

Sources of Wealth in America

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Six Ways to Get Rich

People obtain money and other assets in a variety of ways. Nations can become affluent in similar ways. Please consider this list:

1. Hours of honest labor. Some people do physical work; others have mental tasks (accountants, teachers, *etc.*). They receive wages or salary somewhat related to skill levels. Not a fast way to get rich, but this can be sufficient for good living and can accumulate modest wealth over time. In fact, in a reasonable society, honest labor should be sufficient, assuming the availability of employment. For a nation, a skilled labor force is one key to prosperity.

2. Money generates more money. To have money or assets (perhaps by inheritance or even access to loans) allows opportunities to earn monetary interest or capital gains as in the stock market. Borrowed money (OPM = Other People's Money) that is well applied (as in a home mortgage or business ownership) can also bring gains in an expanding economy. Management of the money is required, but can be hired. There are risks of losing some or all of the original assets, but in general, money makes money. A nation that is wealthy has financial resources to become even wealthier.

3. Physical resources. Oil on Jed's land sent the Clampett family to Beverly Hills. Finding new resources can make a person wealthy. Gold rushes, fertile cropland, abundant water, *etc.* contribute greatly to the wealth of a nation.

4. Innovation and talent. Creativity and unique abilities can bring great wealth. Invent something that can be marketed, or create something special such as a song or computer program. Or perform in exceptional ways, as do outstanding talents like Tiger Woods, Elton John, Jackie Chan, Angelina Jolie and Stephen King. Originality can reap great rewards. For nations this could include period progressions, such as the Iron Age, the Agricultural Revolution, the Space Age, the Information Age.

5. Good luck (including divine intervention). Win the lottery, inherit a fortune, or have an extremely rich friend. For a nation, the hand of God striking down the opposition can be a great boost to prosperity.

6. Take advantage of others. Through legal tricks or real cheating or brute force, take wealth from others. Some people are very good at this, as are some nations.

There are many combinations of the above that have led to great fortunes. Maybe I left out something, but this is a good start.

American Experiences with Race, Origins and Socio-economic Status

For individuals, any one of these six ways to wealth could be the major source of great affluence. To have two or more combining for success is even better. For America, all six have been important in reaching its current high level of prosperity. America has abundant natural resources and a tremendous labor force that produces well and also innovates in so many ways.

Its wealth has accumulated over centuries without major warfare on its home soil (except the Civil War). Whether by good luck or divine intervention, America has been extremely fortunate. Of course, in the early years all of these lands were taken from the Native Americans, often by the Paleface-written laws or brute force and even massacres. But we can forget about that part because the tribal Indians were not using the lands as well as capitalist settlers could do.

“Whoa, wait a minute,” say Tonto and Morning Flower! And I agree. I was just baiting the readers to see if you were awake. Pointing out that much of America’s land was taken from the Native Americans emphasizes that poverty today among Native Americans cannot be justified while the settlers live in splendor. I am not going to debate that episode of American justice here. I am not arguing for compensation in Twenty-first century terms. The ancestors of Native Americas also migrated in found a good home. (“Finders keepers” does not give legal rights.) But I do say that major efforts to help any sub-lower-class Native Americans rise to minimum levels of decent living (education, health, *etc*) should be assisted by our nation, that is, by all residents here who have decent living conditions.

Also, I want to discuss how some of the national and personal bastions of accumulated wealth derived their advantage at the expense of others, mostly under the cover of traditional, legal American-style Capitalism¹⁸, Capitalism¹⁹, and Capitalism²⁰.

America was and still is a land of opportunity for immigrants. Over the centuries the new arrivals have attained good lives that for the very vast majority have been better here than in their countries of origin. By being in America, these people have escaped many European wars that hurt those who did not migrate. Many Irish, Swedes, Italians, British, and other Europeans arrived in the 1800s to 1920s as penniless immigrants and most eventually found happiness here. They built railroads, other industries, and family farms in the heydays of American Capitalism¹⁸/Capitalism¹⁹ that launched our strong middle class. Wonderful. But check out the extremes. The barons of big business created massive fortunes, often by dubious means that were legal then. The Trust Busters introduced laws to limit the robber-baron, monopolistic capitalism. Meanwhile others faced hardships as exploited low-wage laborers. But that is the “luck of the game” of traditional American capitalism, and if the ancestors of today’s low-income, white folks did not get on the gravy train back then, that’s just too bad for them and their offspring.

“Whoa, wait a minute,” say Sven and Ian and Sophia, and so do I. Just because some people have not prospered under American capitalism does not make them unworthy of receiving the basic fairness that this prosperous nation can provide. I did not say prosperity needed to be made equal. But fair at least for the basics. After all, the ancestors of white, well-to-do Americans got off the same boats as did ancestors of those who live in sub-lower conditions today.

Now consider Afro-Americans. Although most of their ancestors came here as slaves, many have prospered. And some have attained truly great influence and wealth under capitalist principles of more prosperity for the “better” ones, that is the ones who work harder, are more intelligent, are more talented, are better connected, have better luck, and who can play the edges of legal profit-games without getting caught. Even those in Afro-American ghettos today have far better lives than in the harsh fields and slums of poorly-governed, impoverished African nations. America’s Blacks should be glad they are here and not in the jungles.

