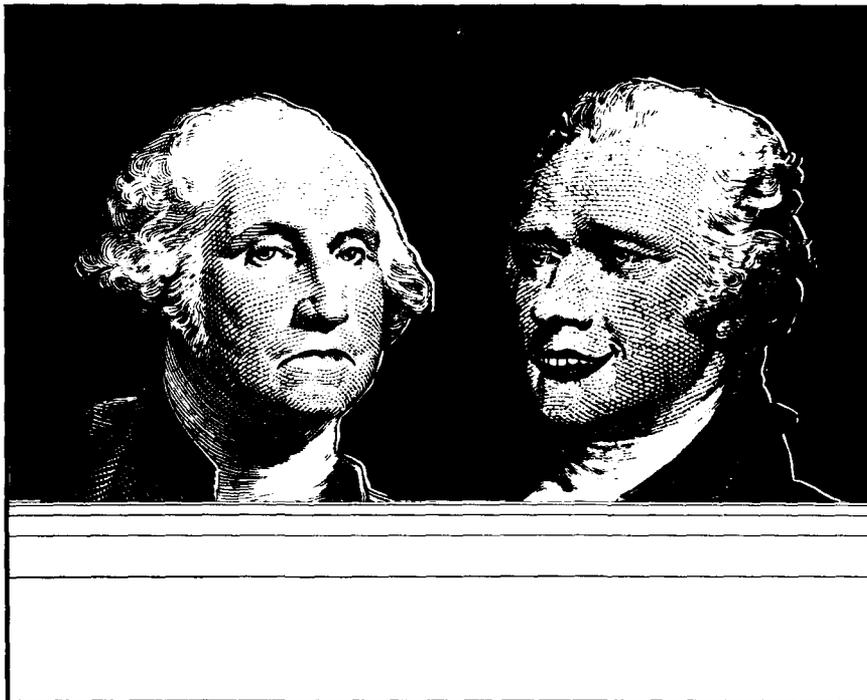


# Let's Cut the Poortalk

by David Myers and Thomas Ludwig



JIM HARTER

**A** DEBILITATING IDEA afflicts American thinking. It is highly contagious, perhaps because people enjoy having it. Moreover, once it starts to spread, people quickly try to one-up each other to see who has it the worst. The ailment contaminates people at all levels of income and education—college faculty, union workers, business executives.

We call this affliction *poortalk*. As people's spending outstrips their income, they feel and proclaim that they are underpaid, defeated by inflation and taxes, and incapable of affording their family's needs. Workers complain they cannot make ends meet on their inadequate salaries. Friends grouse to one another about rising costs and find bittersweet pleasure in itemizing what they cannot afford. People living in lavish homes bemoan the cost of trivial items.

But the fact is that buying power is *not* less than it used to be. Everyone knows that consumer prices have more than doubled in the past 20 years, but we are less vividly conscious that our average income has tripled. Our real disposable income, corrected for inflation and taxes, has risen 57 percent during this same period. Why then do we not *feel* 57 percent more affluent? Why do Americans today report no greater feelings of happiness than did Americans 30 years ago? Why do yesterday's luxuries become today's necessities, leading people to feel that their needs are always slightly greater than their income?

Psychological researchers have developed a principle that helps explain our insatiability. It is called the adaptation-level principle, and its basic point (which actually dates back to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers) is that

our expectations of success and failure, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, even justice and injustice, are relative to our prior experience and to what we observe people like ourselves receiving. If our achievements rise above these expectations, we experience success and satisfaction. If they fall below, we feel dissatisfied and frustrated.

If the achievements persist, notes Northwestern University psychologist Donald Campbell, our experience is recalibrated so that what was formerly positive is now only neutral and what was formerly neutral becomes negative. Thus, humans can never create a social paradise on earth. Once achieved, our utopia would soon be recalibrated, and we would again feel sometimes pleased, sometimes deprived, and sometimes neutral.

This adaptation-level principle helps explain why poortalk is especially prevalent now. American prosperity nearly doubled in the quarter century following World War II—an unprecedented growth in affluence. The 1973 oil price hikes skyrocketed the costs of fuel, housing, and health care, and inflation is now consuming most of our increased earnings. So even though real income is up considerably from past decades, most of us are still evaluating our present experience in relation to the more rapidly rising prosperity of the Fifties and Sixties. The result is poortalk.

