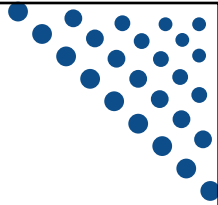


1

National Economic Education Delegation

- **Vision**
 - One day, the public discussion of policy issues will be grounded in an accurate perception of the underlying economic principles and data.
- **Mission**
 - NEED unites the skills and knowledge of a vast network of professional economists to promote understanding of the economics of policy issues in the United States.
- **NEED Presentations**
 - Are **nonpartisan** and intended to reflect the consensus of the economics profession.

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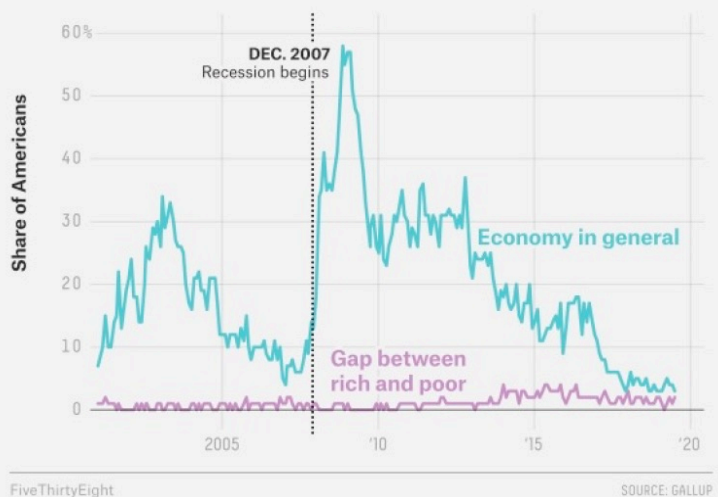
Credits and Disclaimer

- **This slide deck was authored by:**
 - Jon Haveman, Executive Director of NEED
- **This slide deck was reviewed by:**
 - Timothy Smeeding, University of Wisconsin
 - Robert Wright, Augustana University
- **Disclaimer**
 - NEED presentations are designed to be nonpartisan
 - It is, however, inevitable that the presenter will be asked for and will provide their own views
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Few Americans prioritize economic inequality

Share of Americans who said the "economy in general" or the "gap between rich and poor" was the most important issue facing the country



4

Poll

There is ___ economic inequality in the country these days.

- Too much
- The right amount
- Too little

If you answered that there is too much economic inequality, _ of economic inequality is acceptable.

- Some amount
- No amount



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Outline

- Definition
- Measurement
- How does it happen?
- Does it matter?
- Is it a problem?
- What to do about it



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Economic Inequality

- **Definition:**

- The extent to which the distribution of people's economic position deviates from complete equality
- The dispersion of people's economic positions.



Different Ways of Thinking About Inequality

- **Income Inequality**
 - Before taxes and transfers
 - After taxes and transfers
- **Wealth Inequality**
- **Consumption Inequality**

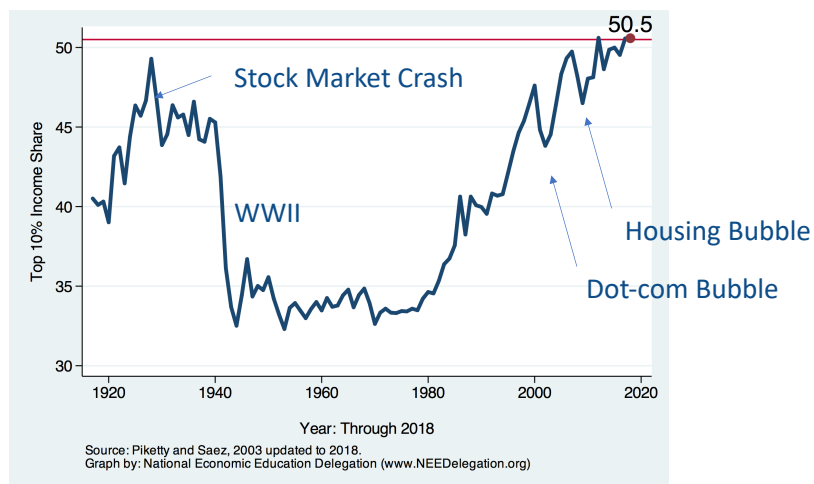


Different Ways of Thinking About Inequality

- **Income Inequality**
 - Before taxes and transfers
 - After taxes and transfers
- **Wealth Inequality**
- **Consumption Inequality**
- **Inequality of Opportunity**

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National Income Inequality: Share of Top 10%



10

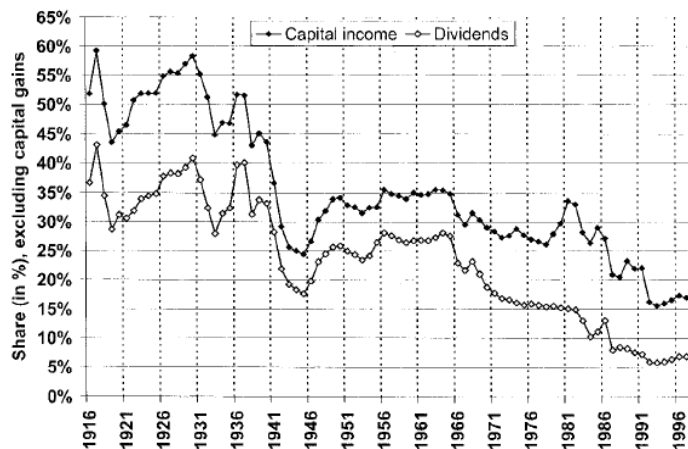


FIGURE V

The Capital Income Share in the Top 0.5 Percent, 1916–1998

Series display the share of capital income (excluding capital gains) and dividends in total income (excluding capital gains) for the top 0.5 percent income quantile.

Source: Authors' computations are based on income tax returns statistics (series reported in Piketty and Saez [2001], Table A7, column P99.5–100).

