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Bringing Work to Life

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## Welcome

Welcome to the latest quarterly issue of Bringing Work to Life. We are pleased that our new book, *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, is now scheduled for publication by Praeger in August 2014. Our book describes why, when, and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781440831584>

It complements our three existing books:

*Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013) that provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on principles of social justice:

<http://www.potomacbooksinc.com/Books/BookDetail.aspx?productID=293765>

*Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development* (Praeger, 2010) that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?id=53104>

and *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (Praeger, 2003) that describes leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781567204360>

This newsletter contains two articles: The Appeal of a Nontraditional Career Path, and Inequality and Its Consequences.

## The Appeal of a Nontraditional Career Path



Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal* (a division of *Elsdon, Inc.*), which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized help to individuals and families in career guidance, coaching and college planning.

Ron is author of the forthcoming *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, which describes why, when, and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income; editor of *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, which

Many of us feel more comfortable and safe when driving a car rather than being a passenger. We know when we're driving that we have seen a car that may be coming up from behind, or we have seen children or animals playing at the side of a residential street and adjust our driving accordingly. We know that we'll brake when needed to slow for traffic lights or a stop sign ahead. Yet strangely when it comes to work we sometimes ascribe greater employment safety to being in a large organization where employment decisions are made by others, and not necessarily made in our best interests. This perspective is changing with the reality that one Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 company in the United States is now being replaced about once every two weeks in the S&P 500 index, and the average tenure of an S&P 500 company in the index fell from 61 years in 1958 to 18 years in 2012. This is coupled with recognition that large corporations are oligarchies with power concentrated in the hands of a few. They are not democracies as Arie de Geus points out in *The Living Company*, "the governance structure gives ample opportunity to an almost medieval exercise of absolute power by management. It is no wonder that, under these conditions, companies can become like fiefdoms for the few, to be exploited like a machine." Not surprisingly we see people choosing to leave organizations as economic conditions improve. This push away from conventional employment is also encouraged by factors such as the following:

- Those at senior levels in large organizations receiving excessive compensation, for example CEO's of major corporations now earn several hundred times average worker pay
- High unemployment for those at early career stages, and challenges finding conventional employment for those at late career stages
- Reduced long term benefits in conventional employment, for example only 30% of U.S. Fortune 100 companies offered defined benefit pension plans to new salaried employees in mid-2012 down from 90% in 1998.

What alternatives are available other than conventional employment? One approach, which will be our focus in this article, and that has much appeal, is to create a nontraditional path from more than one component and more than one source of income. Charles Handy coined the term portfolio career for this in the late 1980s. This nontraditional path, which is tailored to individual needs offers much. Here's a quote from Rachel Nelken from an on-line source. She created a nontraditional career that includes working part-time as a relationship manager for an Arts Council, half a day each week leading a youth music program, working freelance for music funding organizations, and running action learning sessions, commenting "... it's not always a mellow existence. But it does make for an interesting one ... It has taken a while to feel like the sum of my working parts has made more than the whole ... relying on one organization to provide you with progression opportunities is unrealistic. You have to find your own instead ..." The nontraditional approach has much to commend it, offering the following:

- Alignment with personal preferences, values, interests and skills
- Potentially lower risk and higher reward than conventional employment due to diversification and a focus on strengths
- The potential for career fulfillment and growth

