**NYTimes Comments on Why the Poor Don’t Rise Up**

**Frank**

 is a trusted commenter Durham [5 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308791)

Historically, the poor have tended to suffer their condition rather than trying to change it. What they have done is tolerate oppression and hunger until they could no longer and then went on violent rebellions. They never tried to change the system that oppressed them, they simply sought a relief from their miserable condition. The reasons range from ignorance, to lack of means, to lack of education. Someone remarked once that a person remains poor because he doesn't know how to get out of poverty. I presume that this means that the person does not have the imagination, intelligence, opportunity, whatever to improve his condition. The improvement of poor people has always come about through the efforts of the middle class, that sector of society that came to understand that economic conditions are not divine injunctions but political and economic systems that can be altered. I don't know how much of this is still prevalent but it is evident that the decadence of the unions is another proof of the difficulty that the poor (that is, the poor as a group, not as single individuals) have in improving their condition.  
I was amused to notice that in talking about poverty, the author mentions as palliatives the fact that air-conditioners, cellphones, and computers have come down in price. Compare this concept of poverty with real poverty, say the US poor in first part of the 20th century, not to mention the poor people in Latin-America and Africa.

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NYT Pick

**Carol**

 Crockett, Calif [4 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308792)

They don't rise up because they are afraid. Afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of arrest (and possibly being killed in the process). They are also tired - they work all the time, then when they are home they are cleaning, shopping, cooking, helping their kids/parents, fixing the car, etc.

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**Michael Piscopiello**

 Higgganum Ct [4 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308883)

At first blush, the steady decline in union membership would account for the lack of rebellion against social and economic injustice. Certainly the aggressive attacks against unions by policy makers starting with President Reagan's dismantling of the air traffic controllers union have demonized "socialist" unions.  
Equally important is the general shift in this country to the right and the emergence of libertarian thinking. There has been the steady drumbeat of personality responsibility for your life and its consequences, giving short shrift to institutional and social policies that block access to opportunity and basic rights. This dates back to President Kennedy's famous words, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country". President Obama has championed personal responsibility throughout his presidency as well, scolding black families and black men for their shortcomings, and telling them to rise above the economic and social inequities...if I can do it, so can you mentality. Which essentially denies the many resources available to whites, middle-class and upper-class Americans, that aren't available to the poor.  
The notion that we are enjoying new personal freedoms and rights is all smoke and mirrors; the same rights and freedoms won by African American's, LBGT community, the disabled, etc. are the same rights enjoyed by white heterosexual god fearing Americans without any cost or risk, their rights came with privilege.

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NYT Pick

**Pierre Lehu**

 Brooklyn NY [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15309198)

A Republican won the race for the 11th Congressional District recently for the most part because blacks in the North Shore of Staten Island failed to vote despite the fact that the GOP candidate was the DA who allowed a grand jury to decide the fate of those who murdered Eric Garner rather than take action on his own. The day after the election, Garner's mother decried this lack of voter participation. So if the poor won't even bother to go to the polls in a situation as clear as this one, where the residual anger over Garner's death should have been a strong motivating factor, it's not surprising that actual rebellion isn't taking place.  
  
Perhaps after the election of a black president and the resulting lack of positive change in their lives, poor blacks have simply given up.

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**DMP**

 Cambridge, MA [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308791:15309341)

It is true that the material lives of America's working poor are not typically as oppressive as those of past generations or of the urban poor in developing nations today. But if you try to get by in this country on an income of less than $1000 (or $2000 or even $3000, depending on location and family size) a month you quickly discover how difficult it can be to keep a roof over head and food on the table. The vast majority of poor people live lives of constant stress and desperation where even a small financial setback can quickly snowball into a major disaster such as lost employment, eviction, or incarceration. As a Federal reserve study revealed just last week, two thirds of Americans earning less than $40K/year would be unable to come up with $400 in an emergency without borrowing or selling something. And for the poor life is usually one emergency after another.

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**Karen**

 Phoenix, AZ [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308791:15309409)

Yes, political systems can be altered. As a master level macro social worker, I find myself constantly repeating this fact to my friends and family in the middle class who despair that their vote does not matter since elections are all about money. I see the middle class and educated increasingly being lulled into the notion that they have no voice, no power to create change. When many don't vote, do not bother to engage in protest, or participate in letter writing campaigns or boycotts, I suppose they do not have a voice and that political systems are indeed intractable. This is very sad. I have seen unpopular decisions like SB 1062 in Arizona stopped in their tracks due to public outcry. In SC, the horrible confederate flag may come down and even the son of the late segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond now says he does not honor his southern heritage. The problem is that people stop protesting once they make the smallest gain. The confederate flag will come down but race and income motivated voter suppression will continue. Laws will continue to be passed that undermine the economic security of the poor and middle class (the TPP), and the few who do protest will be dismissed as leftists and professional aggitators.

