

Podcasts United – Episode 1: Economic Mobility

Bryce, Seth, Bryan & Jonathan discuss declining economic mobility in the US.

Transcript

Seth: Hey, listeners! Welcome to the 1st episode of Podcasts United, in this episode, we'll be discussing Economic and Social Mobility and how that relates to the book *Outcasts United*. Throughout the novel, economic and social mobility is one of the many issues discussed. Sadly, for this episode we will only get the pleasure of informing you about only this issue and the importance of it in relevance to you, our audience. Now you may be aware of the rising issue of economic mobility, you may have some idea, or you may not have a clue really at all about this issue. And all three of those responses are okay! We're here to inform you of the issue so that you become more aware of it and how serious it is. Now without any more further ado, let's get started shall we. As of right now, if the rate at which economic mobility is declining continues. American's concept of the American Dream will basically become obsolete. It will go poof. (poof audio clip) (pause) Sounds pretty terrifying doesn't it? It's a very serious issue, and if the thought of that doesn't scare you, I'm not sure what will. (insert audio clip of a scary sound or an audio clip meant to startle someone) Well let us get started in breaking this down for you and explaining why the declining economic mobility has become a serious issue. There are three main reasons as to why economic mobility is declining, and we're going to discuss each of these reasons. Now Bryce, one of the reasons why economic mobility has been declining is because of the noticeable gap between the rich and the poor. Could you tell us more about this? (transition into first body paragraph audio)

Bryce: The growing gap between the rich and the poor in the United States has become much more evident. This has become more and more of an issue over time as immigration to the United States has increased. Most refugees are given an unfair disadvantage as soon as they move to the US. They are forced to live in poor areas with little resources to fund basic things such as education. This is made evident in Warren St. John's *Outcasts United*, a story that spends a great deal of time describing the struggles faced by refugees that have moved to America. Because refugees aren't given the same opportunities as native born Americans, it is often much harder to adapt to life here as well as maintain a steady paying job when you aren't American. All together, these factors force refugees to attend underfunded schools which lowers their chances of moving up the economic ladder at all. In Fareed Zakaria's article "Social immobility erodes American dream" he references a report done by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It points out that the United States is one of only three countries that spends less on disadvantaged students than on other students. This is a major issue as we are basically restricting their ability to have any success by keeping them in schools where they don't have the resources to learn properly. This can be tied to the issue of funding schools based on property taxes. It makes it inevitable for people in poor neighborhoods to attend badly funded schools and to receive the lowest level of education. This way the poor stay poor and the rich stay rich. However, schooling isn't the only place where the poor are being given an unfair disadvantage. A new form of adversity is being faced in the workplace when hiring new employees. Hiring based on cultural fit used to be used to benefit the company, but it has evolved into a way for employers to hire people they enjoy being around. This creates a challenge for people that may not be from this country or those who are poor and have no clear connections to an employer. Now they must worry about appealing to the employers passions along with the goals of the company just to be in the running for a position, as if it wasn't hard enough to get a job already. Because employers are limiting their options in this way, it affects the poor by restricting their movement into higher level jobs and keeping their pay low. This creates an even larger gap between the rich and the poor by keeping the wealthy in higher positions in the workplace and blocking lower income workers from progressing up the economic ladder. This

relates strongly to the quality of life people are forced into because of the restrictions they face when trying to get jobs. So Jonathan, what do you have to say about the declining quality of life in America?

