The New Feudalism

A TALE OF TWO AMERICAS

INTRODUCTION:

Elsewhere, I have discussed the (absurd) notion that there is some necessary correlation between affluence and merit—as if the former were a dependable barometer for the latter…and that the latter tended to lead to the former.(See my essays on the MMM Syndrome.)One need only spend an evening in New York City's trendy Meatpacking District to observe a realm in which the "Money Measures Merit" Syndrome is prevalent…and that MMM is most glaringly disproven.

MMM is a theory for interpreting (and rationalizing) outcomes that—upon scrutiny—are patently non-meritocratic.It does this by passing such outcomes off as quasi-merit-based, and therefore not indicative of any underlying injustice (e.g. structural inequalities).This depiction requires one to believe that the actual wealth / power one has managed to accumulate is necessarily consonant with the degree to which one deserves that wealth / power.In this view, the degree to which one is rich is a reflection of some proportional contribution to the weal of society. The corollary of this proposition: If you are poor / disenfranchised, you have nobody to blame but yourself. After all, if the spoils one manages to accumulate for oneself are an ipso facto reflection of talent / effort, then this makes perfect sense.

Needless to say, though tragically commonplace, MMM is easily debunk-able.

The present essay seeks to diagnose the underlying social dysfunction that accounts for the non-meritocratic outcomes present in the U.S.This is done in the hope of elucidating the "real" reasons that circumstances often turn out the way that they do. In this way, I indicate possible ways in which various social injustices may be ameliorated.

It should be recognized that highly-concentrated wealth and gross inequality per se is not unjust, as it may—in theory—be simply a rough reflection of just deserts.It is the explanation for gross inequality that must be subjected to critical analysis. After all, it is rarely power itself that is the problem, but the manner in which power is

used. It's not how wealthy someone is, but what sorts of things one is **doing with** the wealth that one has (and, of course, what sorts of things one did in order to accumulate that wealth).

I have juxtaposed a pair of archetypical settings in order to illustrate the following thesis: Extant inequalities indicate not the result of merit-based outcomes, but rather are the consequence of a pseudo-feudal modus operandi.In using this approach, I have taken two liberties:

- I have used generalization
- I have used hyperbole

I have done this to more forcefully convey my point.In reality, the characterizations don't apply to ALL people in each realm, nor is the diagnosis so severe in all cases.The archetypes represent extreme cases of a phenomenon that often manifests itself in subtler ways.

Nevertheless, it suffices that the following portrayal represents MANY instances—enough to warrant the use of archetypes for didactic purposes.After all, archetypes derive from extreme cases: the extremes of a range of circumstances that emerge from a more widespread, underlying phenomenon.

CANDID OBSERVATIONS OF TWO SCENES:

It is no secret that the Meatpacking District in Manhattan is—in large part—a place where self-important trust-fund-kids and (astonishingly vapid) socialites tend to congregate.On a typical evening, one can behold New York's affluent—equipped with more money than they can possibly burn—milling about and lounging around–carousing and shopping.Here, one can witness the privileged few—chronically exhibiting a sense of entitlement—indulging in the gratuitous extravagance to which they've been habituated. They are typically aloof–attending to the petty cares and fickle concerns that define a privileged existence.

These members of the vaunted "upper crust" commiserate at fancy cafes and luxurious Manhattan lofts in what seems to be a perpetual orgy of self-indulgence.This all seems perfectly wonderful…until one notes that many of these people have never actually (personally) done anything for the common good.Ever.They have lots of money, but often not for noble reasons.They create nothing but more wealth for themselves—and deem that to be a praiseworthy accomplishment in and of itself.

Most of the patrons here in the Meatpacking District don’t contribute to society in any significant way because such endeavors aren’t germane to their sine qua non: preserving their own lofty status.They occupy their time with hob-nobbing, elbow-rubbing, and—when especially ambitious—finagling more ways to use their money to accumulate more money for themselves. Most of them are thoroughly convinced that they are automatically entitled to all that they have.It would rarely occur to them that—even as they don’t contribute in any significant way to the common good—there are millions of hoi polloi toiling away, being productive in whatever way they can, in order to just barely get by.

Behold: two different ways of “creating value”.

These denizens of the “high life” to which the Meatpacking District is tailored are perfectly content with the way things are.Their concerns tend not to stray beyond the boundaries of this happy existence of sipping Cosmos while engaging in idle chit-chat. It is a life of conspicuous consumption and glamour.They’re too busy enjoying their coveted privilege to care about…other things.

