



THE  
REPRESENTATION  
PROJECT

**THE GREAT**

**AMERICAN LIE**

**HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE**

**CURRICULUM**

# EDUCATOR LETTER

## DEAR EDUCATORS,

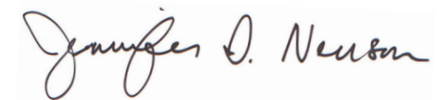
We are thrilled to be able to bring this curriculum for *The Great American Lie* to you. This curriculum is designed to engage your student in critical thinking about the causes and consequences of economic inequality in the U.S.

Students who complete this curriculum will have an understanding of the following:

1. The three primary drivers of economic immobility and inequality in the U.S. (racism; corporate exploitation; gendered societal values);
2. How these three factors work together to produce economic immobility and inequality.
3. Why these conditions exist in U.S. society—who benefits from economic inequality and who is harmed;
4. Why economic mobility and equality are important in a democracy;
5. What policies and cultural practices can improve economic mobility and reduce economic inequality.
6. Actions students can take at the individual, community, and national level to address this issue.

As educators, you play a crucial role in addressing social inequalities by empowering the next generation to take action. We applaud your dedication to making the world a better place, one lesson at a time!

SINCERELY,



Jennifer Siebel Newsom

**JENNIFER SIEBEL NEWSOM**  
FOUNDER



Caroline Heldman

**DR. CAROLINE HELDMAN**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Learning Empathy

Taking Action

A collage of various digital and media icons in shades of pink and red. The icons include a film reel, an RSS feed symbol, a musical note, a video game controller, a smartphone, a tablet, a YouTube logo, an Instagram logo, and a play button. The background is a solid light pink color.

# MODULE ONE

# IS THE AMERICAN DREAM A MYTH?

## OVERVIEW

The American Dream is the idea that, if you work hard enough, you can move into a higher social class. It is the belief that upward mobility is possible for everyone, regardless of the class they were born into— that success is due to hard work rather than chance.

Many people imagine the embodiment of the American Dream as a self-made man who pulls himself up by the bootstraps. Americans are more likely than people in other countries to believe that their effort, skill, and intelligence will be rewarded. And groups that have historically been denied opportunities — Black and Latinx Americans — are actually more inclined to believe in the American Dream than other Americans.

A growing body of evidence shows that the American Dream is not a reality for many Americans, that no matter how hard they work, they will not be able to get ahead. About 40% of Americans who are born into poverty stay in poverty, and 140 million Americans are one paycheck away from financial devastation.



# EXERCISE ONE

## A GROWING GAP

MODULE 1:1

WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

As Economist Joseph Stiglitz points out, “America has achieved the dubious distinction of being the most unequal society of any of the advanced countries.”

*Why do you think wealth is distributed so unevenly in the United States?*

But it hasn’t always been this way. The gap between rich and poor has grown much larger since the 1980s. Economist Raj Chetty points out that the earnings of the top 1% have gone up, while the earnings of the middle-class have stagnated and the earnings of the poor have actually fallen.

*Why has the gap between the rich and the poor increased so much, starting in the 1980s?*

VIDEO CLIP #1: 00.04:40 - 00.05:05



# EXERCISE TWO

## DREAM VERSUS DESTINY

MODULE 1:2

**WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

Economic mobility is the ability of a person to improve their economic status. According to Psychologist Niobe Way, “The American Dream is premised on this notion of the individual above all else. We don’t see context. We don’t see culture. We don’t see circumstances... But the reality is that the circumstances are critical to helping them make it.”

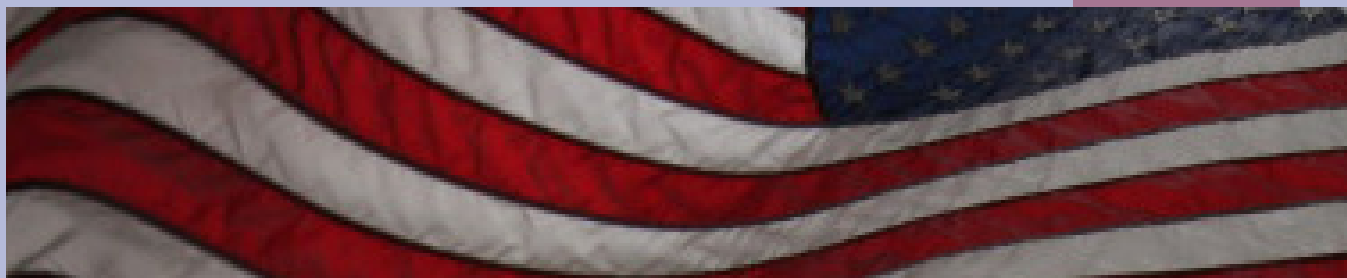
***Make a list of circumstances or challenges in a person’s life that could limit their economic mobility. Discuss how it might affect their life.***

According to Economist Raj Chetty, “When the family you’re born into determines your destiny, that tears at the fabric of the American Dream.”

