
Does Capitalism Reduce Poverty?

Videos:

“Richard Wolff Responds to the Argument Capitalism Has Improved Poverty”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHnDmtwKWYM> (3:07 minutes)

“Hate capitalism? Too bad it keeps lifting billions out of poverty”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEeb04T4Zt0> (4:04 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. What is capitalism?
3. Richard Wolff said that “politicians, professors, [and] media folks” often make the argument that capitalism shouldn’t be criticized because it has reduced poverty. Had you heard this argument before? Do you think capitalism is often protected from criticism? Why/Why not?
4. Tristin Hopper showed that the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped by more than half. Did that surprise you? How does it impact your outlook on poverty today?
5. Richard Wolff said: “Capitalists have resisted virtually every effort to do away with poverty that I am aware of.” What did he mean by this?
6. Tristin Hopper said: "In the late 1970s, 98% of rural China was below the poverty line. By 2016, it was 4.5%." To what did he credit this development? What were some specific changes the Chinese government made in the late 1970s?
7. Richard Wolff said that capitalists often fight against raising the minimum wage. Does this mean capitalists are against fighting poverty? Why/Why not?
8. Tristin Hopper said the common factor shared by countries that drastically reduced poverty is market liberalization. What is market liberalization?
9. Richard Wolff said that when confronted with rising wages, employers “move jobs out of the country to where wages are cheaper....They bring in immigrants who are desperate in order

to give them jobs at lower money....” What impacts do these have on poverty? Are the impacts positive or negative? Why?

10. Tristin Hopper said that South Korea was once one of the poorest countries, but now "we're all using Samsung phones and watching Squid Game, while Korea enjoys one of the lowest relative poverty rates in the OECD." This is an example of globalization. Do you think this is a good thing? Why/Why not?
11. Richard Wolff credited unions and workers for improving working conditions. What are some ways that working conditions have improved?
12. Tristin Hopper said: "[T]o capitalism's credit, once countries get rich, one of the first things they do is pay to stop their rivers from catching on fire." What did he mean by this?
13. If capitalism is a barrier to reducing poverty, how has poverty fallen as global capitalism has grown?
14. If capitalism does reduce poverty, why do we still have poverty in capitalist countries like the United States?
15. After watching these videos, do you think capitalism gets too much credit for reducing poverty or not enough? Why/Why not?
16. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
17. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
18. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
19. What else would you like to learn about this topic?