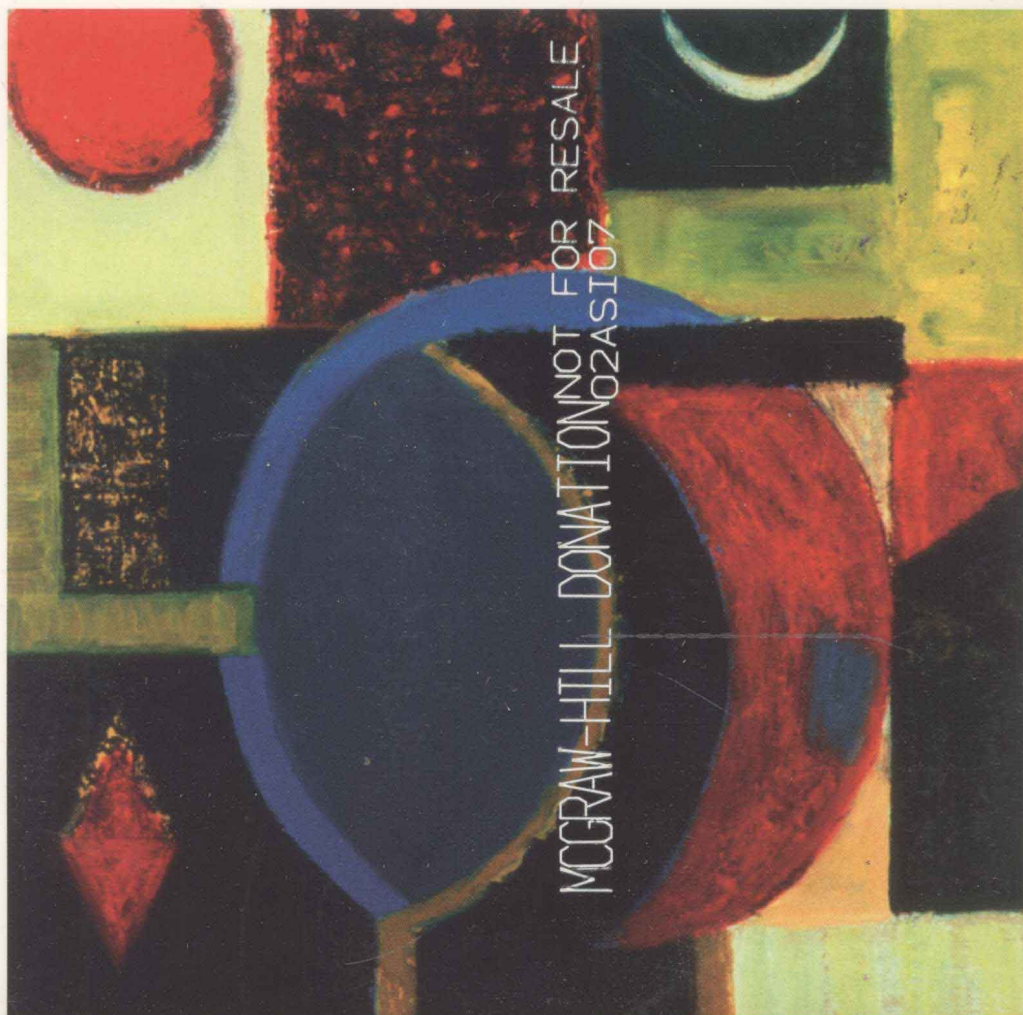


MARTIN N. MARGER



SOCIAL INEQUALITY

PATTERNS & PROCESSES

Third Edition

Social Inequality

Patterns and Processes

Third Edition

Martin N. Marger

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Preface

Throughout the epochs of human history, the regularity—and seeming inevitability—of social inequality has been observed and commented upon repeatedly by philosophers, historians, and, in recent decades, social scientists. At the outset of the twenty-first century, inequality within and between societies remains ubiquitous and starkly apparent. Nothing on the horizon, furthermore, portends a serious reduction in—let alone an end to—this inexorable condition, either in the developing world or the post-industrial world. In the latter, despite the creation of affluence that past generations could only fantasize, the maldistribution of wealth between the haves and the have-nots is as severe and steadfast as in any previous era.