***Identify circumstances or challenges in your life that have affected your economic mobility.***

***How are your circumstances similar to or different from your neighbors or classmates?***

VIDEO CLIP #2: 00.03:10 - 00.04:40



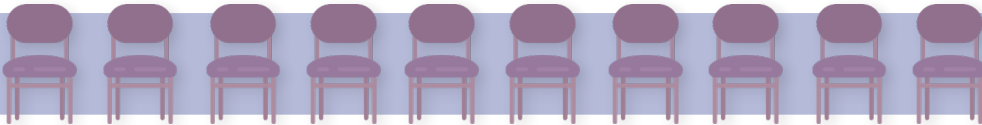
# EXERCISE THREE

# INEQUALITY CHAIRS

MODULE 1:3

THIS EXERCISE REQUIRES TEN CHAIRS AND TEN VOLUNTEERS.

LINE UP TEN CHAIRS AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM FACING THE AUDIENCE.



**ASK** for ten volunteers to line up behind the chairs, one person behind each chair.

**EXPLAIN** that each person represents 10% of the American population, and each chair represents 10% of private wealth in America.

**ASK** the audience, “How much wealth do you think the top 10% of the population possesses?”

**DIRECT** the person representing the top 10% of the population to lie across eight chairs, and direct the other nine people to fit onto the two remaining chairs.

**EXPLAIN** that this represents the current wealth distribution in America—with the top 10% of Americans possessing 77% of the wealth, and the bottom 90% of Americans possessing 23% of the wealth.

**ASK** the audience how they feel about this distribution. Then ask them to come up with a distribution they think would be fair.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATION

[Inequality.Org](http://Inequality.Org) for more information about income inequality.

### ARTICLE

“U.S. Income Inequality Continues to Grow,” by Carmen Reinicke, *CNBC*.

### ARTICLE

“The Gilded Age 2.0: U.S. Income Inequality Increases to Pre-Great Depression Levels,” by Kevin Kelleher, *Fortune*.

### ARTICLE

“The Richest 1% Now Owns More of the Country’s Wealth Than Any Time in the Past 50 Years,” by Christopher Ingraham, *The Washington Post*.

### ARTICLE

“A Dream Deferred,” by Ron Brownstein, *The Atlantic*.

# MODULE TWO

# CAUSES OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

## OVERVIEW

Many factors drive economic inequality in the U.S. *The Great American Lie* focuses on what we think are the three primary factors— racism, corporate exploitation, and gendered values.

### RACISM

While some people believe that racism has disappeared in America, the evidence shows that this is not the case. People of color experience racial discrimination in educational opportunities, workplace hiring and advancement, arrests and sentencing for the same crimes, housing, loans, and many other everyday experiences that serve as barriers to getting ahead economically.

### CORPORATE EXPLOITATION

Corporate exploitation refers to the ability of the wealthiest corporations/people to set public policy and societal values to maintain and grow their wealth, often at the expense of the wealth, health, and safety of everyday Americans. The most obvious way this happens is through corporate exploitation of workers.

### GENDERED VALUES

Income inequality is also driven by society valuing “masculine” values over “feminine” values. For example, the lowest paying occupations are “feminized” jobs (e.g., education, healthcare, hospitality). Also, “masculine” policies like the military are well-funded while “feminine” policies like education and health care are chronically under-funded.

# EXERCISE ONE

# RACISM

## MODULE 2:1

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

According to Pastor Tom Bourque, “I feel like that today, the greatest sins of our country are racism, prejudice, and hatred against people that are different than you.” The film also shows shocking clips of groups yelling “white power” and racial slurs.

*Have you ever been made to feel less than because of the color of your skin?*

*Have you ever thought less about someone because of their race, gender, or social class? What emotions did you experience when you were in this position of power to dehumanize another?*

*How does racism serve as a barrier for economic mobility? Come up with specific examples that illustrate how this plays out in schools, the workplace, and politics.*

Advocate Robert Friedman points out that, “Our best economic policies were investments in the common genius— universal public education, the Homestead Act (to which 25% of Americans today attribute their wealth)...The GI Bill...Each of those major wealth-building initiatives left out people of color.”

