

AMERICA: UNEQUAL
PUBLIC POLICY 113, CSRE 3P, & SOC 3

Why This Course Matters!

Course Information

Quarter offered: Autumn, 2018-2019

Credits: 4

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays (3pm-4:20pm), Building 300, Room 300

Professor: David B. Grusky
(grusky@stanford.edu, 2nd floor, Bldg. 370)

Regular office hours: Thursday, 4:30pm-5:30pm, feel free to stop in!

Appointments on other days: Contact Catherine Lechicki, lechicki@stanford.edu, to schedule

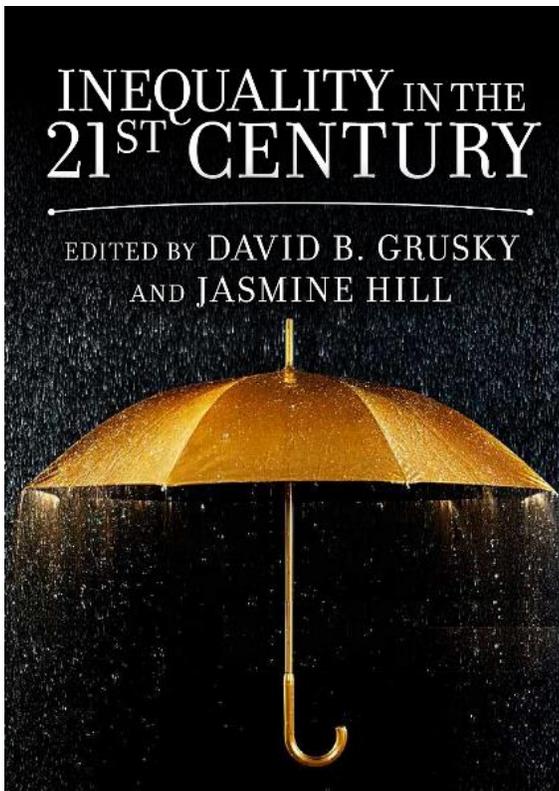
Teaching Assistant: Molly King
(kingmo@stanford.edu, office hours to be announced)

The U.S. is in the midst of an inequality explosion. The upper class has become wondrously rich. Abject poverty is on the rise. A de facto caste system – in which opportunities to get ahead depend on a birth lottery – is firmly in place and is now viewed as natural. The historic decline in gender inequality, which many had thought would continue on until full equality was achieved, has stalled out for many key outcomes. And extreme racial discrimination and racial animus remain at the center of the American story some 150 years after the end of the Civil War. All of this has happened in a so-called land of opportunity.

But *how* did it happen? Why have so many forms of inequality come to be seen as normal and natural? What are the costs of running a highly unequal society? And are there any equalizing forces on the horizon?

The first half of *America: Unequal* will be devoted to presenting the best available evidence – typically drawn from new troves of big data – on the sources and causes of recent changes in income inequality, residential segregation, poverty and homelessness, and racial and gender inequality.

The second half of the course examines the possibility of countervailing inequality-reducing movements. Could a basic income movement change everything? Can we high-tech our way out of inequality? Could opportunity be “taken out of the market” by treating it as a fundamental right? Can we nudge our way to equality? Could a new affirmative action movement be on the horizon? For each of these inequality-reducing possibilities, we’ll explore how change might happen ... either via top-down reform or a bottom-up movement.



Intellectual ambition: We'll be presenting the best and latest research on inequality rather than some watered-down formulation. Although we have high intellectual ambitions, we're deeply committed to clarity of analysis ... not obfuscation!

Exams: This is a course about the type of world we want to build and whether we're charting a course for disaster. By that high standard, grading seems more than a bit prosaic. That said, grades are a necessary evil, and our best and only approach, therefore, is to try to reduce the stress associated with the process by being as transparent as possible. The two exams (which are in-class, closed-book) will involve answering one of the three study questions that will be made available on the website and reviewed in the discussion sessions. Although you will not know which questions we shall select, you will see in advance all possible questions. For each of the two exams, one of these study questions will be selected, and your simple task will be to answer it (a simple task because hopefully you've prepared for it). The first exam will occur in class on Thursday, Oct. 25th, and the second exam will occur in class on Thursday, Dec. 6th. The second exam will not be cumulative (i.e., it will only cover materials in the second half of the course).

