

PS 203 01 Spring 2010
Luce 101
Inequality and American Democracy: Participation, Power, and Policy
Professor Jacob S. Hacker,
MW 1:30-2:20
Office Hours: W 2:30-4:30, 77 Prospect Street, A105

Democracy is based on the ideal of political equality. Yet inequality is an undeniable feature of American society. How does inequality affect the working of American democracy, and how do (and, looking forward, how can) public policies influence inequality and its effects? These questions will map a voyage of inquiry spanning philosophical considerations, historical debates, illustrative cases, and key questions about participation, power, and policy in the United States.

The course will begin by laying down some conceptual and empirical foundations. It will then proceed sequentially through three overlapping areas: participation, power, and policy. We will survey what is known about the effects of inequality on political participation and efficacy, consider the impact of inequality on policymaking, focusing on the enduring question of “Who Governs?”, and examine policies, and policy debates, in three broad thematic areas: “security,” “poverty,” and “opportunity.” The course will close with a consideration of what can and should be done to alter the relationship between inequality and American democracy in the future.

This course is unusual in two respects. First, a large share of it will consider contemporary debates fought outside the academy. We will read a variety of viewpoints, many expressed strongly, and students should recognize that some, if not all, of them will be inconsistent with their own views (or mine, for that matter). Students should also be prepared to discuss these sometimes-divisive subjects in a thoughtful and respectful fashion, even if the authors they read, or the larger society, are at times not so inclined.

Second, the course has an important online component and will employ a variety of media, including films and images. An important theme, indeed, is that views of inequality are heavily mediated. In most cases, that is, our knowledge and perceptions are not based on direct experience. The goal of using a variety of media is to simultaneously enrich our perceptions of the world around us and to show that this world is powerfully refracted by the ways in which it reaches our senses.

A take-home midterm, a final exam, two short (2-3 pp.) discussion papers, and active participation in section discussions are the principal requirements of the course. For grading, 40 percent of the grade will be determined by the final, 30 percent by the midterm, and 30 percent by discussion papers (5 percent each) and participation (20 percent).

All written assignments should be submitted via the classes server. Late papers will be downgraded by 10% for each hour they are behind schedule, rounding up. Plagiarism is a serious violation and is punishable with a failing grade and possibly more severe action.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

Sections are a vital part of this course, and they will be led by an exceptional set of graduate/law students. Course participants should come to section prepared to discuss the week's readings and to listen and respond thoughtfully and respectfully to others.

Students will also be required to write two 2-3 pp. discussion papers—the first of which should be completed on or before week 6; the second, on or before week 12. A good paper will do more than simply summarize the readings; it will critically evaluate the arguments made in the readings, including the evidence presented to support those arguments.

In addition, this year I am including a Community-Based Learning (CBL) section—a special-interest section for those students who wish to enhance their classroom learning and fulfill course requirements with a field-based research project requested by a local non-profit agency. (Students will be paired with agencies based on their interests and skills.) The section will be smaller in size than a normal section, and its requirements will differ. Instead of discussion papers and the midterm, CBL students will write a longer paper based on their research project at the end of the course. They *will* take the final.

The course will have an *online component*—available on the classes server. Before Wednesday's lecture (except in week 1), students should review any online materials for that week. These will principally be breaking-news media stories, but also include statistics, audio, images, and definitional discussions that are easiest viewed online.

Two *movies* will also be shown during the course of the semester: *At the River I Stand* (week 3) and an episode of Morgan Spurlock's *Thirty Days*, "Living on the Minimum Wage" (week 11). Screenings will occur at 6 PM and 9 PM on Thursday night, at locations to be announced. All films will also be available by appointment for private and small-group viewings at the Film Studies Center, 53 Wall Street B-17, 2-0148.

The following *books* are required for the course and available at the Yale bookstore (77 Broadway Street, (203) 777-8440:

1. Jonathan Cohn, *Sick*
2. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*
3. Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, *Random Family*
4. Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*

In addition, I *recommend* Jason DeParle, *American Dream*.

Additional readings are available online and in a *reader*, available through Tyco (262 Elm Street, (203) 562-9723) as well as on reserve. Students should also read at least one general source on American politics on a regular basis, such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*.

My *office hours* will be held on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4:30 in 77 Prospect Street, A105 (2-5554 jacob.hacker@yale.edu). Appointments can be made by email or signing up on the sheet on my door (drop-ins are welcome, but appointments have first priority).

COURSE OUTLINE

| WEEK | TOPIC | Monday | Wednesday |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 (1/11-13) | Foundations | Introduction | Inequality: What is It; Why Does It Matter? |
| 2 (1/20) | Foundations | No Lecture: MLK Day | American Inequality in Historical and Cross-National Relief |
| 3 (1/25-27) | Foundations | Inequality and American Political Thought and Practice | How Democratic is the American Constitution? |
| 4 (2/1-3) | Participation & Inequality | Participation in American Politics: Dimensions and Disparities | Are Americans “Bowling Alone”? Should We Care? |
| 5 (2/8-10) | Power & Inequality | Political Power in Theory and Reality | Responsiveness as a Measure of Power |
| 6 (2/15-17) | Policy I: Security | The American “Welfare State,” or Why Are We So Different? | Economic Security Lost? |
| 7 (2/22-24) | Security | American Health Care | Guest Lecture: Jonathan Cohn (Invited) |
| 8 (3/1-3) | Policy II: Poverty | Race, Poverty, and Urban America | The Underclass Debate Take-Home Midterm |
| 9 (3/22-24) | Poverty | Welfare: What It Is, Why Americans Hate It | Guest Lecture: Adrian Nicole LeBlanc (Invited) |
| 10 (3/29-31) | Policy III: Opportunity | Opportunity: An American Ideal | Education: Great Leveler or Great Multiplier? |
| 11 (4/5-7) | Opportunity | Low-Wage Work: Dead End or Road Out? | Inequality, Opportunity, and American Public Opinion |
| 12 (4/12-14) | Implications | “Winner-Take-All” Politics? | Case Study: Tax Cuts and American Democracy |
| 13 (4/19-21) | Implications | Should—and Can—Inequality be Reduced? | Conclusion |