This book is intended to serve as an introduction to the patterns and processes of social inequality in its major forms—class, racial/ethnic, gender, political—in the United States and other contemporary societies. Its objective is also to help develop an awareness of how inequality impinges on virtually all facets of individual and group life. It is designed primarily for an undergraduate student audience and assumes little prior exposure to the social sciences. A more general readership also may find its contents informative and enlightening.

Inequality, in its sundry forms, has long been a staple of sociological inquiry but has held an important place among the topical concerns of other social science disciplines as well. In recent years its traditionally prominent status among the foci of social scientists has been raised higher. In the United States, issues of economic inequality, particularly the widening gap between rich and poor, have not only become standard points of social science discourse but are also an increasingly salient part of political debate. Racial/ethnic inequality has always served as a focal point of American sociology, but it has grown even more compelling with the emergence of several ongoing societal trends: a persistent economic gap between Euro-American groups and racial/ethnic minorities, a public debate that has arisen in response to efforts to deal with that gap (namely, measures subsumed under the rubric of affirmative action), and the influx of new immigrants who have created a more pluralistic ethnic *mélange*. Gender issues are a fundamental component of the social inequality mix, and particular attention in recent years has been paid to the manner in which they impact class and ethnic issues. The political dimension underlies all other forms of social inequality, and the ability of citizens to hold leaders accountable and to affect public policies is an abiding concern in all contemporary societies, even those where democratic institutions prevail.

In my years of teaching courses in social stratification, race and ethnic relations, and political sociology, I have discovered that most texts either narrowly focus on one or another form of inequality or they analytically conflate these forms, making it difficult to distinguish them. Although the major dimensions of inequality are obviously interwoven, they do not fall neatly together in a coherent package, either for individuals or for whole societies. Accordingly, I have treated different forms of inequality in self-standing chapters, although the interrelationships among them are discussed throughout. I do consider the class dimension to be most basic, however, and it is there that the book is primarily focused. In discussing racial/ethnic, gender, and political inequalities, emphasis is placed on how they relate to and overlap with class inequalities.

Perhaps no other area of inquiry in the social sciences better lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach than does social inequality. Although sociology has usually taken the lead, economics, political science, and anthropology all focus in various ways on this universal phenomenon. As social scientists have acknowledged the interweaving and overlapping nature of the major dimensions of social inequality, university courses in this field have become more integrative and comprehensive. I have tried to design this book to conform to such an interdisciplinary and inclusive perspective.

I also believe that American students can acquire a more profound understanding of patterns and processes of social inequality in their own country through comparative analysis. Too often undergraduates enter social science courses with an inflated view of the United States vis-à-vis the rest of the world; unfortunately, they often leave with that view unchanged. One of the objectives of this book, therefore, is to inform readers of how the nature of social inequality in the United States is both distinct from and common with social inequality in other contemporary societies. Although all chapters emphasize conditions in American society, each contains discussions of U.S. inequality in a cross-national context, drawing illustrations and data from other comparable societies.

Chapter 1 sets the tone of the book, exploring the unique ways in which sociologists deal with issues of inequality and establishing a lexicon of key terms and concepts utilized throughout. It also explains the extant forms of inequality in modern societies and provides a preview of succeeding chapters.

Chapter 2 examines theories of social inequality, particularly those that seek to explain social class. In this edition—unlike previous ones—I have chosen to place the theory chapter before the descriptive chapters. Some instructors, I am sure, will prefer the converse order of coverage. This chapter, as well as most others, can be easily rearranged to accommodate different pedagogical approaches. It should be noted as well that much theoretical discussion is contained in other chapters that deal with particular issues, such as poverty, the elite structure, and mobility, or with racial/ethnic, gender, and political dimensions of inequality. The purpose of this chapter is to examine class theories in a more general context.