Opinion piece: In addition to the two in-class exams, you'll be expected to write an opinion piece, a short 1000-word essay due on Friday, October 19 (to be uploaded on the course website by no later than 5pm that day). We are looking for a special type of opinion piece that's built around a pregnant fact, a fact that is underappreciated by a general audience yet has implications for the views they hold or positions they adopt. The assigned readings and lectures will provide some of these "pregnant facts," but you're free also to draw on facts available from outside sources. This approach departs from the more typical approach to writing an opinion piece. The typical author of an opinion piece will *begin* with a commitment to a certain position (e.g., "there's just too much income inequality these days") and then scurry around to dredge up facts that might be construed as substantiating that view. We want you to instead begin with the fact and ask how it might inform our understanding of inequality. That is, instead of taking some predetermined commitment as the starting point, your job is to begin with an unappreciated fact (e.g., economic segregation is increasing; absolute mobility is declining) and think creatively about what it means.

Essay: The fourth and final assignment is a 2500-word essay describing your assessment of how inequality in the U.S. will look in the year 2050. In laying out the likely future of inequality, your task is to try to figure out how trends in the key indicators (e.g., income inequality, segregation, pay gaps) will likely play out, with due attention to the effects of possible shocks (e.g., climate change, economic depression, wars, revolutions) on those forces. The essay should provide (a) a description of key inequality facts in 2050 (e.g., income inequality, labor force participation, residential segregation, gender pay gap, racial discrimination), and (b) a description of the social forces (e.g., automation, declining mobility, war) that explain why the trends played out as they did. This essay is due on Friday, Dec. 14th and should be uploaded to the course website by no later than 5pm that day.

Grading rules: The grades for the course will thus be based on the two exams (25 percent each), the opinion piece (25 percent), and the final essay (25 percent). The grades for each of these four components will be provided in the form of points (ranging from 0-100 points). The grading scheme is as follows:

97-100 points: A+; 93-96 points: A; 90-92 points: A-
87-89 points: B+; 83-86 points: B; 80-82 points: B-
77-79 points: C+; 73-76 points: C; 70-72 points: C-
67-69 points: D+; 63-66 points: D; Under 63 points: F

Website: The lecture notes, study questions, and other course information can be found on the course website.

Late work: It's fine to turn in your work late. There is no need to ask for permission! But the privilege comes with a price: If you do turn it in late, it will be graded with the usual standards except that your grade for that assignment will be reduced by 10 points for every 24 hours it is late. If you think you can produce a significantly better piece by having a day longer than others, then this may be the option for you.

Readings: All readings will be posted on the course website. And they're also in *Inequality in the 21st Century*, available on reserve in the library or for purchase at the book store (and all other usual outlets). In many cases, the readings have an accompanying 5-minute video (featuring the author of the reading), videos that will be made available as well on the course website.

Sections: There will be two lectures and one session every week. The purpose of the sections is to discuss the lectures and readings, the opinion pieces, the exam questions, and the final essay.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

Tuesday, Sept. 25 Lecture

How Can This Be Happening in the Land of Opportunity?

An overview of the explosion in inequality in the U.S.

Readings

David B. Grusky and Jasmine Hill, *Poverty and Inequality in the 21st Century*

II. THE BIG SOCIAL FORCES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Thursday, Sept. 27 Lecture

The Income Inequality Explosion

Since the late 1970s, income inequality has taken off in the U.S., with current levels as high as have ever been recorded in the U.S. What's driving this development?

Readings

Emmanuel Saez, *Striking it Richer*

Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*

Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology*

Robert Frank, *Why is Income Inequality Growing*

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*

Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld, *Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality*

Richard Freeman, *(Some) Inequality is Good for You*

Tuesday, Oct. 2 Lecture

Opportunity for Sale : A Growing Commitment to Putting Everything on the Market

It's not just that those at the top have more money than ever before. It's also that goods, services, and opportunities are increasingly meted out on the basis of who has the money to buy them.

