**Social Studies 98ta:**

What’s the Matter with Inequality? Normative and Empirical Approaches

Dr. Glory Liu **Spring 2022**

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## Deadlines At-A-Glance

Feb. 16: Topic Memos Due

Mar. 9: Annotated Bibliographies Due

Apr. 6: Prospectus Due

May 10th ish (TBD): Final Papers Due

# Overview

The United States has the highest levels of income inequality among industrialized nations. The top-earning 20% of families made more than halfof all earned income in 2018. The top 5% of families hold more than 200 times as much wealth as the median family. And while more than half of the American public agrees there is too much inequality in the country, whether or not anything can or should be done is largely a partisan issue. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the persistence of such inequalities along racial, ethnic, and geographic lines—whether with respect to safe work environments, access to healthcare, stable living conditions, and much more. In the face of these realities, this class combines both normative and empirical approaches to investigate the following question: what is the matter with inequality?

The objective of this course is to introduce students to different conceptual and methodological frameworks that guide our understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of inequality. It is divided into three thematic units. In the first unit, we will confront empirical evidence of the income and wealth gap with normative theory to help us disentangle various moral objections to inequality. Is inequality objectionable because the poor *don’t have enough,* or because the rich have *too much,* or because there is something intrinsically wrong with some people having more than others? Is inequality primarily a distributional or relational concern? In the second unit, we will consider various empirical explanations for how we got to where we are today: beliefs about inequality, public support for redistributive policies, elite politics, and state capture. In the third unit, we will look at the manifestations of inequality in public health disparities and tax policy, and we will close by examining the theory and practice of some of the main policy levers that supposedly can help “fix” inequality: wealth taxation, universal basic income, philanthropy, and reparations.

This course aims to introduce students to a variety of methods for theorizing and studying economic inequality. Students will be guided through the process of researching, developing, and writing an original research paper that harnesses the methodologies and is related to some of the topics covered in class.

# Format

This is a junior tutorial that will meet regularly in-person until further notice. Should circumstances change (given that we’re living in a covid era), class will be moved to Zoom. More details about the attendance policy are described in the “Attendance and Participation” section.

# Enrollment and Prerequisites

Enrollment is limited to 10 students and spots are allocated by lottery. Students who wish to enroll in this course should rank their preferences accordingly. There are no specific prerequisites for this course, though it is assumed that Juniors concentrating in Social Studies have completed the year-long sequence of Social Studies 10. Non-concentrators will be allowed to enroll in the course if there is space available after the lottery process.

# Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to arrive on time and be actively participating in each session. Students are granted one “no questions asked” absence for the semester. For any additional absences, the student will either need to notify the instructor ahead of time (in the case of illness or a family emergency, for example), and will be responsible for making arrangements with the instructor for make-up assignments in lieu of class participation.

While acknowledging the unique challenges learning in the era of COVID, it is all the more important that we, as a class, take collective responsibility for the success and productivity of our time together. Students are expected to not only have completed the required assigned materials (whether reading, writing, or viewing) but also be active listeners, charitable discussants, and engaged academic citizens. If using a computer or tablet during class, students should close other windows or tabs on their computers, (except those reserved for taking notes), or doing other activities while class is in session.

To maximize participation during our meeting times, there will be multiple ways for students to be an active contributor. (Not everyone likes speaking in front of a group, large or small!) In addition to our large group discussions, students will have ample opportunities participation through other avenues such as small-group discussions, and writing-based active learning activities in class. As a class, we will strive to foster an environment that makes each student feel comfortable, safe, and empowered to contribute in their own way.

# Assignments and Grading

A detailed of student’s final grades and the composition of assignments is as follows:

## *Attendance, Participation, Short Presentation—20%*

In addition to meeting the expectations outlined above, students will also be asked to make a short (~5 minutes), informal presentation once over the course of the semester. The presentation should feature a popular news article from a reliable media source that relates a current event to a topic discussed in class (eg: is COVID19 making inequality better or worse? Has public opinion on raising taxes on the wealthy changed?) Students should be especially attentive to the methodologies, interpretive lenses, sources, and issues that the particular article raises. Students will sign up for presentation slots during the first week of class.