The fact that most people do not experience the luxury of such lifestyles is not only seen as unproblematic—it is the very source of their pride.These privileged few are untroubled by the tribulations of their fellow man, for they have their own topics to banter about at the NEXT chic restaurant—perhaps wondering if that new investment will pay hefty dividends.

What is not on their mind, then?Worrying about going bankrupt trying to pay medical bills…or how to pay their college loans…or how to keep up with the rent.Such concerns have never bothered them.They have “more important” things to worry about. The privileged few relish being the privileged few—and so don’t bother themselves with leveraging their access to power to fundamentally change things. There is zero incentive to alter the established order from which they so handily benefit.

Though such people like to masquerade as the most exalted specimens of mankind (the “achievers”, the “producers”, the “job creators”), they are often quite the contrary.Of course, many quasi-aristocrats esteem themselves to be eminently worthy of their lofty socio-economic status—because WHY WOULDN’T they be worthy? After all, here they are. It never occurs to them that, perhaps, not everyone has been blessed with the same good fortune.

These denizens of the upper crust carry on, content to indulge in all that their esteemed position has to offer.Yet, all the while, the underlying depravity of their coveted decadence is on full display for the impartial observer.

But here's the rub: Even as the social elite of New York's "high society" remain ensconced in their lifestyle, they are—for the most part—existentially and morally (not to mention, intellectually) impoverished.Such impoverishment is obfuscated by the overt opulence.Their sense of entitlement ensures that THIS kind of impoverishment goes unacknowledged.After all, if one is driving a Lamborghini Diablo, what is there to complain about?

And so it goes: This existential impoverishment continues, blissfully unacknowledged.That's perfectly fine with the powers-that-be. For most of these people are the sons and daughters of privilege.In other words, these are the people who MATTER.The covert impoverishment they embody, then, is unproblematic so far as the established order is concerned.They are who they are, and that's all there is to it.

Meanwhile…

If we take the A-train just 25 minutes up-town, we encounter a quite different kind of impoverishment.

Suddenly, we find ourselves in palpably unglamorous environs: a dingy cityscape of run-down buildings and dilapidated venues.Here, most people are materially impoverished.They are destitute, neglected, wallowing in the paucity of opportunities before them.How?Why?Have we stumbled upon an inferior caliber of homo sapiens?

We're in Harlem now—a place where privilege is not dolled out by the powers that be.Upon a cursory survey from the street-corner, one will instantly note that—unlike in the Meatpacking District—most people aren't white.What's going on here?Answer: These are the people who—to be blunt—don't matter quite so much…in the grand scheme of things.(Or so one would be lead to believe.)

Are these people inherently less deserving than the denizens of the Meatpacking District?Are white people just SMARTER and MORE WORTHY than all these people with darker skin?If not, what accounts for such a stark disparity in "deserts"?To reiterate: What's going on here? According to the MMM theory: just a case of just deserts.

Reality tells a different story. In Harlem, one may encounter an inner-city public school teacher who does more for human society any given week than many hedge-fund managers will do their entire lives.(But where is the schoolteacher's private helicopter?) In Harlem, one will encounter a public aid worker who does more for the general welfare than most investment bankers will do in a lifetime.Do these hard-working public servants demand golden faucets in their beachfront mansions in return for their diligent efforts? Are their efforts to—in some small way—help make the world a better place as lionized as a private equity titan?No.Why not? Because the workers here in Harlem will never have a beach-front mansion.Soon, we discover that procuring golden faucets it simply not what motivates most public school teachers in a poor neighborhood.

What's the explanation for all this? The public school teacher, we find, doesn't educate children to acquire mountains of cash for himself; he does it because it's fulfilling: he's doing his part to contribute to society in whatever way he can.He goes to sleep at night knowing that—perhaps—he's made a difference for another person.After all, helping other people is the sine qua non of his daily life.

Meanwhile, many of the Harlem-ites are resigned to their unprivileged lot in life.Why?Because most paths to the upper echelons of society are simply not open to them—never have been, and—so far as they can ascertain—never will be.But why not?As far as they're concerned, that's just the way it is.The struggling blue-collar worker is who he is, and that's all there is to it. He is born into a system where he just won't have the same access to key resources that others have: easy healthcare, lofty connections, or avenues to a high-echelon education.

