No room for poor in Reagan's world

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In fairness to Reagan, I will grant he has good intentions, and he feels that in the long run, the poor, too, will benefit. But the fact is that the gap between the rich and the affluent is widening, not narrowing. And it is clear from the Reagan administration's remarks that it has an incredibly unrealistic perception of the hard facts of poverty.

Reagan gleefully attributes the increase in the number of homeless to people voluntarily choosing to live free from the bureaucratic hassles of owning or renting a place to live, while Edwin Meese declares there is no hunger in America. Such statements make it clear that the poor are not priorities for the Reagan administration.

Nor is it possible to make a case for the growing disparity in incomes being a necessary sacrifice to "get us headed in the right direction," of governmental austerity. Nowhere is it engraved in history. It was, after all, that supposed "golden age of government" among industrial nations which among industrial nations has the fewest — not the most — rates and regulations. Yet Switzerland, Denmark, West Germany, and Sweden all have per capita GNP larger than ours, and income distribution with much less inequality.

Yet Reagan goes blithely on his merry way, mechanically repeating his speeches about getting government off our backs. We have a renewed confidence in our economy, he says, and are "standing tall," back on our way to "greatness.

Well, those who are in that most affluent quintile may be feeling confident. And if they don't mind getting richer on the backs of the poor who are getting poorer, they may feel like standing tall. If that is the type of economic greatness we are looking for, then maybe we should re-elect Reagan.

But there is another kind of greatness, too. That is the greatness that is measured in compassion. With this greatness we may move forward by elevating our fellow man, instead of stepping on him. That is what I believe is America's greatness.

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