

A Snapshot of The United States of America
by Michael Parenti *Dirty Truths* (City Light Books, 1996)

"Conservatives are fond of telling us what a wonderful, happy, prosperous nation this is. The only thing that matches their love of country is the remarkable indifference they show toward the people who live in it. To their ears the anguished cries of the dispossessed sound like the peevish whines of malcontents. They denounce as 'bleeding hearts' those of us who criticize existing conditions, who show some concern for our fellow citizens. But the dirty truth is that there exists a startling amount of hardship, abuse, affliction, illness, violence, and pathology in this country. The figures reveal a casualty list that runs into many millions. Consider the following estimates. In any one year:

- * 27,000 Americans commit suicide.
- * 50,000 attempt suicide; some estimates are higher.
- * 26,000 die from fatal accidents in the home.
- * 23,000 are murdered.
- * 85,000 are wounded by firearms.
- * 38,000 of these die, including 2,600 children.
- * 13,000,000 are victims of crimes including assault, rape, armed robbery, burglary, larceny, and arson.
- * 135,000 children take guns to school.
- * 5,500,000 people are arrested for all offenses (not including traffic violations).
- * 125,000 die prematurely of alcohol abuse.
- * 473,000 die prematurely from tobacco-related illnesses; 53,000 of these are nonsmokers.
- * 6,500,000 use heroin, crack, speed, PCP, cocaine or some other hard drug on a regular basis.
- * 5,000+ die from illicit drug use. Thousands suffer serious debilitations.
- * 1,000+ die from sniffing household substances found under the kitchen sink. About 20 percent of all eighth-graders have "huffed" toxic substances. Thousands suffer permanent neurological damage.
- * 31,450,000 use marijuana; 3,000,000 of whom are heavy users.
- * 37,000,000, or one out of every six Americans, regularly use emotion controlling medical drugs. The users are mostly women. The pushers are doctors; the suppliers are pharmaceutical companies; the profits are stupendous.
- * 2,000,000 nonhospitalized persons are given powerful mind-control drugs, sometimes described as "chemical straitjackets."
- * 5,000 die from psychoactive drug treatments.
- * 200,000 are subjected to electric shock treatments that are injurious to the brain and nervous system.
- * 600 to 1,000 are lobotomized, mostly women.
- * 25,000,000, or one out of every 10 Americans, seek help from psychiatric, psychotherapeutic, or medical sources for mental and emotional problems, at a cost of over \$4 billion annually.
- * 6,800,000 turn to nonmedical services, such as ministers, welfare agencies, and social counselors for help with emotional troubles. In all, some 80,000,000 have sought some kind of psychological counseling in their lifetimes.
- * 1,300,000 suffer some kind of injury related to treatment at hospitals.
- * 2,000,000 undergo unnecessary surgical operations; 10,000 of whom die from the surgery.
- * 180,000 die from adverse reactions to all medical treatments, more than are killed by airline and automobile accidents combined.
- * 14,000+ die from overdoses of legal prescription drugs.
- * 45,000 are killed in auto accidents. Yet more cars and highways are being built while funding for safer forms of mass transportation is reduced.
- * 1,800,000 sustain nonfatal injuries from auto accidents; but 150,000 of these auto injury victims suffer permanent impairments.
- * 126,000 children are born with a major birth defect, mostly due to insufficient prenatal care, nutritional deficiency, environmental toxicity, or maternal drug addiction.
- * 2,900,000 children are reportedly subjected to serious neglect or abuse, including physical torture and deliberate starvation.

- * 5,000 children are killed by parents or grandparents.
- * 30,000 or more children are left permanently physically disabled from abuse and neglect. Child abuse in the United States afflicts more children each year than leukemia, automobile accidents, and infectious diseases combined. With growing unemployment, incidents of abuse by jobless parents is increasing dramatically.
- * 1,000,000 children run away from home, mostly because of abusive treatment, including sexual abuse, from parents and other adults. Of the many sexually abused children among runaways, 83 percent come from white families.
- * 150,000 children are reported missing.
- * 50,000 of these simply vanish. Their ages range from one year to mid-teens. According to the New York Times, "Some of these are dead, perhaps half of the John and Jane Does annually buried in this country are unidentified kids."
- * 900,000 children, some as young as seven years old, are engaged in child labor in the United States, serving as underpaid farm hands, dishwashers, laundry workers, and domestics for as long as ten hours a day in violation of child labor laws.
- * 2,000,000 to 4,000,00 women are battered. Domestic violence is the single largest cause of injury and second largest cause of death to U.S. women.
- * 700,000 women are raped, one every 45 seconds.
- * 5,000,000 workers are injured on the job; 150,000 of whom suffer permanent work-related disabilities, including maiming, paralysis, impaired vision, damaged hearing, and sterility.
- * 100,000 become seriously ill from work-related diseases, including black lung, brown lung, cancer, and tuberculosis.
- * 14,000 are killed on the job; about 90 percent are men.
- * 100,000 die prematurely from work-related diseases.
- * 60,000 are killed by toxic environmental pollutants or contaminants in food, water, or air.
- * 4,000 die from eating contaminated meat.
- * 20,000 others suffer from poisoning by E.coli 0157-H7, the mutant bacteria found in contaminated meat that generally leads to lifelong physical and mental health problems. A more thorough meat inspection with new technologies could eliminate most instances of contamination; so would vegetarianism.