Readings

David B. Grusky and Jasmine Hill, *Poverty and Inequality in the 21st Century* (reread)

Thursday, Oct. 4 Lecture

Why Does Such a Rich Country Have So Much Poverty?

Although the U.S. is one of the world's richest countries, it has a sizable population living in abject poverty of the sort that one usually associates with the world's poorest countries. Why accounts for such U.S. exceptionalism?

Readings

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*

Kathryn Edin, Timothy Nelson, and Joanna Miranda Reed, *Low-Income Urban Fathers and the "Package Deal" of Family Life*

Sheldon Danziger and Christopher Wimer, *The War on Poverty*

Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer, *Living on \$2/Day*

Jack Shonkoff, *Poverty and Child Development*

William Julius Wilson, *Being Poor, Black, and American*

Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid*

Ann Owens & Robert Sampson, *Communities of Well-Being*
Patrick Sharkey and Felix Elwert, *The Legacy of Multigenerational Disadvantage*
Matthew Desmond, *Eviction and the Reproduction of Urban Poverty*
Bruce Western and Becky Pettit, *Incarceration and Social Inequality*

Tuesday, Oct. 9 Lecture

The Death of the American Dream?

The typical American is quite willing to tolerate substantial inequalities in power, wealth, or prestige provided that the opportunities for securing these rewards are distributed equally. What happens when Americans find out that, contrary to the American Dream, the birth lottery matters ... a lot?

Readings

Sean F. Reardon, *The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor*
Richard Breen, Ruud Luijkx, Walter Müller, & Reinhard Pollak, *Nonpersistent Inequality in Educational Attainment*
Florencia Torche, *Does College Still Have Equalizing Effects?*
Laura Hamilton & Elizabeth Armstrong, *Paying for the Party*
Jan O. Jonsson, David B. Grusky, Matthew Di Carlo, and Reinhard Pollak, *It's a Decent Bet that our Children Will be Professors Too*
Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez, *Economic Mobility*
Stephen L. Morgan, *A New Social Psychological Model of Educational Attainment*
Mark S. Granovetter, *The Strength of Weak Ties*

Thursday, Oct. 11 Lecture

Segregation: Two Americas ... Living Separately

The U.S. practices a special brand of inequality in which the poor and rich aren't often in contact. And this segregation is becoming more extreme: The rich are increasingly living with the rich, and the poor are increasingly living with the poor.

Reading

Sean F. Reardon and Kendra Bischoff, *Income Inequality and Income Segregation*

Tuesday, Oct. 16 Lecture

Automation: Is this Time Different?

How will rising automation interact with already extreme poverty and inequality? Will robots and automation increase displacement, unemployment, and poverty? Will they precipitate a stabilizing response ... such as basic income? Or is the robot literature mainly hype?

Reading

Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (reread)

Thursday, Oct. 18 Lecture

Why Has the Long-Standing Decline in Gender Inequality Stalled Out?

In the last twenty years, the long-standing decline in gender inequality stalled out for many important indicators of gender equality, including the pay gap, the labor force participation of married women, and the segregation of women and men into different occupations. Why is this happening?

Readings

Judith Lorber, *The Social Construction of Gender*
C.J. Pascoe & Tristan Bridges, *Fag Discourse in a Post-Homophobic Era*

Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind*
Christine Percheski, *Opting Out?*
Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, *Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of “Blind” Auditions on Female Musicians*
Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Benard, & In Paik, *Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?*
Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, *Why Race, Class, and Gender Matter*
Andras Tilcsik, *Do Openly Gay Men Experience Employment Discrimination?*
Paula England, *The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled*
Cecilia Ridgeway, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality*

REMEMBER ... THE OPINION PIECE IS DUE ON FRIDAY, OCT. 19 (no later than 5pm)

Tuesday, Oct. 23 Lecture

Why is There Still So Much Racism?

The pressing question of our time is whether the U.S.—and other countries throughout the world—can control the most virulent forms of racism and nativism that rear up as rising income inequality, declining mobility, and other macro-level forces induce those who are losing out to blame others.

