

## 15. Freedom from Want

Norman Rockwell

1894-1978

American

Freedom From Want

1943

45 3/4" x 35 1/2"

Norman Rockwell Museum Stockbridge, MA

Oil on canvas

Realistic with anecdotal detail



**Painting Highlights:** In 1943, inspired by President Franklin Roosevelt's address to Congress, Rockwell painted the Four Freedoms paintings. They were reproduced in four consecutive issues of *The Saturday Evening Post* with essays by contemporary writers. Rockwell's interpretations of Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear proved to be enormously popular. The works toured the United States in an exhibition that was jointly sponsored by the *Post* and the U.S. Treasury Department and, through the sale of war bonds, raised more than \$130 million for the war effort. Over 1.2 million people saw the exhibits.

Inside the U.S., Freedom From Want symbolized American prosperity and dependability coupled with family togetherness, virtue, and abundance without extravagance in a Puritan tone (notice water as the beverage of choice). Outside the U.S. it represented American overabundance.

- Focal point is the turkey
- Grandfather is the spiritual leader (dark suit draws our eye in)
- White on white (purity) is an esteemed element
- The Grandmother, Grandfather and turkey form a triangle
- The family is not just eating...also conversing (family togetherness)

**Artist Highlights:** Born in NYC in 1894, Norman Rockwell always wanted to be an artist. Norman would constantly sketch as his Father read Dickens novels by gaslight each night. The Rockwells spent summers on farms in upstate NY. These rural, small-town summers were also a big influence on his later paintings. At age 14, Rockwell enrolled in art classes at The New York School of Art. Two years later, he left high school to study art at The National Academy of Design. Rockwell found success early. He painted his first commission of four Christmas cards before his sixteenth birthday. While still in his teens, he was hired as art director of *Boys' Life*, the official publication of the Boy Scouts, and began a successful freelance career illustrating a variety of young people's publications. He illustrated the Boy Scout calendar for over 50 years.

At age 21, Rockwell's family moved to New Rochelle, NY. There Rockwell produced work for such magazines as *Life*, *Literary Digest*, and *Country Gentleman*. In 1916, the 22-year-old Rockwell painted his first cover for *The Saturday Evening Post*, the magazine considered by Rockwell to be the "greatest show window in America." When Rockwell was hired for his first *Post* cover, he proposed to Irene O'Connor (they divorced in 1930). Over the next 47 years, another 321 Rockwell covers would appear on the *Post*. They were so popular that the magazine produced an extra 250,000 copies when a Rockwell was on the cover. The 1930s and 1940s are generally considered to be the most fruitful decades of Rockwell's career. In 1930 he married Mary Barstow, a schoolteacher, and the couple had three sons, Jarvis, Thomas, and Peter. The family moved to Arlington, VT in 1939, and Rockwell's work reflected small-town American life. He frequently used townspeople as his models. In 1943, inspired by President Franklin Roosevelt's address to Congress, Rockwell painted the Four Freedoms paintings. 1943 also brought Rockwell an enormous loss. A fire destroyed his Arlington studio as well as numerous paintings and his collection of historical costumes and props. In 1953, the Rockwell family moved from Arlington, VT to Stockbridge, MA. Six years later, Mary Barstow Rockwell died unexpectedly. In collaboration with his son Thomas, Rockwell published his autobiography, *My Adventures as an Illustrator*, in 1960. In 1977, Rockwell received the nation's highest civilian honor, the *Presidential Medal of Freedom*. Many of his works reside in the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge. Rockwell worked from "exhaustion to exhaustion" and produced over 4,000 original works. Steven Spielberg owns several originals and says Rockwell influenced many of his movies, particularly *E.T.*

ARTIST: Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) American

PAINTING: *Freedom from Want* 1943  
45 3/4" x 35 1/2"  
Oil on canvas

Private collection, Stockbridge, MA

Part of series: The Four Freedoms (Speech, Worship, Want and Fear) based on Franklin Roosevelt's ideas of our country versus our wartime foes

~~Painting~~

From "Jensen for the Defens"

#### Biography 1894 - 1978

Norman Rockwell is the most popular American artist and illustrator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Almost everyone can cite a favorite Rockwell picture. His work encompassed six decades beginning in the horse and buggy days and continuing into the space age. The combination of Norman Rockwell and *The Saturday Evening Post* made him the best-known, best-exposed artist in the entire world. Twelve to fourteen million people saw his covers 52 times a year. There is a lasting regard and affection for his paintings. They represent a remembrance of times past.