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**Jon Webb**

 Pittsburgh, PA [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308840)

Fundamentally, they don't rise up in this country because they don't see their shared interests with other groups of poor people. Particularly in the South, poor whites see government intervention that would create a more fair society as an unfair gift to black people. They don't see that they have more in common with blacks than the Republicans they support. And elsewhere, we fight about immigrants coming in and taking "our" jobs instead of wondering why, in a rich country, our lives hang by a thread, which our employer can take away at any moment.

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**Paul Adams**

 Stony Brook [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15308860)

The poor have never had the time, energy, education, health and of course money to better their lot. The current problem is they also have no leaders.

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**Margaret**

 New York [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15309933)

The poor have not "risen up" because they are already benefiting from a wide array of govt safety-net programs to help them: Food Stamps, SS Disability, education benefits through today's scaled-down welfare program, public housing in many localities, Medicaid health benefits, etc.   
  
There is widespread support for raising the minimum wage to enable the working poor to take care of their families without having to rely on Food Stamps. But there will never be a "shared belief", as Mr. Edsall terms it, in the "obligation of the state to secure the well-being of the citizenry". It's that kind of "communist-sounding" rhetoric that derails movements like Occupy Wall Street. When Democrats utter the word "redistributive" most people grab for their wallets to protect them and then go out and vote Republican in the next election. The phrases that reach Americans are "level playing field", "opportunity", "fair shot", etc. If the Democrats hadn't been so focused on redistributive language & policy the past 50 years, the 1% never would been able to steal the country right out from under us.

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**CassidyGT**

 York, PA [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15309875)

The poor and the middle class need to recognize the false dichotomy of the two party system. They are both wholly allied in preserving and strengthening the structures that provide the plutocracy with power and wealth. They are allied in tax code, labor law, trade agreements, banking regulations, campaign finance, etc. These are the levers that maintain their power and wealth.   
  
Instead the middle focuses on canards designed to divide people who otherwise might be allied. Abortion, race, gender, guns, sexual orientation etc. These are meaningless issues to those in power except that they are very powerful tools to divide people. See how many comments a column about abortion in Texas gets compared to comments on the inefficacy of the FEC in ensuring a fair election. It is pathetic. Abortion rights are meaningless to these people. But abortion sure distracts everyone from hedge fund carried interest.  
  
Make no mistake, the GOP and Dems are united in what really matters to them. Vote for Hillary or Jeb - your choice. But don't think you are voting for actual change to the things that maintain the status quo.

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**George**

 New Smryan Beach [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15310295)

47% of the population in the south before the civil war were slaves. Why was there no uprising to gain their freedom? Obviously, they did not enjoy slavery. It was fear and intimidation. We have massive incarceration of the working poor. To suggest that the working poor are really happy with their lives is patently absurd.

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**David desJardins**

 Burlingame CA [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15309385)

What this article still doesn't answer is why the poor don't vote. For all of its flaws, US democracy gives the poorest citizen the same vote as the wealthiest. But they are marginalized in politics because they don't actually use that power, even though they have it. If the poor voted at the same rates as the more fortunate, the political system would respond much more to their needs.

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**Molly**

 Bloomington, IN [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15310291)

I've made this comment before, but why is "redistribution" a word used to describe distribution of wealth from the rich to the poor? The redistribution that is contributing to inequality is the distribution of wealth from the poor and middle class to the rich. Where do we suppose the rich get their wealth? I would really like to see someone write about that.

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**Richard Luettgen**

 New Jersey [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15310170)

The answer to Tom's question could be that traditional American values of self-reliance and personal responsibility are as strong among the working poor as they are among most of us.  
  
It might also be that a lot of the working poor don't expect to be so for a lifetime, but find themselves defined so temporarily, as a result of setbacks or because they're young and lack skills for the present to vie for higher-paying jobs. The notion that there's an immense class out there of people permanently locked in poverty as a consequence of immutable economic factors is a liberal one that is finding less and less representation in our elective institutions.  
  
Tom's, and Genov's and Beck's, concept of "individualization" is a force that has been present in the American psyche since there WAS an America, and hardly some new trope to use as excuse to rationalize why their theories of class struggle don't manifest here as they do in Italy or Greece.  
  
But Tom's sense of dismay is valid. The whole BASIS of American progressivism is that "collective action on behalf of the poor requires a shared belief in the obligation of the state to secure the well-being of the citizenry". When you find yourself part of a culture that places that obligation not on the state but the INDIVIDUAL, it's understandable that you wonder at what you've believed for a lifetime.  
  
But, of course, Tom's answer is that they're ignored. And so he goes on ... believing.

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**Jimmy**

 Greenville, North Carolina [3 hours ago](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html#permid=15310192)

I think the poor are smarter than you think. They know the rich will never redistribute their wealth. Redistribution of wealth is a wonderful theory that never works. You cannot change the natural order of things with theories.