So is he less capable of flourishing than the private equity titans he hears about?Is he, on average, less intelligent than the typical investment banker seated in a plush corporate office suite downtown?Well, no.Well, then, we must ask once again: What's going on here?

The typical public school teacher in Harlem toughs it out—knowing that though his students simply won't have the opportunities that kids in—say—Greenwich or Shore Hills have, he's doing something in the public interest.Meanwhile, he is working just enough to get rudimentary healthcare coverage and pay the rent in his modest apartment (assuming bloated medical bills and bloated school loans don't drive him into insolvency).

ASSESSING THE CONTRAST:

Back down in the Meatpacking District, we find a self-important man at a trendy club flaunting his absurdly expensive wristwatch (so as to ensure everyone present takes note of the fact that he has an absurdly expensive wristwatch).He is checking his stocks on his smart-phone to see how his fortune is faring…while trying to decide whether to order another bottle of Cristal.Seated beside him, his female companion (perhaps his wife, perhaps not; largely made of expensive plastic, garbed in haute couture) is toting her Town & Country magazine while taking great care to ensure nearby females notice her $8,000 handbag.The couple oozes a sense of entitlement that would make Nero blush.They are white.Both are as dumb as a box of hair.They are members of an elite club: the club of those who matter.

Those struggling in Harlem are of a different world, it seems—a world where the paths to prosperity are vastly different from those afforded palacial residencies in wealthy, white suburbia.The Harlem-ites' access to vital resources has always been different from those who dwell in the penthouses of mid-town.It's just the way of the world, it seems.So they carry on, struggling amidst crumbling infrastructure and egregiously under-funded schools, wondering if they will go bankrupt trying to pay the exorbitant medical bills for their elderly parents or their sick children.They'd love to change the world a little bit, somehow, but they just don't have much of a say in things.They never have, and figure they never will.

Their Congressman / Senator in Washington, after all, must raise obscene amounts of money to stay in office—and so devotes his/her time to currying favor with moneyed interests. This is a process that does not include investing in basic public infrastructure or vital social services in poor neighborhoods.De-regulating the financial services sector offers bountiful pay-offs. Helping poor minorities? Well, that sounds all fine and dandy for PR purposes, but it won't fill campaign coffers. Yes, democracy is supposed to be about everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, having access…being able to realize their full potential, if they choose to do so, whatever that potential may happen to be.

Put another way, there is a relatively straight-forward explanation for this enormous disparity.There is a reason nothing is done to address the odd disadvantage of the rabble.In the present scheme, those people of Harlem are the people who, essentially, don't matter as much.Consequently, their channels to the Halls of Power are, to put it mildly, limited.They have almost no leverage. After all, they have no prestige. They have no clout, so they have no input.Why should they?They have nothing to offer in the way of campaign contributions or quid quo pros. So they're

out of luck. Those in poor neighborhoods understand this. The hand they've been dealt has no cards to play.And why should that be the quasi-aristocracy's problem? The ruling class has bigger fish to fry.

What the denizens of the "high life" often forget is that the health of a society is determined by how well the worst-off are treated, not by how well off the best-off can become. (Such a thought tends not to cross one's mind when one is perpetually preoccupied with maintaining one's privilege…and everyone else is busy revering it.)

This is not to say that there aren't some people up in Harlem drinking Cristal —"ballers" flaunting their "bling" in an mis-guided effort to garner esteem.Nor is this to say that there aren't any patrons in the Meatpacking District's trendy venues who have actually earned every penny they have—and done so in a noble way.After all, some people ARE rich because they personally contributed to the betterment of society…and some people AREN'T rich simply because they're incompetent.Nevertheless, in both places, it is such notable exceptions that prove the rule.

The point here is to bring to light salient tendencies.These two places elucidate a trend, not an absolute law.It is a trend that indicates a non-egalitarian status quo–a status quo resulting from structural inequalities that go un-addressed. They goes un-addressed in spite of the fact that we (allegedly) live in a democratic society. But, one must ask oneself, what does "democratic" even mean?

POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS:

Two archetypes in one city, 25 minutes apart: West 14th St. to West 125th St. in just four stops on the A-train.The juxtaposition (and proximity) of these different scenes is striking.Each represents a different kind of impoverishment—and thus two distinct symptoms of societal dysfunction.One can't help but wonder: Is such dysfunction conducive to democracy, or is it antithetical to democracy? Obviously, people WITH power will tend to USE that power to PROTECT that power. But in what ways should this tendency be kept in check?

