



Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality

David Cay Johnston (Editor)

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The issue of inequality has irrefutably returned to the fore, riding on the anger against Wall Street following the 2008 financial crisis and the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the superOCorich. The Occupy movement made the plight of the 99 percent an indelible part of the public consciousness, and concerns about inequality were a decisive factor in the 2012 presidential elections. How bad is it? According to Pulitzer PrizeOCowinning journalist David Cay Johnston, most Americans, in inflationOCadjusted terms, are now back to the average income of 1966. Shockingly, from 2009 to 2011, the top 1 percent got 121 percent of the income gains while the bottom 99 percent saw their income fall. Yet in this most unequal of developed nations, every aspect of inequality remains hotly contested and poorly understood.

"Divided" collects the writings of leading scholars, activists, and journalists to provide an illuminating, multifaceted look at inequality in America, exploring its devastating implications in areas as diverse as education, justice, health care, social mobility, and political representation. Provocative and eminently readable, here is an essential resource for anyone who cares about the future of AmericaOCand compelling evidence that inequality can be ignored only at the nationOCOs peril.

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Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality Details

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Aggie says

Great. Excellent collection discussing the topic of inequality which eventually will effect most middle class people.

Andy says

A fascinating, yet simply put, wide array of examples of the cause and continuingly growing divide between the classes. I highly recommend this book.

David Akadjian says

This is a strong collection of essays about the importance of relative equality of pay. It should be required reading for every business school student and anyone interested in how do we make our society better.

Adam says

Great collection of essays about the growing inequality in the United States today.

June Volz says

A collection of articles, essays and speeches made by economists, professors, politicians that address the problems associated with the unprecedented inequality in our society today. People such as Paul Krugman, Elizabeth Warren, Adam Smith (yes, THE Adam Smith), Barack Obama and many more - Pulitzer Prize winning authors and NY Times journalists. From hunger, to education, to the working poor, health care - how this inequality is affecting the lives of citizens at ALL levels and therefore detrimental to the country as a whole.

Lynn says

The difference in justice between the rich and the poor. Our justice system does indeed keep the poor "down." A poor person is not always a lazy person. Just being poor is work - the system runs the poor ragged.

Book says

Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality edited by David Cay Johnston

“Divided” is a very solid collection of essays regarding the growing inequality in our society. The essays come from a wide range of influential sources that include the likes of President Obama, economists, lawyers, journalists, educators and politicians. Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Cay Johnston put together this fine collection that ranges from the rare ordinary to some real standouts. This stimulating 352-page book includes a total of thirty-nine essays broken out by the following seven main topics: 1. Overview, 2. Income Inequality, 3. Education, 4. Health Care Inequality, 5. Debt and Poverty, 6. Policy, and 7. Family.

Positives:

1. A well-written, accessible book.
2. A good collection of essays that cover many aspects of the growing inequality in our society. Can be read in any order.
3. The book is well structured. The essays are broken out by inequality occurring by theme.
4. The book succeeds in covering the most important point sought out by Johnston, “The single most important point of Divided is: keep in mind who benefits and who does not. It’s our choice. We decide.”
5. President Obama kicks off this solid collection of essays with a great speech he delivered on December 6, 2011, at Osawatomie High School in Osawatomie, Kansas.
6. The following positives will highlight the best essays of the book. Elizabeth Warren’s makes the compelling case for creating a Financial Product Safety Commission (FPSC) on the model of the Consumer Product Safety Commission to protect consumers from abusive banking practices. Her idea became law as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which Professor Warren helped set up in 2010–2011.
7. Joseph E. Stiglitz states four reasons inequality is holding our recovery back. “The most immediate is that our middle class is too weak to support the consumer spending that has historically driven our economic growth.”
8. Kim Bobo provides a 5-star essay on how unions protect the interests of workers. “Unions not only raise wages, benefits, and working conditions. They stop wage theft. Unions are one of the most effective wage-theft deterrents around.”
9. Interesting essay by Christopher Jencks that explains why many jobs pay so poorly. “The logic of a market economy is that we should all be paid the smallest amount that will ensure that our work gets done, and that is what low-wage workers generally receive.”
10. Beth Shulman explains the reason behind the ever expanding service-producing sector. “In 1947, service-sector industries accounted for only half of all hours of employment. A half century later, approximately 80 percent of the 134 million nonfarm jobs are in the service-producing industries: retail trade, transportation, telecommunications, utilities, wholesale trade, finance, insurance and real estate, federal, state, and local government, and services.”
11. Two leading advocates for a fairer economy, Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel, explain how great fortunes were assisted by taxpayer’s investments. “Thoughtful Americans are advancing a variety of proposals that would narrow the wealth gap, ranging from expanding worker ownership to creating universal asset-building accounts.”
12. Paul Krugman debunks the myth that education alone is responsible for our inequality. “What we’re seeing isn’t the rise of a fairly broad class of knowledge workers. Instead, we’re seeing the rise of a narrow oligarchy: income and wealth are becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of small, privileged elite. The proof is right in the data we economists get paid to analyze and understand.”

