This seminar considers the problem of income inequality and directs readings and research on the political causes and consequences of changes in income distribution in the US over the last three decades. There will be substantial reading—at least a book or the equivalent in scholarly papers each week—and the expectation of student engagement and discussion is high. The course is designed to help students think analytically about widening income disparity and how the logic of the political economy has structured patterns of great political and economic inequalities. The idea of ‘rising income inequality’ raises fundamental questions about who benefits in the American political system today, and how. Our plan is to finish the semester with a respectable understanding of contemporary arguments, evidence, and explanations surrounding a rising ‘crisis’ in the American case. In this new course, we focus on politics and selected public policies affecting the distribution of income and the accumulation of wealth in the US. Among the policies we may consider are: taxation, campaign finance reform, voting, the minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credits, financial sector reform, and assisted family leave. We will decide as a class which policies to pursue during the semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Attendance is required in this class and it affects your grade. You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet that circulates. Three unexcused absences and you automatically fail the course.

Participation: Your in-class participation is key to your success in this seminar. “Participation” does not merely mean your attendance. Lively classroom discussion and active participation is expected and is impossible without advance preparation. Therefore, students are to be informed in their contributions. This means all assigned readings are required and you are expected to have read them before the class for which they are assigned. Come prepared to ask and answer questions and exchange ideas.

Discussion leadership and discussion questions: I will lecture and/or guide class discussion for a portion of each class meeting but in addition the seminar includes a key student role to encourage intellectual vitality and ensure that “learning happens. 1. Every student will submit discussion questions on our class’s coursework discussion board on each week’s reading by 12 noon Sunday at the latest. 2. Each class session will have two or three student discussion leaders and every student is to serve as discussion leader two times during the semester. We will discuss these arrangements in the first session.

Final paper: A 20-25 page analytical research paper on a topic of your selection related-at least tangentially-to the issues on income inequality in this course is due on DECEMBER 5. You are expected to consult with me prior to OCTOBER 10 when a two-page statement of your proposed research paper is due. This will include a title, thesis, and overview of your argument and proposed
This course provides the opportunity for extensive seminar writing and research consultation and guidance which will be discussed in our first classes. In my seminars, the average student meets with me a minimum of four times over the semester to discuss thesis formation and additional research and writing related matters. All students should read Howard S. Becker’s *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*, 2nd Edition, a useful text on framing appropriate research questions. It is inexpensive (about $12. in paperback; $5. electronically) and available at the Columbia Bookstore.

Your final grade is calculated on the basis of 50% for your final paper, 25% for discussion leadership and questions and 25% for attendance and participation.

**READINGS**

All readings are on reserve at Butler Library. Books are available for purchase at the Columbia University Bookstore.

**REQUIRED BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE**


**SUGGESTED BOOKS**


Thomas Piketty *The Economics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001) (handout on request)

RESERVES


Anthony B. Atkinson, “How to Spread the Wealth; Practical Policies for Reducing Inequalities” Foreign Affairs 95 (1):2 9-33


Katherine Boo. 2004. “The Churn: Letter from South Texas.” The New Yorker. 80(6): 62- (This article is available on The New Yorker Online)


Alexander Hamilton. "REPORT ON MANUFACTURES” December 5, 1791 scanned from Annals of Congress, Works of Hamilton


Harry J. Holzer, “The $15-hour minimum could harm America’s poorest workers,” Brookings: http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/07/15-dollar-min...


Bruce D. Meyer, “The Effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Recent Reforms” 2010 National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) and University of Chicago

Thomas Piketty *The Economics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001)


Robert Reich, “What is a Nation?” in *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (2): 193-209


*Jonathan Tepperman. “Brazil’s Antipoverty Breakthrough: The Surprising Success of Bolsa Familia.”* *Foreign Affairs* 95 (1): 34-44


**TOPICS AND READINGS**

**September 12 Overview: Rising Inequality in an Age of Fraudulent Politics**

Barrington Moore, Jr., *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and Upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them* (on reserve & on courseworks) Preface - 150

Ronald Inglehart, “Inequality and Modernization: Why Equality is Likely to Make a Comeback.” *Foreign Affairs* 95(1): 2-10


September 19  The Problem of Capital in the 21st C, $r > g$, and Histories of Capitalism

Capital in the 21st C by Thomas Piketty commentaries and analyses


Suggested: Thomas Piketty The Economics of Inequality (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001) HANDOUT ON REQUEST

September 26, October 3  Economic Progress and Why It is a Threat to Society


Francoise Bourguignon “Inequality and Globalization” (Foreign Affairs)

Suggested: Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (historical sociology the enclosure acts) ; F.A. Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (dangers and threat to society of state control of the means of production)

October 10  The American View and Middle Class Prosperity

Your two-page research proposals are due


Alexander Hamilton, ”REPORT ON MANUFACTURES” December 5, 1791 scanned from Annals of Congress, Works of Hamilton

Alexis de Tocqueville as Comparative Analysts [http://polihaifa.ac.il//resTocqueville.html]

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America Book II, Chapter 8 “How The Americans Combine Individualism By The Principle Of Self-Interest Rightly Understood”

Robert Reich, “What is a Nation?” in Political Science Quarterly 106 (2): 193-209

Danielle Allen, “Inequality and American Democracy: Why Politics Trumps Economics” Foreign Affairs 95 (1): 29-33


October 17, October 24 Politics and Inequality in Political Science


October 31 Inequality, Public Opinion and Political Representation


November 7 ACADEMIC HOLIDAY; NO CLASS

November 14 Case Studies on Earned Income Tax Credit, Tax Cuts, & the Estate Tax

Walter L. Blum & Harry Kalver Jr., The Uneasy Case for Progressive Taxation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) on class courseworks

Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy, Chs. 6 & 7

Bruce D. Meyer, “The Effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Recent Reforms” 2010 National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) and University of Chicago

November 21 Case Studies on the Minimum Wage


Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy Ch. 8

November 28 Case Studies in Campaign Finance and Financial Sector Reform


TKTK Campaign finance and Financial Sector Reform literature

December 5 “The People. United. Will Never Be Defeated”


December 12 What Is To Be Done?

Barrington Moore, Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and Upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them, pp150-191


Anthony B. Atkinson, “How to Spread the Wealth; Practical Policies for Reducing Inequalities” Foreign Affairs 95 (1):2 9-33