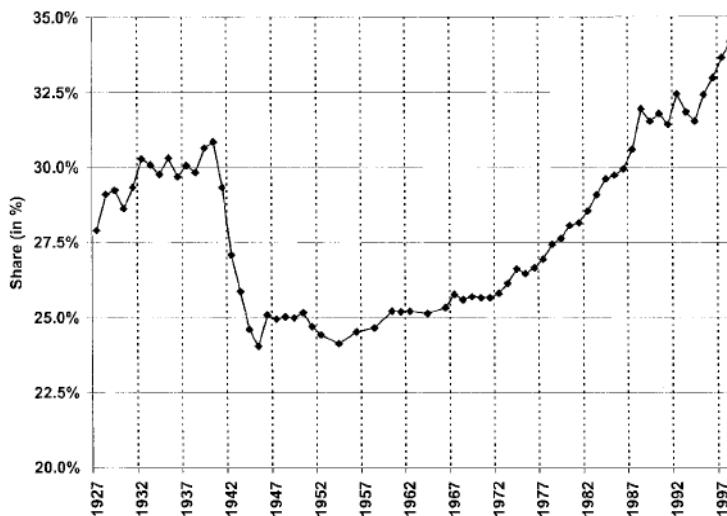


FIGURE VIII

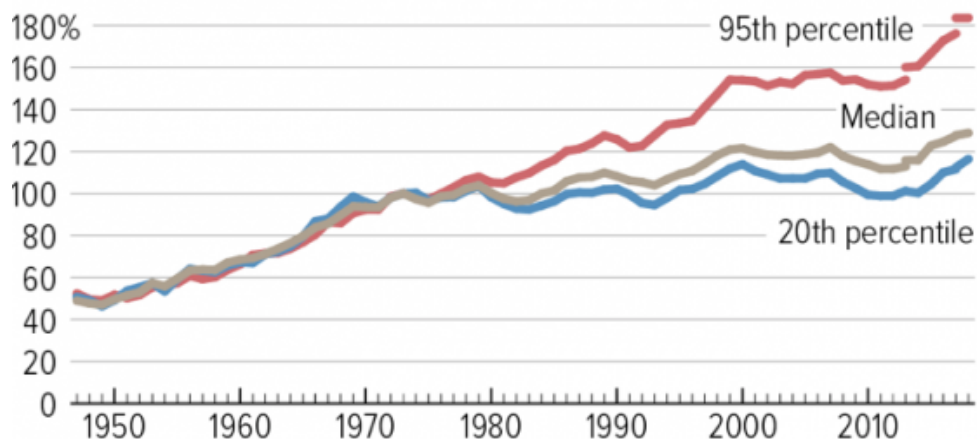
The Top Decile Wage Income Share, 1927–1998

Source: Table IV, column P90–100.



The Abrupt Increase in Inequality

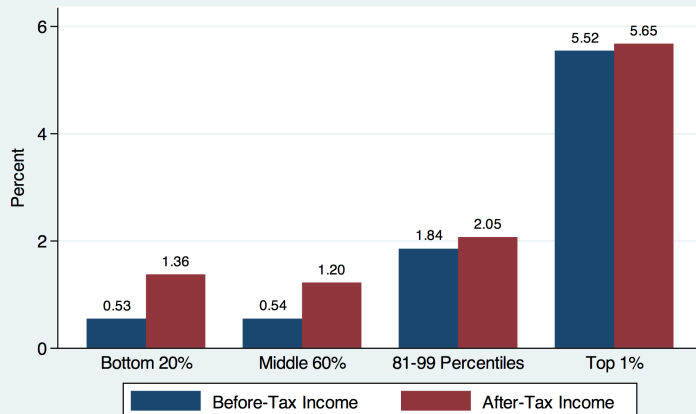
Real family income between 1947 and 2018, as a percentage of 1973 level



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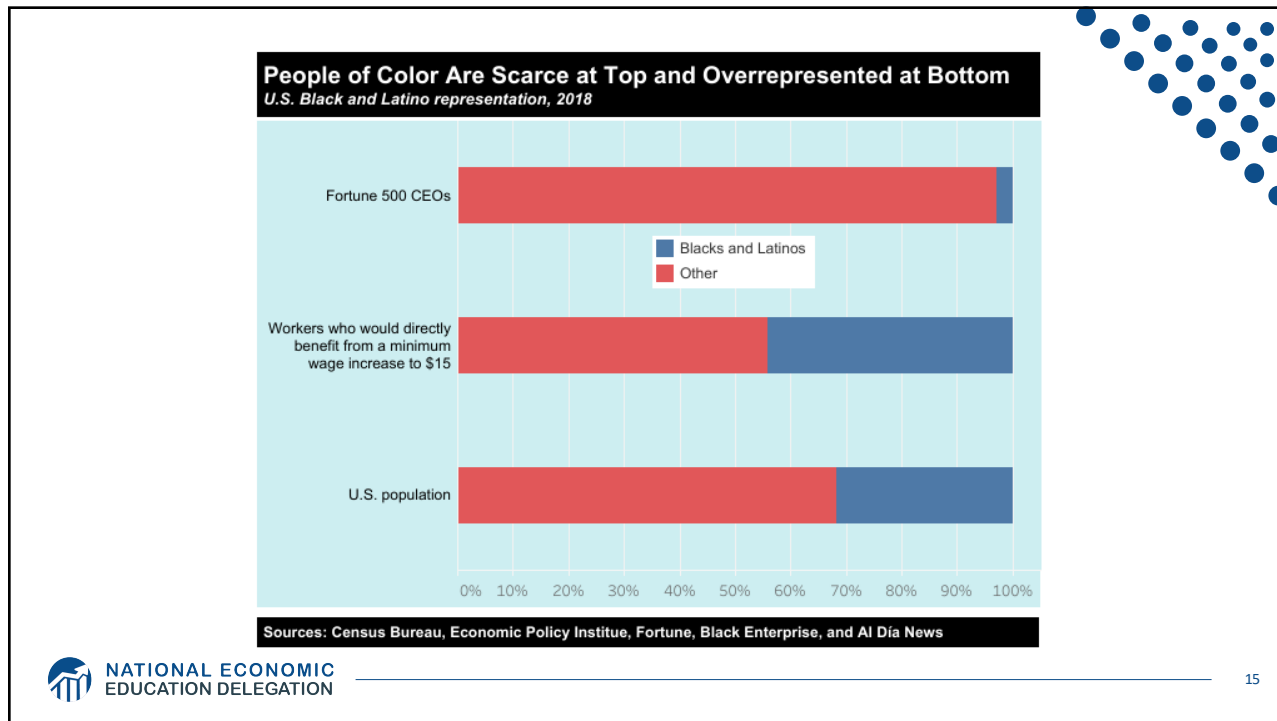
Growth Has Been Primarily at the Very Top