## *The “commitment mechanism to make sure you’re doing the readings” —10%*

Doing the readings has a big effect on the quality of our tutorial. I have an aversion to assigning open-ended, weekly reading responses submitted each week. However, in the absence of such a commitment device, I suspect that there will be a tendency to skip the readings—let’s face it, we are busy people. To that end, we will discuss some options for “reading accountability checks” during the first week. This might take the form of pop quizzes, semi-regular reading worksheets, study questions, or some other low-stakes “deliverable” to ensure that we collectively commit to doing the readings and contributing to a vibrant discussion.

**Update 1/26:** Based on collective deliberative process, each week students will submit a concept, question, and passage via Canvas. I will include a “discussion” link for each Module. The concept should be a key term or idea from one of the readings, distilled into your own words. The question should be more than clarificatory (“I don’t know what this means”) but generative. The passage can be anything you like—something that made you think, something that you thought really expounded the main argument, something totally baffling, or something totally beautiful.

## *“Scaffolding” Assignments for Final Research Paper—35% combined*

In preparation for the final research paper [see below], students will complete a series of assignments that will ultimately support the final project. These include:

* A short topic memo (due Feb. 16) —A short memo describing a focus topic(s) of interest and its significance.
* Annotated bibliography (due Mar 9) (15% of final grade)—A list of sources (books, articles, news articles, documentaries, etc.) with brief (150-200 words) descriptions and/or evaluations of the work. These annotations should be treated like very condensed versions of the summary worksheet assignments. The purpose of this assignment is to help students locate, identify, and assess works that are relevant to their research project.
* Research Prospectus (due Apr. 6) (20% of final grade)—A document that formally describes the research question, summarizes the surrounding literature (based on the annotated bibliography), outlines the research method, and states a current hypothesis/es.

Detailed information about the structure, format, and requirements of these assignments will be distributed to students during the semester.

## *Final Paper—35%*

The final paper is the culminating assignment and most important part of the course. While the paper may incorporate some of the methods, topics, and sources covered in class, the purpose is to allow students to explore a question of their own interest using a methodology of their choice. Some students will use their junior research papers as a starting point for their senior thesis. In addition to the staged assignments listed above, students will be required to meet with the instructor to discuss their methods, sources, and progress of their research.

# Texts

The following texts are ones the bulk of which we will read. You can purchase them at the COOP or through your favorite retailer (I recommend ordering ahead of time from Harvard Book Store!) All of the ones listed below *except* Reeves’ *Dream Hoarders* are also available online through HOLLIS. Other books listed will be excerpted and available as PDFs that I will distribute through Canvas or can be accessed through Hollis.

* Harry Frankfurt, *On Inequality* (Princeton UP, 2015)
* T.M. Scanlon, *Why does Inequality Matter?* (Oxford UP, 2017)
* Rachel Sherman, *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence* (Princeton UP, 2019)
* Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together.* (One World, 2021)
* Richard Reeves, *Dream Hoarders: how the American upper middle class is leading everyone else in the dust, why that is a problem, and what to do about it.* (Brookings, 2017)
* Meghan Condon and Amber Wichowsky, *The Economic Other: Inequality in the American Political Imagination.* (Chicago UP, 2020)
* Jennifer Hochschild, *What’s Fair? American beliefs about distributive justice.* (Harvard UP, 1981)
* Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs, *Class War? What Americans really think about economic inequality?* (Chicago UP, 2009)
* Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age,* 2nd edition (Princeton UP, 2016).
* Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, *The Triumph of Injustice: how the rich dodge taxes and how to make them pay.* (New York, 2019)
* Rob Reich, *Just Giving: why philanthropy is failing democracy and how it can do better.* (Princeton, 2018)
* Anand Giridharadas, *Winners take all: the elite charade of changing the world* (Vintage Books, 2019)
* Annie Lowrey, *Give People Money: How a universal basic income would end poverty, revolutionize work, and remake the world* (Crown books, 2018)

# Community beyond the Classroom

Even though we won’t be seeing each other in person, we have other creative means of staying connected, learning together, and building relationships beyond the classroom. We will decide during the first session how we will like to do this—a class Slack Channel, Facebook Group, Google Group, or something else.

# Virtual Office Hours and Email

I hold regular office hours on Mondays from 2-4 and Thursdays from 3-5. Appointments can be arranged **through Calendly:** [**www.calendly.com/gloryliu**](http://www.calendly.com/gloryliu)**.** Email me to schedule outside of regular office hours.

I check my email regularly on weekdays, but please allow up to 24 hours for a response before following up.

