

American Affluence: Continuation of the “Walls and Tower of Jericho”?

Richest Nation. According to the United Nations and World Bank, the United States is the richest country in the world. Based on gross domestic product (GDP), the top four countries, compared with two of the poorest, are:

1		United States	\$14,991,300
2		China	\$7,203,784
3		Japan	\$5,870,357
4		Germany	\$3,604,061
113		Democratic Republic of the Congo	\$16,069
138		Nicaragua	\$7,297

Gross domestic product is the market value of all final goods and services from a nation in a given year, and a measure of per capita in millions of dollars. GDP is often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living; GDP per capita is not a measure of personal income. The median personal income for an American is about \$32,000 annually.

Over three billion people, almost half the world's population, live on less than \$2.50 a day, for an annual personal income of \$912.50. One in two people live in abject poverty today.

Rich and Poor Disparity. The United States is one of the most highly stratified societies in the world, with unequal access and distribution of wealth and resources.

Poor: In November 2012 the U.S. Census Bureau said more than 16% of the population lived in poverty in the United States, including almost 20% of American children, up from 14.3% (approximately 43.6 million) in 2009 and to its highest level since 1993. The poverty level for 2012 was set at \$23,050 (total yearly income) for a family of four. Most Americans (58.5%) will spend at least one year below the poverty line at some point between ages 25 and 75.

Rich: The top 1% of the stratified society controls over 40% of the wealth. Or rephrased; the United States federal government reports that the net worth of the top 1 percent of people in the United States is approximately equal to that of the bottom 90 percent. The annual average income of the 1% is almost \$800,000, with an individual net worth of \$8.4 million.

The gap between the rich and the poor has grown 93% over the last four decades.

Illegal Drug Use: Despite tough anti-drug laws, the U.S. has the highest level of illegal drug use in the world. The use of drugs is a feature of the wealthiest countries.

The World Health Organization's survey of legal and illegal drug use in 17 countries, including the Netherlands and other countries with less stringent drug laws, shows Americans report the highest level of cocaine (crack and powder), methamphetamine and marijuana use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows that 22.6 million Americans 12 or older (8.9-percent of the population) were current illicit drug users, with approximately 13 million people over the age of 12 have used—and 529,000 of those are regular users of meth.

Within the United States, the populations that are turning away from drugs are the most educated and wealthiest. The poorest and least-educated have continued or increased their drug use. In the most economically depressed urban and rural sections of the country, the poor are resorting to illegal drug distribution as a means of economic survival.

Incarceration Rate: The United States imprisons its population at a greater rate than any other nation in the world, resulting in a total prison population greater than in any other country in the world. While there are many factors, poverty linked to illegal drug use and trafficking is the single greatest cause of incarceration.

While Americans represent about 5 percent of the world's population, nearly one-quarter of the entire world's inmates have been incarcerated in the United States in recent years. Imprisonment of America's 2.3 million prisoners, costing \$24,000 per inmate per year, and \$5.1 billion in new prison construction, consumes \$60.3 billion in budget expenditures.

The Question:

If "**Affluence**" is a measure of the ratio of the means and products available, i.e., the technological knowledge and goods produced, relative to the desired wants, i.e., the expectations, which is the most affluent – American communities or Indigenous communities? Is America a continuing reflection of the "walls and tower of Jericho"?