“Whoa,” say Tom and Wilma and Bill, and so do I. Yes, Afro-Americans have more opportunity here, but that does not justify substandard education and lack of neighborhood security for America’s Blacks. We can hope that the wealthy leadership (both Black and White)

will strongly support the Nehemiah Proposals that explore remedies for the fundamental issues of poverty. This is crucial to the success of Capitalism21.

America's two current waves of immigrants come here mainly for financial benefits. One wave consists of skilled people for computer jobs, medical work and other professional-level employment. Our national policies favor this "brain drain" from developing countries into America. Bringing in skilled migrants is generally less expensive than paying for education and training of born-here Americans, which helps keep the overall costs of such services from skyrocketing, improving business profits. The second wave consists mainly of Latinos / Hispanics with few skills except a willingness to do manual labor that most born-here Americans decline to do for minimum wages or even less. Again, in true capitalist style, businesses receive the financial advantages, and prices are lower for Americans eating in restaurants or enjoying hand-picked fruits and vegetables or buying products from dubious businesses. Some Latinos are here illegally and leech off of our tax-supported schools, healthcare services, etc. They are lucky we do not try very hard to kick them out!

"Pare, espera un momento," say Juan and Maria. But should anyone even listen to them? They are not even speaking English! I say, yes, we must listen. And we must act. Something is wrong with current American capitalism if exploitation can still continue today. One option is to close our borders, send many non-residents back, and simply pay more for grapes and products that are not processed by their cheap labor. The only other defensible option is to provide fairness to this sub-lower-class, and that will definitely cost something extra. And the only apparent ways to cover those costs are higher taxes on somebody, increased national debt, or serious sharing of some of our super-affluence (as mentioned in the Nehemiah Proposals and included in Capitalism21).

Race and national origin are major characteristics of the various waves of immigration, so we do need to acknowledge those roots. However, please note that ethnic origin and race are NOT the basis of America's prosperity and poverty. Instead, in today's America, the major class distinction is in terms of wealth, as expressed in "socio-economic status." But socio-economic class is also highly related to education and intelligence.

Education and Intelligence

By definition, half of the American population is below average in intelligence. However, those in the middle two-thirds (67%) are probably so similar to each other that differences are not very noticeable in terms of wealth and status because other variables are dominant, such as personal drive, willpower, inheritance, and even health. At the top end, a very intelligent person has a better chance for a higher-quality education and its benefits for employment and wealth. This relates to talent, the fourth way to become wealthy. These people have advantages, but that is how life is.

At the extreme lower end, we find those who suffer severe mental challenges, and our society does offer services and assistance for them. In the next, slightly-higher group are many millions who fall between the cracks. They are the dim, the slow-witted, or the ones who struggled mentally in school with low "C" grades even in the "slower" or "assisted" classrooms in the best school districts. They are with us, and they have problems that are not adequately addressed.

But there is still another third (100 million people) of the American population who have various degrees of mental difficulties which hinder them when confronting complicated tax forms, health options, banking, job training, and retirement plans. Adjectives for them include

“semi-skilled,” “unskilled” (by ability, not by choice like some lazy, smart ones), and “vulnerable.” Some elements in our society will entice them with credit-card debt, sub-prime, minimal-down-payment mortgages, the empty rhetoric of negative political campaigns to elect serial-incumbents, and occasionally manipulative leadership seeking personal advantages. And the prospects can be disastrous for those people and, cumulatively, for the nation. However, theoretically-pure capitalism allows, encourages, and thrives on the notion that those who can do things better should benefit at the expense of those who cannot.

And here I say “whoa, our system is out of balance.” In our materialistic Capitalism²⁰ society, the cards are truly stacked against those who have less mental ability. All of the educational assistance in the world cannot turn a slow-learner into a mental wizard. Besides, our country needs the variety of skills and attitudes that match with different job types. People are not created equal in all aspects, and our economic system needs to be fairer in such situations.

My main point is that all of us Americans have received some benefits from the “exploitation” of other people in America. And our personal prosperity does not alter or justify the fact that some people are less fortunate, especially those in substandard circumstances. And those of us who enjoy the wondrous financial well-being of the middle-class and upper-class and super-class in America must recognize that this prosperity has been built on the shoulders of all Americans before us, including the ancestors of those in need today. We must get the lower end of our house in order. Otherwise we have failed some of our own people. We need to have our own house in order if we desire to be now and in the future a leading, prosperous and great nation.

The “lower classes” come from low income, which leads to poor living conditions, inferior schools, and crime-ridden neighborhoods which, in turn, often lead to poor social skills which disqualify job-seekers from any but the lower-paying jobs. And, this cycle for “lower classes” continues with each generation. The wealthy people who are white, black, brown, red, yellow or whatever color or origin must pay attention to the needs of the less fortunate members of our society without regard to race or origin. Period. This is crucial if America is to remain a great nation for decades and centuries to come.

Concerning capitalism, free enterprise is a crucial component. Free enterprise is good, but free enterprise with compassion is better. Far better!!! Capitalism²¹ will be good for America the nation and for all Americans, whether rich, poor or in between. So says

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