

01 | Assignment 1: How do you explain inequality in the United States? / 12 Supporting your arguments: An Annotation

I believe a couple of causes that lead certain individuals to being rich or poor include the following: invisible caste system, systemic racism, oppression, conflict so we do not band together, the oligarchies, the rich helping the rich, and unequal access to better education, and more opportunities. withholding genuine education to keep the poor dumb, and of course good ole Ronald Reagan. After taking this class I still stand on and by everything I originally said, but now I am able to explain it better because I have more knowledge regarding structural inequality. I still believe we are basically living in an invisible caste system, but I would say that this system is maintained through institutions, policies, and unequal opportunities that keep certain groups ahead and others struggling from the beginning. Whether people believe it or not, we are essentially in an invisible caste system, because at the end of the day, the American society needs the poor to work the lower wage jobs, because if everyone was "equal", then who would work those jobs? Module 5 supports this idea by showing that some people defend inequality as something that keeps society functioning and pushes people to work harder (Module 5 – Is Inequality a Problem?). The entire system is unfair, and it shows how inequality is built into the system. Systemic racism, oppression, continuous conflict, and unequal access to education and opportunity is self-explanatory, this is to keep non-white folk from benefiting as much as the white folk, but of course there are white folk that also fall under oppression and the education being withheld such as rural white folk. The myth of meritocracy helps cover this up. One reading showed that low-income students who believed more strongly in meritocracy later had lower self-esteem and more risky behavior (Module 5 – Canvas reading Anderson, 2017). There are without a doubt, other issues that impacts white folk as well, but that is for another time. ~~Ronald Reagan... I could go on forever about that former president, but he is a massive reason why we are where we are today, in more aspects than just socially.~~

Generational wealth, access to good education, where one was born, lineage, skin color, social status, and access to "healthy" foods on a regular basis are just a couple of factors that may assist in determining whether someone will be rich or poor later in life. I would now also add wealth, inheritance, homeownership, debt, equal pay, and protection from discrimination. This class made it clear that income and wealth are not the same. Income is what people earn, but wealth is what they own minus debt, and wealth can be passed down. In the chairs example/activity, the top 20% owned 84% of the wealth, while the bottom 40% owned less than 1% (Module 3 – Wealth Inequality as Chairs). The most important factors to support this, in my opinion, would be generational wealth is where your great-grandparents may have created an invention, and the trickling down wealth has

assisted the family in keeping up with the times and furthering their wealth each generation; they did not have to worry about money, education, or social class. I still think generational wealth is one of the biggest factors because it impacts almost everything else. Wealth can help pay for college, housing, business opportunities, and connections that poor families often cannot provide (Module 9 – Race Disparities). Access to good education would be if you are able to read, speak, and write then your chances of being able to have more opportunities to jobs that pay a significant amount more than your counterparts would be elevated incredibly. Although, I would now say more clearly that education alone does not fix inequality. Even “neutral” policies can still favor wealthier and whiter families. Legacy admissions are one example because they reward families who already had access to higher education (Module 9 – Institutional, Structural, and System Racism). Lineage, if you are born into a family where the name carries weight (in a rich positive way), you automatically have access to wealth, education, and more opportunities. That is exactly why I do not believe in meritocracy. In Born Rich, Jaime Johnson says he did nothing to earn the wealth he inherited. That alone shows success is not solely about merit or hard work (Module 7 – Video “Born Rich”). The birthplace/area where one is raised, skin color, having access to "healthy" food is self-explanatory as well because if you are brown born into a horribly poor neighborhood, and do not have access to adequate food, then you are more likely to struggle in all aspects of life. I continue to feel strongly about that, because some minorities are more likely to live in poorer neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, fewer resources, and heavier policing. The module on institutional racism explained that race-neutral policies can still produce racial inequality because of older housing and poverty patterns that are already in place (Module 9 – Institutional, Structural, and System Racism).

No, I do not believe that everyone in the U.S.A. has a fair chance of being rich if they just work hard enough because everyone doesn't have the same opportunities from the beginning, may not have the same level of education, may automatically be discriminated against, and unfortunately, having family or friends who are wealthy may amplify the chances of others getting better opportunities to become rich. I believed this before, and this class gave me stronger proof. Module 7 showed that the wealthy do not just have more money. They also have more power and more influence over policy, which makes it harder for regular people to be represented fairly (Module 7 – Wealth, Struggles and Ruling Class). I interpret a fair chance as equity versus equality because not everyone is the same but if everyone is given assistance to be able to be at the starting point despite what circumstances they may have, then that would be a fair chance. I still believe that. A fair chance means people actually have the support they need, not just the same speech about hard work. I do believe that society should ensure a "fair" chance and to the extent of everyone having safe neighborhoods, safe housing, free healthcare, mandatory free

schooling through college, assistance for families with children, and assistance for individuals or families without children. After this class, I would narrow that down most to healthcare, free college, equal pay, and protection from discrimination. If those four were taken seriously, I believe the rest would fall in line or improve as well. Alas, I am not done yet. I would also add that inequality impacts democracy itself. One study of over 1,700 policies found that public support had little impact on whether a policy passed, while the preferences of economic elites did matter (Module 8 – Policy: Power Elite). That means the wealthy have more influence over the rules that the rest must live under. Module 4 also showed that poverty can be profitable for institutions. Asset forfeiture and heavy use of fines and fees have disproportionately hurt poor people, especially in places like Ferguson, where law enforcement was shaped by revenue more than public safety (Module 4 – Who Profits from Poverty?). Society should not guarantee that everyone would get rich, but it should stop setting poor people up to fail. I believe society would need to look like what Bernie Sanders and AOC preach. I have found out... quite recently that I have somewhat Socialist views, but I do not agree with the government governing what I can and cannot own; government should provide for their citizens without overreaching.

Reflection

I would say that this class did not change my opinion completely because I already believed that hard work alone is not enough and that the United States is not a true meritocracy. What it did do though, was give stronger evidence and better language to explain why. Before, I explained inequality more through personal opinions and feelings. Now I would explain it more through structural inequality. The modules showed me how wealth, race, education, and policy all intersect and keep inequality present through generations. That part felt personal to me because I have seen and experienced how certain minorities are more likely to grow up in poorer neighborhoods and repeated cycles of crime, and because my parents did not have many opportunities, I had to figure out most of my life decisions on my own. I do want to clarify that I do not blame them either. This class just reinforced for me that not everyone starts with the same opportunities, and choosing to ignore it will only continue the cycle.

References

[\(Module 3 – Wealth Inequality as Chairs\)](#)

[\(Module 4 – Who Profits from Poverty?\)](#)

[\(Module 5 – Is Inequality a Problem?\)](#)

[\(Module 5 – Canvas reading Anderson, 2017\)](#)

[\(Module 7 – Video “Born Rich”\)](#)

[\(Module 7 – Wealth, Struggles and Ruling Class\)](#)

[\(Module 8 – Policy: Power Elite\)](#)

[\(Module 9 – Race Disparities\)](#)

[\(Module 9 – Institutional, Structural, and System Racism\)](#)