Rockwell was a commercial artist. He developed a style of finely drawn clear realism with a wealth of intricate anecdotal detail, also described as obsessive perfectionism. Each illustration was a frozen moment in time. Each painting tells a story and the clues are in the details. His paintings captured everyday people in everyday situations. Throughout his career his style changed as he experimented with design, technique, and subject matter. His style was unmistakable, his pictures unforgettable... his signature almost unnecessary.

Norman Rockwell spent his early years living "a shabby brownstone apartment" on 103<sup>rd</sup> St and Amsterdam Avenue in New York city. His family moved several times, each time moving farther "uptown." He never felt close to his parents. His mother, Nancy Hill Rockwell, a self-centered woman, was one of twelve children. (His paintings never depicted self-centered mothers.) His father, Jarvis Waring Rockwell, was the manager of the New York office of a textile business. His father's life revolved around his wife to the exclusion of almost everything else. He treated his sons as grown-ups.

Norman had one older brother, Jarvis. Norman and his father often copied illustrations from magazines. Norman discovered he liked to draw as he sketched dogs, houses, vegetables, pirates, whales, and Indians. His father read Dickens aloud after dinner and in his autobiography, Rockwell remembers drawing and smudging an erasing...struggling to get the Dickens' characters right using the descriptions his father read and reread. He was very deeply impressed and moved by Dickens. This factor had a major influence on his way of looking at things and people in the world.

Rockwell was impressed with his grandfather, Howard Hill's paintings, noting, "He painted in great detail -every hair on the dog was carefully drawn; the tiny highlights in the pig's eyes- great watery human eyes - could be clearly seen. I sometimes think that's one of the reasons I paint in such detail." His grandfather was an English painter who emigrated to the U.S. shortly after the Civil War. He hoped to open a studio as a portrait and landscape painter but ended up painting portraits of animals, pets, and also doing house painting to support his large family.

Rockwell was a slight child, "a bean pole," wearing corrective shoes at age 10, and corrective glasses at age 12. He often perceived himself as being the laughingstock of the whole school, like when he was forced to wear his grandfather's coat. He was prone to nostalgia and make-believe. He always wanted to be an artist. Often a teacher would hang his drawings on the blackboard. He entertained his friends by making drawings, but realized as he grew older that the athlete was top dog, and he was unable to excel in sports or games. "I didn't think too much of myself. I could see I wasn't God's gift to man in general or to the baseball coach in particular." He received a 70 in Advanced Art - Drawing and a 75 in Advanced Art - General I. The lowest passing grade was 70. He led the class in algebra. The first public recognition of his ability came from Miss Julia Smith, his eighth-grade teacher, long-remembered as his favorite teacher, who had encouraged him to draw murals on the blackboard for holidays, history, science. He later created a cover in her honor and as a tribute to all teachers. This March 17, 1956 *Post* cover was criticized for his plain-looking depiction of a teacher.

It has been said that his paintings created "shining alternatives to the city and to everything that was wrong with his childhood years." His early impressions had a lot to do with what he painted later on. He had the average experiences with friends as a city kid, but was also exposed to sordidness, filth, and drunks. He noted that, "In the city you are constantly confronted by unpleasantness..." In contrast, he described his summers in the country as a farm boy as "sheer blissfulness..."