Average Annual Growth of Group Income 1979-2013

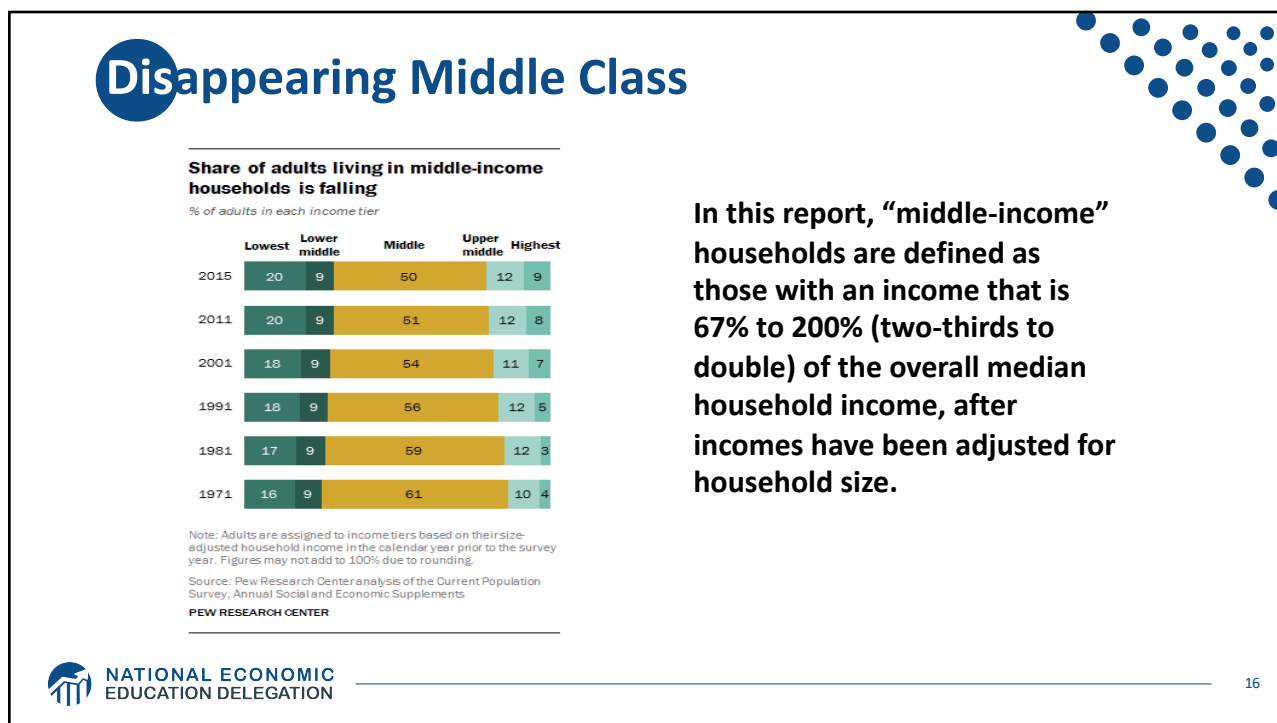


Source: Congressional Budget Office

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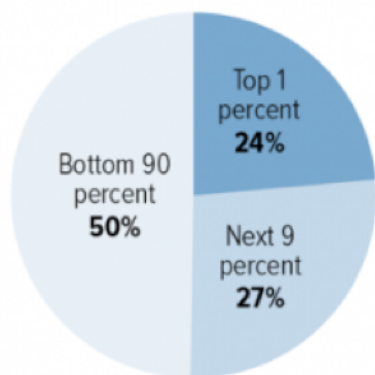
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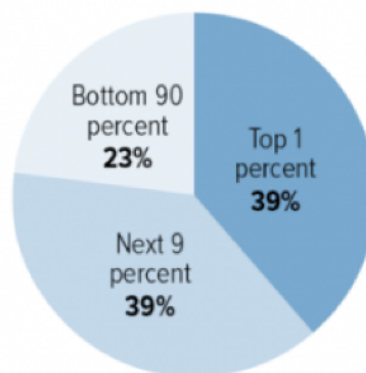
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Wealth Inequality Exceeds Income Inequality

Distribution of before-tax income, 2016



Distribution of wealth, 2016



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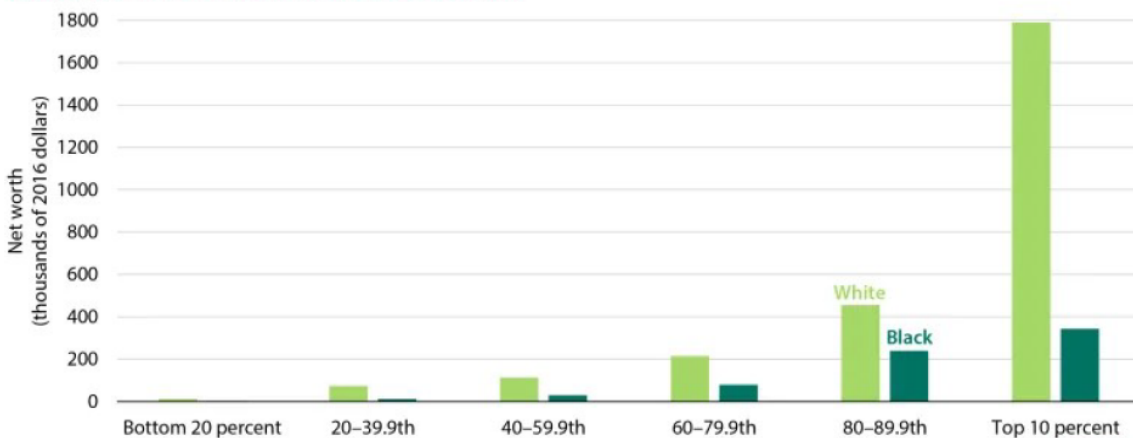
Source: Chad Stone, Danilo Trisi, Arloc Sherman, and Roderick Taylor, "A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Policy Futures, Dec. 11, 2018.