But aren't all of us in the same boat? Why are so many people dissatisfied when they compare their lot in life with others in their own groups? One reason is that people generally perceive themselves to be more admirable and deserving than those others. This phenomenon has been observed many times in laboratory experiments and in national surveys. Most people see themselves as superior to the average members of their groups. These perceptions are obviously distorted: The

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**Dwelling on one's relative deprivations reduces the likelihood of taking action to reduce the absolute deprivation of others.**

average person is *not* better than the average person. The human tendency to see oneself as better than others is surely a source of discontent. When merit salary raises are awarded by a company, half of the employees will receive an average or less-than-average raise. Since few perceive themselves as average or less-than-average employees, many will feel an injustice has been done them. The result: more poortalk.

The dissatisfactions bred by adaptation to affluence and by pride are compounded by yet another psychological phenomenon. Laboratory experiments indicate that when people are given the opportunity to compare themselves with various other people like themselves, they generally choose to compare themselves with those whose performance or rewards have been superior rather than inferior to their own. This behavior parallels that found in the real world. As an employee group or a family increases in affluence and social status, its members elevate the comparison standards by which they evaluate their own achievements. When climbing the ladder, people look up, not down; their attention is where they are going, not where they have come from. Unfortunately, the ladder is infinite; so unless we renounce the climb, we will forever be comparing ourselves with others who are still above us. The result of this upward comparison is still more poortalk.

Although poortalk is understandable, it is nevertheless debilitating. First, it makes us feel worse about our plight than is necessary. We enjoy complaining and commiserating; yet the very act of complaining increases our unhappiness. Psychologists have found that what we say influences what we think and feel. Too much poortalk can sour our thinking and diminish our satisfaction with life.

Second, poortalk focuses our attention on ourselves, thus blinding us to the genuine needs of those who lack the basic necessities of life: clean water, adequate nutrition, a roof overhead, and medical care. Dwelling on one's relative deprivations reduces the likelihood of taking action to reduce the absolute deprivation of others.

Third, by negatively comparing present experience with fantasies about the "good old days," poortalk interferes

with the needed recalibration of our experience. When conservation and enormous energy bills become a way of life, most Americans will calibrate their experience again, this time downward, and thus will eventually recover life's normal balance of satisfaction, neutrality, and disappointment. Suppressing poortalk facilitates this recalibration process and thus helps lessen the frustration and despair that accompany adaptation to a simpler way of life.

Those making a conscious effort to reduce poortalk know that it is not easy. We can, however, take some steps to muffle poortalk's siren song, steps that could help us find satisfaction while living on a moderate income. We can analyze our present life satisfaction in light of the adaptation-level principle. Recognizing the relativity of our perceived deprivation can diminish our feelings of deprivation. Recognizing our past captivity to our appetites can open us to a new perspective on life, such as Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount: Happy are those who renounce selfish ambition, who cease clutching at things. Simple living unclutters the heart and makes room for those things that have ultimate value.

We can also go out of our way to confront true poverty. Discovering how relatively small our needs and problems are can reduce the insensitivity to real poverty that always accompanies poortalk as well as give us an appreciation for the extent to which some people's *real* needs are items we take for granted. Realizing this not only sensitizes us to the suffering of the truly impoverished, but also helps us develop gratitude for what we have.

If our limited supply of energy and natural resources necessitates a no-growth economy, or even simplified ways of living, will we be able to cope with the future? Will we ever be free from captivity to our material appetites? Becoming aware of the relativity of our appetites and reducing poortalk can be steps toward liberation from the pain that so often accompanies economic change. ●

*Social psychologist David Myers is the author of The Human Puzzle: Psychological Research and Christian Belief, just published by Harper & Row. Thomas Ludwig holds a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from Washington University.*

# HOW TO GET RICH THE LAZY MAN'S WAY

I used to work hard. The 18-hour days. The 7-day weeks.

But I didn't start making big money until I did less—a lot less.

For example, this ad took about 2 hours to write. With a little luck, it should earn me 50, maybe a hundred thousand dollars.

What's more, I'm going to ask you to send me 10 dollars for something that'll cost me no more than 50 cents. And I'll try to make it so irresistible that you'd be a darned fool not to do it.

After all, why should you care if I make \$9.50 profit if I can show you how to make a lot more?

