



Antony Davies: U.S. middle class is the real 1%

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The Occupiers on Wall Street (and in cities across America, including Madison) refer to themselves as the 99 percent — a downtrodden majority consigned to a second-class existence by a wealthy minority.

They're wrong. In their naive march against corporate greed, the Occupiers only look up at those who have more than they. If they looked down, they'd see far more people — people who would encourage the Occupiers to be thankful for what they have.

Let's put our country's wealth in context. Compared to the rest of the world, any American who earns more than \$48,000 per year is already part of the wealthiest 1 percent. That includes more than half of U.S. households, even after adjusting for differences in cost of living across countries.

Even the poorest of us ranks rather well: A single American earning the poverty line income of \$12,000 is in the top 13 percent of income earners worldwide, and has access to far more aid and assistance (via government transfer payments) than the poor in developing countries.

The Occupiers' oblivious attitude to the world around them is direct evidence that they take the prosperity in which they live for granted. One-hundred percent of Americans have access to sanitation, and ninety-nine percent have clean drinking water.

Ninety percent of us have mobile phones. So many Americans have computers (or access to them) that in 2007 the Census Bureau stopped counting.

Not only is virtually everyone in America rich compared to most of the world, but — contrary to the zero-sum rhetoric written on the signs of Wall Street protestors — we have been getting richer over time.

Consider our access to health care. In his day, Andrew Carnegie was the richest man in the world. Despite his wealth, he could not afford to save his mother who was dying of tuberculosis. Today, even the poorest American can afford this cure, making — at least in this regard — the poorest American today better off than Carnegie in his day.

It's easy for protestors to look up at people with nicer cars, nicer homes, and more secure retirement funds and to rail against an unjust system that doesn't afford them the same luxuries. Were they to look down, though, they would see people not only with no cars, but with no roads to drive them on, and nowhere to go even if the roads existed. They would see people with no homes who do not live long enough to need retirement funds.

If the real 99 percent had electricity and could afford televisions and had local broadcasts that enabled them to see the protestors, they would regard the protestors as the spoiled rich kids they are.

They tweet from their iPhones, receive subsidized loans for their college educations, take advantage of free medical care in hospital emergency rooms — all the while complaining about the unjust system which has provided them these luxuries.

The Occupiers aren't railing against the greed of the 1 percent; they are the 1 percent railing against the greed of the 0.01 percent.

Greed, indeed. Physician, heal thyself.

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