17

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FIGURE 3.

Median Net Worth, by Household Income Percentile



Source: Survey of Consumer Finances 2016; authors' calculations.
 Note: Data are from 2016. Net worth refers to the difference between assets and debt for a household head. Race and ethnicity are those of the survey respondent.



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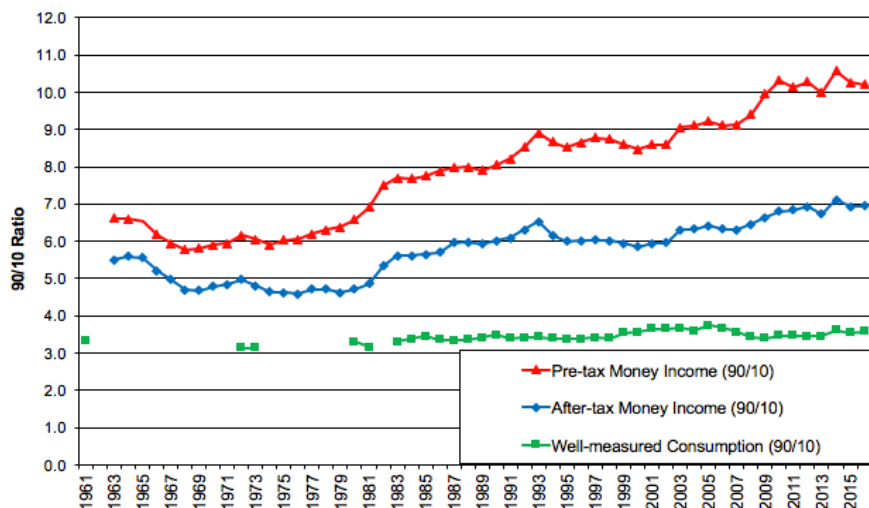
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A Third Measure of Inequality: Consumption Inequality

- Consumption is another important metric for judging inequality
- Arguably a better indicator of “well-being”
- Extremely difficult to measure
- Growing evidence that consumption inequality has also increased

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Consumption Inequality



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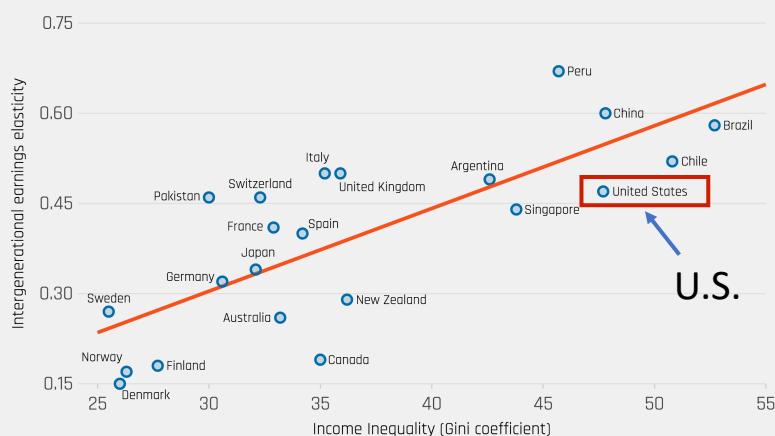
Summary: Consumption Inequality

- **Early research indicated that although income inequality may be increasing, consumption inequality may not be.**
 - How is this possible? Borrowing, or otherwise smoothing consumption.
- **Mounting evidence that it is increasing along with income and wealth inequality.**
- **Consensus reached? No.**

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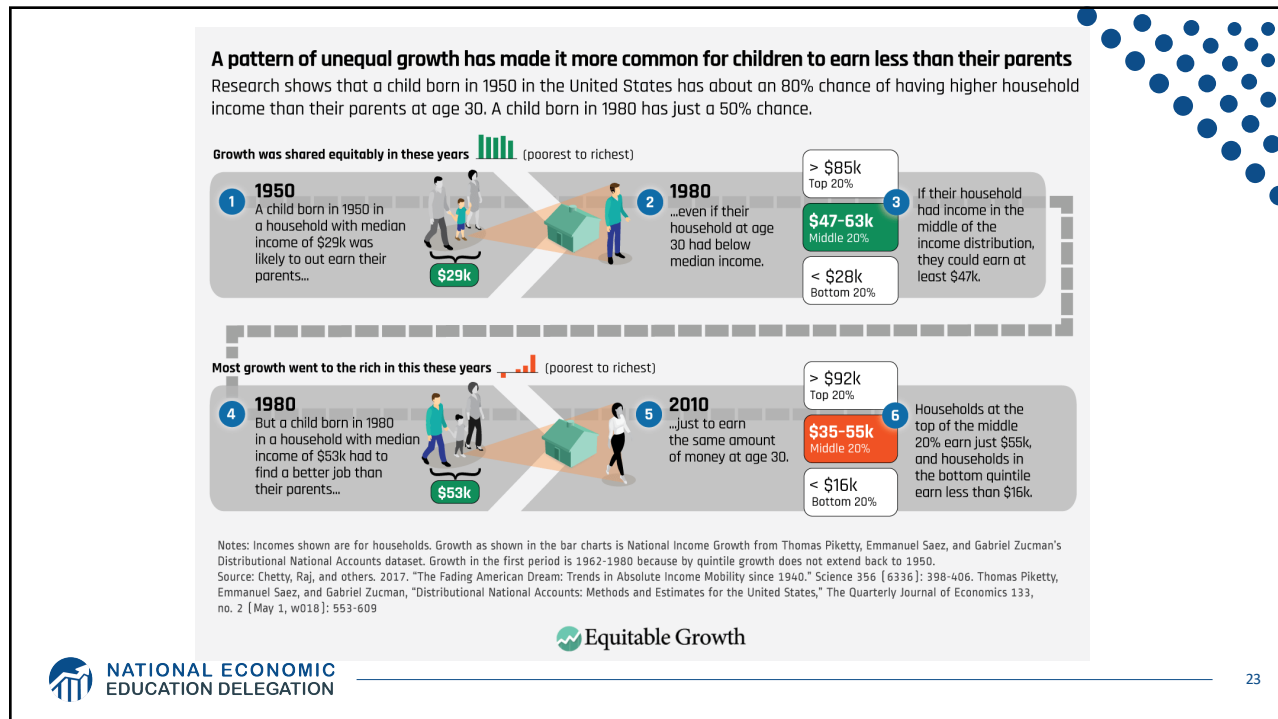
The Great Gatsby Curve: high inequality tends to mean low mobility