What if I'm so sure that you will make money my Lazy Man's Way that I'll make you a most unusual guarantee?

And here it is: I won't even cash your check or money order for 31 days after I've sent you my material.

That'll give you plenty of time to get it, look it over, try it out.

If you don't agree that it's worth at least a hundred times what you invested, send it back. Your uncashed check or money order will be put in the return mail.

The only reason I won't send it to you and bill you or send it C.O.D. is because both these methods involve more time and money.

And I'm already going to give you the biggest bargain of your life.

Because I'm going to tell you what it took me 11 years to perfect: How to make money the Lazy Man's Way.

O.K.—now I have to brag a little. I don't mind it. And it's necessary—to prove that sending me the 10 dollars . . . which I'll keep "in escrow" until you're satisfied . . . is the smartest thing you ever did.

I live in a home that's worth \$250,000. I know it is, because I turned down an offer for that much. My mortgage is less than half that, and the only reason I haven't paid it off is because my Tax Accountant says I'd be an idiot.

My "office," about a mile and a half from my home, is right on the beach. My view is so breathtaking that most people comment that they don't see how I get any work done. But I do enough. About 6 hours a day, 8 or 9 months a year.

The rest of the time we spend at our mountain "cabin." I paid \$30,000 for it—cash.

I have 2 boats and a Cadillac. All paid for.

We have stocks, bonds, investments, cash in the bank. But the most important thing I have is priceless: time with my family.

And I'll show you just how I did it—the Lazy Man's Way—a secret that I've shared with just a few friends 'til now.

It doesn't require "education." I'm a high school graduate.

It doesn't require "capital." When I started out, I was so deep in debt that a lawyer friend advised bankruptcy as the only way out. He was wrong. We paid off our debts and, outside of the mortgage, don't owe a cent to any man.

It doesn't require "luck." I've had more than my share, but I'm not promising you that you'll make as much money as I have. And you may do better; I personally know one man who used these principles, worked hard, and made 11 million dollars in 8 years. But money isn't everything.

It doesn't require "talent." Just enough brains to know what to look for. And I'll tell you that.

It doesn't require "youth." One woman I worked with is over 70. She's travelled the world over, making all the money she needs, doing only what I taught her.

It doesn't require "experience." A widow in Chicago has been averaging \$25,000 a

*“ . . . I didn't have a job and I was worse than broke. I owed more than \$50,000 and my only assets were my wife and 8 children. We were renting an old house in a decaying neighborhood, driving a 5-year old car that was falling apart, and had maybe a couple of hundred dollars in the bank.*

*Within one month, after using the principles of the Lazy Man's Way to Riches, things started to change — to put it mildly.*

- We worked out a plan we could afford to pay off our debts — and stopped our creditors from hounding us.
- We were driving a brand-new Thunderbird that a car dealer had given to us!
- Our bank account had multiplied tenfold!
- All within the first 30 days!

And today . . .

- I live in a home that's worth over \$250,000.
- I own my "office". It's about a mile and a half from my home and is right on the beach.
- I own a lakefront "cabin" in Washington. (That's where we spend the whole summer — loafing, fishing, swimming and sailing.)
- I own two oceanfront condominiums. One is on a sunny beach in Mexico and one is snuggled right on the best beach of the best island in Hawaii.
- I have two boats and a Cadillac. All paid for.
- I have a net worth of over a Million Dollars. But I still don't have a job . . .”

year for the past 5 years, using my methods.

What does it require? Belief. Enough to take a chance. Enough to absorb what I'll send you. Enough to put the principles into action. If you do just that—nothing more, nothing less—the results will be hard to believe. Remember—I guarantee it.

You don't have to give up your job. But you may soon be making so much money that you'll be able to. Once again—I guarantee it.

The wisest man I ever knew told me something I never forgot: "Most people are too busy earning a living to make any money."

Don't take as long as I did to find out he was right.

Here are some comments from other people. I'm sure that, like you, they didn't believe me either. Guess they figured that, since I wasn't going to deposit their check for 31 days, they had nothing to lose.

They were right. And here's what they gained:

#### \$260,000 in eleven months

"Two years ago, I mailed you ten dollars in sheer desperation for a better life . . . One year ago, just out of the blue sky, a man called and offered me a partnership . . . I grossed over \$260,000 cash business in eleven months. You are a God sent miracle to me."