*How do you think the historic exclusion of people of color in key government programs impacted people of color today?*

*How might policies be different if our elected officials looked more like the population of people they serve?*

VIDEO CLIP #3: 00.36:15 - 00.36:50



VIDEO CLIP #4: 00.43:25 - 00.45:28



# EXERCISE TWO

# CORPORATE EXPLOITATION

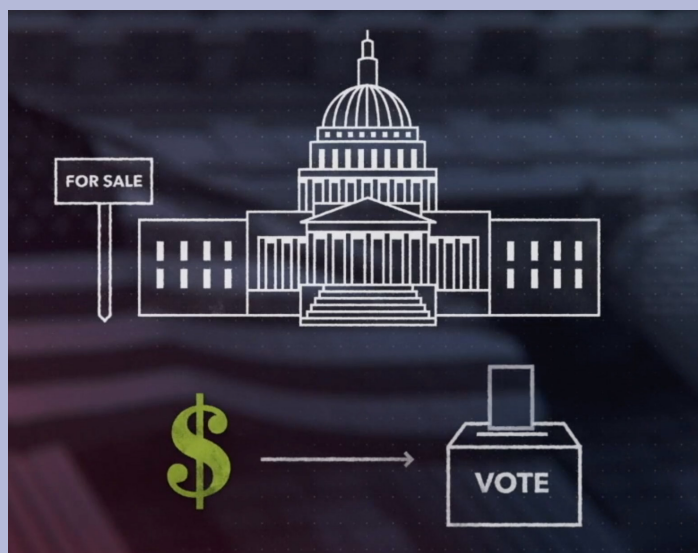
MODULE 2:2

WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Steve Schmidt points out that taxpayers are stuck with the bill if a company fails to pay its workers a living wage. Taxpayers end up “giving welfare in essence to some of the wealthiest corporations in the world.”

*What is a reasonable CEO-to-average worker ratio, and why? What are some ways we can take action to bring CEO pay more in line with the pay of average workers?*

*How might you address this if you are an employee? A consumer? A corporate leader?*



VIDEO CLIP #5: 00:19:57 - 00:22:25



Economist Joseph Stiglitz says corporations rewrote the rules of the economy and rigged the system. “Corporations and the financial sector figured out that investments in Washington by campaign contributions paid huge returns in terms of first, deregulation, and then in terms of re-regulation that would make our economy function well for everybody in society.”

*Many politicians prioritize corporate interests over citizen interests. Make a list of ten specific things citizens can do to make their voices heard by the elected officials who represent them.*

# EXERCISE THREE

# GENDERED VALUES

MODULE 2:3

## WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Political Scientist Caroline Heldman points out that professions that are seen as “feminized” (e.g., teaching, health care) are underpaid while professions that are seen as “masculinized” are overpaid (e.g., sports players, bankers). “So compare teachers to someone in the finance sector—the value that they contribute to society and the hours that they’re putting in. It’s outrageous that we value one so much more than the other.”

*Which jobs do you think should be paid more based on their contribution to society? Which jobs should be paid less? Why?*

*To what degree has your current profession or the profession you want to enter been shaped by the money it makes and societal prestige? If those influences were not present, what profession would you choose?*

Labor organizer Ai-jen Poo points out that women of color, immigrant women, and poor women are especially vulnerable to low wages and poor working conditions.

*How do race and gender deepen the problem of economic mobility for women of color? Provide specific examples of challenges that women of color face.*

VIDEO CLIP #6: 00:55:30 - 00:58:19



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATION

[OpportunityInsights.org](https://www.opportunityinsights.org) for more information about factors that determine economic mobility.

### ARTICLE

“The Opportunity Atlas: Mapping the Childhood Roots of Social Mobility,” by Raj Chetty et al., [Opportunity Insights](https://www.opportunityinsights.org).

### ARTICLE

“Income Inequality in America: Causes of Income Inequality,” by Kimberly Amadeo, [The Balance](https://www.thebalance.com).

### ARTICLE SERIES

“The 1619 Project,” by Danielle Bowman, [The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com).

### ARTICLE

“Whole Systems Change,” by Rianne Eisler, [The Next System Project](https://www.thenextsystemproject.org).

# MODULE THREE

# RACISM & ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

## OVERVIEW

Ruby De Tie is a principal at a school that primarily serves poor children of color. She sees the effects of racism on economic immobility firsthand. Many of the students come to school without supplies, without food, and with immense trauma in their lives. Ruby is inspired to serve these kids because her tenth grade English teacher showed her how education is a powerful tool for economic mobility. The students Ruby is serving may not get that chance because poverty presents challenges at a very young age that make it difficult to get ahead later in life.



# EXERCISE ONE

MODULE 3:1

## “NOTHING IS WRONG WITH MY KIDS”

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

In this clip, Ruby says, “Nothing is wrong with my kids. Everything is wrong with the system.” Ruby later describes the challenges her students face— kids in foster care, homeless families; “my students come with no supplies, no backpack, didn’t eat.”

*How does the typical experience of a child in Ruby’s school compare to the experience of the typical child in your local school?*

*Do/did you face any of these challenges in school? In what ways do you think this could/did impact your economic mobility later in life?*



In this clip, experts discuss why the educational system for poor kids of color is so different from other kids. Some kids are on a high speed elevator, others are on an escalator, while others are climbing stairs with holes. In poorer areas with apartment buildings and public housing, the funding for schools is much lower than areas with high rates of home ownership.

