

The Real Victims of the Recession

Thousands of words have been written about the victims of the current recession, and most of them have described the plight of the millions thrown out or frozen out of the labor force.

Every month, I get an email from the Bureau of Labor Statistics listing the percentages of the newly unemployed, and each month I reflect soberly on the hundreds of thousands of Americans who are now shunted aside to the unemployment rolls or worse. Many of them are young workers, older workers and inexperienced unskilled workers, but they also include white collar middle managers. Anyone who has ever been unemployed can relate to this tragic situation and has probably sat across the kitchen table from their spouse adding up the monthly bills and wondering how they were going to pay them. Journalists write about home foreclosures and bankruptcies, highlighting the statistics, but often forget about the stinging human tragedy of unemployment that can lead to crime, clinical depression, divorce, domestic violence and even suicide.

Victimization a part of our DNA?

It's not part of our national DNA to feel victimized, but this might be changing as many people are in genuine dismay over how we as a nation got to this point. Many of us who never lived through the Great Depression or were too young to remember the hardships of WWII have only the oil crisis of the 70s, the recession of 1982 and the 'dot com bubble' as our barometer to measure hardship.

Because of that we are at a distinct disadvantage on how to accurately assess the misery of our current times. Granted, being unemployed and feeling desperate probably *feels* the same in 2012 as it did seventy or eighty years ago, but there are differences as well as similarities. After the stock market crash of the 30s, wealth was wiped out on a grand scale and along with it the expectations of an entire nation. In the 40s, America went to war, and while there were shortages of basic materials that were re-directed to the war effort, the solidarity of supporting the winning of that war put everyone in the same boat so that *doing without* meant sacrificing for a noble cause and was therefore more acceptable.

The oil crisis of the 70s woke us up to the reality that we were a foreign energy-dependent nation and that that dependency victimized our long-held beliefs about our self-sufficiency. Fast forwarding to the mid-80s saw us pay the piper for our excesses. The massive economic slowdown, inflation and high unemployment were everywhere and American confidence was on a rapid downward spiral. A whole *new* generation of Americans began to doubt themselves and felt that the country had lost its instruction manual on how to manage things and keep the intricate 'machine of commerce' running.

The hidden victims

We recovered, but it took a long time, and while we learned a few important lessons along the way, the recessions had divided America into two rather large groups that split along pro and anti-government and pro and anti-business lines. We weren't alone. Europe experienced the same dilemma and Asia was just waking up from a long ideological slumber that was dominated by collectivist dreams.

Every crisis and every disaster has its victims. The obvious ones are the walking wounded, those left without the means to rebuild their lives. The hidden victims are just as real as those that bleed. They are our aspirations, our confidence, and yes, our hope. America has allowed its courage, steadfastness, pluck, optimism, sense of humor, cooperative spirit and dreams become the collateral damage of the recession of 2008-2012.

Words will not return America to greatness, and our crisis won't be solved by 60-second campaign ads. It is one of a profound lack of confidence, cooperation and leadership. While our former *landlords* felt that "the sun never sets on the British empire," America's dawn is always breaking anew. We need only look up at it for inspiration and remember from whence and where we all came.

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