Chapter 3 describes the American class system, presenting a bird's-eye view of the class hierarchy and an examination of the distribution of income and wealth. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal with the three major class divisions—the poor, the rich, and the classes in the middle—emphasizing socioeconomic

issues and patterns. Chapter 6 also discusses the power elite and the ways in which power relates to wealth. Chapter 7 begins with a description of the major systems of stratification, explaining the provisions for mobility in each, and then looks at the forms, extent, and issues of social mobility in the United States and other societies.

Chapter 8 examines the ways in which government affects the distribution of wealth and power. An underlying assumption of this chapter is that public policies play a fundamental role in determining the shape and depth of inequality in all modern societies. Much discussion centers on how the U.S. welfare state differs from those of other post-industrial societies.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with issues of racial/ethnic inequality. Chapter 9 describes the ethnic makeup of American society and the development of its ethnic diversity as a prerequisite to explaining the ethnic hierarchy in Chapter 10. Over the years I have discovered a disturbing lack of awareness on the part of U.S. students, as well as the general public, of the most elemental features of the American racial/ethnic system, particularly the historical processes of its formation and the demographics of specific groups and categories. Essential to a meaningful analysis of racial/ethnic inequalities is a basic understanding of the concepts of race and ethnicity and of the society's racial and ethnic composition.

Chapter 11 focuses on the gender dimension of inequality. With the enormously wide range of issues that today comprise gender studies, coverage of gender as part of a comprehensive introduction to social inequality must be selective. Among gender issues, it is changes in the occupational role of women, in my view, that have rendered the most far-reaching societal effects during the past several decades. Much of this chapter, therefore, concerns patterns and processes of gender inequality in the workplace, though other institutional areas are discussed, including politics and the family.

Chapter 12 examines political inequality. The first part of this chapter covers the more prominent theories and debates about the U.S. power structure and the role of political elites. The second part deals with the role of masses, exploring how and to what degree they can effectively impact the political system.

Chapter 13 is devoted to ideology and the legitimization process. The basic objective is to explore the functions of ideology in solidifying and sustaining social inequality. The features of the prevailing American ideology are discussed along with the role of major institutions in communicating that ideology. This chapter explains the persistence of social inequality, not primarily as a result of coercion, but through other, less blatant and obvious, means.

Although I did not set out deliberately to frame these chapters thematically, as I wove together the various topics, a leitmotiv seemed to emerge: the discordant societal currents of *liberty* and *equity*. In all societies, various forms of social inequality, the efforts and policies that address them, and the theories that seek to explain them, appear to revolve around the clash of these two overarching values. This ideological confrontation is particularly evident in the United States, where the sanctity of individual freedom within capitalism conflicts with notions of democracy and equality. This is an age-old philosophical battle, of course, not limited to the contemporary world or to capitalist democracies. As the nineteenth-century essayist Walter Bagehot put it, "There is no method by which men can be both free and equal."

Changes to the Third Edition

While the core of the previous editions has been retained, all chapters have been updated with the latest statistical data available. Also, among the book's 58 tables and figures, 16 are entirely new. Several sections are expanded or entail new discussions. These include the status of low-income families in the reformed welfare system (Chapter 4); the precarious financial position of the American middle class, exacerbated by increasing levels of debt (Chapter 5); outsourcing of jobs and the export of white-collar, skilled jobs abroad (Chapter 5); forms of modern slavery (Chapter 7); the relationship of education to income and wealth (Chapter 7); the digital divide (Chapter 7) and the potential impact of the Internet on political participation (Chapter 12); the regressive effects of the tax cuts of the early 2000s (Chapter 8); and the linkage between income and political participation (Chapter 12).

The most apparent change in this edition is a slight rearrangement of the table of contents. The theory chapter—previously Chapter 8—is now Chapter 2, following the introductory chapter. Although in my own classroom experience I have often found it effective to move sequentially from a description of class systems to theoretical explanations of those systems, I acknowledge the more common approach of establishing a theoretical base *prerequisite* to an examination of class, racial/ethnic, gender, and political inequality. Also, I have moved the chapter on ideology (formerly Chapter 9) to the book's conclusion (Chapter 13). Reviewers of past editions have remarked that, although certainly relevant throughout the text, this chapter can easily stand alone. Upon reflection it seemed to me that placing it at the end was perhaps most logical because it addresses a common query of students after they have looked at patterns of inequality in different social spheres: Why are stratification systems not more often challenged and transformed? In my view, the role of ideology is central in explaining how difficult it is to alter well-established patterns of inequality when they are rationalized by key institutions and become an accepted part of the social landscape.

