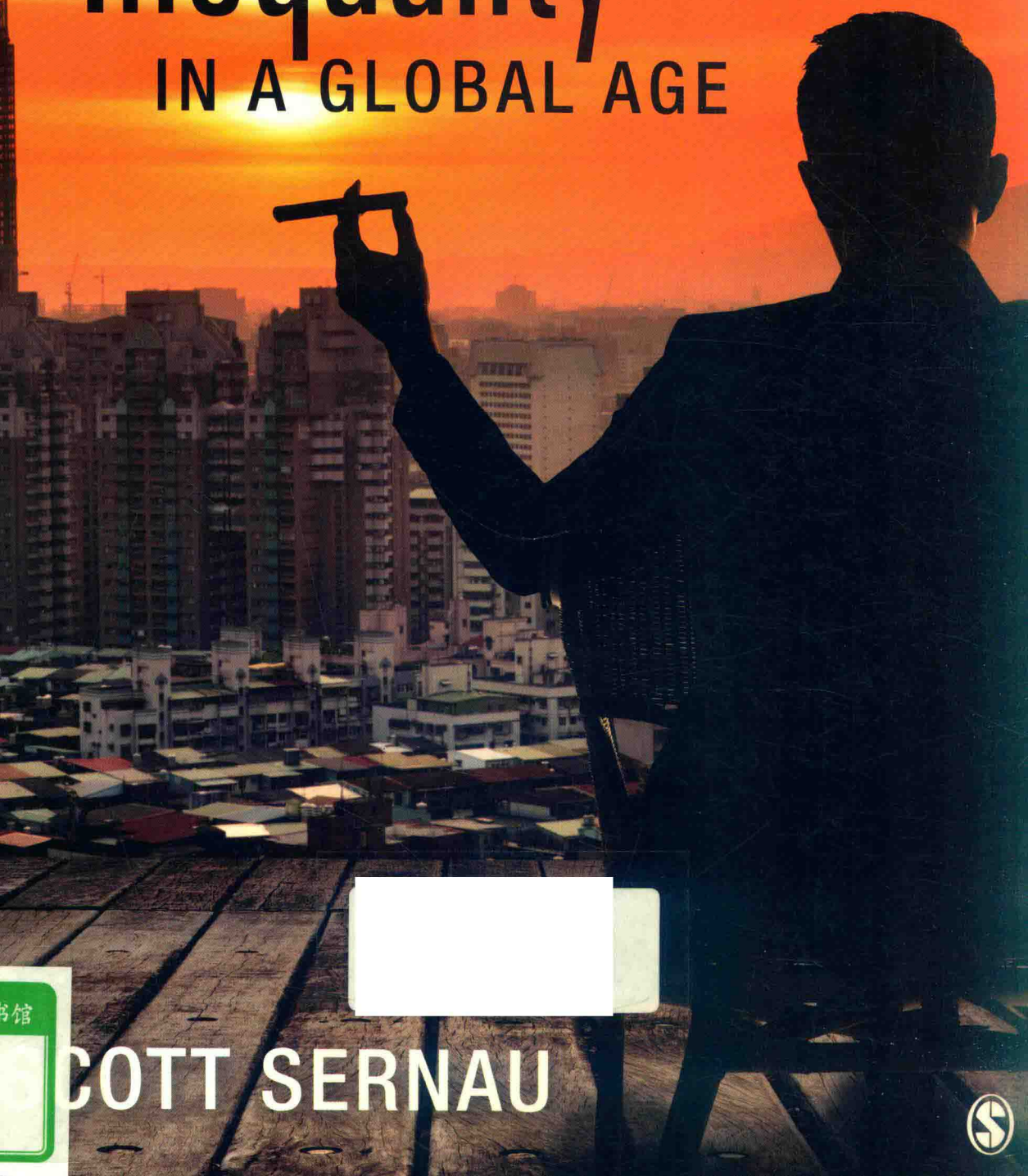


FIFTH EDITION

# Social Inequality

IN A GLOBAL AGE



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COTT SERNAU



# Social Inequality

IN A GLOBAL AGE

FIFTH EDITION

**SCOTT SERNAU**

*Indiana University South Bend*



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
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Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
E-mail: [order@sagepub.com](mailto:order@sagepub.com)

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55 City Road  
London, EC1Y 1SP  
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SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
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Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044  
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.  
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#10-04 Samsung Hub  
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Acquisitions Editor: Jeff Lasser  
Editorial Assistant: Alexandra Croell  
eLearning Editor: Gabrielle Piccininni  
Production Editor: Jane Haenel  
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Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.  
Proofreader: Jeff Bryant  
Indexer: Terri Morrissey  
Cover Designer: Scott Van Atta

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Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record of this book is available from the Library of Congress.*

Names: Sernau, Scott, author.

