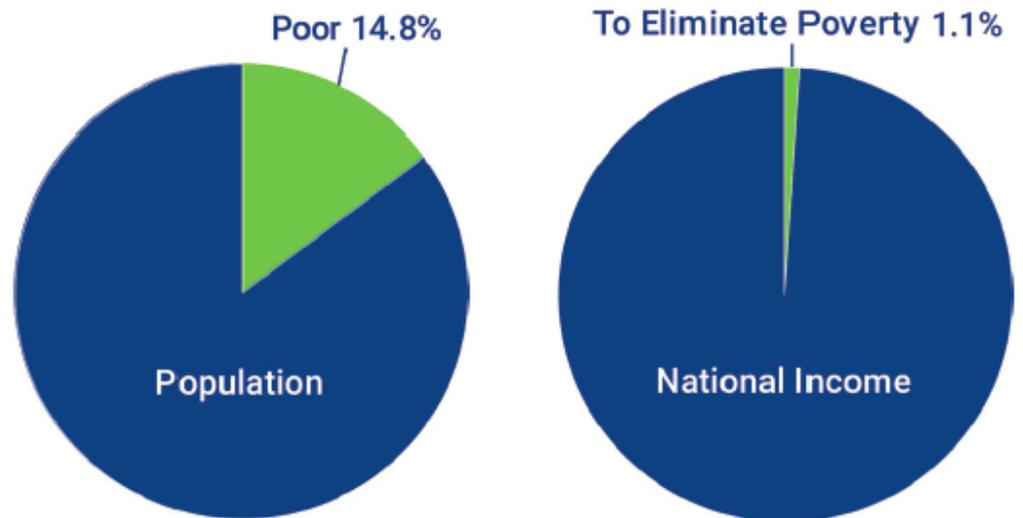
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of *Current Population Survey (CPS)* data, 2007, 2016.

Note: Employment includes all workers age 18 and older. The monthly employment numbers are seasonally adjusted using the U.S. Census Bureau X-12 procedure and smoothed using a four-month moving average.

Source: Anthony Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gulish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, 2016, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

It might seem that the steps we need to take to eradicate poverty are beyond our means. In fact we could eliminate poverty in the United States by investing only 1.1% of our national income as shown in the following figure:

FIGURE 1. PERCENT POOR OF TOTAL U.S. POPULATION AND PERCENT OF NATIONAL INCOME TO ELIMINATE POVERTY



Source: DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2015

Source: Authors' calculations

Source: Carsey Perspectives, University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy, Is the Poverty Rate 1.1 Percent?, May 26, 2016.

As we approach another national election in the United States this is a reminder of the importance of voting for substance over bombast, and the importance of voting for those who represent all in our society rather than those who represent only wealth and privilege.

Quote

“They have a law neither to sow corn nor to plant any fruit-bearing plant, nor to use wine, nor to build a house. This law they hold because they judge that those who possess these things will be easily compelled by powerful men to do what is ordered them because of their enjoyment of these things.”

Translation of Diodorus Siculus writing in the second half of the first century B.C. in Bibliotheca Historica about the Nabateans. A description of the Nabateans is provided by John R. Hale in The Great Courses series: Exploring the Roots of Religion.