

**Wealth and Culture (070:303), Fall 2019**

Tues. 2:15-5:15 p.m., RAB 209A

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**WEALTH AND CULTURE**

Student debt, gig economy, billionaire bonanzas...how does anthropology help us to make sense of this era, our moment in history? Today there are more than 2,000 billionaires in the world, and more than one billion people live on less than \$1.25 per day. The richest one percent of the planet's people own more wealth than the other 99 percent combined. In the United States, the wealthiest three individuals--Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffett--hold more wealth than the entire bottom half of the U.S. population.

Political scientists ask how much inequality democracy can bear, while economists ask how much inequality markets can bear, writes historian Jill Lepore (in the *New Yorker*, 2015). Anthropologists are interested in those questions and more: how do people interpret and experience inequality in their everyday lives; how do large-scale structural inequalities shape the lives of individuals and help us to understand their stories; how do news media depict inequality; and how and why do patterns of inequality vary across space and time?

This course explores how scholarly thinking, as well as popular discourses, about wealth and income inequality have changed in recent decades. What causes this era's soaring wealth inequality? Is inequality harmful for all? How are wealth and income inequalities connected to long-standing differences rooted in gender, race, ethnicity, and other identities? How do cultural understandings of wealth differ across countries and world regions? How do ideas about wealth and the purpose of the economy shape perceptions of self, family, society, nation, and citizenship? What moral and social obligations do people believe the possession of wealth entails?

These questions and more are the focus of this course, which introduces students to key concepts, theories, and debates in the study of wealth and culture. The class is intended to help students develop critical analytical skills for interpreting today's global wealth divide as it is portrayed in both mass media and scholarship. Readings and lectures incorporate geographically diverse examples and are drawn from anthropology, history, political science, philosophy, psychology, economics, geography, sociology, literary and cultural commentary, and news media.

The class format will include lectures, group discussion, films, and occasional brief oral presentations by students (such as commentaries on assigned readings or on supplemental material the student has researched). There will be two in-class exams and occasional pop quizzes (no final exam).

**Core Curriculum Goals**

Group I: 21st Century Challenges

a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world.

d. Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.

**Department Learning Goals Met by this Course**

<https://anthro.rutgers.edu/academics/undergraduate/undergraduate-learning-goals>

Identify, explain, and historically contextualize fundamental concepts, modes of analysis, and central questions concerning the anthropological study of wealth, and demonstrate proficient use of this knowledge. Students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in their use of critical thinking

skills; and will be able to express themselves knowledgeably and proficiently in writing and speaking about central issues in this area of scholarly inquiry.

This interdisciplinary course will enable students to probe popular conceptions of the economy, demystify its workings, understand historical reasons for today's great divide between affluence and poverty, explore how people cope with increasing economic precariousness, analyze how rules of economic competition are defined and institutionalized, and assess competing notions of economic justice in a world where the incomes of the wealthiest individuals exceed those of entire nations.

### Course Objectives

- To provide students with concrete knowledge about historical reasons for today's great divide between affluence and poverty, and to examine how people cope with economic precariousness.
- To explore how ideas about wealth and the purpose of the economy shape perceptions of self, family, society, nation, and citizenship.
- To introduce students to key concepts and debates in the study of wealth inequality and economic crises.
- To help students develop critical analytical skills for interpreting today's global economic challenges as they are portrayed in both mass media and scholarship.

### Anthropology Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

1. Students gain knowledge that will allow them to identify, explain, and historically contextualize the primary objectives, fundamental concepts, modes of analysis, and central questions in their major field and demonstrate proficiency in their use of this knowledge.
2. Students are able to demonstrate proficiency in the use of critical thinking skills.

**Pre-requisites:** None, but an introductory course in cultural or linguistic anthropology course is helpful (070:101 or 070:108). If you have not taken any anthropology courses, and you would like to learn about the field's core concepts and theories, consult Kenneth J. Guest's introductory textbook: *Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age*. WW. Norton Publishers. (Copies are available in Rutgers libraries.)

**Required Texts:** Articles and book chapters will be available on the Sakai course site or through databases such as Wiley Online Library that are accessible through Rutgers libraries. Supplemental materials (such as documentary films) will be available online.