Accompanying Test Bank

Kevin Everett, Radford University, has written a test bank to accompany the text. The test bank includes multiple-choice, true-false, and short-answer/essay questions. The test bank is available on CD-ROM.

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At McGraw-Hill, Amy Shaffer, Sherith Pankratz, and Cathy Iammartino provided valuable editorial and production support to this edition. I appreciate the thoughtful comments and critical suggestions offered by those who reviewed the second edition, in preparation for the third: Reba L. Chaisson, Purdue University–North Central; Josefina Figueira-McDonough, Arizona State University; Donna Goyer, California State University at San Marcos; Daniel A. Powers, University of Texas at Austin; and Lisa K. Zottarelli, Idaho State University. I also owe an intellectual debt to Jim McKee and Kevin Kelly, whose observations often prompted me to rethink issues of social inequality. And, as always, my thanks to Connie.



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An Introduction to the Study of Social Inequality

[F]or centuries and over almost the whole of the globe, it has been a basic assumption in societies of any size or complexity that some men are born to power and luxury, others to toil and poverty.

PHILIP MASON

Equality would be a heaven, if we could attain it.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

In 1989, Malcolm Forbes, the publisher of *Forbes* magazine, celebrated his seventieth birthday by gathering his friends at Kennedy Airport in New York and flying them to Tangier, Morocco, for the weekend. There they dined in Arabian tents erected on terrace gardens overlooking the sea. Luxury also extended to the portable sanitary facilities, which were designed with black-and-white tile floors, sinks, and toilets that flushed. Forbes's date for the affair was Elizabeth Taylor.

Just a few miles from where the Forbes party was getting ready to board three chartered jets (including a Concorde) to attend the birthday party to end all birthday parties, a husband and wife and their four children were living in two small rooms at the Kenmore Hotel, a run-down apartment house where the toilets did not work, the mice ran free, and the hallways were used by prostitutes and drug dealers.

Although the contrast in these two cases could not be more stark, it is not one that is particularly uncommon or surprising. The gap between rich and poor in the United States is wide and in recent years has been continually expanding. In this, however, the United States is far from unique. Although there are relative differences among them, all contemporary societies display a significant disparity between those at the top of the social hierarchy and those at the bottom. Moreover, the gap between whole nations, rich and poor, is also great and in most cases shows little sign of closing. Consider that the annual per capita gross national income in the United States is more than \$34,000 while in many Asian and most sub-Saharan African countries it is less than \$1,000 (Table 1-1).

Table 1-1 ■ Per Capita Gross National Income (GNI), 2000

Country	GNI (\$)
Luxembourg	42,060
Switzerland	38,140
Japan	35,620
Norway	34,530
United States	34,100
Germany	25,120
United Kingdom	24,430
France	24,090
Canada	21,130
Australia	20,240
Israel	16,710
Greece	11,960
Korea	8,910
Argentina	7,460
Mexico	5,070
Lebanon	4,010
Malaysia	3,380
Peru	2,080
Russian Federation	1,660
Egypt	1,490
Pakistan	440
Vietnam	390
Nigeria	260
Rwanda	230
Burundi	110

Source: 2002 *World Bank Atlas*.

How can we explain these inequalities? Are inequalities within and between human societies natural and inevitable? Is equality ever more than a chimera, an ideal that can never be realized? Social scientists have been wrestling with those questions since the nineteenth century. This book is about social inequality: its origins, its scope, the ways in which it is sustained, and the ways in which humans seek to reduce it.

No sphere of inquiry is more fundamental in the social sciences, whether we are studying sociology, economics, or political science. Each of these disciplines deals most basically with human inequalities, specifically, differences in income and wealth, differences in social standing and prestige, and differences