In 1908 at age 14, Rockwell began taking lessons at the Chase School of Fine and Applied Art, one and then two days a week. This was a two-hour commute each way on a trolley and a subway. He had to work odd jobs to earn money to pay for school. During his sophomore year, at age 16, he dropped out of high school and enrolled in the (free) New York National Academy School. It wasn't long before he transferred to the better Art Students League on 57<sup>th</sup> St., which was then the most progressive of all New York art schools. Illustrators were highly respected at this time..."Illustration was in the main stream of the arts." The best contemporary writing of Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy

was being illustrated. Rockwell did not paint pictures for museums. He was "not a starving artist in a garret." He was not a rebel. Taking into account his abilities and his temperament, he had chosen a profession with a great tradition that he, his family and his friends could be proud of. At the League he learned to "step over the frame and live in the picture." He was taught, "Can't expect to paint a live boy unless you know him, *everything* about him." He had a sign "100%" in gold letters near his easel as a reminder to do his best always. There he learned the importance of the knowledge of anatomy in illustrating..."You can't draw a leg if you don't know what makes it move backward from the knees instead of forward. The body isn't a hollow drum covered with skin."

Aware that Rockwell needed income to pay for his classes at the League, his teachers often steered him toward art assignments. At age 16, he received his first commission for four Christmas cards. At age 17, he illustrated his first book, *Tell Me Why Stories*. By 1912, at the age of 18, he was receiving enough commissions to become a full-time illustrator. He rented his first studio in an attic on the Upper West Side of New York. Two times he changed studios. At age 19, he became the art director of *Boy's Life* for \$50.00 a month and also created 100 illustrations for *The Boy Scouts Hike Book*. In 1914, he created 55 illustrations for *The Boys Camp Book*, 70 illustrations for *Boys Life*, and illustrations for various other magazines. He was beginning to be noticed as the ambitious kid who was the "boy illustrator."

He sold his first three covers for *The Saturday Evening Post* to the Curtis Publishing Company for \$75 each in 1916, which began a career spanning almost 60 years. He had ascended to a new plateau in the world of illustration. He was now competing with the best. At age 22, he had established himself as a major-league illustrator. Later he received \$500 for a cover. It is reported that \$5000 to \$7000 was the most he ever received for a *Saturday Evening Post* cover, and twice that amount for advertising art. Due to his generous nature, he only ever charged \$50 for covers he painted for the *Boy Scout Magazine*. In the 1920's he was making \$45,000 a year. He was only in his mid-twenties, and he was rich and famous. At that time illustrators were regarded as celebrities. In the 30's Rockwell was the hottest property in illustrating. He had a long list of clients including *Collier's*, *Life Good Housekeeping*, *Look*, *McCall's*, *Leslie's*, *Judge*, *Country Gentleman*, *Literary Digest*, *People's Popular Monthly*, *Farm and Fireside*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Poor Richards Almanac*, *Popular Science*, *Afloat and Ashore*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *St. Nicholas*, Perfection oil heaters, Fisk bicycle tires, Overland automobiles, Edison Mazda Lamp Works, Jell-O, and Orange Crush, Coca-Cola, Maxwell House coffee.

In 1929, Rockwell's first marriage ended in divorce after 13 years when his wife, Irene, left him for another man. In 1930, he met and married his second wife, Mary Barstow, after friends had successfully played matchmaker. They had three sons; Thomas became a writer, Jarvis became an artist, and Peter became a sculptor. His *Post* covers between 1932 and 1936 reflected a new kind of first hand interest in family. He and his family moved from New Rochelle to Arlington, Vermont.

In 1932 a visit to Paris and exposure to modern art influenced a change in his style. He admired Picasso and wanted to learn about the new wild and wonderfully imaginative approaches to painting being done by the futurists, expressionists, and surrealists. He left after seven months when he realized, "My best efforts were some modern things that looked like very lousy Matisses." The *Post* staff was horrified and only published three of his covers that year. It was a long three year struggle before his style and confidence returned but the turnaround came in 1935, when he received an assignment to do sixteen illustrations for Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

1943 -- In all probability the fire that ravaged his Vermont studio started as a result of the ashes from his pipe discarded in a wastebasket filled with turpentine rags. The fire destroyed many of his original paintings and also the props and costumes he relied on for old themes. The loss of these items deflected Rockwell's attention toward the everyday environment, studies of careers, and World War II. His work took on specificity.