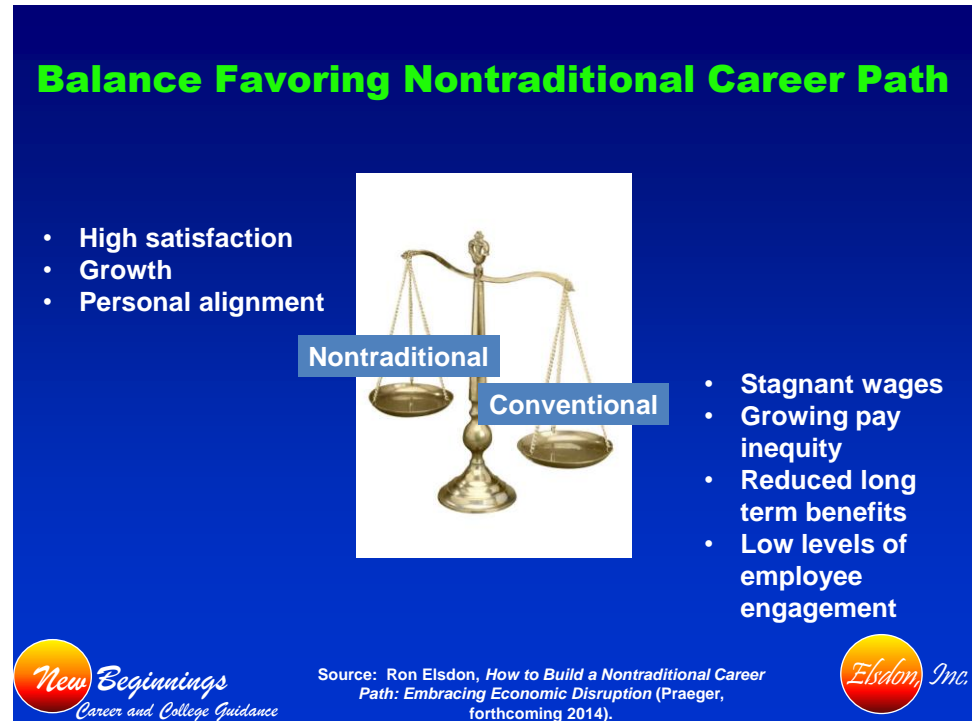
Furthermore the emergence of readily accessible computing and communication

provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on real-world examples from contributing authors, and principles of social justice; editor of *Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development*, a book that describes the applications of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations; and author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Chemical Engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in Career Development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in Chemical Engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

tools is an advantage to small, nimble enterprises and individuals. Moreover implementation of the Affordable Care Act has removed the egregious U.S. insurance company practice of denying coverage for people with pre-existing conditions, and therefore made health insurance readily accessible for those in a nontraditional career.

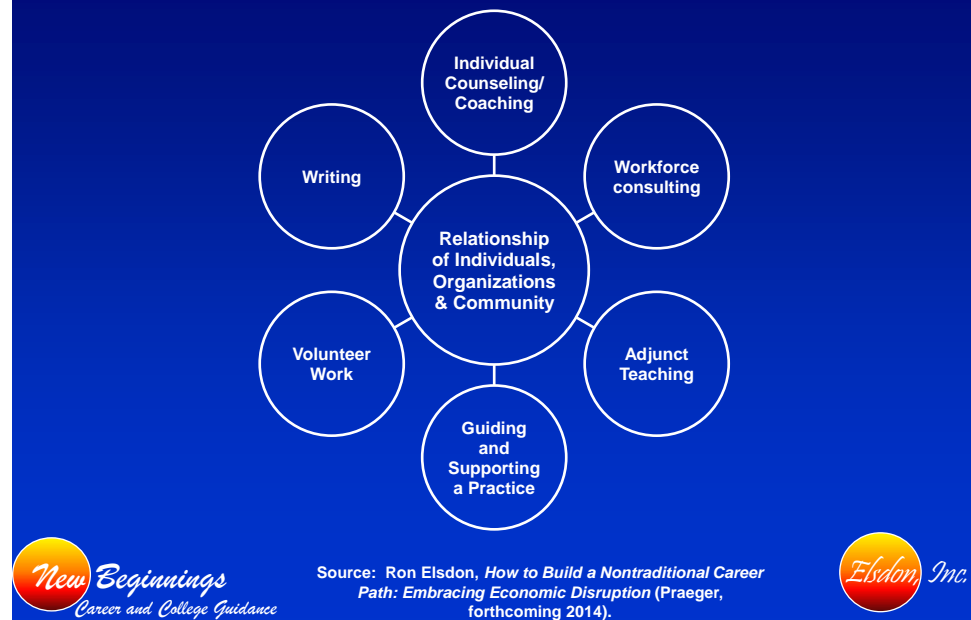
It is not surprising to see studies showing satisfaction levels much higher for those taking a nontraditional career path than for those in conventional employment.

