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Economic inequality is at historic highs, but its impact differs by race. African Americans' net wealth is just a tenth that of white Americans. In our increasingly diverse nation, sociologist Thomas M. Shapiro argues, wealth disparities must be understood in tandem with racial inequities—a dangerous combination he terms “toxic inequality.”

Toxic Inequality reveals how these forces trap families in place. Shapiro's longitudinal research vividly documents the Great Recession's toll on parents and children, the ways families use financial assets, and the real reasons some families build wealth while others struggle in poverty. The structure of our neighborhoods, workplaces, and tax code—much more than individual choices—push some forward and hold others back. Toxic inequality has been forged by history and preserved by policy, and only bold, race-conscious reforms can move us toward a more just society.

Toxic Inequality: The True Costs of Poverty and Racial Injustice for America's Families Details

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Xergio says

An absolute must read

Fantastic book that deserves attention and careful consideration. Well written, chock full data and personal stories. A very necessary read for those that care for the well being of our nation and our fellow people.

Elizabeth Higginbotham says

Thomas Shapiro has done grown breaking work on racial inequality. Toxic Inequality goes further in detailing how the racial gap keeps widening even with a few changes in social policy. I have followed the literature and know much of what Shapiro covers in this book about how the wealth gap makes mobility difficult. So I very much appreciate the packaging of the data and his arguments. He focuses on housing, employment, the role of inheritance and offers a very coherent argument about the role of government. Using a tool that looks at how policies impact the wealth gap is insightful. It is important to learn that social policies still favor the rich, even when much of the media attention is on the little that goes to people in need. Following the lives of people initially interviewed 1998-1999 with interviews in 2010-2011 provides many insights into the presence or lack of wealth means for families. We see what the Great Recession did to their lives and how wealth protected the few who had it. In the interviews we also can see the stress of living on the edge, not knowing if you can secure a future for your children or what retirement holds. The final chapter offers insights into polices that can make a difference. It in this era when there is a huge gap between the findings of social science research and the policies that are attractive to Congress, we need to read this chapter carefully and argument for what we know will make a difference in the lives of people in need and the overall health of the nation. If I was still teaching poverty, I would use this book. It is very accessible and a good starting point for discussions across political gaps.

Peter Mcloughlin says

It would be great if inequality was simply a matter of finding a plutocrat villain like a Koch or Mercer and running them out of town on a rail. Billionaires like them are certainly bad actors but inequality is more structural and subtle it is more about subtle shifts in the economic, political, and legal environment well camouflaged in boring legalese, wonky legislation, and rules which are funneling wealth to the top and creating a lethal economic undertow for the rest of us. It is in tedious fine print that our bondage comes. This makes it hard focus upon politically and that is exactly how the well-heeled like it.

William Schram says

With Toxic Inequality, Thomas M. Shapiro uses narrative and statistics to great effect, describing the harrowing experience of being a person who is not wealthy in today's America. With many of the families, they do not desire long-term assistance. They have pride in their capacities to work, but if your job only pays

minimum wage and has no benefits whatsoever, the smallest setback can totally destroy your entire wealth base. Shapiro argues that this is a basis of many of the issues in America, and I cannot help but agree. This also comes in line with the disappearing Middle Class in the United States. Back in the 1970s, the largest employer was General Motors. They offered benefits and great pay. Now the largest employer is Wal-Mart, and we know what they offer to their employees.

Most of the families that have these issues are families of color. People that are Black or Latino are disproportionately well represented in such situations. It does not help that there is a massive snowball effect in place as well. People may chide others for even taking a subprime loan or some other such 'deal' but if that is your only offer and your credit score is fantastic that might be your ticket out of a slum or other situation. Being in a different area also allows you to attend a better school and attain the benefits of a well-supplied district. So I can't really blame someone for taking advantage of such a thing. So for instance, if you are Black and have a great resume, you might receive discrimination just from your name alone.