The privileged and the subaltern rabble described above represent two extremely different lots in life, but both involving human lives.Both exist within an ostensibly democratic society.Nobody doubts that these two drastically different fortunes

indicate a glaring inequality of outcome.The issue, then, is the explanation for such divergent outcomes.There are many theories that propose such explanations; the present essay offers what seems to be the most plausible explanation.

In sum, this inequality of outcome is no reflection of some corresponding disparity in merit.(The MMM theory has been debunked elsewhere: see me essays on the topic.)Rather, such drastic divergence in fortune seen in America is a consequence of something more systemic than can be explained by “different fruits for different endeavors”.What is at play is STRUCTURAL inequality.Insofar as structural inequality exists, can we still call a society genuinely democratic?What is a participatory democracy if it is not a system in which all people—irrespective of socio-economic status—may influence the system?What kind of political system would ensure that ALL people are afforded access to the levers of power—regardless of their ability to “buy” influence? What is a civil society if not ALL people having avenues open to them for realizing their potential?

What does “democracy” entail for the rank and file vis a vis the most privileged?It stands to reason that genuine democracy would be predicated on a “parity of access”. That is to say, a democratic society means all people have access to certain things—things by which the opportunity to realize one’s potential is based.We may call such things, “public goods”.It would seem, then, that democracy requires the elimination of structural inequalities even as it allows for inequality of outcome—outcomes based on disparities in merit, virtue, talent, personal prerogative, interests, initiative, dedication, will-power, dumb luck, innate capacities, etc.But this can only possibly happen when public goods (healthcare, education, clean air and water, safe streets) are made universally available…**so that there it makes no difference whatsoever whether one comes from Harlem or from Greenwhich, Connecticut**.

In the end, it’s a question of ACCESS.Social justice means nothing if it doesn’t involve the guarantee of universal access to high-quality public goods. So what do we mean by un-equal access?Evaluating the pseudo-aristocracy described above, one need only note the caliber of schools they attended k-12, the “connections” they have, the kind of colleges they were able to attend, the quality of healthcare that is (dependably) available to them, and the general social resources at their disposal (e.g. modes of transportation, domestic security, etc.)For each factor, a comparison to the pseudo-peasantry reveals a gigantic disparity.What does such a large disparity entail? Structural inequality.

The degree of democracy, then, is inversely proportional to the degree of structural inequality present in a society.

Barriers to entry, it seems, account for much of the difference in outcomes observed between rich and poor.But to what degree are such barriers allowed in a society that claims to ensure equal opportunity for all people?Must opportunity exist independently of socio-economic status?Only if the MMM Syndrome is recognized to be problematic.Only if public goods (like healthcare and education) are not treated as consumer products to be bought and sold in a marketplace. How democratic a society REALLY IS may be gaged by how well the worst-off are treated (not how well off the best-off can become). After all, benefits siphoned to the well-positioned few rarely “trickle down”.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Spend an hour with a typical public school teacher in Harlem, then with a typical investment banker from Tribeca, and see how the MMM theory holds up.Again, this is not to say that ALL people in Harlem have oodles of untapped potential…or that NO super-rich people deserve their massive fortunes.There are, indeed, plenty of exceptions in both cases.The point is that there are MANY people (TOO many people) in each place to whom the present depiction applies.More people fit the above caricature than is acceptable in a society that pretends to be even roughly meritocratic. It is a caricature–but all caricatures portray key elements of the actual case.

Are the public school teachers in Harlem less capable or less worthy than the high-flying wheeler-dealers in the swank venues downtown?Is the typical resident in Washington Heights less intelligent than the typical occupant of the luxury suite on Central Park East?Who personally contributes more to society’s weal?To pose the query once more: What is going on here?

Alas, what we’re witnessing here in America is a kind of neo-feudalism.It is a social order in which entrenched power structures offer unequal access to basic societal resources.Here, access is implicitly allotted based on socio-economic status.This translates to unequal opportunity—an inequality based on demographic group.That is to say, the inequitable allocation of opportunity results primarily from accident of birth…in conjunction with whatever favor can be curried with those working the levers of power.Consequently, not only is opportunity not equally distributed, but it is allotted based on patently non-meritocratic criteria.