Jonathan: We as Americans love a good rags to riches story, but unfortunately stagnant wages, soaring income, wealth inequality and reduced equality of opportunity have all put a dent in our idea of the American dream. Some do beat the odds though and become successful, but to what physical extent does this take on their bodies. A long term study was started a few years ago to determine if their success stories translated into physical health benefits. What they discovered was surprising. These young adults were succeeding in America by all conventional markers, such as staying out of trouble, not abusing drugs, making friends, and developing a positive sense of self. This is good, however underneath their physical health was deteriorating. A study of 489 rural young African-American people in Georgia first showed signs of this pattern. The kids that became successful in life were found to be more obese, had higher blood pressure, and produced more stress hormones. They were also at a substantial risk of developing hypertension and diabetes as they grew older. This pattern is consistent with other sociological findings that suggest upward social mobility doesn't always come with physical gain. "If we look at the life expectancy associated with a college education, blacks gain about four fewer years from bachelor's degrees than do whites. In fact, black college graduates have shorter life expectancies than do white high school graduates." What causes these physical declines in some successful people? Some explanations include: They feel internal pressure to succeed, many feel socially isolated and disconnected from peers, and they also may encounter racism and discrimination. What can we do to mitigate these effects? A few examples include schools and colleges that serve lower-income students could provide health education, screenings and checkups as a part of their curriculum. Furthermore, schools could offer stress management programs, targeting lower-income holders, to help them balance the competing demands on their minds and bodies. Finally, we could develop programs to help these young people blow off steam in productive ways. Now Bryan is going to tell us a little more about the idea of the American Dream.

Bryan: If you find yourself wondering "What happened to the American Dream?" or "Why have I not noticed this before?" Well you're not alone. In fact a study conducted by two psychologists Michael W. Kraus and Jacinth J.X. Tan of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that on average participants in the study overestimated the upward mobility in the United States by 23%. Well, what does this mean, to overestimate one's social mobility? To put it simply, it means that on average every participant involved in the study overestimated any random U.S. citizen's ability to move up in socioeconomic standing. When asked, the participants even overestimated the number of college students to come from families in the bottom 20% of income by nearly 5 Times the actual statistic. These misunderstandings have developed from accepted truths, ones in which we rarely think to question. As children in America we are ingrained with the idea of "the American Dream," and in truth this idea of the land of dreams spreads worldwide. America is viewed as a melting pot of cultures where no matter your background you can achieve a successful and purposeful life. Hence why America has such a large influx of immigrants. And who can blame them, everyone just wants a chance at a good life. Sadly though a similar study by Shai Davidai, and the Cornell psychologist Thomas Gilovich, found that members of ethnic minority groups tended to overestimate upward mobility more than did European Americans. Yet the disheartening truth, as before mentioned, is that climbing the social ladder is even harder for those from ethnic minorities. This statistic alone shows one of the key conclusions that came from both studies, and that is that "those with the most to gain from believing in an upwardly mobile society tended to believe in it more intensely." That being said a strong belief in upward mobility can cause people to work hard and be innovative, but too much faith in the system can "downplay the inherent strain that economic inequality places on society, and specifically, on individuals at the bottom of the social class hierarchy." Understanding that things may not be the way we thought is one of the

key components to understanding this social mobility issue. And as stated at the end of the New York Times article “American Dream? Or Mirage?”” Addressing the rising economic gap between rich and poor in society, it seems, will require us to contend not only with economic and political issues, but also with the biases of our psychology. If you feel overwhelmed with all of this new information, it's understandable, it can be a lot to take in. So what should you take away from this episode of podcast united, what is its purpose? Well, I am going to pass it back to Seth, who will wrap this up for us.

Seth: So that about wraps up this episode of the Podcasts United Series. Thank you, Bryce, Jonathan, and Bryan for taking the time to inform us about economic and social mobility. Ultimately, what we hope we have done is, is that we've made you more aware of the issue of the declining economic mobility and the disaster that could result if there is no change. If America continues to decline in economic mobility the way it has been, then there will truly be no concept of American Dream anymore. (plays gasping audio track) In the future there will only be two social classes, the well off and the not so well off. What will determine which class someone will be a part of, will simply be what class they are born into. (pause) Once born into that social class, there will be no wiggle room, no moving up the ladder, no nothing. I.e. No more American Dream. Take a second to think about it, what effects would this have on America? The fact that this concept is in everyone's mind when they come to America, that they believe they can 'make it' here. And the fact that once they got here, they find out that it has become a myth. (play music to provoke thought for about 5-10 seconds) Well I do believe that's wrapped up our episode, I hope you all have enjoyed this episode of Podcasts United: A crash course in English 1120. Thanks for listening. Join in next time for our next episode, where the topic of discussion will be Police and Community Relations. (start outro music) Special thanks to all you listeners out there, without you, our podcast would have no purpose. (parting music/transitioning into next podcast)