*Make a list of three specific things we would we have to do as a society to close the education gap to make sure that all kids have the same chance at the American Dream.*

VIDEO CLIP #7: 00.07:25 - 00.09:37



VIDEO CLIP #8: 00.45:34 - 00.47:01



# EXERCISE TWO

## THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

MODULE 3:2

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Ruby responds to a fight in her school. According to Ruby, poverty, violence, and trauma are at the root cause of behavioral issues with kids in her school. “We keep failing them” by not addressing these issues.

*What would we need to do as a society to address the trauma that socioeconomically disadvantaged kids are more likely to experience?*

Public Interest Lawyer Bryan Stevenson draws a link between being born into poverty and despair, some of which is related to drug use, which sometimes involves violence.

*Have you experienced or seen despair that comes from poverty? What are some things we can do as a society to address this despair?*

California Governor Gavin Newsom says that the War on Drugs has been “a war on poor people and a war on people of color.” Journalist Charles Blow points out that policing is racist in that people of color are treated differently for the same crimes as white people. The film draws a link between poverty, despair, drug use, and racist policing where kids of color born into poverty are far more likely to be incarcerated later in life. This is called the school to prison pipeline.

*What must we do as a society to break this school to prison pipeline?*

VIDEO CLIP #9: 00:10:23 - 00:11:28



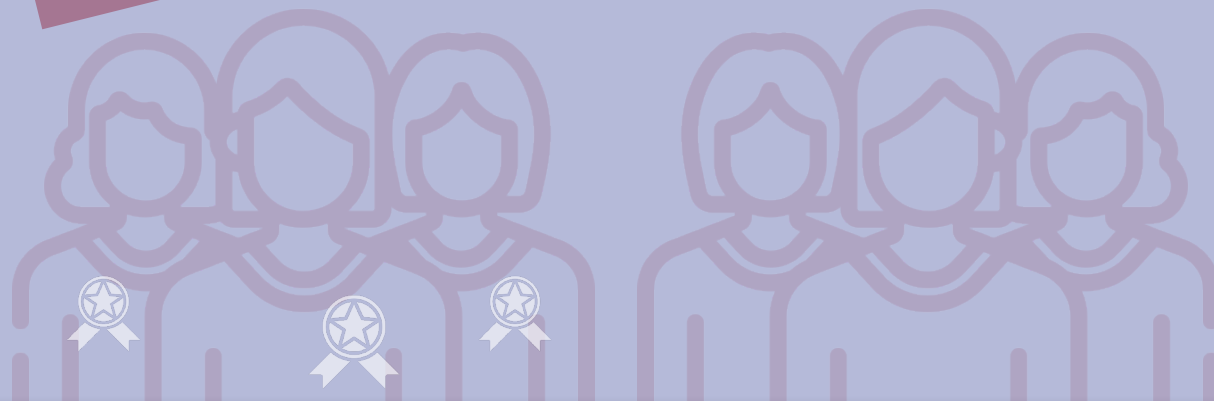
VIDEO CLIP #10: 00:47:11 - 00:49:02



# EXERCISE THREE

## THE SPECIAL STICKER ACTIVITY

MODULE 3:3



1.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CLASS/EVENT, RANDOMLY BREAK THE CLASS/GROUP INTO TWO DIFFERENT GROUPS.

2.

GIVE ONE GROUP STICKERS AND CALL THEM THE “SPECIAL STICKER” GROUP.

3.

GIVE THE “SPECIAL STICKER” GROUP PRIVILEGES THAN THOSE WITHOUT STICKERS DO NOT HAVE— LET THEM SIT UP FRONT, ONLY CALL ON THEM, ETC.

4.

AT THE END OF THE CLASS/EVENT, HAVE THE TWO GROUPS DISCUSS HOW IT FELT TO BE SEGREGATED INTO TWO GROUPS AND TREATED DIFFERENTLY.

Q&A

*Even though you knew that this was an exercise, how did being assigned to one group or the other affect you? How did this bias make you feel?*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATION

“Race, Inequality & Social Mobility” for more information about how structural racism affects racial/ethnic disparities in life chances, achievement, social mobility, economic mobility, and health in the U.S.

### ORGANIZATION

National Center for Children in Poverty for research on disparities in education and child development.

### ARTICLE

“Social Inequality and Educational Disadvantage,” Russell Sage Foundation. Want to know more about how social inequality leads to educational inequality?

### ARTICLE

“Educational Inequalities at the Starting Gate,” by Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, Economic Policy Institute.

### ARTICLE

“The Emergence of the School to Prison Pipeline,” by Artika R. Tyner, American Bar Association.

# MODULE FOUR

# CORPORATE EXPLOITATION & ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

## OVERVIEW

Scott Seitz lost his job when the steel company he worked for closed in Ohio. Scott had worked there his whole life, and the entire community depended upon the steel mill for jobs and economic prosperity. Unemployed and broke, Scott struggles to make ends meet. He goes door to door, cleaning people's gutters. Scott's son, Cameron, works multiple jobs and still struggles to pay his bills to support his son each month.