Title: Social inequality in a global age / Scott Sernau, Indiana University South Bend.

Other titles: Worlds apart

Description: Fifth edition. | Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016. | Earlier editions published as: *Worlds apart: social inequalities in a new century*. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016000043 | ISBN 978-1-4833-7397-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Social stratification. | Equality.

Classification: LCC HM821 .S47 2016 | DDC 305—dc23  
LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2016000043>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

16 17 18 19 20 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# **Social Inequality**

**IN A GLOBAL AGE**

**FIFTH EDITION**

**SAGE** was founded in 1965 by Sara Miller McCune to support the dissemination of usable knowledge by publishing innovative and high-quality research and teaching content. Today, we publish over 900 journals, including those of more than 400 learned societies, more than 800 new books per year, and a growing range of library products including archives, data, case studies, reports, and video. SAGE remains majority-owned by our founder, and after Sara's lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures our continued independence.

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# Preface

**S**ocial stratification and inequality have remained at the core of sociological thinking from the classical theorists on through the work of current scholars, who are demonstrating new interest in issues of race, class, and gender. Yet the concept of stratification itself can be a challenging one to teach and to study. Students are often more interested in learning about the particular aspects of inequality that they see affecting themselves than they are in examining the whole structure of social inequality. Students who have never been encouraged to think of their own experiences in terms of social class and social structure may approach the whole topic with apathy. This is not to blame students—the failure to think in terms of class is a problem deeply rooted in our society. Students may also face a course on social stratification with a certain dread: Those who are math-phobic may worry about too many statistics, and those from relatively privileged backgrounds may worry that they will be the subject of finger-pointing by “radical” professors. Although I have always tried to connect the course I teach about inequality to the lived experiences of my students and their communities, I admit that I have probably also assigned readings that have often contributed to both apathy and angst on the part of students.

At the same time that I’ve been teaching courses on inequality over the past 3 decades, I have also had the privilege of editing the American Sociological Association’s syllabus and instructional materials collection for inequality and stratification, and I have organized workshops on teaching courses in this subject matter at the annual meetings of various professional societies. In attending these workshops, I have realized that although instructors are often passionate about the topic, they have their own angst in teaching it. They want students to understand the foundations of classical theory in a way that actually illuminates their current studies; they don’t want students to see those foundations as just the work of “old, dead Germans.” Instructors want to incorporate exciting new material on race, class, and gender while still giving students a solid grounding in the core concepts. They are often eager to include material on the globalized economy while still helping students understand changes in their own communities. And above all, they are struggling to find ways to help students see the relevance—even the urgency—of this material to the society we are currently making and remaking. Their plea has been for materials that are organized but not pat, hard-hitting but not preachy; they are looking for ways to help students both care deeply and think deeply about the topic.

This book is an effort to answer that plea. The language and the examples I use here are straight from current headlines and everyday experience—straightforward without oversimplifying difficult issues. The classical theorists get their say, not just in a perfunctory overview at the beginning but throughout the entire book, as their ideas give foundation to current topics. At the same time, discussion of the divides of race and gender is not just appended to the chapters but integrated into the analysis and the narrative so that students can begin to grasp how differing dimensions of inequality interrelate. Likewise, the theme of global change and the globalization of our times is integral to each chapter. Rather than tack some comparative material onto the end of each chapter, I place the U.S. experience in a global context throughout. In my teaching, I have found that the way to help students see the relevance and importance of global material is to link it directly to their own lived experience, and I have brought that approach to this book.

This is not a book by committee, and I have not tried to make it sound like one. I occasionally relate personal experiences (they are, as one speaker noted, the only kind I have) and close-to-home examples. My hope is that students in turn will be able to relate the material to their own lives and communities and the changes they are witnessing in both.