More inequality is associated with less mobility across generations

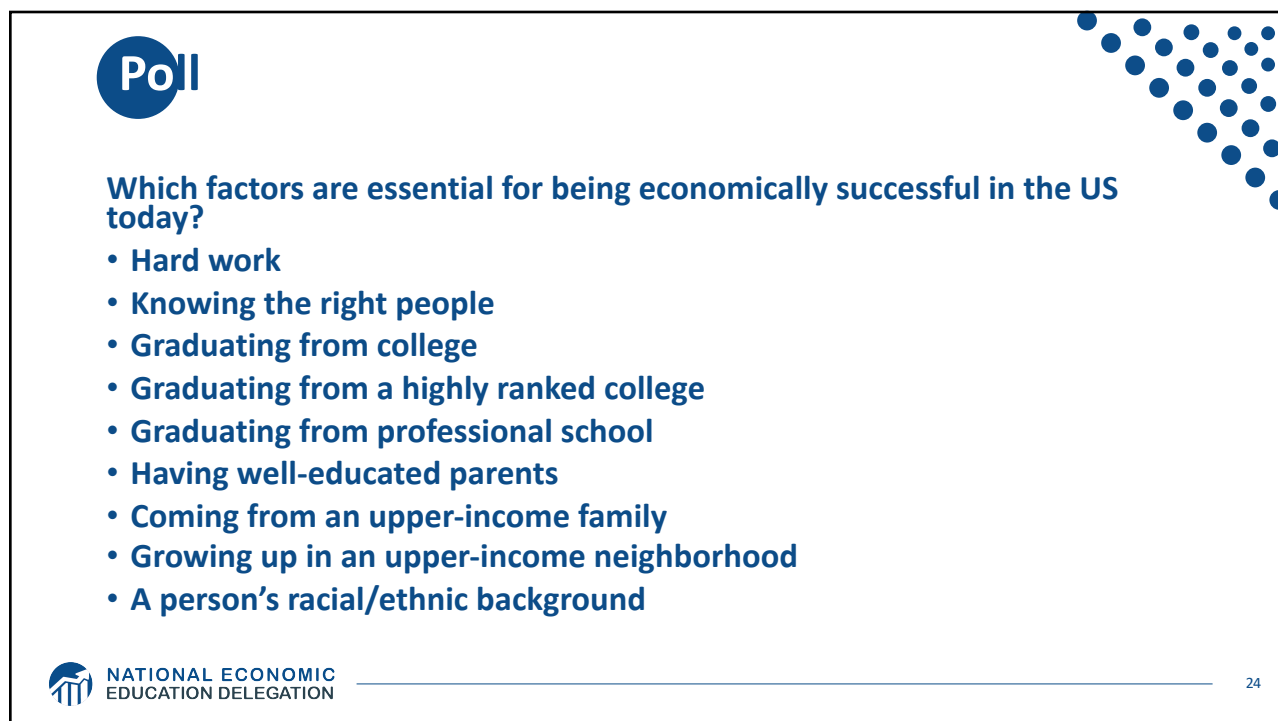


Source: Miles Corak, "Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27 (3): 79-102; "All the Ginis," available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/all-the-ginis> (last accessed 9/28/2018)

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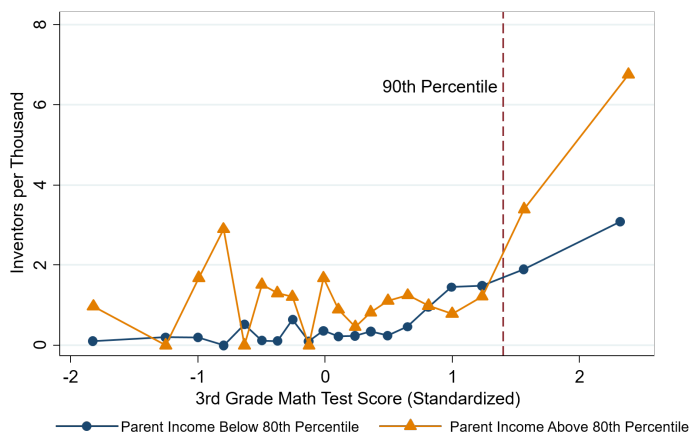


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Upward Mobility: Finances Matter

High math-ability 3rd graders much more likely to become inventors if their family is well-off.

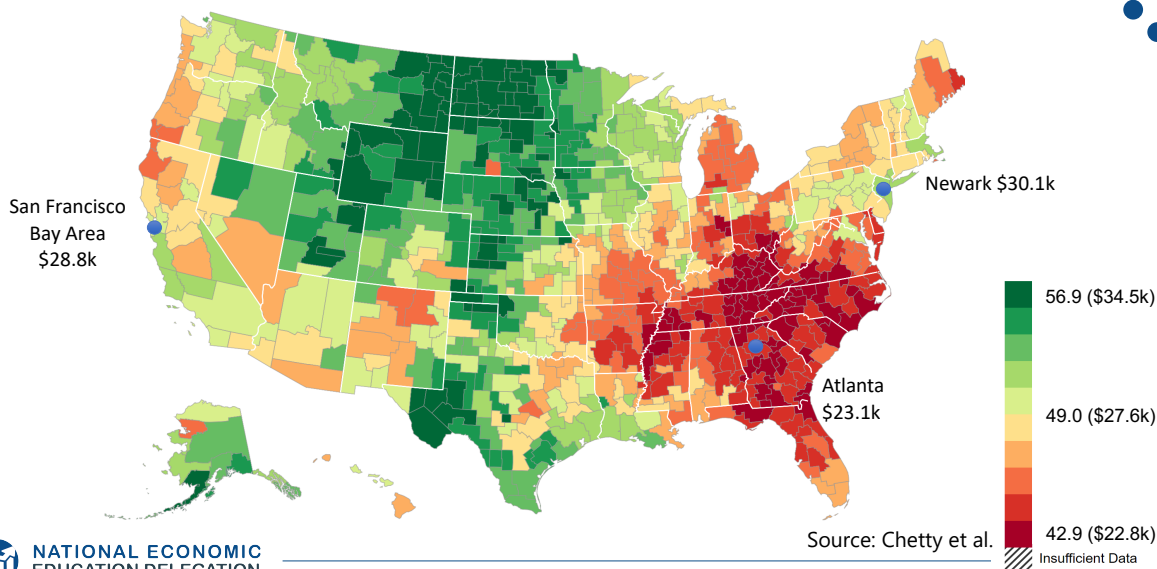
(Also if they grow up in high-innovation areas)