In any case, this book was really tragic and put me in a melancholy mood. It makes me wonder if we should just start over with this whole America thing, though I doubt that it would work. As long as the concept of property has existed, there has been inequality between us. That isn't going to go away any time soon. Luckily for me, Shapiro offers some solutions, though to the wealthy it might be something that is hard to take. It mostly has to do with offering better jobs that have benefits and such. If you are Wal-Mart, you won't do that, since you are a terrible place. The same thing goes for all of the giant corporations nowadays.

Mark Isaak says

The topic is important: wealth inequality, racial inequality, and the unfortunate synergy between them. The author is well familiar with the issues; as part of the Leveraging Mobility Study, he interviewed a wide range of families about their economic situation in 1998 and interviewed the same families again 12 years later. Shapiro does a good job pointing out the many institutional factors that perpetuate and worsen conditions, including issues around home ownership, employment, inheritance, and federal policy (especially regarding taxes). In the last chapter, he sketches some ideas to help, but he neglects to mention that the most important factor is to have a nation which wants its wealth to go to more than 10% of the population, with essentially no hope of the lower classes to rise out of serfdom. The book is somewhat dry at times (especially the last chapter), but personal stories of the interviewed families help spice it up. The information in it is worth reading regardless.

Valeriano Diviacchi says

I usually do not bother to write reviews especially bad ones for popular books since they draw more trouble than they are worth, but I must for this one. I did not make it past the introduction without finding a material misrepresentation of fact. In it they state that banks such as Countrywide and others "stipulated" to race discrimination in lending as part of their settlement agreements with the Department of Justice and actually cited to the government webpages with the settlement agreements. I actually looked up the agreements because based on prior experience with such settlements I knew they always stipulate to the opposite: the settlement is not an admission of liability. As always, the cited agreements after repeating the governments' allegations stipulated the settlement was not an admission of liability. As always, to save litigation expenses, the banks settle for pennies on the dollar and the AG gets political brownie points without anything ever being proved or admitted. The writer did not bother to look up the cited agreements and he probably knew the readers never would. The book is full of such gamesmanship. It is impossible to talk about race in this

country. One of the reasons for it being so is books such as this that distort everything to reach a predetermined conclusion: race not class is the dominant explanation for all social inequality regarding race; they reach this conclusion without even bothering to define race. It is simply not worthwhile to read anything called "empirical" on race written by academics anymore. Use your instincts and life experience --- if you have any. One can find statistical correlations for anything if one looks hard enough. Doubt these writers can do the math. They seem to have others create the correlations they need and they then incorporate them into polemics.

Justin Steele says

If you've read much on social justice and inequality, this will mostly be repeat information for you. But if you're brand new to the topic, Shapiro gives a solid overview.

Donna Hines says

The Great Recession is just one example of the toxic equality facing our nation today.

Many are struggling not to get ahead but merely to survive especially those with families, the elderly, the disabled, those on fixed income such as retired, and more.

The issue isn't that the need isn't known it feels more like it's everyone for themselves.

The moral compass has swayed. The empathy and compassion for the fellow man or women is no longer evident.

The idea that there's seniority in jobs, fair hiring practices without nepotism, state payments that are in the black not red are long gone.

The issue is the lack of money to go around. The top 1% and the young who are in debt from trying to reach for higher educational goals leaving them mounted in debt.

We cannot continue on the course we are currently on.

The very well educated are facing a new era in which age matters, family life matters, high debt matters yet the 'living wage' has not increased.

In order to achieve the basics we must pay minimum wage or higher and not ignore the long term unemployed for medial pay workers.

I'm the new face of poverty. After graduating with honors and a masters I never thought I'd be living below poverty with three teens after divorcing an abusive spouse.

Here I am with an MPA/CJ dual degree begging for work that pays above poverty level yet in the last 8 years have not been successful.