# Academic Integrity

As members of the Harvard College community, students commit themselves to the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code. Plagiarizing, misrepresentation of ideas that are not one’s own, falsifying data, or submitting the same work for more than one course without express permission of the instructor(s) are considered violations of the Honor Code. For all written assignments, students are required to cite sources following a recognized citation format. For more information on Academic Integrity and Honesty, visit <https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/academic-integrity>

# Confidentiality

Students are prohibited from recording our class sessions on Zoom. If, however, there are extenuating circumstances that require a class to be recorded, students will be notified ahead of time and the recording will be available through Canvas for a limited period of time.

# Accessibility and Accommodations

Students who require academic accommodations should notify the instructor and may also wish to meet with the Accessible Education Office to address their specific needs (extensions, assistive technology, accessible course materials, note-taking, etc.) The Accessible Education Office is available for Zoom meetings with students, and more information can be found here: <https://aeo.fas.harvard.edu/>

# Student Well-being

These are challenging times! I will make a concerted effort to build in student wellness checks throughout the semester, but I encourage students to make the most of the many resources Harvard has to offer virtually for students’ mental and emotional well-being:

*Counseling and Mental Health Services:* <https://camhs.huhs.harvard.edu/>

*Center for Wellness and Health Promotion:* <https://wellness.huhs.harvard.edu/virtual-resources>

(virtual yoga and meditation!)

*Harvard Chaplains:* <https://chaplains.harvard.edu/>

# Course Schedule

Subject to revision

## Jan. 26: Introduction

*Watch/Hook*

* “[The World’s Richest Men Doubled Their Fortune during the Pandemic.”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D574Pm-OMWY&ab_channel=ABCNews) ABC News, Jan. 17, 2022
* “[As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html)” (*NY Times,* March 15, 2020)
* “[Extreme Inequality was the Preexisting Condition:” How Covid 19 Widened America’s Wealth Gap](https://abcnews.go.com/Business/extreme-inequality-preexisting-condition-covid-19-widened-americas/story?id=71401975) (ABC News, June 28, 2020)

*Read*

* T.M. Scanlon, *Why Does Inequality Matter?* Chapter 1

*Browse*

* Income and Wealth Inequality Factsheet: [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org)
* Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality: [Pew Research Center](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/)
* “[American Inequality in Six Charts](https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/american-inequality-in-six-charts),” (The New Yorker, November 18, 2013)
* [HKS Resource Guides](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/poverty): Poverty and Inequality
* Inequality.is –Economic Policy Institute, data visualization by Periscopic

## Feb. 2: Having Enough

*Watch*

* [“Why is there still poverty in America?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i45h76ioHY) (*The Economist,* October 2019)
* [Frontline PBS: What happened to Poverty in America in 2021](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/poverty-america-2021-covid-pandemic/)

*Read*

* Harry Frankfurt, *On Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2015)
* Samuel Scheffler, “Is Economic Inequality Really a Problem?” (*The New York Times,* July 1, 2020).
* G.A. Cohen, “How to do Political Philosophy,” in G.A. Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice and Other Essays,* pp. 225-235.([Hollis](https://www.stanforddaily.com/2020/08/17/toxic-work-culture-at-cantor-forces-staff-out-interventions-fall-short/) Link)
* Heather Bullock, Lawrence Eppard, Mark Rank, *Poorly Understood: What America Gets Wrong about Poverty* (Oxford: 2021), Introduction, I, and III (optional: V and VI)
* Optional: Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal.” *Ethics,* 98/1 (1987): 21-43

*Browse*

* “[How the geography of U.S. poverty has shifted since 1960,”](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/10/how-the-geography-of-u-s-poverty-has-shifted-since-1960/) Pew Research Center
* [Income and Poverty in the United States (2018)](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.html)—US Census Bureau
* [J-PAL Evaluations and Reports](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluations)
* [Mapping Poverty in America](http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2014/01/05/poverty-map/index.html)—The New York Times

## Feb. 9: Having Too Much

*Hook:*

* [“Pandemic Profiteers” (inequality.org)](https://inequality.org/great-divide/updates-billionaire-pandemic/)