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The Geography of Upward Mobility in the United States

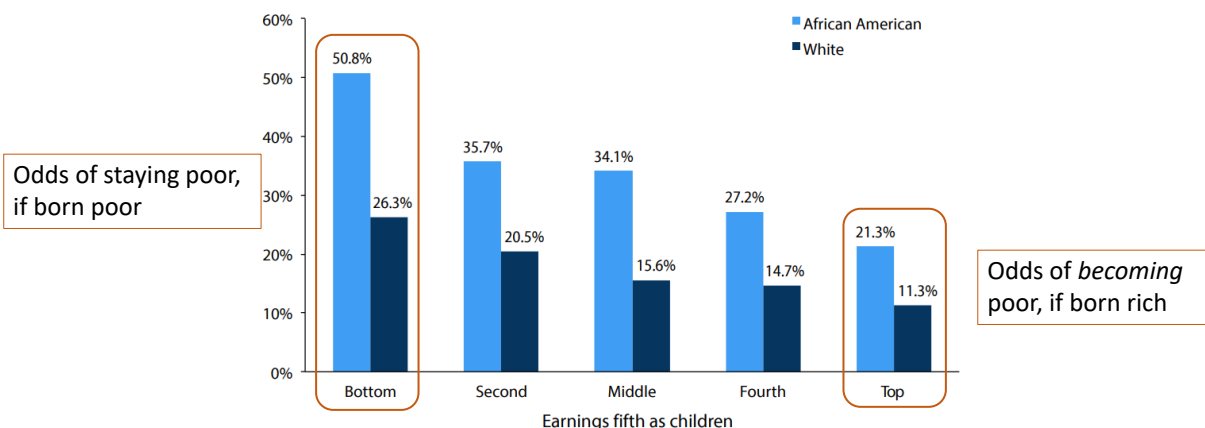
Average Individual Income for Males with Parents Earning \$25,000 (25th percentile)



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U.S. – racial differences

Figure 3L Share of children from various earnings fifths ending up in the bottom fifth as adults, by race



Source: Authors' analysis of Mazumder (2011, Table 7)



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Economic Policy Institute, *State of Working America*, 2012

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Inequality of Opportunity

It occurs when people living in the same society do not have access to the same opportunities.

- Outcomes that are valued by all or most members of society (such as income, wealth, health status, etc.) are determined by two types of factors: those for which the individual can be held responsible, and those for which they cannot (e.g. gender, place of birth, ethnicity, or parental background).
- Inequality of opportunity is thus widely regarded as the unfair part of inequality

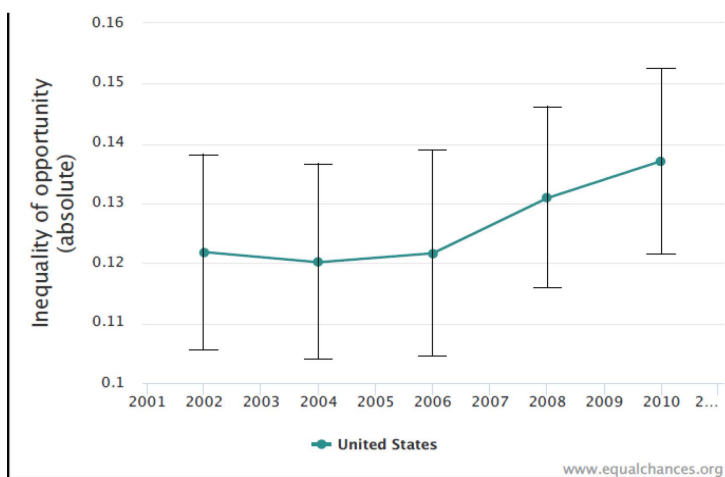


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An example from the Equalchances database



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Poll

What do you think are the top three contributors to economic inequality?

- Outsourcing of jobs to other countries
- The tax system
- Problems with the education system
- The different life choices people make
- Some people start out with more opportunities than others
- Not enough regulation of major corporations
- Some people work harder than others
- Discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities
- The automation of jobs
- Current US trade policies
- Immigration
- Too much regulation of major corporations



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Where Does Inequality Come From?

• Labor Characteristics

- Demographics
 - o Age distribution
- Personal Choices
 - o Educational attainment
 - o Effort
 - o Priorities
 - o Household composition
- Immigration

• Market Forces

- Technology
- Changing demand patterns
- Competition for labor

• Government Policy

- Market influence
- Redistribution



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Government Policy and Inequality

• Market Influence: PRE-distribution

- Characteristics of labor
 - o Access to education
- Effects on labor demand
 - o Market regulation
 - Competition policy
 - o Labor regulations
 - Minimum wage, overtime, health insurance, etc.