One of the primary drivers of economic inequality identified in *The Great American Lie* is corporate exploitation of workers. For example, in 2018, CEOs made 287 times what the average worker made. And 51 million Americans make less than what is needed to cover basic needs, even though they work full-time. Today, sixteen million Americans live below the poverty line.

The last fifty years have been especially hard for people with lower levels of education, with the average earnings of a white man with a high school degree being less than 50 years ago when adjusted for inflation. The growing gap between the rich and the poor is the result of corporate exploitation of workers and tax policies that benefit the wealthiest Americans.



# EXERCISE ONE

## LAI D OFF

MODULE 4:1

WATCH THE VIDEOS AND  
ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Scott says “corporate greed annihilated this area.”

*What did the corporations in his area do that devastated the community?*

*In what ways have corporations affected your community?*



Steve meets with a group of friends at a cafe, all of whom were laid off by the steel mill.

*How did these men make ends meet when they were laid off, and how did it affect their families?*

*Have you or someone you know been affected by job loss?*

*How did it affect you/them in terms of food insecurity, a sense of instability, and trauma?*

VIDEO CLIP #11: 00:22:36 - 00:24:53



VIDEO CLIP #12: 00:26:07 - 00:27:16



# EXERCISE TWO

## “TAKE CARE OF YOUR PEOPLE”

MODULE 4:2

### WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Sociologist Ian Haney Lopez describes the role of the government in assisting corporate exploitation. Tax cuts in the 1980s transferred \$1 trillion of public wealth to the top 1% of the country.

*What social service programs have been cut as a result of these tax cuts, and how has this affected the health and well-being of our society?*

*Have you or anyone you know been affected by a lack of social service programs (e.g., health care, mental health services, addiction programs, child care, food assistance, etc.)?*

Former steel worker Steve Whiteley says that we need to pay a living wage if we want people and the economy to thrive.

*Imagine that everyone suddenly had a living wage. List ten ways the world would be different if nearly half the population wasn't struggling just to get by.*

*Why might some people be uncomfortable if there were a more equitable distribution of wealth in our society?*

According to Governor Gavin Newsom, the U.S. used investments of tax money in infrastructure, education, and research and development to build a thriving economy that benefitted private companies.

*Explore this idea that private companies benefit from public investments in citizens. List five ways that companies benefit if people have economic stability— as employees, consumers, etc.*

VIDEO CLIP #13: 00:27:45 - 00:29:19



VIDEO CLIP #14: 01:06:32 - 01:08:13



# EXERCISE THREE

## THE LIVING WAGE ACTIVITY

MODULE 4:3

Ask students to guess the minimum wage. (Keep in mind that the federal and state minimum wage levels may differ.) Then tell the group that the current federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and discuss. Minimum wage was intended to help full-time workers avoid poverty and/or unfair treatment by employers.

*What can \$7.25 buy in the current economy? Does the current minimum wage meet its intended goal of helping workers avoid poverty?*

*How many hours would you have to work each week to provide for the basics (food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and health care) if you earned minimum wage?*

Ask the group/class to describe the average person who makes the minimum wage. (They will likely talk about first jobs in the service sector.) Then use the chart here to examine what they got right and what they got wrong.

*Who will benefit the most if we raise the minimum wage? Who might oppose this? Consider the impact on employers, consumers, heads of household, teens, and part-time workers.*

### WHO'S HELPED BY RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE?

#### WHAT PEOPLE THINK

Teenager  
Works part time after school  
Lives with parents  
Earning extra spending money



#### THE REALITY

Average age: **35 years old**  
**88% are not teens**, They're 20 or older  
36% are **40 or older**  
56% are **women**  
**28% have children**  
55% work **full time**  
On average, they **earn half** of their family's total income



ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

# EXERCISE FOUR

## FAMILY HISTORY ACTIVITY

MODULE 4:4

HAVE THE GROUP/CLASS BREAK INTO GROUPS OF TWO. THEN DIRECT EACH PAIR TO INTERVIEW ONE ANOTHER ABOUT THEIR BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCES USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Q&A

*Tell your partner your name, where you grew up, and one interesting thing about yourself.*

Q&A

*What is your family history? Do you descend from Native Americans? If not, when did your family immigrate to the U.S. and from where?*

Q&A

*Are/were you economically comfortable growing up? Did you lack for basic things like food or a stable home?*

Q&A

*Have you or anyone in your family had to work multiple jobs to make ends meet?*

Q&A

*In what ways have the economic deficiencies of your childhood influenced your relationship with money?*

Q&A

*Has your physical or mental health been affected by economic struggles? What about members of your family?*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATION

The Living Wage Campaign is a clearing house for the latest information on research and activism to pass a living wage in the U.S.

### ARTICLE

"Why so Many Americans Still Work Multiple Jobs in a Strong Market," by Sho Chandra and Sarah Foster, *Bloomberg*.

### ARTICLE

"CEOs made 287 Times More Money Last Year Than Their Workers Did," by Alexia Fernandez Campbell, *Vox*.