In 1953, he left Arlington and moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts to a whole new collection of faces for future paintings. He had been restless and having trouble again with his work and thought a change of scene would help. "It didn't. I sank deeper into the muck. I was dissatisfied, doubted my ability; decisions made in the morning evaporated by three o'clock." He listened to the advice of several psychiatrists and finally recovered from the crisis.

Mary, age 51, passed away in August 1959. He married Molly Punderson October 1961. He and Molly enjoyed meeting friends at the Red Lion Inn, riding bikes, and going out in the rowboat, but his work was his life. He hated to turn down any job, even those he didn't particularly want to do. His son said, "Pop never felt secure. He was always afraid of becoming "old hat" and being replaced by younger illustrators. He worried that he suddenly would not have enough work, that the interest in his work would fall off, that he'd end up forgotten..."

1963 -- Rockwell's last *Post* cover was the memorial portrait of John F. Kennedy. He left the *Saturday Evening Post* to do free-lance work and work for *McCall's* and *Look*. The character of his work changed again as he focused on racial integration, the Peace Corps, the Space Program. He traveled to the Soviet Union, Tibet, Mongolia, Ethiopia - drawing and painting.

He was quoted in 1971, "I work from fatigue to fatigue... at my age there is only so much daylight left." As he got older, he knew he had too many ideas and not enough time. Rockwell never had an agent and would not work for people he didn't like. He insisted on being judged by his work. He really never liked doing portraits and later only left his studio to do the Presidents. He did the portraits of many Hollywood celebrities.

Rockwell was not a preserver of his work. He never valued the original after he was paid. He saved the frame, tossed the work aside, and often easily gave the original painting away if someone wrote to him saying they liked it. Many original paintings

have disappeared including those he prepared for *Post* covers. Originals that remain have become collectors' items.

### Honors

- An original illustration by Rockwell commemorating the *100<sup>th</sup> Year of Baseball* hangs in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.
- 1969 Named Artist of the Year by his colleagues of the Artists Guild of New York. His hometown of Stockbridge held a parade in his honor.
- 1977 "The President of the United States of America awards this Presidential Medal of Freedom to Norman Rockwell, artist, illustrator, and author. He has portrayed the American scene with unparalleled freshness and clarity. His vivid and affectionate portraits of our country and ourselves have become a beloved part of our American tradition." Signed, Gerald F. Ford
- 1994 The US Postal service issued a commemorative stamp, *Rockwell's Triple Self-Portrait-Post cover* of February 13, 1960.
- Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, President Ronald Reagan agreed to chair a fund-raising drive for the new Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA.

### Saturday Evening Post Covers: (324) (305) (317)

A major factor in his popularity was his exposure through the Saturday Evening Post.

1920 – hilarious look at the jazzing twenties

1930's and 1940's - Rockwell's illustrations provided a much-needed chuckle during that time. Critics say he was a denier of grim reality. His optimism and humor gave strength to restore a nation. He created 33 covers, 18 related to the war, between Pearl Harbor and the end of the war. All were patriotic, filled with humor and deep feeling, and also portrayed the Americans back home, like the 1943 cover *Rosie The Riveter*. He did not portray dramatic incidents or great tragedy. Willy Gillis became a model of "every soldier" a bewildered, young innocent in a strange new world.

Inspired by Roosevelt's State of the Union speech in 1941, he created the heart of freedom in painting *The Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear*. *The Four Freedoms* were epic and the "capstone of his great career"... his best success. He made the freedoms visible to the minds and spirits of an entire nation to help remind them why our nation was undertaking such a gigantic and desperate war effort. His project was turned down by Washington, but approved by the *Saturday Evening Post*. He worked very hard on this effort. This art became the heart of the war bond effort.