We can represent the comparison visually as follows:



What might a nontraditional career look like? Here is an example from my experience:

## Example of a Nontraditional Career



There is a common connecting theme shown in the center circle as the relationship of individuals, organizations and community. There are a number of components shown in the surrounding circles. They include individual counseling/coaching shown at the top, and workforce consulting the circle at the upper right. Learning from this latter component transfers well into work with individuals and vice versa. The third item is adjunct teaching built on experience from the first two components and the fourth item, guiding and supporting a practice, is a natural outgrowth of workforce consulting. The next item volunteer work includes a number of activities over the years, while the final component is writing.

I remain mindful and appreciative of Annie Dillard's thoughtful perspective about writing, "When a struggling writer found unexpected success and wrote Dillard for advice, she got this reply: 'I have an urgent message for you. *Everyone* feels like a fraud ... Separate yourself from your work. A book you made isn't you any more than is a chair you made, or a soup. It's just something you made once. If you ever want to make another one, it, too, will be just another hat in the ring, another widow's mite, another broken offering which God has long understood is the best we humans can do – we're forgiven in advance.'" And perhaps those words apply to much of what we do, not just to writing.

This nontraditional career evolved over time as needs arose and according to my preferences. It has been fulfilling and sustainable due to the support of many people for which I am so grateful. These are some learnings I have taken away from the experience:

- Be clear about purpose
- Stay true to personal beliefs
- Expect unexpected supporters and barriers
- Be patient and start the different components when timing is right
- Develop needed skills before launching a nontraditional path and

anticipate needing a broad range of skills

- Nurture relationships for they are the lifeblood of the enterprise
- Build knowledge and capabilities with commercial value that are portable
- Enjoy the journey - there's only one!

A nontraditional career path offers an opportunity to integrate the emotional, intellectual, spiritual and practical parts of who we are. It can be a journey with delightful surprises, with kindred fellow travelers, that brings personal fulfillment and community benefit. We explore this in depth, including strategic and practical aspects, in our forthcoming book *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*. We will describe this in our next newsletter.

Parts of this article are extracted from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, by Ron Elsdon currently scheduled to be published by Praeger in August 2014.

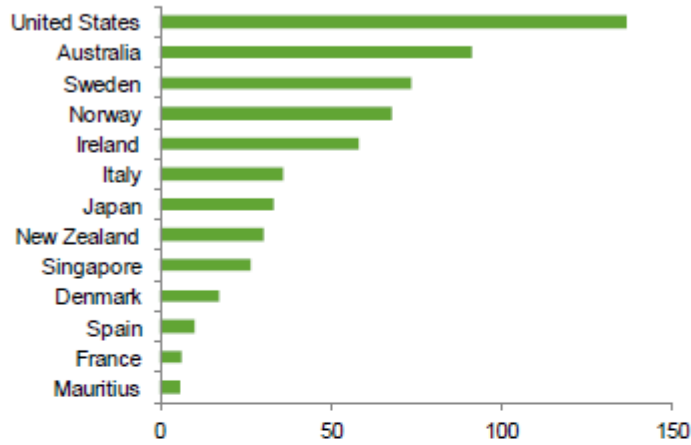
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## Inequality and Its Consequences