**Requirements** include regular attendance, completing assigned readings on time (so that students are prepared to discuss them in class the week they are assigned), two in-class exams during the semester (Oct. 22 and Nov. 12), a 30-minute quiz during week 13, pop quizzes, and short in-class oral presentations. Quizzes and exams will cover assigned readings, lectures, and films. There will be no final exam.

**Grades** will be determined as follows:

Pop quizzes = 20%  
Exam #1 (Oct.22) = 25%  
Exam #2 (Nov.12) = 25%  
30-minute quiz (Dec. 3 or Dec. 10, if Dec. 3 is snow day) = 15%  
Attendance, participation, in-class presentations = 15%

### **Make-ups of the two exams and 30-minute quiz will *not* be allowed except in cases of serious illness.**

If you miss an exam or the 30-minute quiz, please notify the professor of the reason no more than 24 hours later. (Be sure to notify the professor by both voicemail and email.) \**Travel plans are not an acceptable reason for missing an exam or quiz.*\* Make your travel arrangements so that you will be in class when exams are given.

Pop quizzes cannot be made up, but the lowest score will be dropped when calculating grades.

**Office hours** will be announced during class. Please feel free to drop in or make an appointment, and please let the professor know if you would like any assistance with course material.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all classes. (See information below about required advance notification for a necessary absence due to a religious holiday.)

If you miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to the instructor. \*\*Students are required to see a Dean of Students for assistance in verifying the circumstances of any absence longer than one week, or when an exam is missed.\*\*

Points will be deducted for class absences as follows: Since the class meets just once per week, 20% of the total possible points for the attendance and participation portion of the grade will be deducted if two classes are missed; 65% will be deducted if three classes are missed; 100% if four classes are missed. Anyone who misses three or more class meetings is advised to drop the course.

**Religious Holidays:** Please notify the instructor during the first two weeks of the semester if you will observe a religious holiday that will prevent you from attending a class meeting. You may arrange to make up the missed session and any required work (sometimes through an oral quiz on assigned readings)—if you **notify the instructor during the first two weeks of the semester.**

**Lateness:** To avoid disrupting the class, students should arrive on time.

**Classroom atmosphere:** We are all responsible for creating a friendly, relaxed, and productive classroom atmosphere. That requires listening respectfully to everyone, phrasing comments constructively and politely, turning off cell phones and other electronic devices, coming to class on time, and refraining from reading the newspaper or working on other assignments during class. (**No recording devices may be used during class.**)

**Communication:** Students are responsible for timely attention to email and Sakai postings for this course and therefore should check the Sakai site and their Rutgers email accounts regularly. Dates and assignments may change; all changes will be announced in class or posted on Sakai or both. To access Sakai, go to <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>, log in with your Rutgers userid and password, and use the course membership tool to access class materials.

**Students with disabilities** requesting accommodations: Please follow the procedures outlined at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html>.

**Ethics/Academic Integrity:** Read the Rutgers academic integrity policy at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>. Violations include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. For tips about how to consult sources without plagiarizing, and how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident, see [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid\\_plagiarism](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism).

In addition, the Rutgers Copyright Policy assigns ownership of pedagogical materials developed by instructors to those instructors (<https://policies.rutgers.edu/view-policies/governance-legal-matters—section-50#3>). *Students do not have the legal right to post course materials on websites without the written authorization of the instructor. Doing so without authorization could violate the University Academic Integrity Policy and subject the student to disciplinary action.*

#### **Additional Course Resources (Optional):**

--Global inequality data: <http://www.WID.world>

--Current and historical data on income inequality in the United States, by economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez: <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/>

--Harri Englund, 2015. "Poverty." In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, Didier Fassin, ed., pp. 283-301. Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons.

--Sherry Ortner, ed. 1999. *The Fate of 'Culture': Geertz and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Michael Lambek and Janice Boddy. 1997. "Introduction: Culture in Question." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 41(3)3-23.
- Robert Borofsky, Fredrik Barth, Richard A. Shweder, Lars Rodsdeth, and Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, 2001, "WHEN: A Conversation about Culture." *American Anthropologist* 103(2):432-446.
- Lila Abu-Lughod, 1991, "Writing against culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology*, Richard G. Fox, ed., pp. 137-162. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.