1950's – Rockwell "caught the wistful charm of a nation in breathless acceleration"

1960's – Covers for *Post, Look, McCalls*: Rockwell showed an uncanny genius for the serious problems of an explosive new era. Began to address contemporary subjects, astronauts, the conquest of space, Peace Corps, civil rights, racial strife, portraits of international figures.

His covers for the holidays became a special tradition, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. His Santa Claus became the ultimate mold for a character that loved children.

Rockwell was tired of people writing to him pointing out mistakes, so he began painting April Fools Day covers loaded with errors. One illustration drew a response of 140,000 letters.

#### **Setting the stage for his work**

Early in his career and low on funds, he often used the same model for all the people in one painting. He was the writer, costumer, set-designer, and director for the story he was about to sketch with charcoal and ultimately paint. His studio contained his collection of props and costumes. Detail by detail, he would develop a picture to build a story out of real things assembled with care and closely observed. He used professional and amateur untrained models. If he needed a model for a banker, he would call a banker. When he used children as models, he kept them still by a pile of shiny nickels stacked just out of reach. His favorite test was to see if a model could raise his eyebrows halfway up his forehead. He enjoyed demonstrating the precise facial expression and the exact pose he wanted. Sometimes he took models to the local hairdresser if he wanted to change the hairstyle for the picture. *The Saturday Evening Post* asked him to stop using one man who modeled for too many of the covers, but Rockwell continued to use him for a time... in disguise. Models reported him as generous, patient, and humorous. His affection for but also his difficulty with models is legendary. He was horrified by the lady who stuck a pin in her baby to make it cry and by the man who nailed a duck to the floor to make it stand still.

During the second half of the 1930's the use of photography made it possible for him to get a photographer to capture the scene once it was set and then use many studies instead of the live models while completing the work. He liked to play act, so he often dressed up in costume, had the photographer take his picture and then used the photos for his painting.

#### **How Rockwell and his art has been described:**

"Rockwell in the 1990s, stands for something timeless and true... a vision of America that becomes harder and harder to reconcile with rampant crime, urban chaos, and the impersonal age of the computer. To cherish Rockwell can be the act of defiance, a willful retreat into nostalgia and should-have-beens."

"Norman Rockwell created six decades of portraits defined as the visual memory of a nation through two world wars, the Great Depression, unprecedented national prosperity, and radical social change."

"Rockwell was one of America's most beloved men, an artist, an illustrator, an historian, who produced a storybook, a pictorial history of our country -a documentation of America."

"His illustrated covers depicted a simpler life, relationships that were more straightforward, close families celebrating holidays together, and America's interests, sorrows, and joys. He painted common life, as we might wish to have lived it."

“Rockwell creates an irresistible desire in the viewer to know what happened before and what will happen next. He invites you to join in the storytelling.”

“He was a genius in his understanding and trust of what is gentle in the hidden core of America - optimism, humor, and sensitivity.”

“In the world of Norman Rockwell, there are always good people ready to save us. A common theme was security in an insecure world. He would not, and could not paint people with evil ideas.”

Norman Rockwell’s pictures are “recollected with genuine pleasure... an intimate part of other people’s lives, as precious to them as their own memories. Everyone could recognize someone or something in his pictures. There is always something else to notice in his pictures.”

“For 60 years, Norman Rockwell has been the keeper of the American spirit, a time when God, family, country, and goodness meant everything.”

“Boy Wonder” (very successful at a very early age)

“An American painting machine”

“Realist master”

“If we all like it, is it art?”

Celebrities such as John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, Doris Day, Mary Tyler Moore, and Lucille Ball all cited favorite pictures “with an ease bred of familiarity.”

Ross Perot often poses in front of his Rockwells. Steven Spielberg “derived his old-fashioned, apple-pie, front-porch Americana” settings in movies like ET and Jaws from Rockwell. “It is the snug rightness of the Norman Rockwell settings that makes the incursion of Spielberg’s alien forces so terrifying.”