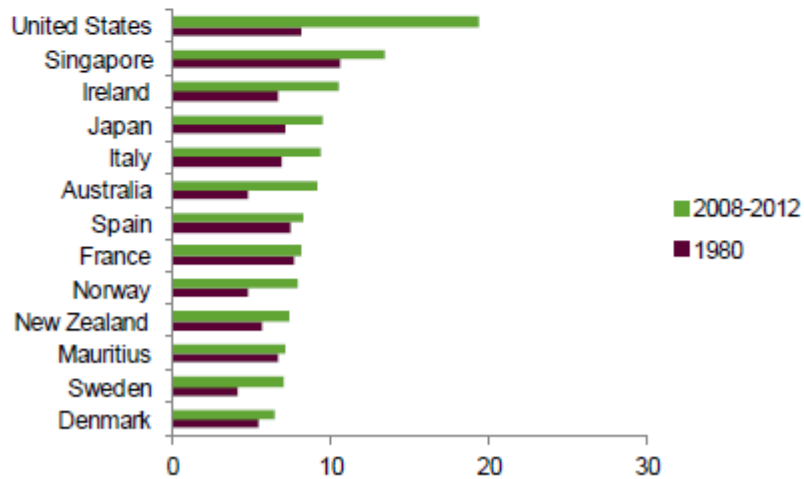
Unfortunately, we, in the United States, are leading the way in the growth of inequality as shown in the next figure:

**Figure 1: The rich get richer**

The percentage increase in share of income of the richest one percent, 1980–2012



The share of national income going to the richest one percent

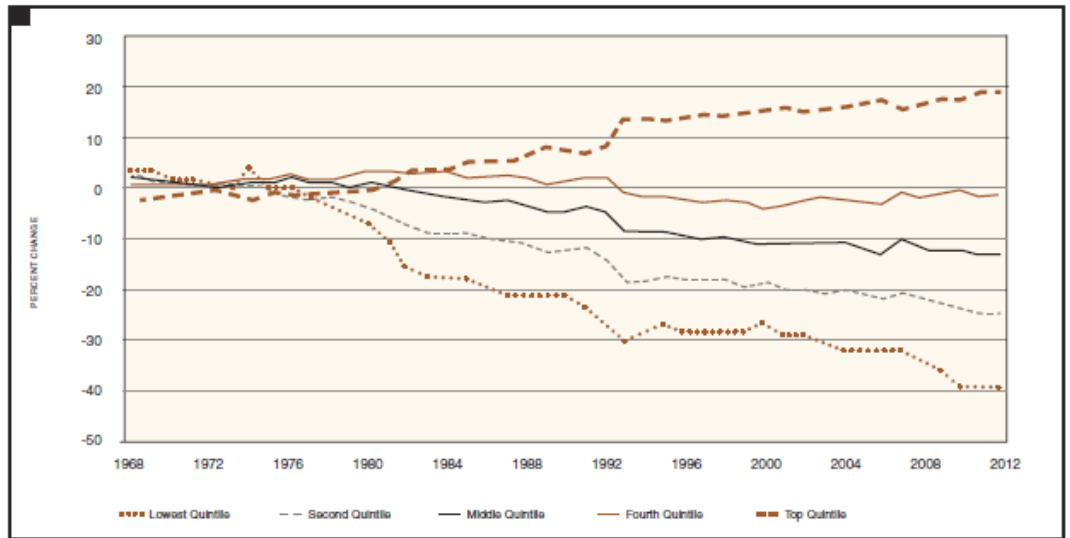


Source: F. Alvaredo, A. B. Atkinson, T. Piketty and E. Saez, (2013) 'The World Top Incomes Database', <http://topincomes.g-mond.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/> Only includes countries with data in 1980 and later than 2008.

Source: Oxfam Briefing Paper: Working for the Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality, 20 January 2014

We see this reflected in gross disparities in growth of household income in the United States, with those at the top of the economic ladder benefitting disproportionately as shown in the next figure:

FIGURE 2. Percent Change in Shares of Adjusted Household Income by Quintile (Share of Income of Each Quintile Relative to Share in 1967)