B. F., Pascagoula, Miss.

#### Made \$16,901.92 first time out

"The third day I applied myself totally to what you had shown me. I made \$16,901.92. That's great results for my first time out."

J. J. M., Watertown, N.Y.

#### 'I'm a half-millionaire'

"Thanks to your method, I'm a half-millionaire . . . would you believe last year at this time I was a slave working for peanuts?"

G. C., Toronto, Canada

#### \$7,000 in five days

"Last Monday I used what I learned on page 83 to make \$7,000. It took me all week to do it, but that's not bad for five day's work."

M. D., Topeka, Kansas

#### Can't believe success

"I can't believe how successful I have become . . . Three months ago, I was a telephone order taker for a fastener company in Chicago, Illinois. I was driving a beat-up 1959 Rambler and had about

\$600 in my savings account. Today, I am the outside salesman for the same fastener company. I'm driving a company car . . . I am sitting in my own office and have about \$3,000 in my savings account."

G. M., Des Plaines, Ill.

I know you're skeptical. After all, what I'm saying is probably contrary to what you've heard from your friends, your family, your teachers and maybe everyone else you know. I can only ask you one question.

How many of them are millionaires?

So it's up to you:

A month from today, you can be nothing more than 30 days older — or you can be on your way to getting rich. You decide.

#### Sworn Statement:

"On the basis of my professional relationship as his accountant, I certify that Mr. Karbo's net worth is more than one million dollars."

Stuart A. Cogan

#### Bank Reference:

Home Bank  
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Fountain Valley, California 92708

Joe Karbo  
17105 South Pacific, Dept. 337-H  
Sunset Beach, California 90742

Joe, you may be full of beans, but what have I got to lose? Send me the Lazy Man's Way to Riches. But don't deposit my check or money order for 31 days after it's in the mail.

If I return your material — for any reason — within that time, return my uncashed check or money order to me. On that basis, here's my ten dollars.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

© 1978 Joe Karbo

# Nubia's African- Egyptian- Western Art

by Vicki Goldberg

Prince Arikhaner  
Smiting Enemies  
— "No longer  
thought of as  
a debased  
Egyptian offspring."



**F**OR YEARS, Westerners looked at African culture through a scrim of prejudice. The continent (except for Egypt) was presumed to have neither art nor history. It took Derain and Picasso to recognize that primitive idols and ethnographic curiosities constituted a powerful art. It took scholars some years more to discover that the ancient land of Nubia south to Khartoum had a history approximately as long as history itself. Only the near destruction of that land and its people prompted a close study of its remarkable past. Now the first major show of this culture ever mounted is on view at the Brooklyn Museum—Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan (through December 31).

In the 19th century, the colonial powers had conveniently assumed that Egypt alone of African lands had a rich past, and Egypt, of course, was Western. But by 1959, when modern tech-

nology and the new economic imperialism, in the shape of the high dam at Aswan, presented a clear danger to what remained of ancient Nubia, a great international effort was made to rescue and study the fragments of the area's history. Just before the dam flooded all of Egyptian Nubia and forced one half the population to move outside their homeland, ancient Nubia became what is probably the most exhaustively excavated area in the world.

Only yesterday, when Nubian art was thought about at all, it was thought of as a kind of ugly bastard, a debased Egyptian offspring. Egypt had dominated Nubia from around 1500 B.C. to around 1000 B.C. and had built such temples there as Abu Simbel and Dendur (Dendur has been reconstructed and is now on view at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art). Then the Nubian Kingdom of Kush ruled Egypt, from 747 to 656 B.C., and Kushite art adopted Egyptian conventions includ-

ing fractional representation (faces and legs drawn in profile, eyes and torsos drawn from the front), the sphinx, and such Egyptian gods as the ram-headed Amun. There are more pyramids in Kush than in Egypt itself.

But something was always wrong.

Long after Egypt achieved sophistication, art in Nubia remained rather primitive, producing little but pottery with geometric designs and clay figurines of women with heads like thumbs and enormous, scarified hips. Pyramids did not rise in Kush until 800 years after Egypt stopped building them. Kushite figures, even when they imitate Egyptian, tend to be squat and overweight, with faces that may be bald. They wear too much jewelry. They worship odd gods. They rarely possess the extravagant elegance of Tutankhamun's perfectly measured, ideal, golden world. Egypt gone sour, so to speak.