### **What did the art critics say?**

Rockwell never commanded much respect in the realm of high art. Cover art was throwaway stuff... yesterday’s trash. He worked “for the new mass-market magazines that sold themselves to passing customers through the visual appeal of the color cover.” By working in a commercial setting, his subject matter was often dictated and edited by advertisers and publishers, and his paintings were only one step in a complicated business process that led to the finished ad, calendar, greeting card, illustration, or cover. Often he painted because the client wanted it, or the theme was popular. Some constraints included paintings that had to be vertical, happy, seasonal, and non-controversial. Art historians criticized Rockwell for not having the freedom to be an artist, maintaining that a real artist has to be creative, not constrained. During his lifetime, there were only a handful of museum exhibitions of his work, despite rising auction prices, a mounting



demand for old Rockwell covers, reproductions, prints and collectibles. Nobody wrote about him, except as an example of bad taste.

An art critic invited to his studio to see his work ... only could comment that he was "a hard worker"

Art critics assigned to write eulogies after Rockwell's death offered the following: "Rockwell will not live in the history of art, but as a witness to a certain view of America... he was the right man at the right place at the right time." He was dubbed "the Rembrandt of Punkin Crick." "He was a picture-maker who supplied pre-electronic America with an endless store of images framed in the depthless narrative clarity of the TV set." He painted "visual bromides."

Rockwell's *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, an oil painting for the *Post* cover April 29, 1950 earned the following praise, "Although despised by the critical establishment, Norman Rockwell's sheer obsessive perfectionism had crossed the line from mere commercial work to an art for art's sake perilously close to high art."

Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art says, "In addition to an acceptance of all styles and modes of expression, today there's a refreshing gradual disappearance of art criticism based purely on ideology. Critics and historians are beginning to recognize that styles are simply languages with one no inherently better than another. There are fewer and fewer art critic fights and tantrums defending one style against another. There's also a forgiving, permissive mood currently gaining ground in the art world. Norman Rockwell, who only a decade ago was considered by most art critics to be a hopelessly mawkish illustrator of little talent and no energy, has recently been touted, even by the curator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art at New York's Guggenheim Museum (which has the subtitle of The Museum for Non-Objective Art - hardly Norman's forte), as a major artistic force and potent communicator in America from the 1930s through the 1960s. I agree."

#### **How Rockwell described himself:**

- "Everything I have ever seen or done has gone into my pictures in one way or another."
- "I was showing the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed."
- "Maybe as I grew up... I unconsciously decided that, even if it wasn't an ideal world, it should be and so painted only the ideal aspects of it..."
- "The view of life I communicate in my pictures excludes the sordid and ugly. I paint life as I would like it to be."
- "Every artist has his own peculiar way of looking at life. It determines his treatment of his subject matter." (ie. Same subject matter painted by Picasso and Rockwell)

## **Norman Rockwell**

- Born in 1894 in New York City.
- Studied at National Academy of Design and Art Students League
- Died November 8, 1978

The foremost illustrator of twentieth century America, Norman Rockwell produced countless paintings for The Saturday Evening Post covers (1916 to 1963) and other magazines and such books as Tom Sawyer. He recorded the nation's history (Astronauts on the Moon) and commemorated its holidays in Post covers.

He portrayed ordinary people in everyday situations. With an eye for detail he chose just the right models. His genius lay in his ability to make people identify with the characters and situations he depicted.

# Freedom from Want

## From A Study Guide to The Four Freedoms



CREDIT: [Nat'l Archives and Records Administration](#)

*“The third is freedom from want...everywhere in the world.”*

When FDR first took office, the country was in the depths of the Great Depression. Thus, from the start of his first administration, President Roosevelt placed a high priority on securing “freedom from want,” seeing it as essential to the nation’s long-term strength and future. Social Security, unemployment insurance, aid to dependent children, the minimum wage, housing, stock market regulation, and federal deposit insurance for banks—these are but a few of the measures introduced through FDR’s New Deal programs, many of which are still with us today.