READINGS (Starred readings are available in the reader)

Week 1

Monday

- Paul Krugman, "For Richer," *New York Times Magazine*, 20 October 2002.
- Thomas Cooley, "Has Rising Inequality Destroyed the Middle Class?" *Forbes*, 3 June 2009.

Wednesday

- Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?" *Liberty, Equality, and Law: Selected Tanner Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).*
- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard University Press, 2001), Part II, 39-61.*
- Douglas Rae, *Equalities*, 20-44.*

Week 2

Wednesday

- Robert Gordon and Ian Dew-Becker, "Unresolved Issues in the Rise of American Inequality," 7 September 2007. [Warning: This is a technical article; focus on the big points and do not be afraid to ask me or your TF for guidance.]
- Emmanuel Saez, "Striking It Richer," 5 August 2009.
- Alan Reynolds, "The Top 1% of What?" *Wall Street Journal*, 17 December 2006.
- Piketty and Saez response to Reynolds.
- Steven Brill, "What's A Bailed-Out Banker Really Worth?" *New York Times Magazine*, 29 December 2009.

Week 3

Monday

- Jacobs and Skocpol, *Inequality and American Democracy* (2005), Chap. 1.*
- Michael J. Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality: The Political History of the Idea of Economic Inequality in America* (2007), Ch. 2.*

Recommended if you have not read already (though they reward re-reading):

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Chap. 3 (1835). (More about Tocqueville.)
- James Madison, *Federalist 10* (1787).
- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?" (1852)
- The Declaration of Sentiments from the Seneca Falls Convention (1848)

Wednesday

- Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (2003), Ch. 3-5, 8.*
- Michael Lind, "Alice Doesn't Vote Here Anymore," *Mother Jones*,

March/April 1998.

Week 4

Monday

- Joe Soss and Lawrence Jacobs, “The Place of Inequality: Non-participation in the American Polity,” *Political Science Quarterly* (2009).
- Christopher Uggen, Angela Behrens, and Jeff Manza, “Criminal Disenfranchisement,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* (2005).
- Richard Freeman, *America Works*, Ch. 5.*

Wednesday

- Robert Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America,” *American Prospect* (December 1996).
- Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Ch. 1-6.

Week 5

Monday

- Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review* (December 1962).

Wednesday

- Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 9.
- Martin Gilens, “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2005).

Week 6

Monday

- Alberto Alesina, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote, “Why Doesn’t the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (2001). [Warning: This is a technical article; focus on the big points and do not be afraid to ask me or your TF for guidance.]

Wednesday

- Jacob S. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift* (2008), selections.*
- Brink Lindsay, “Poor-Mouthing Prosperity,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 Sept. 2006.

Week 7

Monday

- Jonathan Cohn, *Sick*

Week 8

Monday

- Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, *Random Family*. (Read an interview with LeBlanc.)

Wednesday

- Alan Berube and Bruce Katz, "Katrina's Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America," Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program.
- Charles Murray, "The Hallmark of the Underclass," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 October 2005.

Week 9

Monday

- R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It* (2000), Ch. 2. (The full text is [here](#), but you need only read Ch. 2.)
- Jason DeParle, *American Dream*, Ch. 5-8, 12. (The whole book is recommended.)*

Week 10

Monday

- Tom Hertz, "Understanding Mobility in America," 26 April 2006.
- "Ever Higher Society, Ever Harder to Ascend," *Economist*, 29 Dec. 2004.
- Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868), Chap. 27.

Wednesday

- Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (2003), Introduction and Chap. 1.
- Robert Haveman and Timothy Smeeding, "The Role of Higher Education in Social Mobility," *The Future of Children* (Fall 2006).

Week 11

Monday

- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickle and Dimed* (2001).
- Ron Haskins, "Economic Mobility of Immigrants in the United States," July 2007.

Wednesday

- Lawrence Jacobs and Benjamin Page, "Class War? Americans as Conservative Egalitarians"
- Lane Kenworthy, et al., "The Democrats and Working Class Whites."

Week 12

Monday

- Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Winner-Take-All Politics," *Politics & Society* (forthcoming); and selected responses [to be provided].

Wednesday

- Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (2008), Ch. 6.*
- Hacker and Pierson, "Abandoning the Middle," *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (2005).

Week 13

Monday

- Will Wilkinson, "Thinking Clearly About Economic Inequality," *Policy Journal*, 14 July 2009.
- Lane Kenworthy, "Is Consumption the Grail for Inequality Skeptics?" *Cato Unbound*, 14 October 2009.
- Kenworthy, "The High-Employment Route to Low Inequality," *Challenge*, September/October, 2009.