At present:

- * 5,100,000 are behind bars or on probation or parole; 2,700,000 of these are either locked up in county, state or federal prisons or under legal supervision. Each week 1,600 more people go to jail than leave. The prison population has skyrocketed over 200 percent since 1980. Over 40 percent of inmates are jailed on nonviolent drug related crimes. African Americans constitute 13 percent of drug users but 35 percent of drug arrests, 55 percent of drug convictions and 74 percent of prison sentences. For nondrug offenses, African Americans get prison terms that average about 10 percent longer than Caucasians for similar crimes.
- * 15,000+ have tuberculosis, with the numbers growing rapidly; 10,000,000 or more carry the tuberculosis bacilli, with large numbers among the economically deprived or addicted.
- * 10,000,000 people have serious drinking problems; alcoholism is on the rise.
- * 16,000,000 have diabetes, up from 11,000,000 in 1983 as Americans get more sedentary and sugar addicted. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure and nerve damage.
- * 160,000 will die from diabetes this year.
- * 280,000 are institutionalized for mental illness or mental retardation. Many of these are forced into taking heavy doses of mind control drugs.
- * 255,000 mentally ill or retarded have been summarily released in recent years. Many of the "deinstitutionalized" are now in flophouses or wandering the streets.
- * 3,000,000 or more suffer cerebral and physical handicaps including paralysis, deafness, blindness, and lesser disabilities. A disproportionate number of them are poor. Many of these disabilities could have been corrected with early treatment or prevented with better living conditions.
- * 2,400,000 million suffer from some variety of seriously incapacitating chronic fatigue syndrome.

- * 10,000,000+ suffer from symptomatic asthma, an increase of 145 percent from 1990 to 1995, largely due to the increasingly polluted quality of the air we breathe.
- * 40,000,000 or more are without health insurance or protection from catastrophic illness.
- * 1,800,000 elderly who live with their families are subjected to serious abuse such as forced confinement, underfeeding, and beatings. The mistreatment of elderly people by their children and other close relatives grows dramatically as economic conditions worsen.
- * 1,126,000 of the elderly live in nursing homes. A large but undetermined number endure conditions of extreme neglect, filth, and abuse in homes that are run with an eye to extracting the highest possible profit.
- * 1,000,000 or more children are kept in orphanages, reformatories, and adult prisons. Most have been arrested for minor transgressions or have committed no crime at all and are jailed without due process. Most are from impoverished backgrounds. Many are subjected to beatings, sexual assault, prolonged solitary confinement, mind control drugs, and in some cases psychosurgery.
- * 1,000,000 are estimated to have AIDS as of 1996; over 250,000 have died of that disease.
- * 950,000 school children are treated with powerful mind control drugs for "hyperactivity" every year with side effects like weight loss, growth retardation and acute psychosis.
- * 4,000,000 children are growing up with unattended learning disabilities.
- * 4,500,000+ children, or more than half of the 9,000,000 children on welfare, suffer from malnutrition. Many of these suffer brain damage caused by prenatal and infant malnourishment.
- * 40,000,000 persons, or one of every four women and more than one of every ten men, are estimated to have been sexually molested as children, most often between the ages of 9 and 12, usually by close relatives or family acquaintances. Such abuse almost always extends into their early teens and
- * is a part of their continual memory and not a product of memory retrieval in therapy.
- * 7,000,000 to 12,000,000 are unemployed; numbers vary with the business cycle. Increasing numbers of the chronically unemployed show signs of stress and emotional depression.
- * 6,000,000 are in "contingent" jobs, or jobs structured to last only temporarily. About 60 percent of these would prefer permanent employment.
- * 15,000,000 or more are part-time or reduced-time "contract" workers who need full-time jobs and who work without benefits.
- * 3,000,000 additional workers are unemployed but uncounted because their unemployment benefits have run out, or they never qualified for benefits, or they have given up looking for work, or they joined the armed forces because they were unable to find work.
- * 80,000,000 live on incomes estimated by the U.S. Department of Labor as below a "comfortable adequacy"; 35,000,000 of these live below the poverty level.
- * 12,000,000 of those at poverty's rock bottom suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. The majority of the people living at or below the poverty level experience hunger during some portion of the year.
- * 2,000,000 or more are homeless, forced to live on the streets or in makeshift shelters.
- * 160,000,000+ are members of households that are in debt, a sharp increase from the 100 million of less than a decade ago. A majority indicate they have borrowed money not for luxuries but for necessities. Mounting debts threaten a financial crack-up in more and more families.