A small ruling class conveniently quarantined from a massive subaltern population can't help but be the outcome of this process. America has calcified socio-economic stratification: the working class stagnates even as the privileged few channel most of the gains of the nation's economy into their own coffers.

The consequence of this pseudo-caste system is a flagrantly anti-meritocratic distribution of the fruits of the nation's economic activity.It's therefore not merely the unequal outcome itself that is the problem; it is that on which it is based that is at issue.Those who enjoy the lion's share of the spoils are often not those who are making the most positive contribution to society.(Investment bankers are an obvious example: often accumulating fortunes by mooching off of the fruits of others' productivity.)The pseudo-aristocracy is largely populated with free-riders.Meanwhile, it is they who are calling the shots, determining how such fruits shall continue to be distributed.

How convenient for them.

Within this system, then, some people are well-positioned, some people are not.Which is which, we find, has very little to do with the merit of either.The repercussions of this are simple: Some people matter more and some people matter less.Many of those who do nothing for society are showered with excess while many of those who contribute most to society end up struggling to survive. There's a name for that kind of society: plutocracy.

It is no secret that those who managed to accumulate the most wealth sometimes accumulate it via less-than-noble means (most notably, speculation).In such cases, the affluence is no measure of a positive contribution to the public good; it is instead a reflection of a happy position—a position that can be leveraged to perpetually accumulate wealth for oneself in ways that don't require actually creating anything of value for the rest of society.

If we want to see the de facto aristocracy of this neo-feudal order, we need only visit the Upper East Side or go to the Hamptons.If we want to see the de facto peasantry, we need only go to Washington Heights or visit the projects in the Bronx.Most of the pseudo-peasantry, one will find, are NOT white…while most of the pseudo-aristocracy ARE white.How is this?What is the explanation for such a consistent pattern?Are whites inherently better than blacks?If not, then what in heaven's name is going on here? What systemic dysfunction could possibly account for this striking trend?

If outcomes were based on sheer merit, then one could promptly conclude that white people were superior to people of color—that those born into wealth had been endowed with a superior stock.If MMM were true, one could conclude that the pseudo-aristocracy DESERVED their spoils because they EARNED it...or because they're of superior pedigree. If the unequal outcome was not a consequence of structural inequality, then social justice has been served.In such a scenario, the poor have nobody to blame but themselves for being poor.In this case, if you are disenfranchised, you brought it upon yourself.Meanwhile, the rich are rich because they deserve it.To the hoi polloi, we need only say, "Get over it."

Alas, common sense informs us that this is not the case.

Why is such egregious social injustice not being addressed?We may answer this query by posing another question: On a typical evening in the Meatpacking District, how many of the quasi-aristocracy are concerning themselves with the plight of the poor who are located up-town?The answer is quite plain: They don't care, because why should they?What's it to them?Why should THEY be burdened by the plight of the subaltern? It's not THEIR problem.

More to the point: How many Senators are concerned with alleviating the woes of those unlucky enough to be marginalized.How many Senators strive to address the disenfranchisement of the rabble resulting from the established order?What is the incentive structure, after all, for a power-broker in Washington D.C.?On K Street, what is the address of the lobbying firm for dish-washers in Harlem?

Alas, few Senators lose sleep at night over such matters.The Senator, after all, is one of the prime beneficiaries OF the established order.Why, then, would he be motivated to tamper with it?The incentive structure in which he finds himself is simply not conducive to altering things in such a way.His entire career is based on currying favor with moneyed interests whilst keeping the hoi polloi appeased, distracted, complacent, and satisfied with their right to place a vote every few years.

As things currently operate, the priorities of a public official are consonant with the degree to which constituents contribute to his campaign coffers.The mechanisms that make (and keep) the pseudo-aristocracy wealthy are precisely the mechanisms that fill those campaign coffers—and thus ensure the incumbent power structures remain as is.Favors-swapping dictates the legislative agenda; policy is a function of the quid pro quos available to lawmakers.

Logically, like any savvy opportunist, careerist politicians will cater to the interests of those who can return the favor.As a consequence of this modus operandi, those in public office will attend only to the requests of those who keep them in power.After all, those in power will leverage that power to preserve that power.It is, therefore, a government of, by, and for the privileged.

