

VOICES



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MY *view*

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BLOOMBERG NEEDS NEW APPROACH TO POVERTY

In the fall of 2005, the United Nations Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty conducted a mission to the United States. The report from the mission noted that the United States was a paradox: How could the wealthiest nation on earth have one of the highest incidences of poverty amongst industrialized nations? The U.N. mission probably did not have to go very far to reach its conclusion. Within a few miles of Turtle Bay lies perhaps the greatest paradox of all. While New York City is widely recognized as the center of the financial world and is one of the richest cities in the country, one in three children here live in poverty. And even though New York City has a municipal economy that is larger than many developing nations, 19 percent of New Yorkers live in poverty.

In January, Mayor Michael Bloomberg set out to resolve this paradox with the establishment of the Mayor's Commission on Economic Opportunity. In launching the commission, the mayor said its goal was no less ambitious than "a major reduction in the number of children, women and men who live in poverty in this city over the next four years."

“The concept of poverty is seen internationally as not only economic deprivation but a basic human rights issue.”

tax credit, small cash grants to poor people to make "better" choices, and expanded apprenticeship and job-training opportunities are certainly better than nothing, but will have little impact on reducing New York's extraordinary poverty rate.

A year after Hurricane Katrina exposed the ugly persistence of poverty in the United States to the world and a year after the United Nations examined the extreme chasm of American wealth and poverty, Mayor Bloomberg is missing an enormous opportunity to reframe the debate on poverty and summon all of the energies of city government and the private sector to finally lift millions of New Yorkers out of extreme poverty. What is missing from the mayor's approach is a comprehensive understanding of poverty: the concept of poverty is seen internationally as not only economic deprivation but a basic human rights issue. This view includes indicators of well-being such as health, education, food and hunger and other basic necessities to lead a life of dignity. Persistent poverty — and the deep racial disparities it usually entails — is and should be regarded as a violation of human rights and international norms.

Indeed we need to rethink what our obligations are as New Yorkers and as Americans to eradicating poverty. While our national and state constitutions provide us with civil rights and the promise of living with dignity, in reality we live without any official state recognition of the right to be free from hunger or the right to health-care or education or any other right necessary to carry out a productive life. To eradicate poverty in New York we need to expand our notion of rights to include the right to be free of deprivation caused by unrelenting economic hardship.

→ RAMONA ORTEGA is director of the Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center.

“Iran must abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions. Despite what the regime tells you, we have no objection to Iran's pursuit of a truly peaceful nuclear power program.”

PRESIDENT BUSH, SPEAKING BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

“She's the hero. She's the one that made it happen.”

FRANKLIN COUNTY SHERIFF GARY TOELKE ON DOROTHY TORREZ, WHO TURNED OVER A HEALTHY 11-DAY-OLD ABIGALE LYNN WOODS TO POLICE, TELLING THEM THAT HER SISTER-IN-LAW HAD KIDNAPPED THE INFANT

LETTERS

Journalists afraid to mock Islam

JOHN NERNOFF
• via e-mail

Regarding "Holy moly!" (Sept. 12): I appreciate that religions are not exempt from criticism and even parody, and I agree that their follies are subject to scrutiny. I dislike fundamentalism of any kind. Now I challenge you to put your liberalism "on the line" and write a similarly mocking column about Islam. It is easy to target Christians and the "religious right," but journalists are afraid to mock Islam.

As we have seen, Christians do not resort to rioting in the streets, burning effigies and making death threats when they are mocked. Muslims react violently every time they are accused of being intolerant. What an absurd irony.

Better ways to spend \$20 million

CONSTANCE WRIGHT
• Bronx

Although I believe that a person can and should do with their money whatever they wish, I also believe that paying \$20 million to go to space is very selfish and a misplacement of priorities. There are young people who cannot afford to pay for one semester in college. There are people still homeless and jobless from the Katrina tragedy. There are working people who are caught between a rock and a hard place because they don't qualify

for affordable housing because they make more than the income limit, yet cannot afford the market rate rents in the city. If you are not handicapped or have a child and you lose your job and fall behind in your bills, you cannot even get any help from the Human Resources Administration for temporary assistance. I can go on and on with examples of hardships.

Twenty million dollars may not solve these people's problems, but it could definitely help some of these people get back on their feet. I know that I would feel a whole helluva lot better knowing that I did more to help others than to satisfy a curiosity. Twenty million dollars can go a long way when spent wisely.

Space tourist Anoushch Ansari could go to space, come back home, slip and fall and lose her memory of the entire space venture. And what good would it have done for humanity? Nada. Nothing.

I believe people should enjoy their money and their life. I also think that people need to re-think their priorities and stop being so selfish and self-centered.

Afghanistan as lawless as ever

ED COREY
• Bronx

Regarding "Bush shows U.S. not a punching bag" (Sept. 20): Wayne Sargent writes that Bush stood up to the "thugs" that attacked us. As I heard one observer state, attacking

TODAY'S *debate*

How have you been affected by the gridlock caused by the United Nations meetings this week?

HAN BENSON

34 Clerk Brooklyn

I wasn't affected because I leave [for work] at 6:30 or 7 a.m. I don't think it affects me, because I get off at Bowling Green.

GABY KOBAL

25 Social worker Queens

It hasn't affected me at all. I take the train, and I haven't experienced any delays.

DAVE TANNENBAUM

45 Car dealer Forest Hills

It took me an hour and a half on what is usually a 40-minute train ride. And [the train] was basically a sardine can.



HOW TO CONTACT US

E-mail your letters to: letters@metro.us. Keep them as brief as possible, preferably under 100 words. Metro reserves the right to edit all letters. Please include your name and contact information.

Iraq after 9/11 was as logical as attacking Mexico would have been after Pearl Harbor.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan is as lawless as ever, poppy cultivation is rampant and Osama bin Laden is still making videos.

Bush is not a good leader. He's a liar funneling us all into the same state of dysfunction as the businesses he started. And his defenders rely on untruths, misinformation and innuendo to justify his actions.

THE METRO CARTOON: HUTCH OWEN

TOM HART



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