(6:43) Snapshot of the United States at the Beginning of the 21st century

Data Source: Michael Parenti *Dirty Truths* (City Light Books, 1996)

**Questions**

1. Which of these problems do you find most pressing? Explain.

2. In your opinion, what can be done to address these problems?

Prisons: 5,100,000 are behind bars or on probation or parole; 2,700,000 of these are either locked up in county, state or federal prisons or under legal supervision. Each week 1,600 more people go to jail than leave. The prison population has skyrocketed over 200 percent since 1980. Over 40 percent of inmates are jailed on nonviolent drug related crimes. African Americans constitute 13 percent of drug users but 35 percent of drug arrests, 55 percent of drug convictions and 74 percent of prison sentences. For non-drug offenses, African Americans get prison terms that average about 10 percent longer than Caucasians for similar crimes.

Mental Illness: 280,000 are institutionalized for mental illness or mental retardation. Many of these are forced into taking heavy doses of mind control drugs. 255,000 mentally ill or retarded have been summarily released in recent years. Many of the “deinstitutionalized” are now in flophouses or wandering the streets.

Disease: 15,000 people have tuberculosis, with the numbers growing rapidly; 10,000,000 or more carry the tuberculosis bacilli, with large numbers among the economically deprived or addicted. 16,000,000 have diabetes, up from 11,000,000 in 1983 as Americans get more sedentary and sugar addicted. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure and nerve damage. 3,000,000 or more suffer cerebral and physical handicaps including paralysis, deafness, blindness, and lesser disabilities. A disproportionate number of them are poor. Many of these disabilities could have been corrected with early treatment or prevented with better living conditions. 10,000,000 suffer from symptomatic asthma, an increase of 145 percent from 1990 to 1995, largely due to the increasingly polluted quality of the air we breathe. 1,000,000 are estimated to have AIDS; over 250,000 have died of that disease. 40,000,000 or more are without health insurance or protection from catastrophic illness.

Elder Care: 1,800,000 elderly who live with their families are subjected to serious abuse such as forced confinement, underfeeding, and beatings. 1,126,000 of the elderly live in nursing homes. A large but undetermined number endure conditions of extreme neglect, filth, and abuse in homes that are run with an eye to extracting the highest possible profit.

Children: 1,000,000 or more children are kept in orphanages, reformatories, and adult prisons. 950,000 school children are treated with powerful mind control drugs for “hyperactivity” every year with side effects like weight loss, growth retardation and acute psychosis. 4,000,000 children are growing up with unattended learning disabilities. 4,500,000 children, or more than half of the 9,000,000 children on welfare, suffer from malnutrition.

Work: 7,000,000 to 12,000,000 are unemployed; numbers vary with the business cycle. Increasing numbers of the chronically unemployed show signs of stress and emotional depression. 6,000,000 are in “contingent” jobs, or jobs structured to last only temporarily. About 60 percent of these would prefer permanent employment. 15,000,000 or more are part-time or reduced-time “contract” workers who need full-time jobs and who work without benefits. 3,000,000 additional workers are unemployed but uncounted because their unemployment benefits have run out, or they never qualified for benefits, or they have given up looking for work, or they joined the armed forces because they were unable to find work.

Poverty: 80,000,000 live on incomes estimated by the U.S. Department of Labor as below a “comfortable adequacy”; 35,000,000 of these live below the poverty level. 12,000,000 of those at poverty’s rock bottom suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. The majority of the people living at or below the poverty level experience hunger during some portion of the year. 2,000,000 or more are homeless, forced to live on the streets or in makeshift shelters.