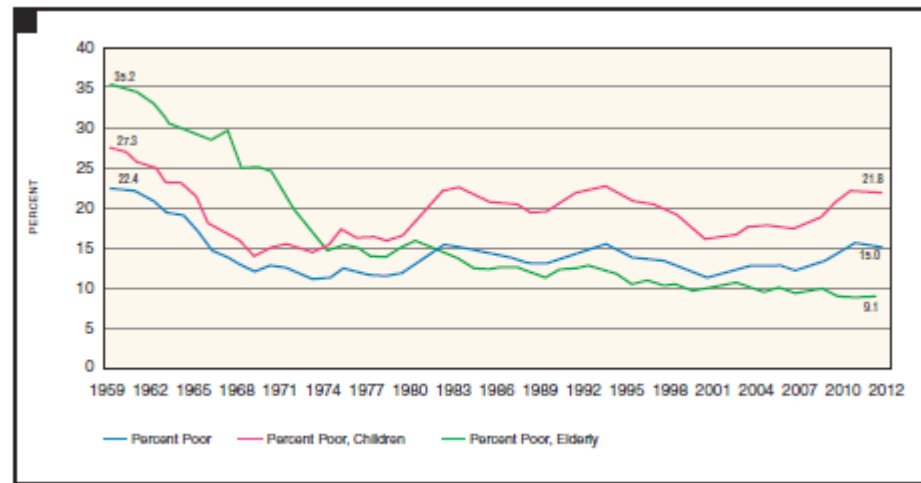


Source: DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith (2013), Table A-2, pages 40-44.

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

As a result our overall poverty rate remains high with children particularly affected:

FIGURE 1. Trends in Official Poverty

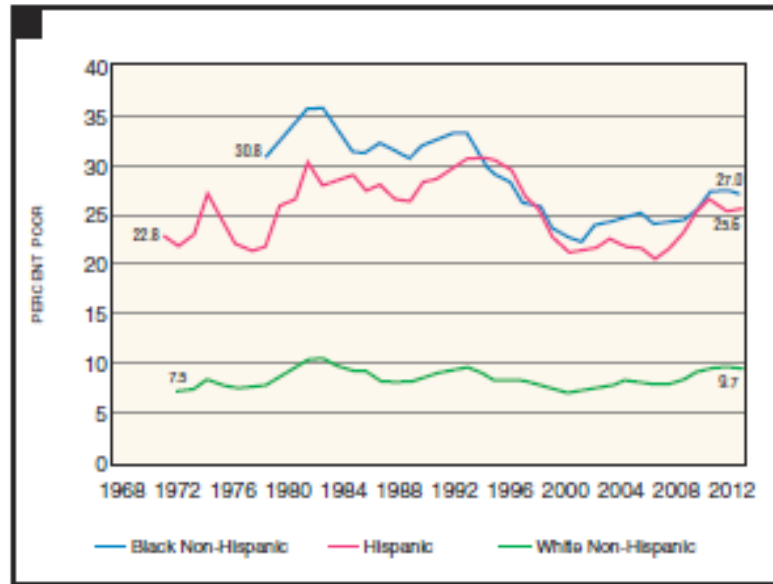


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Poverty Tables

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

As are those who are African American or Hispanic:

FIGURE 4. Poverty Rates by Race/Ethnicity Persons Ages 18-64

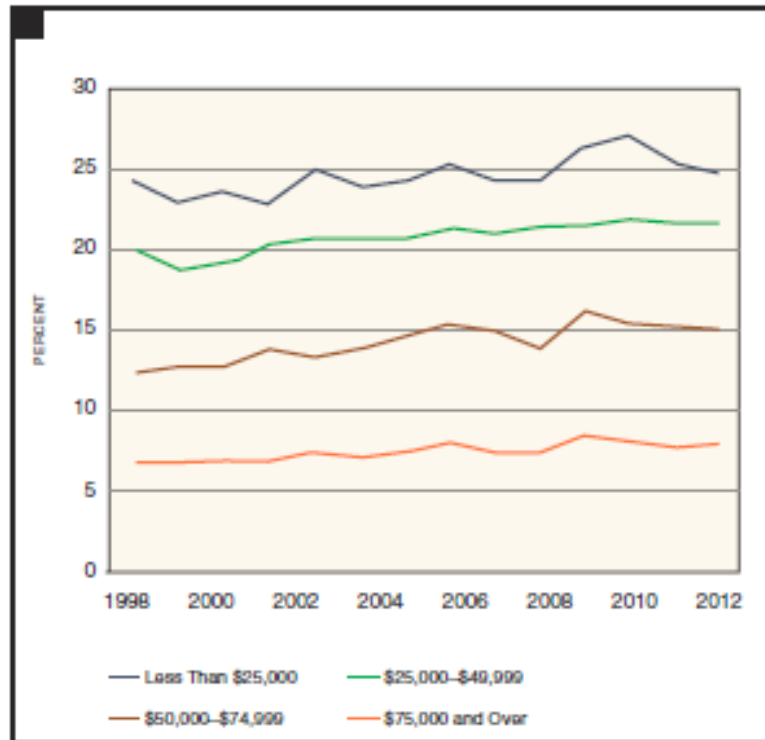


Source: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html> and Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality calculations using March CPS microdata downloaded from IPUMS (King et al., 2010).

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

We see inequality starkly reflected in health care coverage with those at lower income levels suffering disproportionately:

FIGURE 6. Uninsured Rates by Real Household Income (in 2012 dollars), 1999-2012.



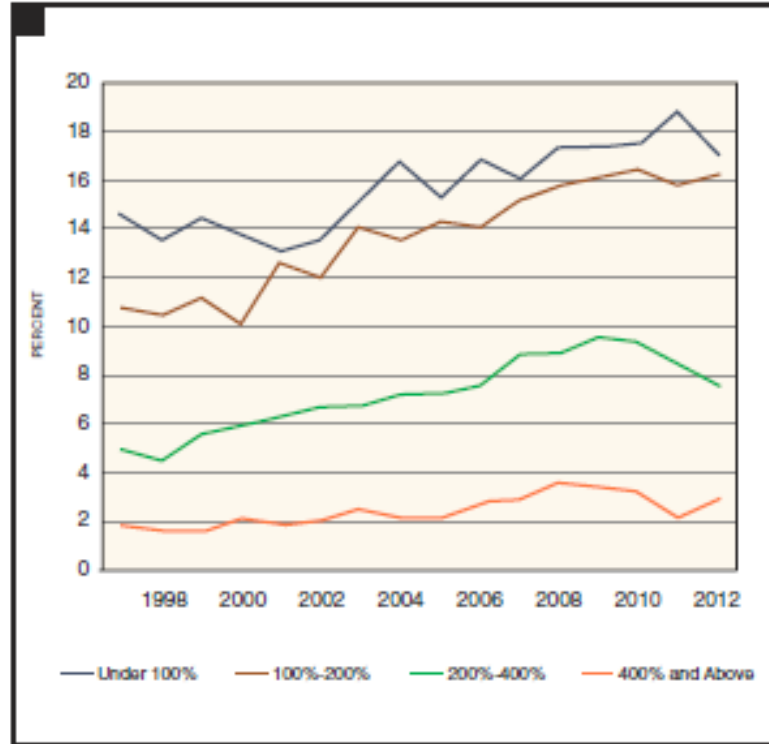
Source: US Census Bureau.\*

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality



With those who are poorer having to forego needed medical care (the lines in the following chart correspond to income as a % of the poverty level):

FIGURE 10. Percentage of Adults in the United States who *did not* Receive Medical Care (Foregone Care) Due to Cost by Poverty Level Category, 1997-2012.



Source: National Health Interview Study (<https://www.hhs.gov/nhis/>).

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

Those with lower incomes report poorer health:

FIGURE 2. Percentage of People Reporting Poor or Fair Health, by Poverty Level Status, 1997-2012.