• RE-distribution

- Tax Rates
- Income support
 - o Direct aid
 - o Food stamps

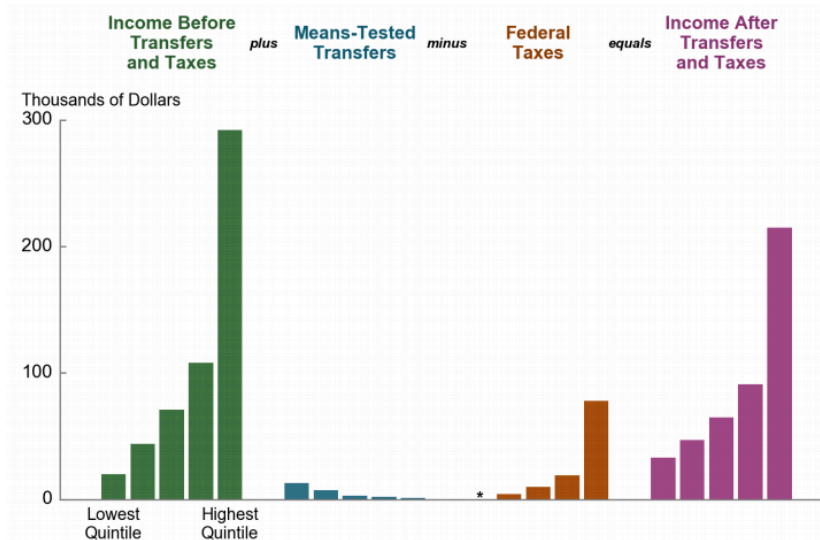


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Taxes, Transfers, and Income: 2016



Government Policy and Racial Inequality

- Product of a long historical process of discrimination with at least two reinforcing sets of policies.
 - Policies that govern the spatial distribution of the black population.
 - Restrictive covenants, redlining, and general housing and lending discrimination
 - Policies that have a disparate impact on black individuals because of their locations.
 - The original version of Michigan Senate Bill 897 exempted individuals from this work requirement conditional on residing in a county with an unemployment rate above 8.5 percent. The higher unemployment rates in rural counties would disproportionately exempt white Medicaid recipients from the work requirement within the bill.

Market Forces and Inequality

- **Changing demand patterns**
 - Technology
 - Globalization
 - Industry composition
 - PCs instead of typewriters
 - Services instead of goods
 - Professional services instead of personal services
- **Competition in labor markets**
 - Unionization
 - Market concentration

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Technological Change and Inequality

- **Much of the technology adopted in the last 30 years has eliminated low-skill or low-wage jobs.**
 - Computers, advanced manufacturing equipment, steel mini-mills, automation
- **There is a “winner take all” aspect of the technology-driven economy.**
 - This likely favors a small group of individuals.
- **Both aspects increase inequality by increasing the rewards to:**
 - Those with significant labor market skills.
 - Owners over workers

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Technology can Hurt Low Income Workers



Early on, technology was good to low income workers



Until it was bad for them....

Globalization

- **What is globalization?**
 - Flow of goods, services, capital, and labor across international borders
- **How does it affect inequality?**
 - Through a differential impact on low-skilled workers and hence their wages
 - For the United States, globalization is thought to lower the wages of low skilled and hence low-wage workers relative to those of high-skilled workers

Mechanisms for the Effects of Globalization

- **Merchandise trade**

- Importing goods that are made with low-skilled workers and exporting goods that are made with high-skilled workers
 - Lowers the wages of unskilled relative to skilled
 - making the distribution of income **less equal**

- **Outsourcing**

- Similar channel as with merchandise trade

- **Trade in services**

- US imports of middle-skill services: business and some professional services

- **Intuitively: The same as if we were to move the actual workers.**



Immigration and Inequality- Summary

- **Beginning in about 1970, the immigrant share of the U.S. Population increased dramatically.**

- 5% in 1970 and 14% in 2016

- **Immigration tends to happen most often among:**

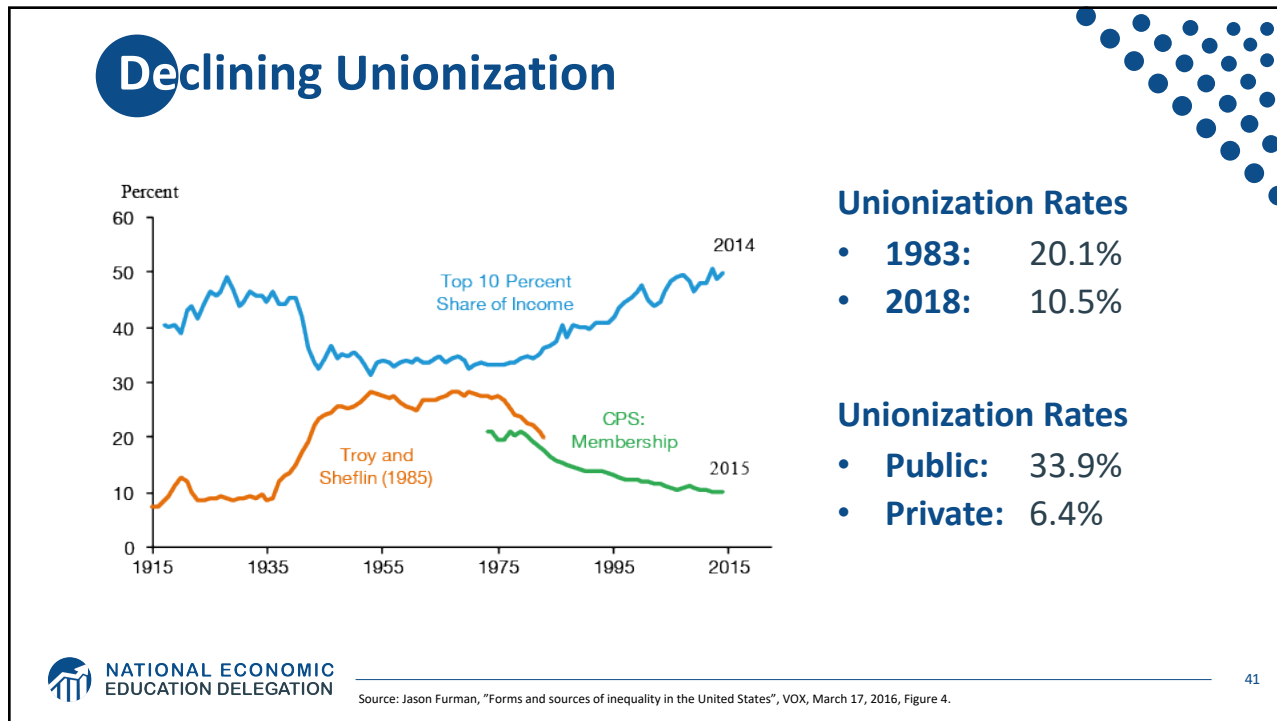
- Low-skilled low-wage workers
- High-skilled high-wage workers

