

Artist's Statement: I'm not sure if any of my attempts to help while I'm at Oxbow, or while I'm out in the world, will really do anything. More and more, I lose faith that any good will come from people, much less from the art world. If there is some good that can come from art-making, I will have to strive to make the best effort I can. Otherwise there truly is no hope.

One type of misery is the same as any other. There is no possible way that I, or anyone else can say that someone's suffering is somehow more important or deserved than someone else's. However, every time I pass a homeless person, I feel anger, because I know that this is a type of suffering that could be so easily solved. I can't do much for someone that is heartbroken about a long lost love, or a broken iPhone. However, when something is so clearly avoidable and causes so much continued, unjust, and undeserved pain, I cannot help but feel like something has to be done; even if it's something simple like just talking about these problems. Or in my case, asking people to look at them. If people are not aware of problems, it is impossible to fix them.

When I first came to Oxbow, I saw the most obvious problem staring me right in the face: the huge divide between the rich and the poor. To me, it seemed blatantly obvious if you stepped out of the little Oxbow oasis. How could you avoid the people in the line in front of you at Community Projects? People who weren't just teenage hipsters looking for some retro clothes, but people who actually needed clothes, any clothes, that could fit their budget that they ironically had no choice over. How could you ignore the Walmart shoppers who were forced to shop there because they had to. They are essentially forced to by the very institutions like Walmart themselves. Or the multiple rich people strutting around their vineyards, selling wine that was made from people in the bottom ten percent? People who couldn't get out of the system. Who worked from sunrise to sunset just to make a living and feed their families and yet, somehow, the fact that they "didn't work hard enough" meant they had to stay there... Curious, isn't it?

I was angry enough to see if there was some way out. As I will explain, there isn't a way out for the masses of people in these situations, unless we rebel, or the government/Federal Reserve finally does its part. The latter is questionable though, so I personally vote for rebellion. Or, if you're not an angst-y teenager, positive social change generated by putting morals into the framework of jobs and other social structures over which we have power. In my paper, I will explain how the part of the economy that relates to income inequality works (or doesn't work). In the latter half, I will explain what we as a people can do, and how art can help inspire change.

I'd like to start by adding a disclaimer that I am in no way an expert in economics. I only understand bits and pieces, not the system as a whole in all of its intricacies and details. That being said, there are three things that I found to cause inequality. They are globalization, the rise of technology, and government policy, and for the most part, it all started in the 1970's. Globalization is the idea that jobs that were once only in America are now being outsourced to countries who can do the task better. This is true with skilled and unskilled labor. The workers in the United States often don't have the education to compete. Nor does it have the loose government that allows some countries to pay people less than a dollar a day to produce cheap goods in mass quantities. The second thing is the rise of technology. This one is somewhat simple; basically, we just have a hard time keeping up with everyone else. We are slow, and we haven't adapted quickly enough to be on top. People with better, newer degrees like those relating to healthcare and technology are getting the jobs that need more than just cheap, unskilled labor. This has left us with fewer jobs, and fewer chances for the next generation.

The last, and probably most complicated and controversial is the idea that it is the government and Federal Reserve's fault. There are several things that go into this theory, the first

being the idea of taxes being changed when they shouldn't be, and the decline of unions. Under President Reagan (1937 to 1964), taxes were lowered for the rich under the premise that trickle down economics would work. However, it is evident now that it only works when they actually spend money. When they keep it as assets, or investment, the money just sits there and the economy is not stimulated in any way. This was furthered when the government cut the estate tax in 2003. As for Unions, they declined under Reagan when he fired 11,000 Air Traffic Controllers to show that Unions would not be tolerated. This is a problem because in a lot of cases, Unions are the only way for workers of different backgrounds to get the fair pay that they deserve. This in turn, leads to inequality because no one can say any differently.

