

Hunger and Hoarding in the Welfare State

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The Huffington Post:

Suzanne Collins' futuristic trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, takes place in Panem, a totalitarian nation of obscene wealth and pervasive poverty. Its twelve districts are all impoverished, but District 12, the coal-mining region formerly called Appalachia, is the poorest of the poor. Citizens struggle to eke out a living in the mines, but hunger is the norm and the unfortunate routinely die of starvation.

Panem is the opposite of a welfare state. There is no dole, no safety net — certainly no 47 percent. Indeed, there is no institutional sharing at all. Katniss Everdeen, the tale's hero, nearly starves to death as a child, and later turns to hunting and foraging to provide for herself and her family. But she expects no handouts, nor does she receive any.

In some ways, District 12's plight is not unlike that of our primitive human ancestors, who also had to devise strategies to get by in a world of scarce resources. They also hunted and foraged for plants, and they also faced periods of debilitating hunger. But our ancient ancestors came up with a better solution to the problem of scarcity. They embraced communal values, in words if not in actions.

That's the theory of psychological scientists Lene Aaroe and Michael Bang Petersen, both of the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Aaroe and Petersen believe that resource sharing was so crucial to human survival that it became deeply engrained in our collective psyche, where it remains today. Indeed, modern social welfare policies and institutions may be simply a modern manifestation of an ancient mental strategy to coerce widespread sharing.

Read the whole story: [*The Huffington Post*](#)

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