With the onset of World War II, Roosevelt further saw the necessity of spreading “freedom from want” throughout the world. The Second World War, he believed, was caused in part by the currency disorders, mass unemployment, and economic desperation that had brought Hitler and Mussolini to power. As he stated when proposing an economic bill of rights ([see Appendix B](#)): “[T]rue individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. ‘Necessitous men are not free men.’ People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.”

During his first administration, FDR had informed his countrymen that American democracy could not survive if one-third of the nation were ill-housed, ill-clothed, and ill-fed. During his second term, he urged the further recognition that American welfare could not be assured in a disordered and impoverished world economy. America should seek “economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peace time life for its inhabitants,” he declared in his Four Freedoms speech—a sentiment he reiterated a few months later when meeting with Winston Churchill to draw up the Atlantic Charter, which included a provision for international economic collaboration. Specifically, Roosevelt had in mind the creation of new international organizations—an international monetary fund, a world bank—with the mandate of fostering high levels of employment, growth, trade, and economic justice throughout the world.

## **Untold Prosperity—for Some**

Sixty years after Roosevelt's death, a large number of Americans have achieved living standards far beyond the wildest dreams of their forbears who endured the Great Depression. Indeed, Rockwell's painting of a family about to enjoy a hearty Thanksgiving meal depicts the kind of scene of plenty that many Americans have come to take for granted. Likewise, citizens of other Western countries—including those living in the vanquished nations of Germany and Japan—have experienced an unprecedented rise in living standards.

Yet there are still significant numbers of Americans who are hungry and poor. According to a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture report, in 2003, 36.3 million Americans lived in households experiencing food insecurity, compared to 33.6 million in 2001 and 31 million in 1999. Meanwhile, the U.S. Census Bureau has found that in 2003, 35.9 million Americans were in poverty, up 1.3 million from 2002.

How did this situation evolve? William Felice of Eckerd College traces it back to the Cold War, when "human rights" were equated with political rights and civil liberties—not to economic and social rights, which were associated with the values of communism. The right to an adequate standard of living was not seen as the government's special province and instead was left up to private enterprise and market forces.

The trend toward privatization is evident in President Bush's domestic agenda, which is focused on restructuring the government-sponsored social safety net created by FDR—including the capstone of the New Deal, Social Security. Meanwhile, the gap between the superrich and the common working person continues to widen—to the point where the top 1 percent of U.S. citizens now possess more wealth than the combined incomes of the bottom 90 percent. A recent New York Times investigation of class in America revealed that despite the nation's greater affluence, it has become even harder for Americans to move up from one economic class to another. "Americans are arguably more likely than they were thirty years ago to end up in the class into which they were born."

## **Strategies to End World Poverty**

Prosperity at home is only half of the equation. What about in the rest of the world? As former World Bank economist Nancy Birdsall pointed out in her Eckerd College lecture, today's world is "incredibly unequal." In the foreign policy arena as well, the United States has yet to put its weight behind the goal of guaranteeing "a more secure, more prosperous world, a less unequal world, a world where fewer people live in poverty." On the contrary, the gap has been widening between rich and poor nations. Again in the words of Birdsall: "The wealth and income levels of rich countries like the United States and those Scandinavia, in Northern Europe, is one hundred times on average, in real terms, the average income level in countries like Ethiopia, Nepal, much of Africa, and some parts of Central America. That gap was about 10:1 a hundred years ago."

Why are we so far away from realizing FDR's vision of securing freedom from want "everywhere in the world"? Some economists, most notably Joseph Stiglitz, have blamed irresponsible, "one size fits all" trade policies for the growing disparity between Western countries and the rest of the world. Others, such as Jagdish Bhagwati, are more optimistic about

the potential for trade liberalization to benefit the economies of developing countries by stimulating growth. As Financial Times writer Martin Wolf, another globalization advocate, wrote in his recent book: “Never before have so many people or such a large proportion of the world's population enjoyed such large rises in their standard of living.”