You see I'm told I'm overqualified with a masters yet lack prior work experience having been a homemaker raising my med disabled son since birth to age 18 along with my two daughters and now can't reenter the workforce .

I was told the only way is to dummy down my resume yet I worked my butt off to get those degrees, labels, titles of importance.

In fact I'm also a Points Of Light award recipient as of 2016 having worked the past 20 yrs with 13 nonprofits full time year round to no avail in job hunting.

So for those who think the myth is just about work hard and getting what you deserve think again.

I was top producer at Lord and Taylor Distribution Center. I earned \$7.25 entry level as material handler . I was associate of the month multiple times in two departments (CTH and GTH) yet with all that hard work I earned a 10cent raise with a one time \$25 bonus.

Now here I stand having been left bankrupt, homeless, without income assets or savings nor credit and told get a job!

Great are you hiring and willing to pay this mom of 3 a living wage above poverty when I've not professionally worked in over 20 yrs?

A tall order and ladies if you give up your career you won't be reimbursed for lost time and wages as I had hoped our legal system would afford.

All I have to say to anyone in similar circumstances is good luck, don't give up, volunteering for free may someday afford you a new avenue, if not stay grateful and keep moving forward as best you can.

Don't worry about labels rather know that your work is valuable and you are important to the outside world.

We all have something we can offer just keep hoping someone someday somewhere will notice.

Coach Andrea says

The stories presented would give a reader unfamiliar with this delicate subject an excellent view of the "haves" and the "have nots"; How some families are scratching and striving to get ahead, others on "terra firma" only to have the ground shaken underneath them by unemployment or illness, then of course those families living on easy street (i.e. trust fund kids).

The book was clearly written and very detailed although one can get bogged down in the statistics used to support the argument. I did expect more from the solutions given at the end of the book as these aren't solutions that those familiar with the issue haven't heard or discussed before. Overall, GREAT READ!

Greg Strandberg says

One of the things I liked about this book were the stories.

You don't get as many facts in this one as you do stories about people losing their homes, their jobs, and just about everything else.

Plus there are tons of stats. Here are some passages that stood out to me:

"David, like 85 percent of middle-class Americans polled in a 2012 survey, said it was more difficult to maintain living standards than it had been ten years earlier. A little more than six in ten middle-class families reported having had to cut back household spending. Today, it is both harder to get into the middle class and harder to stay there than at any time since World War II." (p 93)

"Social Security provides widespread but not universal coverage; as of 2010, 14.4 percent of persons aged sixty-five or older were not receiving income from Social Security as they lacked sufficient paid and reported work histories to gain coverage." (p 115)

"Whereas 62 percent of workers enrolled in a single retirement plan in 1983 had a defined benefit pension, by 2013, 71 percent of those enrolled in a single plan had defined contribution plans like 401 (k)s." (p 117)

Paulinoakland says

Brutal Truths

This book lays bare a lot of the systemic issues which result in a significant race based split between haves and have nots

Matthew Showman says

This is thought-provoking read, assuming you don't already have inflexible opinions about wealth, race, inequality, etc. The author intersperses statistics and economics research with stories gleaned by interviews of more than 130 families of different racial and economic backgrounds, tracked over 12+ years. What was interesting to me is that it described quantitatively what I've inductively understood from discussions with friends, colleagues, and others over the years. It added data to what I seemed to already know. There was nothing in this book that seemed out of place or off-base.

Again, this is a good read. However, if you've already made up your mind about wealth, race, and economic policy, don't bother with this book. Read this only if you're willing (or even hoping) to update and add to the matrix with which you use to develop your thoughts and opinions about the topic.

Danny Cerullo says

A well-researched and great introduction to income inequality in the United States. Shapiro, through hours and hours of interviews paints a personal picture of what it means to be financially insecure and how our system (sometimes even when it's well-intentioned) perpetuates economic and racial divide. He doesn't just lay on the problems though, there are plenty of solutions suggested in this book as well.