### Schedule of Topics and Readings

(Any changes or amendments will be announced in class and on Sakai.)

#### Week 1/Sept. 3 ~ Introduction

--(3-minute video) United for a Fair Economy. "How much do the wealthiest own? A 3-minute demonstration in sand." <http://www.faireconomy.org/videos>

#### Reference/optional:

- "The World's Billionaires." 2018. <http://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>  
<https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/#38472a3b251c>
- Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 2015. "Anthropology: Comparison and Context," chapter 1 (pp. 1-11), in *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, Fourth Edition. London: Pluto Press.

Film: *Inequality for All*, Part 1

#### Week 2/ Sept. 10 ~ "You Are Not a Loan": The Student Debt Debates and Moral Personhood, Part I

--Caitlin Zaloom, 2019. "How Paying for College is Changing Middle-Class Life." *New York Times*, August 30. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/opinion/sunday/college-tuition.html?smid=tw-nytopinion&smtyp=cur>

--Danielle Douglas Gabrielle, 2019. "Robert F. Smith Lifted a Debt Burden from 396 Morehouse Graduates." *Washington Post*, May 31. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/robert-f-smith-lifted-a-debt-burden-from-396-morehouse-graduates-it-remains-for-thousands-of-other-african-americans/2019/05/31/65db01c8-7431-11e9-8be0-ca575670e91c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.d8258f09fede](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/robert-f-smith-lifted-a-debt-burden-from-396-morehouse-graduates-it-remains-for-thousands-of-other-african-americans/2019/05/31/65db01c8-7431-11e9-8be0-ca575670e91c_story.html?utm_term=.d8258f09fede)

--Audra D. F. Burch, Alan Blinder, and Ron Lieber, 2019. "A Pledge to Pay Morehouse College Students' Debt Prompts Elation, Envy and a Host of Questions." *New York Times*, May 22. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/us/robert-smith-morehouse-college-student-loan-debt.html>

--Tara Siegel Bernard and Karl Russell, 2018. "The New Toll of American Student Debt in 3 Charts." *New York Times*, July 11. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/your-money/student-loan-debt-parents.html>

--Matthew Chingos and Susan Dynarski, 2018. "An International Final Four: Which Country Handles Student Debt Best?" *New York Times*, April 2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/02/upshot/an-international-final-four-which-country-handles-student-debt-best.html>

Film: *Inequality for All*, Part 2

#### Week 3/Sept. 17 ~ "You Are Not a Loan": The Student Debt Debates and Moral Personhood, Part II

--Caitlin Zaloom, 2019. *Indebted: How Families Make College Work at Any Cost*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, excerpts TBA.

--Hannah Appel and Astra Taylor, 2015. "Education with a Debt Sentence: For-Profit Colleges as American Dream Crushers and Factories of Debt." *New Labor Forum*, originally published on TomDispatch online:

<https://www.guernicamag.com/astra-taylor-and-hannah-appel-education-with-a-debt-sentence/>

--Laura Hanna, Alessondra Shackleton, Ann Larson, Luke Herrine, and Hannah Appel, 2016. "The Potential of Debtors' Unions," *ROAR Magazine*, January 4. <https://truthout.org/articles/the-potential-of-debtors-unions/>

## **Week 4/Sept. 24 ~ Wealth and Income Inequality in the United States, Past and Present, PART I**

--Umair Haque, 2018. "Why We're Underestimating American Collapse." *Eudaimonia&Co.*, January 25, 2018. <https://eand.co/why-were-underestimating-american-collapse-be04d9e55235>

--Angus Deaton, 2018. "The U.S. Can No Longer Hide From Its Deep Poverty Problem." *New York Times*, January 24. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/opinion/poverty-united-states.html>

--Brett Williams, 2010, "Body and Soul: Profits from Poverty," pp.224-237, in *The Insecure American*, Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

--Christine J. Walley, 2010, "Deindustrializing Chicago: A Daughter's Story," pp. 113-139, in *The Insecure American*, Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, eds. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