*Read*

* T.M. Scanlon, *Why does Inequality Matter?* Chapter 9, “Unequal Income”
* Ingrid Robeyns, “[What, if Anything, is Wrong with Extreme Wealth?”](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19452829.2019.1633734) *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities,* 20(3): 251-266.
* Rachel Sherman, *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence* (Princeton UP, 2019)
* “[Billionaire Wealth, US Job Losses, and Pandemic Profiteers,”](https://inequality.org/great-divide/updates-billionaire-pandemic/) *Inequality.org*

*Browse*

* [Mapped: The World’s Ultra-Rich, by Country](https://www.visualcapitalist.com/map-worlds-ultra-rich-by-country/). (Visual Capitalist)
* [Mapped: The Wealthiest Person in Every U.S. state in 2020](https://www.visualcapitalist.com/wealthiest-person-in-every-u-s-state-2020/) (Visual Capitalist)
* [World Inequality Database](https://wid.world/data/)

## Feb. 16: What *is* the point of equality?

### **\*\*Research Topic Memo Due\*\***

## **Maybe: Research Guidance Session with Sue Gilroy**

*Read*

* T.M. Scanlon, *Why does Inequality Matter?* Chapter 2 (“Equal Concern”) and Chapter 3, (“Status Inequality”)
* Anne Phillips, *Unconditional Equality* (Princeton University Press, 2021)
* Elizabeth Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* vol. 109, no. 2 (January 1999), 287-337.

*Prep*

* [Brooke Harrington, “How to Plan a Research Project” *Aeon Magazine,* December 9, 2020.](https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-plan-a-research-project-in-four-clear-steps)
* Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, William T. FitzGerald. *The Craft of Research,* 4th edition (Chicago: 2016), Chapters 1 and 3.

## Feb. 23: Beliefs about Inequality, part 1

*Watch*

* “[Wealth Inequality In America](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM&t=4s)”
* [“Americans know wealth inequality is a problem, but what does it look like?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DANUXO-GQwU&ab_channel=CBSMornings)

*Read*

* Michael Norton and Dan Ariely, “Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time” *Perspectives on Psychological Science,* 6(1), January 2011, 9-12.
* Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs, *Class War? What Americans really think about economic inequality.* Selections + Questionnaire and Data
* Christina Starmans, Mark Sheskin, and Paul Bloom, “Why People Prefer Unequal Societies.” *Nature Human Behavior* 1.
* Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy,* Chapter 5

*Browse*

* “[Most Americans Say There is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer than Half Call it a Top Priority](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/01/09/most-americans-say-there-is-too-much-economic-inequality-in-the-u-s-but-fewer-than-half-call-it-a-top-priority/).” Pew Research: Social and Demographic Trends
* [YouGov Data: Inequality](https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/explore/issue/Inequality)

## Mar. 2: Beliefs about Inequality, part 2

*Read*

* Meghan Condon and Amber Wichowsky, *The Economic Other: Inequality in the American Political Imagination,* selections.
* Jennifer Hochschild, *What’s Fair? American beliefs about distributive justice,* selections.

## Mar 9: Opportunity

### **\*\*Annotated Bibliographies Due\*\*\***

*Hook:*

* [Are You a Dream Hoarder?](https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/are-you-a-dream-hoarder/)
* NY Times, “[I Am the Portrait of Downward Mobility](https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/88891/modules/items/1068021)”

*Read*

* Richard Reeves, *Dream Hoarders*: *How the American upper middle class is leaving everyone else in the dust, why that is a problem, and what to do about it.*
* Leslie McCall, *The Undeserving Rich: American Beliefs about Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution,* (Cambridge, 2013), Chapter 4.
* Raj Chetty, Nathan Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, Sonya R. Porter, “Race and Economic Opportunity,” non-quantitative executive summary.
  + Full paper (OPTIONAL) “[Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective](https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/race_paper.pdf).”
* “The Case Against Equality of Opportunity,” by Dylan Matthews, *Vox* <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/21/9334215/equality-of-opportunity>

*Browse*

* [Opportunity Insights](https://opportunityinsights.org/)

~Spring Break~

## Mar 23: The Politics of Inequality

*Hook:*

* John Cassidy, “[Is America an Oligarchy?”](https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/is-america-an-oligarchy) *The New Yorker* April 18, 2014
* Dylan Matthews, “[Remember that study saying America is an oligarchy? 3 rebuttals say it’s wrong.](https://www.vox.com/2016/5/9/11502464/gilens-page-oligarchy-study)” Vox, May 9, 2016.