- **Immigration has likely increased income inequality.**

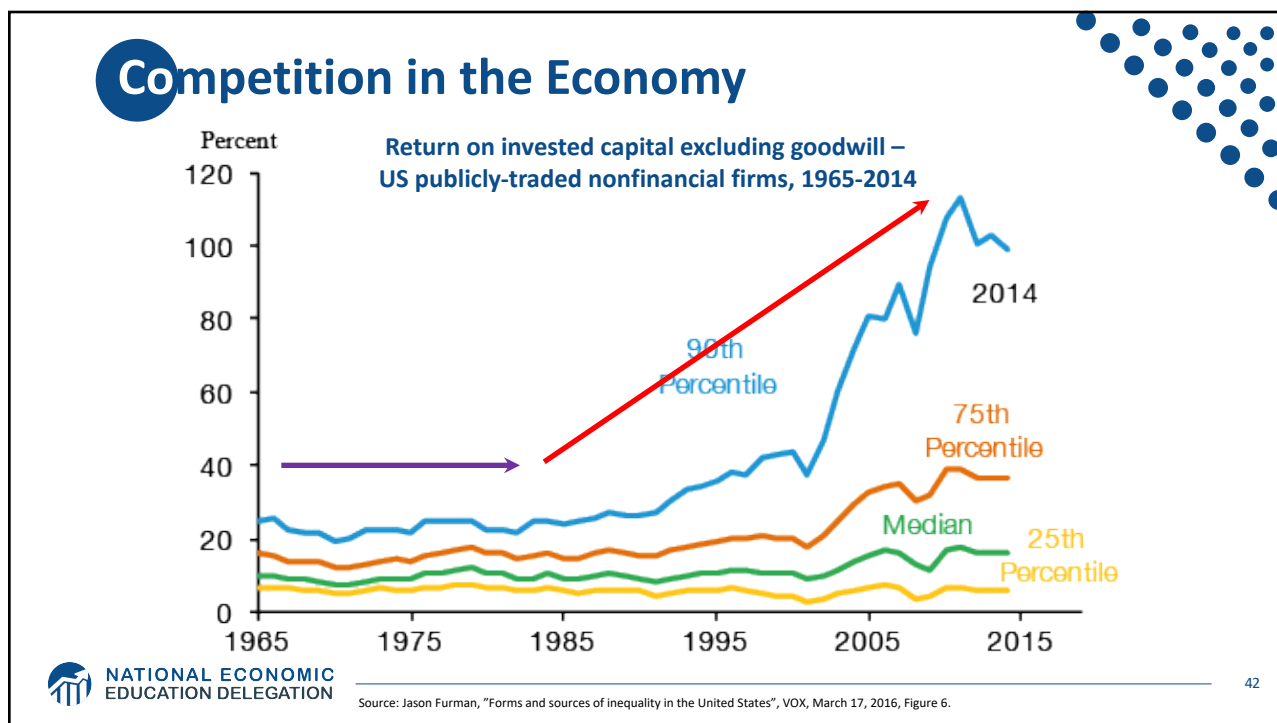
- **Its effect has likely been small.**

- ~5% between 1980 and 2000
- No reason to think it has been bigger since





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Growing Revenue Concentration

Industry	Percentage Point Change in Revenue Share Earned by 50 Largest Firms, 1997-2007
Transportation and Warehousing	12.0
Retail Trade	7.6
Finance and Insurance	7.4
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	6.6
Utilities	5.6
Wholesale Trade	4.6
Educational Services	2.7
Accommodation and Food Services	2.6
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	2.1
Administrative/Support	0.9
Other Services, Non-Public Admin	-1.5
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-2.3
Health Care and Social Assistance	-3.7



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Source: Furman and Orszag, "A Firm-Level Perspective on the Role of Rents in the Rise in Inequality", 2015.

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Addressing Inequality: Is It A Problem?

- **Why it might be a problem.**
 - Economic issues (*Efficiency*)
 - There is evidence that at some level, increased inequality slows economic growth.
 - Or, inequality concentrates resources among investors.
 - Noneconomic issues (*Equity*)
 - Values, ethics and morals will drive individual evaluations of the level of inequality.
 - E.g., inequality is primarily a function of market outcomes, so should be left alone.
 - Or, a solid middle class is important for maintaining a civil society, which runs contrary to a high degree of inequality.
- **Suppose you think it's a problem. How might it be addressed?**



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Addressing Inequality: Long Term

- **It's all about access to resources:**
 - Education, in particular
 - Improve public education
 - Reduce disparities in quality of public education
 - Improve counseling in low-income schools
 - With respect to college – paths to success and funding
 - Investments are needed in early education, not later (e.g. universal pre-k)
 - Opportunities for wealth-building
 - Housing
- **Initiatives whose impacts cross neighborhood and class lines and increase upward mobility specifically for black men**
 - Mentoring programs for black boys, efforts to reduce racial bias among whites, interventions to reduce discrimination in criminal justice, and efforts to facilitate greater interaction across racial groups.



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Tension in Policy Solutions

- **Is it possible to increase growth at the same time that you reduce income inequality?**
 - Common refrain among some that government intervention in the economy is always and everywhere bad for growth.
- **Possibly: expanding equality of access promotes the full utilization of resources.**
 - Expanding equality of access requires resources likely from the well-to-do.



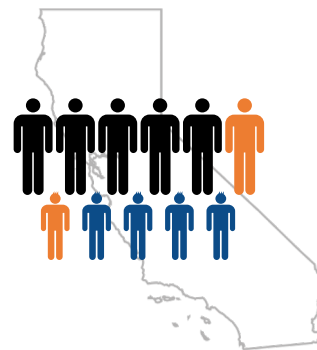
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Summary

- **Income inequality is clearly increasing.**
 - The economy is clearly favoring owners of productive resources over labor.
- **The causes appear to be largely driven by:**
 - The market – technology, competition, and trade
 - Changing institutions.
- **Open questions are:**
 - To act or not to act?
 - If so, how?
- **The level of inequality is a policy choice.**



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Thank you!

Any Questions?

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