

Measuring Poverty *(continued)*

It is widely understood that the Department of Labor's official measure of Americans in poverty is crude, at best offering a sense of trends in material hardship (see the *Milken Institute Review*, 1st Quarter 2006, p. 96). Indeed, thoughtful conservatives such of Robert Rector and Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation counter that most Americans classified as poor generally now consume as much as middle-class Americans consumed in the 1970s.

HOUSING, SQUARE FEET PER RESIDENT

U.S. Average: 721

U.S. Poor: 439

U.S. Poor, Apartment Dwellers: 320

Germany Average: 424

France Average: 379

Greece Average: 285

Spain Average: 278

Sweden Average: 460

Nonetheless, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about poverty because low-income Americans:

- Get the short end of the stick on key public services – education and police protection.
- Cope with greater financial insecurity, occasionally experiencing catastrophic hardship.
- Are in relatively poor health, because they are more likely to smoke, be obese, abuse drugs and get sub-standard medical care.
- Live in single-parent households.

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN THE BOTTOM-FIFTH OF THE INCOME DISTRIBUTION THAT OWN:

House: 46

Refrigerator: 99

Color television: 97

Cable television: 63

Microwave oven: 73

Dishwasher: 34

Air conditioner: 76

Clothes washer: 65

Car or truck: 73

VCR or DVD player: 78

SOURCES: Heritage Foundation 2004
(www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/bg1713.cfm)