Next, is the Federal Reserve. By buying and selling bonds, they can control interest rates. If the Federal Reserve wants to stimulate the economy, they can lower interest rates to encourage people to buy, and if they want to reel spending in, or they need money, they can increase interest rates to discourage spending. The one major flaw in this is that, because of interest, someone is always in debt, and there is never enough for everyone. The other problem is that economists don't really know the right way to provide a stable economy for everyone for a long period of time (by using this system). The most recent theory that has worked was Keynesian economics, but that stopped working when the Cold War happened. Even with the flaw of there not being enough for everyone because of interest, controlling interest rates to meet the ever-changing and often unpredictable economy is difficult. Difficult enough that they often get it wrong. Getting it wrong at crucial times can be extremely detrimental to the economy and can cause depressions that dig the lower class even deeper.

The last thing is the intermingling of business, money and the government. To be brief, money speaks. Because of things like lobbyists, and Super PACs (Political Action Committees) the type of government we choose to elect are less controlled by the people than ever. Lobbyists are pretty straightforward - they are usually lawyers who are hired by companies to persuade politicians to advocate for something. As for Super PAC's, they allow people to anonymously donate large sums of money to indirectly support the candidate they want to get elected. This is bad for a lot of reasons. The most obvious being that the masses of people in the lower and middle class have no say. It is also problematic because often these generous sums of money go into advertising. So some candidates are more likely to get elected based on their funding, and deals for funding they might have made. This wouldn't be awful if they made deals to create an eco-friendly company that gives their employees more than minimum wage, but they don't. Like most systems in the modern day economy, it's meant to benefit the people who want to benefit themselves. Meaning that the system that benefits the rich will continue to perpetuate itself because they have the power.

I also wanted to talk about the people who I'm doing this for, the working poor. At the forefront of capitalist ideology is the belief that by pulling yourself up by the bootstraps, you can get somewhere. The CEO's and VP's only get what they do because they work that much harder for it. They deserve what they get, and all those slackers working at minimum wage deserve what they are paid as well. Now I'm not saying that this is completely wrong, but there are some basic things we overlook. The first, which I already mentioned, is the decline of Unions. Workers are now too vulnerable to revolt or protest because they could easily lose their jobs. Essentially, they are trapped in these jobs. The lack of upward mobility is due to the fact that most of their life has already been decided by their gender, race, education, where they live, and what their parents did. Poverty is too often a self-perpetuating cycle. Without money, an otherwise small problem can turn massive for someone who is living paycheck to paycheck. Though

money certainly doesn't fix everyone's problems, it can help from the leaking of one problem into another.

Solutions to this large and all encompassing issue are difficult to enact. I think it would probably just be simplest if the government got its power back from business. Or perhaps there would be some simple economic system that we could integrate into and live happily ever after. I suppose there's always the idea of going off and living in a hippie commune somewhere. Or we could try upgrading our education system to be one that makes our workers prepared for the modern world without leaving them with lifelong debt. As to how we get there, I couldn't be sure. I think people need to be aware and get angry first. Not violent-angry, but the type of angry that allows you to start a movement.

It was Gandhi who said, "There is enough for everyone's need, but not everyone's greed." I fully agree with him. Personally I think there will always be people who want more and more. This could be blamed on advertising telling us that we need things to be happy when in actuality we don't. But it could also just be blamed on human nature. We have every right to want to better ourselves. Perhaps it just becomes too much sometimes. We forget that we already at the top and we have this inner need to prove ourselves, to make sure we get our place, to be absolutely sure that we are infinite. And to be quite honest, I like this. I like the idea of fighting to reach your full potential. To be the best you can possibly be at what you do and to take pride in your hard earned skill. I think we go wrong when we think that we fully deserve all of it. A lot of life is random (petty much all of it in my opinion). There is no reason we should be proud about inherited wealth or random circumstance. As I said, I don't know if my art can help anyone or do anything. Maybe there's no point in trying in the first place. Actually there probably isn't.... I don't really expect people to care anymore. Why should we? It does not help our genes, and it can certainly put us in danger. There's no real reason to be a good person. But people have fixed it before, so there is reason for some hope I suppose.