--Pete Beatty, 2014. "Exit Zero: A Q & A with Rust Belt Anthropologist Christine Walley. *BELT Magazine*, July 25. <https://beltmag.com/exit-zero-q-and-a/>

--Chuck Collins and Josh Hoxie. 2017. "Billionaire Bonanza: The Forbes 400 and the Rest of Us." Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. <https://inequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/BILLIONAIRE-BONANZA-2017-Embargoed.pdf>

Film: *Exit Zero*, excerpts

### **Reference/optional:**

--Sommeiller, Estelle and Mark Price, 2018. "The New Gilded Age: Income inequality in the U.S. by state, metropolitan area, and county." Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. [www.epi.org/147963](http://www.epi.org/147963).

--World Inequality Report 2018, coordinated by Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucan. World Inequality Lab, Creative Commons License 4.0-CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. <https://wir2018.wid.world> \*\*Read section on the United States, pp. 212-219.

--Rakesh Hochhar and Anthony Cilluffo. 2017. "How Wealth Inequality Has Changed in the U.S. Since the Great Recession, by race, ethnicity, and income." Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/01/how-wealth-inequality-has-changed-in-the-u-s-since-the-great-recession-by-race-ethnicity-and-income/>

## **Week 5/Oct. 1 ~ Wealth and Income Inequality in the United States, Past and Present, PART II**

--Trymaine Lee, 2019. "How America's Vast Racial Wealth Gap Grew: By Plunder." *New York Times*, August 14. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/racial-wealth-gap.html>

--Interview (4 minutes) with Trymaine Lee, August 2019, on the roots of the racial wealth gap: <https://www.msnbc.com/ali-velshi/watch/the-roots-and-impact-of-america-s-racial-wealth-gap-66208325626>

--W.E.B. DuBois, [1935] 2017. *Black Reconstruction in America*. Transaction Publishers. [Excerpts TBA]

--Asante-Muhammed, Dedrick, Chuck Collins, Josh Hoxie, and Emanuel Nieves. 2016. "The Ever-Growing Gap." Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies & CFED. [https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Ever-Growing-Gap-CFED\\_IPS-Final-2.pdf](https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Ever-Growing-Gap-CFED_IPS-Final-2.pdf)

### **Reference/optional:**

--"The 1619 Project," *New York Times*, August 18. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>

["The 1619 Project is a major initiative from The New York Times observing the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history, understanding 1619 as our true founding, and placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are."]

--Video: "In Conversation With Ta-Nehisi Coates." *The Atlantic*, October 16, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/410815/in-conversation-with-ta-nehisi-coates/>

## **Week 6/Oct. 8 ~ The Anthropology of Wall Street**

--Karen Ho, 2005, "Situating Global Capitalisms: A View from Wall Street Investment Banks." *Cultural Anthropology* 20(1): 68-96.

-- Hannah Appel, 2014. "Finance, Figuration, and the Alternative Banking Group of Occupy Wall Street." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40(1):53-58.  
[http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/appel/appel\\_signs.pdf](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/appel/appel_signs.pdf)

Film: *Inside Job* (directed by Charles Ferguson), part 1

**Extra credit (for exam #1):**

--Hannah Appel. 2014. "Occupy Wall Street and the Economic Imagination." *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 4: 602-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14506/ca29.4.02>

**Week 7/Oct. 15 ~ Global Financial Crisis**

--Michael Lewis and David Einhorn, 2009, "The End of the Financial World as We Know It," *New York Times*, January 4. (includes part 2, "How To Repair a Broken Financial World")

--Simon Johnson, 2009, "The Quiet Coup." *The Atlantic*, May.

--Karen Ho, 2010. "Outsmarting Risk: From Bonuses to Bailouts." *Anthropology Now*, May 14.  
<http://anthronow.com/online-articles/outsmarting-risk-from-bonuses-to-bailouts>

Film: *Inside Job* (directed by Charles Ferguson), part 2

**Week 8/Oct. 22 ~ View from the Top, View from Below**

**\*\*EXAM #1\*\*** (includes readings from weeks 1-8)

(Mixed format: fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, true/false, short narrative answers)

--Reed Hastings (CEO, Netflix), 2009, "Please Raise My Taxes." *New York Times*, February 6.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/opinion/06hastings.html>