13. Sean F. Reardon exposes what's really behind children's success in school. "Family income is now a better predictor of children's success in school than race."
14. Mary E. O'Brien provides an analysis of unequal quality of care. "Quality of health care has little meaning if millions are unable to access care in the first place." "What we need is a system that scrupulously guards our medical privacy and confidentiality while affording health care professionals immediate access to a patient's medical history."
15. Authors Olveen Carrasquillo and Jaime Torres show how racism pervades the provision of health care in America with severe consequences. "Disparities in health are due to a variety of factors—including environment, housing, poverty, education, and racism—that go far beyond just having insurance."
16. Leo W. Gerard explains the benefits of universal health care. "A national single-payer system would relieve corporations of the burden of health-insurance administration, stabilize costs, and give corporations, the global level playing field they want."
17. My favorite essay goes to *Inequality Kills* by Stephen Bezruchka. "The forty-seven infant deaths occur every day because of the way society in the United States is structured, resulting in our health status being that of a middle-income country, not a rich country."
18. Robert Kutter explains why inequality is as much a political problem as an economic one. "A prosperous economy demands investment in children, in health, in education, in job training, in public systems, in the commons generally."
19. Two scholars Nancy Altman and Eric Kingson, show how Social Security does more to reduce income inequality and prevent poverty among the old in the United States than any other program, public or private, while providing crucial protection for orphans and the disabled. "The reality is that Social Security is not a government handout. It is a benefit that is earned and paid for through hard work."
20. Ernest Drucker closes out the best of the rest with his excellent essay titled, *A Different Kind of Epidemic*. "A subtle but significant factor in inequality is America's use of long prison sentences for nonviolent crimes, which has hit black Americans especially hard. A prominent epidemiologist explains this as a new kind of public health problem."

Negatives:

1. Some essays did not live up to the quality established overall. Adam Smith's (yes that Adam Smith) essay or excerpt on necessities was underwhelming.
2. Barbara Ehrenreich's satirical essay on the other end of the pay scale falls flat.
3. Herrera was misspelled throughout one of the best essays of the book, *Wage Theft* by Kim Bobo.
4. Unless you look closely you would think that this book was written by David Cay Johnston. The book cover does not make clear it's a book of essays, the term edited implies that but I would venture to say many will miss that.
5. Lack of supplementary materials. I would have added a chapter of interesting tidbits that highlight the main theme of the book. Perhaps a table that showcases what CEOs of top companies make versus the average employee.

In summary, this was an interesting and accessible book of essays covering the hot topic of income inequality. These are generally high-quality essays that cover a wide-range of topics within inequality. A worthwhile read, I recommend it!

Further recommendations: "Perfectly Legal", "The Fine Print" and "Free Lunch" by the same author, "Divide" by Matt Taibbi, "Runaway Inequality" and "Looting America" by Les Leopold, "Saving Capitalism" and "Beyond Outrage" by Robert B. Reich, "Protecting Capitalism Case by Case" by Eliot Spitzer, "The Great Divide" and "The Price of Inequality" by Joseph E. Stiglitz, "Winner-Take-All Politics" by Jacob S. Hacker "Republic, Lost" by Lawrence Lessig, "The New Elite" by Dr. Jim Taylor, "ECONned"

by Yves Smith, "The Great Divergence" by Timothy Noah, and "Bailout" by Neil Barofsky.

Peter McLoughlin says

Book on inequality that long sucking sound in our economy that has been bothering the bottom 98% since the 1970s. Inequality has grown and quality of life has declined. It's been going on for decades. Rich people who run the economy like it and it sucks for everyone else. The essays cover phenomena of inequality and how it makes life worse for most of us from politics to health to our lives and our economy. Problem is that books like this rarely move those at the levers of power who like inequality just fine.

Lynn says

Fascinating Collection of Articles on American Financial Inequality

These articles discuss the causes, implications, and impact on our country for potential unrest, political harm to the democracy and the country's development. People in America are being continually harmed. David Cay Johnston is the editor of this election. He often appears on MSNBC. He provides an insightful book on inequality and how it harms the nation that we love and the people living inside its borders. Because the U.S. is such a huge example for the world, what policies are advanced affects other countries. To some, we may be an example for cracking down on civil liberties, to others, the U.S. will become irrelevant and another nation will become more important.

David Hillman says

Skimmed, probably good if you care much about social justice.

Ray Johns says

The first two essays in this collection by David Cay Johnston are President Barack Obama's great 'Osawatomie, Kansas speech -- the President's re-election 2012 campaign speech was a prairie populist economic manifesto for the 21st century and an essay by Elizabeth Warren on our rigged economic system. This book is an excellent source book for understanding how we might positively reform the rigged social and economic system that we're still facing today. I highly recommend David Cay Johnston's book for the citizen-advocate interested in the pursuit of a more fair, just, moderate liberal sustainable American economy.