### ARTICLE

"U.S. Economic Inequality Worsens, Widening to a New Gap," by Bill Chappell, *NPR*.

### ARTICLE

"The Rich Can't Get Richer Forever, Can They?," by Liaquat Ahamed, *The New Yorker*.

# MODULE FIVE

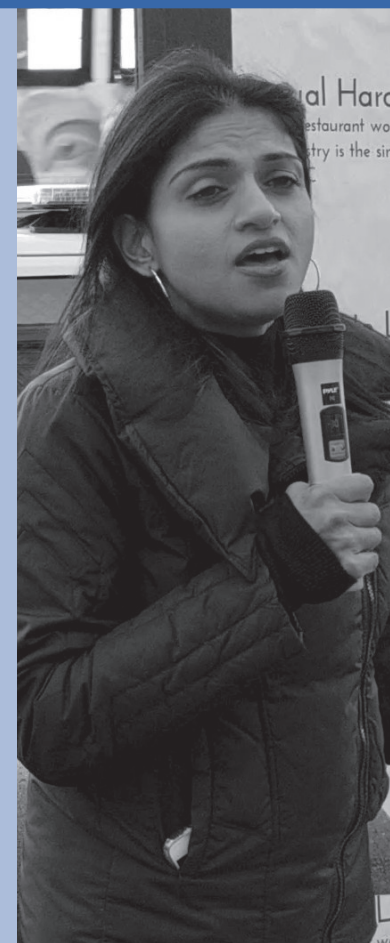
# GENDERED VALUES & ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

## OVERVIEW

*The Great American Lie* is the first film to identify another major cause of economic inequality—gendered values. Because we live in a society that prioritizes “masculine” values, we spend fewer public (tax) dollars on vital support policies—health care, education, childcare, food assistance, etc.—that would reduce economic inequality. For example, only 9% of the federal budget goes toward safety net programs that keep families out of poverty, such as school meals, low-income housing, and child care assistance.

Our masculine societal values also deem “masculine” jobs as more important, so “feminized” jobs are paid far less. One primary example of this is tipped wage work. Saru Jayaraman advocates for a living wage for tipped service workers. Two-thirds of tipped workers are women—restaurant servers, bartenders, massage therapists, hairdressers, nail salon workers, etc. The federal minimum wage for tipped workers is \$2.13 an hour, so it is no surprise that 20% of full-time workers who rely on tips live below the poverty line.

Women in the restaurant industry experience high rates of sexual harassment, which is tied to their status as tipped workers. They make an average of \$15,814, and 90% experience sexual harassment over which they have little recourse because they depend on tips from customers, who are “always right.” Saru is working tirelessly to expose the ways in which gendered societal values put women in economically vulnerable positions in the U.S. that exacerbate economic inequality.



# EXERCISE ONE

## THE DOMINATION PYRAMID

MODULE 5:1

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Historian Riane Eisler states that “as long as you have a model of our species in which one half is considered inferior to the other half, you are not going to have equality, because that is basic to inequality.” This creates a Domination Pyramid with very few women at the top.

*List five ways that we as a society rank one half of our population (men) over the other half (women).*

*Every human in a society upholds the Domination Pyramid in some way. How have you supported this? How have you experienced this?*

Riane Eisler discusses how this ranking plays out in policy. “Politicians always seem to find money for traits and activities that are stereotypically considered masculine— weapons, wars, prisons. But somehow, they can’t seem to find enough money for anything we’ve learned to call ‘soft,’ ‘feminine’— childcare, healthcare, early childhood education.”

*Why are investments in “feminine” things so vital for human happiness? For economic prosperity?*

“Masculine” and “feminine” are categories that we typically associate with men and women, respectively. But these categories are socially created.

*How are men harmed by our prioritization of “masculine” values over “feminine” values? How might men, women, and gender non-conforming individuals benefit from prioritizing a collective set of positive human values?*

VIDEO CLIP #15: 01:00:32 - 01:01:28



VIDEO CLIP #16: 00:14:45 - 00:15:40



# EXERCISE TWO

## WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

MODULE 5:2

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Saru argues that women in the restaurant industry have little power in relation to their mostly male bosses, and to customers. This means they are subject to low wages and sexual harassment. Restaurant worker Shanita Thomas discusses her monthly income and bills—earning \$900/month, but with \$2,000 in expenses each month. Shanita is one of the working poor—people who work full-time but can't cover basic expenses each month.

*Have you ever worked a full-time job and still been unable to pay your bills? Do you know someone who has?*

Heather McIntosh talks about her experiences of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry, an industry that has the highest rate of sexual harassment of any industry.