*Read*

* Scanlon, *Why Does Inequality Matter?* Chapter 6 (“Political Fairness”)
* Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics,* 12/3 (2014): 564-581.
* Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age,* Chapters 1 and 2. (HOLLIS)
* Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady and Sidney Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People’s Voice in the New Gilded Age*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 10-12. (HOLLIS)

## Mar 30: Wealth Taxation

*Watch*

* “[How Wealth Inequality Spiraled Out of Control](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOI8RuhW7q0&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=RobertReich)”
* “[How the rich avoid paying taxes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6V9i8fFADI&ab_channel=Vox)”

*Read*

* Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, *The Triumph of Injustice: How the Rich Dodge Taxes and How to Make Them Pay,* selections.
* Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, “[Get $1 Trillion from 1000 Billionaires: Tax their Gains now.](https://eml.berkeley.edu/~saez/SZ21-billionaire-tax.pdf)” April 14, 2021.
* [Taxing the Superrich](http://bostonreview.net/forum/taxing-superrich/martin-o%E2%80%99neill-economic-justice-requires-more-wealth-tax) (Forum on the *Boston Review)*
* “[Uncovering the Secret Offshore Accounts of the Global Elite](https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-inquiry/uncovering-the-secret-offshore-accounts-of-the-global-elite?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=onsite-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker&utm_social-type=earned)” *The New Yorker,* Nov. 4, 2021

*Browse*

* [OECD Tax Database](https://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/tax-database/)
* [Top Income Tax Rates](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/top-income-tax-rates-piketty), Our World in Data
* [*https://missingprofits.world/*](https://missingprofits.world/)

## Apr. 6: Universal Basic Income

### **\*\*Research Prospectus Due\*\***

*Watch*

* “[The Instrument of Freedom](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP4sBGbeF8w),” TED Talk, Philippe Van Parjis, Aug. 18, 2016.
* “[Why the Virus Stimulus Is Renewing the UBI Debate”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzGjaoy7Idg&ab_channel=WallStreetJournal) (Wall Street Journal), April 6, 2020

*Read*

* Juliana Bidadanure, “The Political Theory of Universal Basic Income,” *Annual Review of Political Science,* Vol. 22, 481-501
* Annie Lowrey, *Give People Money: How a universal basic income would end poverty, revolutionize work, and remake the world,* selections (eReserve)1-2, 5, 8-10
* [Basic Income in a Just Society](http://bostonreview.net/forum/brishen-rogers-basic-income-just-society), The Boston Review (Forum)

*Browse*

* [Map of Universal Basic Income Experiments and Related Programs](https://basicincome.stanford.edu/experiments-map/), Stanford Basic Income Lab

## Apr. 13: Philanthropy

*Hook/Watch*

* “[Mackenzie Scott Gives Away Another $2.74 Billion Even as Her Wealth Grows](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/15/business/mackenzie-scott-philanthropy.html)” *NY Times,* June 15, 2021
* “[Mark Zuckerberg Vows to Donate 99% of His Facebook Shares for Charity](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/technology/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-charity.html)”
* [Is Billionaire Philanthropy a Sham?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVpCbHKqqKI&ab_channel=RobertReich) Robert Reich

*Read*

* Rob Reich, *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy is Failing Democracy and How it Can Do Better,* selections.
* Rob Reich, “What Are Foundations For?” *The Boston Review*
* Anand Giridharadas, *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World,* selections.
* Emma Saunders-Hastings, “Send back the blood-stained money: Frederick Douglass on tainted gifts” *American Political Science Review* 115 (3) (2021) 729-741.

*Browse*

* [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](https://www.philanthropy.com/data?cid=UCOPNAVTOP)
* [Giving Statistics](https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=42)

## Apr. 20: Race and Reparations

*Watch*

* The Daily Show feat. Nikole Hannah-Jones: [Why Reparations are Necessary and what CRT Actually is](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fmf5ZleOMgk&t=183s&ab_channel=TheDailyShowwithTrevorNoah)
* Ta-Nehesi Coates: [Opening statement in House Committee on reparations](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcCnQ3iRkys&t=3s&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour)

*Read*

* William A. Darity and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (UNC Press, 2020), selections. (HOLLIS)
* Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: what racism costs us and how we can prosper together.*
* Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” *The Atlantic,* June 2014 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

## Apr. 27/TBD: Final Presentations