I could launch into some strident jeremiad about America's egregiously skewed priorities—about our fixation on glamour, decadence, excess, and material accumulation.But an indictment of our topsy-turvy values is another matter.The point here is strictly ECONOMIC.The fact is that such flagrant structural inequalities exist, that such highly-concentrated wealth is antithetical to a genuine democracy, that such severe socio-economic stratification is deleterious to the weal of a society, and that we most certainly do not live in a merit-based system.Poor people are destitute often NOT due to some shortcoming that brings their deficient lot in life upon them…while the super-rich are basking in affluence often NOT due to some fount of excellence they embody.

Something is very, very amiss.

EPILOGUE:

I sit in the Meatpacking District, alarmed.Harlem: A 25-minute subway ride away, yet another world away.Two vastly different outcomes are before me, begging for an explanation.I conclude that one outcome involves moral impoverishment amidst material opulence…while the other involves a more overt deficiency: material impoverishment.Both conditions perpetuate the on-going social injustice that account for those conditions.

Indeed, it is a positive feedback loop.Local taxation in poor neighborhoods yields under-funded public infrastructure…while the rich live in resplendent communities, with unlimited access to high-quality education, the best healthcare, and top-notch security.It is no wonder, than, that things continue to turn out the way they turn out.

The poor are deprived of access to key avenues of opportunity—because they are poor.Existence for the wealthy is a different story: Every public good is at the fingertips, the levers of power at their beacon call.If the access to education or medicine doesn't suit them, they always have the option to shop around for expensive alternatives in the marketplace.After all, we live in a society where

education and health are FOR SALE. Instead of being treated as a public service, education and medicine are consumer products, to be peddled by for-profit ventures to those able to make the purchase. Tough luck for everyone else.

Of the rich, we could ask: Who'd want to give any of that up—even just SOME of it—in the name of the common good?Any takers?Putting the general welfare above ones own indulgences in material excess is an unpalatable proposition for most of the denizens the "high life".Of course, the political system is rigged to cater to those who MATTER: those with money.The electoral and legislative processes are run on money—and can't help but serve the interests of those WITH money.So this neo-feudal condition is self-reinforcing…and self-perpetuating.Naturally, the privileged are inclined to leverage their privilege toward maintaining the conditions on which their continued privilege depends.

Questions arise: Why would someone willingly concede to alterations in the established order if that is precisely the set-up on which one's privileged position is predicated?Why would someone agree to modify the current system if it means abdicating some of his socio-economic status?Such an incentive simply isn't part of the picture.If left to their own dispositions, it is not those who benefit from the rigged system who will work diligently to un-rig it.Yet—as the system now operates—those are the only people who's interested are accommodated.They're the only ones who CAN un-rig it. The result is a catch-22.

It should be little wonder, then, that the colossal income disparity in the United States has reached levels not seen since the Great Depression.When CEOs are making 300 times as much as the average employee, we know that compensation no longer reflects merit, but is the stuff of entrenched aristocracy.In 2008, for example, the wealthiest 0.1% of earners took in more than 10% of the personal income in the United States, including capital gains.Meanwhile, the wealthiest 1% took in more than 20%.Over the last generation, real income for the rank and file (90% of the population) has stagnated even as executive compensation has quadrupled.(So much for "trickle-down" economics.)This is not accounted for by some sort of merit-based remuneration; it can be none other than the consequence of a system rigged BY a plutocracy FOR plutocrats.

We can ask of this discomfiting status quo: "Cui bono?And who gets shafted?"

If one takes the time to look around, the answers to both questions become quite apparent.The scene in the Meatpacking district and the scene in Harlem tell the whole story.Democracy, we find, is more than about just being able to push a button in a voting booth every couple years—selecting one from the available alternatives—each of whom is basing his agenda on currying favor with the moneyed interests on which his career depends.We wind up with two things:

- A ruling class, based on a chronic sense of entitlement (unhealthy)
- A proletariat that either resigns themselves to their inferior lot in life (unhealthy) or that persists in a stew of simmering resentment (unhealthy)

What I’m observing is two different kinds of impoverishment: one based on an epidemic depravity of character and the other based on systematic material disenfranchisement.Both kinds of impoverishment must be attended to if we are to ever live in a genuinely democratic society.In the meantime, a more appropriate moniker for the U.S. would be: “Land of opportunity for those lucky enough to have privileged access.”It’s not as catchy, but it is far more accurate.