*Why are women in the restaurant industry especially vulnerable to sexual harassment? What aspects of the industry make it difficult to report this harassment?*

*What does it mean that women across the board are more likely to experience sexual harassment than men when it comes to economic inequality?*

Saru offers a number of solutions: one fair wage, paid sick days, paid family leave, healthcare for everyone, and an end to gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

*How might each of these solutions improve working conditions and wages for all employees (not just women)?*

VIDEO CLIP #17: 00:18:13 - 00:19:11



VIDEO CLIP #18: 00:59:11 - 01:00:33



# EXERCISE THREE

## THE BOX ACTIVITY

MODULE 5:3

THE BOX ACTIVITY ASKS STUDENTS/PARTICIPANTS TO REFLECT UPON SOCIETAL AND PERSONAL GENDER BIASES. LET PARTICIPANTS KNOW THAT IN THIS EXERCISE WE ARE GOING TO ASK THEM TO SAY OFFENSIVE WORDS.

### STEP #1

Draw two boxes on the board and label them “Man” and “Woman.”

### STEP #2

Have students/participants fill in traits society associates with what it means to “act like a man” (e.g., strong, tough, in control) and “act like a woman” (emotional, soft submissive), respectively.

### STEP #3

Then, next to each box, write what men and women are called when they act outside the box. For example, for men it might be “wimp,” “fag,” “pussy” and for women it might be “butch,” “nasty,” “angry.”

## Q&A

*How many men here are in the box all of the time?  
How many of the women here are inside this box all of the time?*

*Why are men put down using names associated with women?*

*What should a “man” do if he gets called these names?  
Would that put him back inside the box?*

*If a man stays inside the box, does he  
generally avoid getting called names and being harassed?  
If a woman stays inside the box, does she stay safe?*

*Are women inside the box ever raped or abused by their partners? (Yes)  
What does that say about the suggestion that women stay inside the box?  
Does it really bring them safety or power?*

*How do these boxes contribute to the existence of  
domestic and sexual violence? To economic inequality?  
How do we change these societal expectations?*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATION

ROC United provides research and data on inequalities in the restaurant industry, and efforts to life wages for all ripped workers.

### ARTICLE

“I Dare You to Read This and Still Feel Good About Tipping,” Roberto Ferdman, *The Washington Post*.

### ARTICLE

“Unrealized Potential: The High Cost of Gender Inequality in Earnings,” *The World Bank*.

### ARTICLE:

“It’s Time to put Gender Justice at the Heart of our Economies,” by Wangari Kinoti, *Open Democracy*.

### ARTICLE

“The Narrowing, but Persistent, Gender Gap in Pay,” by Nikki Graf, Anna Brown, and Eileen Patten, *Pew Research Center*.

# MODULE SIX

# LEARNING EMPATHY

## OVERVIEW

Insurance Broker Sharon Galicia tells us that she was raised in a household that lacked empathy for people who are struggling. Her mother believed that if someone was struggling, it was due to their lack of hard work, not circumstances. As a child, Sharon believed this, but as she grew into adulthood, she learned about all the hard work people do just to get by, and through her church began to understand how wrong her mother was about the American Dream. She learned about her own privilege as a middle-class white woman, and how that affected her life and career opportunities. She met people who worked multiple full time jobs but could still barely afford to pay rent and began to see and understand how broken the system is.

By the end of the film, Sharon has gone on an empathy journey— discovering empathy for folks who are struggling to make ends meet. She now volunteers and works to help those who have been failed by the system and who are working as hard as they can to barely get by.



# EXERCISE ONE

## MODULE 6:1

# “YOU SHOULD STARVE TO DEATH”

### WATCH THE VIDEOS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

Sharon talks about her mother’s lack of empathy. “My mother believed she was right and everyone else was wrong. She was not compassionate at all. It was, “You’re on welfare, you should starve to death.” Sharon’s experience shows how misconceptions of poor people are passed down from one generation to the next.

*What messages did you get growing up about people who are struggling economically?*

Journalist Nicolas Kristoff states that, “One of the fundamental problems we have to address is this empathy gap. This tendency to ‘otherize’ people who aren’t like ourselves.”

*List three ways in which U.S. society sends the message that we should care less about people who are not like us. Come up with specific examples.*

Sharon came to the realization that she failed to see how much she had in common with people who are struggling: “One or two bad decisions, and he had nothing. Wow, that could be me. How many paychecks do most Americans live from bankruptcy?”

*What did Sharon witness that helped her understand the struggles of people who are different from her?*

*Think of someone you know who lacks empathy for those who are struggling. What facts or stories do they need to know in order to start their empathy journey?*

VIDEO CLIP #19: 00:33:29 - 00:34:41



VIDEO CLIP #20: 01:19:05 - 01:22:47



# EXERCISE TWO

# CULTIVATING EMPATHY

MODULE 6:2

WATCH THE VIDEO AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

VIDEO CLIP #21: 00:34:39 - 01:35:27



Sharon's pastor, Tony Bourque, has built a ministry around empathy—helping and serving people in need. “A lot of people aren’t really interested in understanding other people right now.” Pastor Tony has helped Sharon along in her empathy journey by providing her experiences to interact with people who are not like her.