Readings

Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*
Aliya Saperstein & Andrew M. Penner, *The Dynamics of Racial Fluidity and Inequality*
Alejandro Portes & Min Zhou, *The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants*
Tomás R. Jiménez, *Why Replenishment Strengthens Racial and Ethnic Boundaries*
Marianne Bertrand & Sendhil Mullainathan, *Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination*
Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*
Claude Steele, *Stereotype Threat and African-American Student Achievement*
William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*
Reanne Frank, Ilana Redstone Akresh, and Bo Lu, *How Do Latino Immigrants Fit into the Racial Order?*
Mary Patillo, *Black Picket Fences*
Jennifer Lee, *Tiger Kids and the Success Frame*

Thursday, Oct. 25

In-class exam

SECTION III: WHAT’S TO BE DONE?

Tuesday, Oct. 30

Will the U.S. Rear Up and Act?

In the past, the U.S. has *sometimes* acted decisively when it’s most sacred commitments were in peril, thus raising the possibility that it will again. If the country were to recommit to authentically equal opportunity, how might that commitment be realized? An overview of the approaches that might be taken ... either from the top down or the bottom up.

Readings (for the balance of this section)

James J. Heckman, *Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children*
Carol Dweck, *Why Late Investments Can Work*
Roland Fryer, *The Harlem Children’s Zone*
Joshua Cohen & Charles Sabel, *Flexicurity*

Harry Holzer, *Workforce Development as an Antipoverty Strategy*
Lucien Bebchuk and Jesse M. Fried, *Tackling the Managerial Power Problem*
Michelle Jackson, *We Need to Have a Second Conversation*

Thursday, Nov. 1

The Redistribution Solution

Are basic income proposals a game changer? Or a dystopian disaster? How much would change if income inequality were suddenly reduced by 50 percent (without changing the relative ranking of households or individuals)?

Tuesday, Nov. 6

The Basic Rights Solution

What would happen if we took opportunity “out of the market” and decided to deliver basic services (e.g., high-quality childcare, high-quality neighborhoods) to *all* children ... no matter how rich or poor their parents? Would doing so reduce income inequality? How would it affect racial and gender inequality?

Thursday, Nov. 8

The Predistribution Solution

If the paychecks that workers brought home every week were more equal, maybe we wouldn't have to worry about redistribution. How can we get those paychecks to be more nearly equal? The answer: Predistribution.

Tuesday, Nov. 13

The Technocratic Solution

If we could reliably assess what works and what doesn't, could our interventions become so efficient and cost-effective that everyone would happily support them?

Thursday, Nov. 15

The Philanthropic Solution

If we're not willing to tax our way out of the problem, can we safely rely on philanthropy instead? Do we want philanthropist-kings to rule the roost?

Tuesday, Nov. 27

The Affirmative Action Solution

What if I told you we could instantly equalize opportunity ... without it costing a dime? We can.

Thursday, Nov. 29

The Nudge Solution

Is it all about people making bad decisions? If so, is it enough to nudge them into the right ones?

Tuesday, Dec. 4

The Tech Solution

It's sometimes thought that Silicon Valley caused it all. Is Silicon Valley instead the solution?

Thursday, Dec. 6

In-class exam

REMEMBER ... THE FINAL ESSAY IS DUE ON FRIDAY, DEC. 14 (no later than 5pm)

RELATED INFORMATION

Following Up

If your interest is piqued, you can follow up in the following ways:

- Minor in [Poverty, Inequality, and Policy](#)
- Earn a Stanford University [Certificate on Poverty and Inequality](#)
- Get involved! The [Center on Poverty and Inequality](#) is actively recruiting undergraduates

Honor Code

Go [here](#) for statement of the Honor Code and Fundamental Standard.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>).

Affordability of Course Materials

Stanford University and its instructors are committed to ensuring that all courses are financially accessible to all students. If you are an undergraduate who needs assistance with the cost of course textbooks, supplies, materials and/or fees, you are welcome to approach me directly. If you would prefer not to approach me directly, please note that you can ask the Diversity & First-Gen Office for assistance by completing their questionnaire on course textbooks & supplies: <http://tinyurl.com/jpqbar> or by contacting Joseph Brown, the Associate Director of the Diversity and First-Gen Office (jlbrown@stanford.edu; Old Union Room 207). Dr. Brown is available to connect you with resources and support while ensuring your privacy.