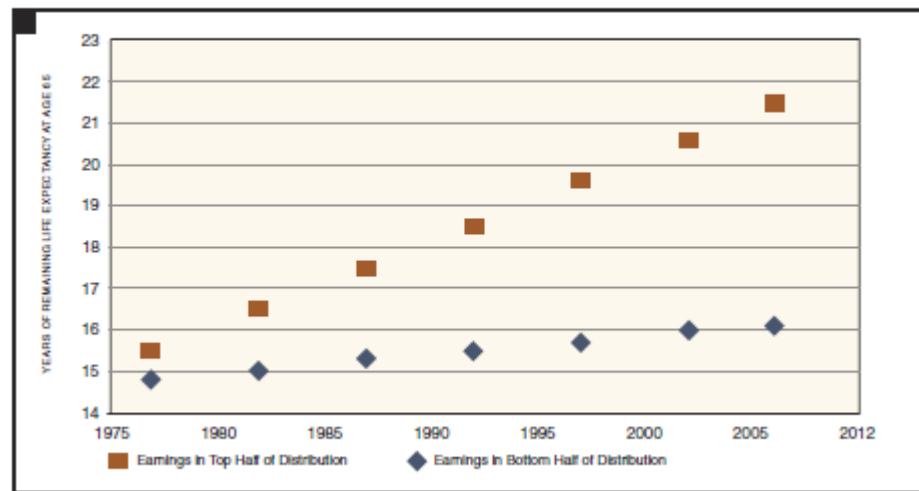


Source: National Health Interview Study (<https://www.hhs.gov/nhis/>).

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

Die at a younger age:

FIGURE 1. Additional Years of Life Expectancy at Age 65 for Men Covered by Social Security, by Year and Lifetime Earnings Group.

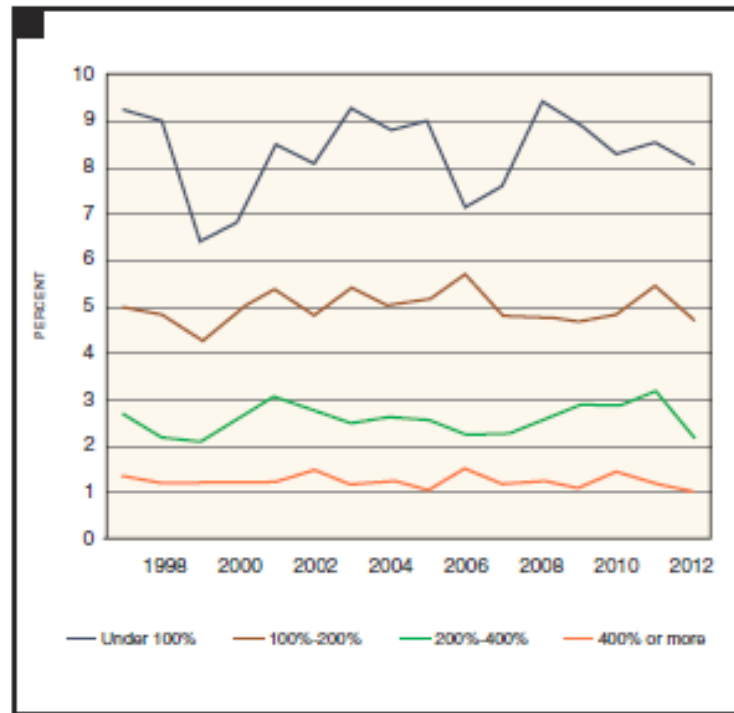


Source: SSA Working papers.\*

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

and disproportionately experience psychological distress:

FIGURE 4. Percentage of Adults Age 18 and Over who Experienced Serious Psychological Distress During the Past 30 Days by Poverty Level, 1997-2012.



Source: National Health Interview Study (<https://www.hhs.gov/nhis/>).

Source: State of The Union, The Poverty and Inequality Report 2014, The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

Hopefully the Affordable Care Act will begin to redress some of these healthcare inequities, recognizing that a Medicare-for-All system is needed to create an effective health care system in this country.

We have much to do to reverse the tide of inequality that has swept our country since the early 1980s.

## Quote

“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”

*T.S. Eliot, from Little Gidding, quoted in Leading from Within, edited by Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner, Jossey-Bass, 2007.*