*What role should societal institutions— religious organizations, educational institutions, media, government, corporations— play in cultivating more empathy in our culture?*

*Come up with specific ideas about how each institution can increase cultural empathy.*



# EXERCISE THREE

## THE PRIVILEGE WALK ACTIVITY

MODULE 6:3

**THIS EXERCISE EXPOSES THE VARIOUS TYPES OF PRIVILEGE THAT EXIST, AND HELPS PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAND THAT THEY HAVE BENEFITTED FROM THEIR IDENTITY IN WAYS THAT THEY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AWARE.**

Have participants line up in a straight line, shoulder to shoulder, in the middle of the room. Once they are lined up, begin reading these statements and allow them to step forwards and backwards with each one. It is best if students/participants take large steps so the differences are obvious.

|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                  |                                                                               |                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you are a cisgendered man                                                                     | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you identify as white                                                                               | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if your work holidays coincide with religious holidays that you celebrate                 | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you were born in the United States                  | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you have a disability         |
| <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if your ancestors were forced to come to the United States not by choice                        | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were ever called names because of your race, class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality            | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if there were people who worked for your family as servants, gardeners, nannies, etc.     |                                                                               |                                                          |
| <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were ever ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, car, etc.                       | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if one or both of your parents were “white collar” professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers)              | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school                         | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if your parents own their business                     |                                                          |
| <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were ever hungry because there was not enough money to buy food when you were growing up | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if one of your parents was unemployed or laid off, not by choice                                      | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you were encouraged to attend college                                                  | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you identify as straight                            |                                                          |
| <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were raised in a single parent household                                                 | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if your family owned the house you grew up in                                                          | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were treated less fairly because of race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you had to rely primarily on public transportation | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if English is your first language |
| <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if your family ever had to move because they could not afford the rent                          | <b>STEP BACKWARD</b><br>if you were ever the victim of violence related to your race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you have ever attended a private school                                                | <b>STEP FORWARD</b><br>if you have health insurance                           |                                                          |

Now ask participants to look at where they are standing, who is around them, and how far did they move from where they began the activity. Ask them to reflect upon their positioning in this activity, and how their location at the end made them feel.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### ORGANIZATION

The Center for Partnership Studies provides research and action plans to tackle interconnected global problems, including economic inequality.

#### ARTICLE

“Six Welfare Myths We All Need to Stop Believing,” by Katie Dupere, Mashable.

#### ARTICLE

“The Double-Standard of Making the Poor Prove that They’re Worthy of Government Benefits,” by Emily Badger, The Washington Post.

#### ARTICLE

“Does America Have an ‘Empathy Deficit?’,” by Mike Pesca, NPR.

#### ARTICLE

“America’s Continuing Empathy Deficit Disorder,” by Douglass LaBier, The Huffington Post.

# MODULE SEVEN

# TAKING ACTION

## OVERVIEW

There are steps we can all take to work toward a more empathetic society, based on a care economy that supports and values all people. Here are some actions you can take as an individual in your personal life, at the community level, and at a societal level.



1.

## PERSONAL LEVEL

**EMPATHY JOURNEY** Read, study, and self-reflect upon ways you can increase your empathy for others, especially for people who are different from you. Document your empathy journey through regular journaling and reflection about your thoughts and actions.

**DAILY EMPATHY CHECKLIST** In all of your interactions, whether it be with service workers, people experiencing homelessness, people online who hold different political beliefs, people you manage, etc., practice empathy. Instead of treating them poorly for any reason (even if you feel justified), make a point of showing love, care, and compassion, realizing that do not know what they are going through.

*What other actions can you take at a personal level to reduce economic inequality?*

2.

## COMMUNITY LEVEL

**GET CONNECTED** Make a point to interact with people who are different from you in your community, whom you would not ordinarily interact. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, a nursing home, a food pantry, a homeless shelter, a job retraining program, or another community program serving the neediest residents in your community.

**PROMOTE YOUTH** Do some research on funding and support for schools and youth programs in your community. Do your local elementary, middle, and high schools have enough resources to serve students well? What about after-school programs and extra-curricular activities? Is your community spending enough on youth to ensure that they have a fair shot at pursuing the American Dream? If not, advocate and agitate on behalf of the next generation.

*What other actions can you take at a community level to reduce economic inequality?*

3.

## SOCIETAL LEVEL

**VOTE FOR A CARE ECONOMY** Register to vote, if you are not already registered. Then vote for candidates who show empathy through their support care policies (a living wage, equal pay, paid family leave, universal healthcare, well-funded education, progressive taxation, policies that value caregiving/homemaking, etc.). Also, work on campaigns to register others to vote for candidates who support a care economy.

**NATIONAL EMPATHY REVIVAL** Call on our nation's leaders to prioritize empathy as a national value. Contact political, corporate, and thought leaders and urge them to make addressing our national empathy deficit a national priority.

*What other actions can you take at a societal level to reduce economic inequality?*



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