

**The American Income and Wealth Inequality Debate**

**Media List**

The debatable question for this project is formulated as follows:

**Income and wealth inequality is the most significant economic problem in America today.**

Background Information or Both Sides

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoTzjxUfh1Q>

[Video] Short video from BBC News highlighting some of the current facts about American income inequality, including some revealing Pew Research Center survey data on Americans’ attitudes toward it. One conclusion drawn by the piece: Americans are united that income inequality is a big problem but are divided about what to do about it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GHKp6tPsEY>

[Video] Intelligence Squared Debate on this motion: ‘Income inequality is impeding the American Dream of upward mobility.’

<http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/02/349863761/40-years-of-income-inequality-in-america-in-graphs>

NPR-collected graph data that shows the ‘hollowing out of the middle,’ where middle-income salaries have actually been falling, when adjusted for inflation, while low-income wages have been stagnant, and upper-income salaries and wealth have been climbing.

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/30/the-hidden-prosperity-of-the-poor/?src=me&ref=general>

Fascinating, bi-directional, and very thorough look at the ‘consumption theory’ that has been developed against the problem of income inequality. ‘Consumption theory’ is the idea that the economic condition of the lower and middle income Americans has gone up even as their relative income has gone down because (a) the price of essential goods and services has gone down, and (b) governmental safety net programs have become more efficient and effective.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Income_inequality_in_the_United_States#cite_note-126>

A scholarly review of the history and current state of income inequality in America, with lots of references to additional sources.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfgSEwjAeno>

[Video] Funny review of the issues wrapped up in the income inequality debate, with a strong bent toward the affirmative side, and (unfortunately) several uses of profanity and one inappropriate image.

Affirmative

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>

[Video] A series of infographics highlighting how much worse income inequality is in the U.S. than is commonly perceived or than Americans believe should exist.

<http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson?language=en>

[Video] TED Talk by Richard Wilkinson outlining the specific ways that income inequality harms societies.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/07/5-facts-about-economic-inequality/>

Data points from the Pew Research Center about American income and wealth inequality. It is large and getting larger, and it’s worse than it’s been since 1928. The gap is wider in the U.S. than in other developed nations. The wealth gap is also bigger than the income gap.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/15/shiller-income-inequality-problem_n_4100509.html>

Nobel Prize winning economist Robert Schiller argues that income inequality is the biggest problem America faces right now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ik1y4ZNSjek>

[Video] Professor of economics Robert Reich presents a mini-documentary that argues that income inequality in the U.S. has grown substantially beginning in the 1970s. The causes of this growth in inequality have been (a) a reduction in tax rates in the highest-earning tax brackets, and (b) policy changes that have favored corporations, for instance financial deregulation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWpGJI1H17s>

[Video] According to Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, income inequality is closely related to the lack of economic opportunity in the U.S.

<http://fortune.com/2014/10/31/inequality-wealth-income-us/>

High level of income and wealth inequality leads to a lack of economic mobility, which in turn causes social problems like alcoholism and crime.

<http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/531726/technology-and-inequality/>

Statistic-laden article discusses in depth two possible consequences of what it calls the worst income and wealth inequality in human history. One is economist Thomas Piketty’s view that the U.S. is moving to complete dominance of an oligarchy, where inherited wealth almost fully rules and determines one’s life chances. The other is economist Eric Brynjolfsson’s view that technology advancement is cementing a wide gap between innovators and everyone else.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/02/opinion/paul-krugman-twin-peaks-planet.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=c-column-top-span-region&region=c-column-top-span-region&WT.nav=c-column-top-span-region&_r=0>

Economist Paul Krugman implies that the current wide gap in income and wealth inequality might lead to a repeat of the rise of fascism and the great risk of war that would result, as happened in the 1930s.

<http://www.people.hbs.edu/mnorton/norton%20ariely%20in%20press.pdf>

Study finds that (a) most Americans are unaware of how severe income inequality actually is in the U.S., and (b) the consensus of Americans, from across the political spectrum, favor a more equitable distribution of income and wealth.

Negative

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvgx5H5dWSw>

[Video] Fox News host Bill O’Reilly argues that although income inequality exists, the affluent provide the majority of tax revenues in the U.S., several trillion dollars per year, and are taxed enough. The bigger priority for the American economy is increasing growth so that wages and salaries can go up.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/246134>

Entrepreneur Andrew Yang argues that the primary economic problem in the U.S. is stifled entrepreneurship. If more small businesses were being created, lower-income people would have more job opportunity, better chances of advancement, and their incomes would rise.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/232397>

‘Inequality is the other side of success’ and is acceptable. What isn’t acceptable is the lack of opportunity. Focus should be on expanding economic opportunity.

<http://www.cnbc.com/id/100361302>

Income inequality is a sign of an efficient, highly functioning capitalist economy, and it creates stronger incentives for hard work and productivity in workers.

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w6770.pdf>

Harvard economist Martin Feldstein writes that income inequality is irrelevant. The only reason to make it more relevant than a concern about poverty is if we wanted to punish high achievement. The focus of U.S. economic policy should be on eradicating poverty, if that can be done.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/upshot/income-inequality-is-not-rising-globally-its-falling-.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0>

Economics professor Tyler Cowens substantiates that global income inequality is declining, even if American income inequality is increasing. Egalitarians should therefore not view income inequality as a key economic problem.

<http://budget.house.gov/uploadedfiles/cboinequality.pdf>

Rep. Paul Ryan (R – WI) states in a report that there are two economic problems more important than income inequality that, if they were fixed, they would significantly mitigate income inequality in the U.S. First, governmental spending is making income inequality worse. Entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security, which are not means tested, are drawing income from low and middle income people and sending it to upper-middle and upper income people. Plus there is substantial ‘corporate welfare’ in governmental programs today. Second. economic opportunity is limited in the U.S. A lack of economic opportunity is the driver of inequality.

<https://ricochet.com/archives/paul-ryan-on-income-inequality-and-upward-mobility/>

Demographic trends are an important factor in income inequality. Gender equality has meant that upper-income, well-educated families now have two high-earners, since wives are now working in those families in high-paying jobs. And the explosion of single-parent families, particularly at lower income levels has diminished family income and family wealth.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/may/13/income-inequality-doesnt-matter/>

For a variety of reasons, income inequality shouldn’t matter that much to us. It’s not a very meaningful measurement.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/05/business/economy/seeking-new-tools-to-address-income-inequality.html>

Income inequality may be too deeply intrinsic to capitalism to have any solution, as suggested by decades of efforts by the U.S. government that have had very little impact. If the current issue is to be mitigated that may have to come exclusively through internal reformation of the private sector.