Still others have focused on practical plans to address the limitations of market forces in helping the world's poor. They argue that with 1.1 billion people suffering from extreme poverty (defined by the World Bank as an income of less than \$1 a day), it is high time to do something to reduce these numbers.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs, for instance, has been spearheading an ambitious UN scheme to end global poverty by 2025. In his view, geography has played a crucial role in determining Africa's fate—it is landlocked and disease prone—yet such problems, once acknowledged, can be overcome. By increasing foreign aid, disease (such as malaria) can be controlled, and infrastructure can be created. The upshot will be greater returns on private investment, triggering market-led growth. Otherwise, political elites will continue to focus on removing resourcebased wealth from poor countries as quickly as possible; investment and development will never be anything but empty promises.

At the April Eckerd meeting, Birdsall outlined the anti-poverty plan developed by her organization, the Center for Global Development, which has much in common with Sachs' prescriptions. The United States, she said, has an ethical duty to make “freedom from want” a high priority in its foreign policy. Birdsall finds it paradoxical that America readily utilizes its “hard power” resources in both the market and military affairs while failing to make use of its “soft power” resources to shore up its reputation and moral standing in the world.

She went on to list a number of key ways in which the United States could enhance its soft power, beginning with foreign aid. U.S. Overseas Development Aid (ODA) is “scandalously cheap,” she said. As a share of overall GDP, the U.S. aid level has dropped to 0.15%, the lowest of any major industrialized country. To the poor and vulnerable of the world, America seems to be sending the message that it just doesn't care. Birdsall called for dramatic action to improve the U.S. record on this score. Such action would include not just more aid but also “development-friendly” steps such as lower agricultural subsidies and a cabinet-level development agency tasked with working with other affluent countries to come up with feasible strategies for alleviating world poverty.

### **All Talk and No Action?**

In fact, there is no shortage of proposals on the table for freeing the world from want. President Bush has proposed the Millennium Challenge Account, which directs aid to countries that have taken responsibility for government reforms. In the view of journalist Nicholas Kristof, this plan, while off to an “agonizingly slow start,” is at least “shrewdly focused on encouraging good governance and economic growth.” Another hopeful sign was Bush's recent announcement of \$1.2 billion for a five-year campaign against malaria—acknowledged by New York Times editors as an “admirable start” to the July 2005 G8 summit meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland.

But while there are plenty of ways, is there a will? The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, known as the Bretton Woods institutions, celebrated their sixtieth anniversaries in 2004 with very little to show for their goals of reducing world poverty and fostering development. Likewise, six decades after FDR attempted to persuade world leaders to work cooperatively toward promoting prosperity around the globe, we are once again faced with a situation where the heads of nation-states are primarily interested in pleasing their own constituents—a position that one speaker described as "democratic narcissism." Such a narrow and short-sighted approach makes it difficult to implement even the simplest of proposals, such as the Tobin tax initiative.<sup>1</sup> Western leaders lack the political traction to move such ideas forward.

In Michael Smith's view, the time has come for the United States to revisit Roosevelt's rationale for international economic collaboration: namely, that a world marred by rising poverty is unstable and hence insecure for all of its inhabitants. Particularly during these times of heightened insecurity, taking action to lessen global inequalities should be seen as being in America's best interests. People who think that America's interests come first "need to be persuaded that they are living on borrowed time," he suggested.

Birdsall reinforced Smith's conclusions in the final meeting of the Eckerd series, stating that America should use its power not only to capture for Americans the benefits of globalization but also to "reduce the two kinds of risk, conventional security risks and human security risks, that globalization has brought." Improving the plight of the world's poor would not only bring ethical returns, it would also serve U.S. national interests, she argued.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) In the 1950s and 1960s many economists predicted that the newly independent African countries would become wealthier once they developed modern industrial sectors. Yet Africa has failed to prosper in an era of globalization. What can, and should, be done to address the situation?
- 2) Do market-friendly (i.e., free trade) policies stimulate economic growth and in turn reduce poverty? How can we measure this?
- 3) The economist Jeffrey Sachs claims that ending world poverty should be possible in our lifetimes. What are the main proposals of the UN anti-poverty plan he espouses? Are such proposals feasible?