--Joseph E. Stiglitz, 2018. "Meet the 'Change Agents' Who Are Enabling Inequality." *New York Times*, Book Review Section, August 20.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/books/review/winners-take-all-anand-giridharadas.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FStiglitz%2C%20Joseph%20E.&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/books/review/winners-take-all-anand-giridharadas.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FStiglitz%2C%20Joseph%20E.&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection)

--Emily Cooke, 2019. "The Brutal Economy of Cleaning Other People's Messes, for \$9 an Hour." *New York Times*, January 31.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/books/review/stephanie-land-maid.html>

**Extra Credit (for exam #1):**

--Anna Jefferson, 2013. "Narratives of Moral Order in Michigan's Foreclosure Crisis." *City and Society* 25, no. 1: 92-112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12006>.

**Week 9/Oct. 29 ~ The Global Wealth Divide**

--Jason Hickel, 2017. *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions*. Read "Preface: Beginnings," pp. 1-4, and "The Development Delusion," pp. 7-32. London: Heinemann.

--Jason Hickel, 2017. "The End of Poverty...Has Been Postponed," pp. 33-64, in *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions*. London: Heinemann.

**Reference/optional:**

--World Inequality Report 2018, coordinated by Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucan. World Inequality Lab, Creative Commons License 4.0-CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.  
<https://wir2018.wid.world> **\*\*"Executive Summary," pp. 1-23.**

**Week 10/Nov. 5 ~ Wealth, Social Networks, Audit Culture: East Africa's Silicon Savannah and Elites in China**

Read either Poggiali or Osburg:

--Lisa Poggiali, 2016. "Seeing (From) Digital Peripheries: Technology and Transparency in Kenya's Silicon Savannah." *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3):387-411. DOI: 10.14506/ca31.3.07

**or**

--John Osburg, 2018. "Making Business Personal: Corruption, Anti-corruption, and Elite Networks in Post-Mao China." *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 59, Supplement 18, April. (Access online through Rutgers libraries.)-

**Week 11/Nov. 12 ~ Beyond Empowerment: Micro-loans in India**

--Sohini Kar. 2013. "Recovering Debts: Microfinance Loan Officers and the Work of 'Proxy-Creditors' in India." *American Ethnologist* 40(3):480-493.

**\*\*Exam #2 (includes this week's reading)**

**Week 12/Nov. 19 ~ Wit, Irony, and Austerity in Italy and Greece**

Read either Knight or Pipyrrou:

--Daniel M. Knight, 2015. "Wit and Greece's Economic Crisis: Ironic Slogans, Food, and Antiausterity Sentiments." *American Ethnologist* 42(4):230-246. (Access online through Rutgers libraries.)

**or**

--Stavroula Pipyrrou, 2014. "Cutting Bella Figura: Irony, Crisis, and Secondhand Clothes." *American Ethnologist* 41(3): 532-546. (Access online through Rutgers libraries.)

**\*\*No class Nov. 26/Thanksgiving week (because Thursday classes meet on Tuesday, Nov. 26 that week)\*\***

**Week 13/Dec. 3 ~ The Migration "Crisis" at Europe's Africa Frontier and the Illegality Industry**

--Ruben Andersson. 2014. *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*, selections TBA. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

--Rod Nordland, 2018. "'All of Africa Is Here': Where Europe's Southern Border Is Just a Fence." *New York Times*, August 19. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/world/africa/ceuta-morocco-spain-migration-crisis.html>

**\*\*30-minute quiz, Dec. 3 (includes week 13 readings)**

**Week 14/Dec. 10 ~ Final Thoughts**

--Short presentations by students.

[30-minute quiz if Dec. 3 is a snow day]

--Akhil Gupta. 2010. "The Construction of the Global Poor: An Anthropological Critique." In *World Social Science Report: Knowledge Divides*, International Social Science Council, pp. 13-16. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

[http://unescore-clic.org/system/files/upload/wssr\\_13-16.pdf](http://unescore-clic.org/system/files/upload/wssr_13-16.pdf)

--Farhad Manjoo, 2019. "C.E.O.s Should Fear a Recession." *New York Times*, August 22. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/opinion/economy-recession.html>