The first three chapters explore the background to a sociological study of inequality. Chapter 1 gives expanded attention to the intersection of race, class, and gender—along with the related dimensions of age, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion—as a way to provoke thoughtful reflection on how these are intertwined in our social world. It presents students with a challenge to think systematically, maybe for the first time, about how social inequalities of class, race, and gender have affected who they are and what Max Weber would have called their life chances. The next two chapters explore the fervent debate that has swirled around the topic of inequality since the very first civilizations and the emerging global economy that provides the context for understanding a society's struggles with poverty and inequality. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explore how class, race, and gender divide U.S. and global social structure. These three chapters are followed by two that round out Max Weber's analysis of the dimensions of inequality: Chapter 7 addresses prestige and lifestyle, and Chapter 8 discusses political power. These chapters bring the ideas of Weber, Thorstein Veblen, and C. Wright Mills to life with current examples of changing lifestyles and patterns of consumption as well as debates about such things as campaign finance reform. The chapters in Part III look at the challenges posed by inequality: education and mobility, poverty and place, public policy, and the role of social movements. These chapters examine the classic studies of mobility but also the current debates on educational reform; the realities of urban, suburban, and rural poverty; the challenges of public policy, from the New Deal to welfare reform and beyond; and the struggles of both old and new social movements. The final chapter, on the globalization of race, class, and gender, is both a call to understanding—linking the labor movement, the women's movement, and the civil rights movement just as previous chapters linked class, gender, and race—and a call to action. It describes new movements whose successes show that despite real societal constraints, positive action toward a more just society is possible.

The combination of critical thinking and personal involvement is carried into the “Making Connections” and “Making a Difference” resources and activities at the end of each chapter. These provide students with links to reliable sources of further information through both the world and the World Wide Web. They also offer students options for exploring the topics discussed in the chapters in more detail, applying concepts to their own experiences, backgrounds, and local communities. These wide-ranging exercises amplify the local–global connections made in the book and give students and instructors the opportunity to deepen and extend the learning process. The message throughout this volume is that although there are no easy answers, we must not assume that there are no answers. Rather, we must accept the challenge to move on to deeper understandings and to new and better questions. My hope is that every reader finds here a challenge to move from apathy and angst to analysis and action.

## Online Instructor Teaching Site

SAGE’s password-protected Instructor Teaching Site for *Social Inequality in a Global Age, Fifth Edition*, is available at <http://study.sagepub.com/sernau5e>. Simply provide your institutional information for verification, and within 72 hours you’ll be able to use your login information for any SAGE title!

Password-protected Instructor Resources include the following:

- A **Microsoft® Word test bank** is available containing multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions for each chapter. The test bank provides you with a diverse range of pre-written options as well as the opportunity to edit any question and/or insert your own personalized questions to effectively assess students’ progress and understanding.
- **Tables and Figures** are available in an easily downloadable format for use in papers, handouts, and presentations.
- Carefully selected **web links** for each chapter are provided to enhance classroom-based explorations of key topics.



# Acknowledgments

Books are always a collaborative effort, and the SAGE team has been both highly professional and highly supportive. I have worked with Jeff Lasser, publisher, on various projects over the years and always appreciated his thoughtful guidance. Steve Rutter and Jerry Westby helped craft this project in its early stages, and Ben Penner and David Repetto provided insights, enthusiasm, and encouragement for later editions. It has been a pleasure to work with a publisher who not only understands “market forces” but also truly grasps social forces and the important social justice issues of our day. This is a rarity, and I have enjoyed the collaboration. Jane Haenel, production editor, cheerfully and efficiently organized everything, including last-minute updates, into a coherent whole. Pei-Chun Lee was a wonderful research assistant who collected and updated data. Amy Harris repaired my problematic prose and carefully checked sources. The book is also enriched by a collaboration with two talented young photographers, Catherine Alley and Elena Grupp, who provided photo essays set in rural Honduras, the Navajo reservation of Arizona, and the old industrial corridor of South Bend, Indiana. Their eye for the challenges and harsh realities as well as the beauty and cultural richness of struggling places is a wonderful complement to the message of the text.

Books such as this live and die at the hands of reviewers, and I’ve been fortunate to have had some of the best. Thanks go to those who read the early drafts of the first chapters and provided the insights to build this into a much stronger book.

For the first edition:

William L. Breedlove, *College of Charleston*

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For the fifth edition:

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Martin Rowe, *Boston University*

J. Zach Schiller, *Kent State University*

Gretchen Webber, *Middle Tennessee State University*

Their resounding enthusiasm for the book and its contributions kept me writing, while at the same time their painstaking critiques of the chapters kept me honest and constantly refining the material. The book's final form owes a great deal to their suggestions because I reorganized some of the chapters to present the material with maximum clarity as well as to highlight important issues concerning race and gender, global economic change, and social movements.

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