For my project I chose to do public art that about half of the time, was Napa-based. To me, it seems to be much more difficult to try and fix something a million miles away when you have no impact over it and for the most part, your attempts will have even less of a chance. Also, I like community work because I feel like that way you're not some arrogant outsider telling people to get their act together rather, I prefer to be a arrogant insider telling people to get their act together. I should also mention that in this project I wanted to see if skill would have any impact on how people would react. I can't say if it will or not, but it might be worth a try based on my last attempt at street art. The main goal was just to bring awareness to the people who live here about the things I see. My results thus far on the artworks I have done has been better than I had originally hoped for. I have cast out several pieces into the world, and I have heard that they got responses from the community. Unfortunately I did not get to them in time, and both were taken down. I plan to remedy this in the future by checking on them more often, but it is a great start.

To conclude, inequality makes many people's lives more miserable than it needs to be. It is enforced by the systems that we created, and will continue on unless we are desperate enough to change it for ourselves. It leaves people with no chance to dream, and even less of a chance to live the life they want to. It leaves some people with nothing and others with everything. In Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech he says, "...that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs." I feel as though my freedom is in very poor quality seeing the modern disparities all around me. There are probably no real solutions that will fix everything, but I hope one day there might be.

Works Cited

- Banksy. "Taking the Piss." ZEN PENCILS. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.
<<http://zenpencils.com/comic/155-banksy-taking-the-piss-explicit/>>.
- Conal, Robbie. "Robbie Conal's Art Attack +." Robbie Conal's Art Attack +. Ragtag, n.d. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <<http://robbieconal.com/>>.
- Food Chains. Dir. Sanjay Rawal. Netflix. N.p., 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.
<<https://www.netflix.com/WiMovie/80015286?trkid=200250783>>.
- Four Horsemen. Dir. Ross Ashcroft. Youtube, 14 Mar. 2012. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fbvquHSPJU>>.
- Goodwin, Michael, and Dan Burr. Economix: How Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work) in Words and Pictures. New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2012. Print.
- Inequality For All. Dir. Jacob Kornbluth. Perf. Robert Reich. Netflix. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Apr. 2015. <http://www.netflix.com/WiMovie/70267834?trkid=540131825_0_0&trkid=222336&fclid=true&movieid=70267834>.
- Kishtainy, Niall, and George Abbot. The Economics Book:. New York: DK Pub., 2012. Print.
- Lemesoff, Raul. Weapons of Mass Instruction. 2015. Argentina. This Is Colossal. Christopher Jobson. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/03/weapons-of-mass-instruction-book-tank/>>.
- McCormick, Carlo. Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art. Taschen, 2010.
- MyPrivateParty. Walk on by. 2006. DeviantArt. 27 Aug. 2006. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.
<<http://myprivateparty.deviantart.com/art/Walk-on-by-38808947>>.
- Real Value. Dir. Jesse Borkowski. Perf. Dan Ariely. Youtube. N.p., 4 Mar. 2014. Web. 22 Apr. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ3CWXQrgVo>>.
- "Roa's Work.": Archive. Tumblr, 2007. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.
<<http://roaweb.tumblr.com/archive>>.
- RS Connett. "CRUCIFIXION 001." By RSConnett on DeviantArt. DeviantArt, 8 Mar. 2008. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <<http://rsconnett.deviantart.com/art/CRUCIFIXION-001-79494874>>.
- The Beehive Collective. "Beehive Design Collective." Beehive Design Collective. Feidt Design LLC, n.d. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <<http://beehivecollective.org/en/>>.
- Wealth Inequality in America. Dir. Politizane. Perf. Politizane. Youtube. Youtube, 20 Nov. 2012. Web. 22 Apr. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>>.