

AP Seminar Summer Assignment

2026

Booklet 1: The Stimulus Packet



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INTRODUCTION:

Within this packet you will find directions for the summer assignment as well as the stimulus sources that you will need to complete your “AP Seminar Summer Assignment Workbook”.

Directions

Pt. I: The Stimulus Material

Read and annotate each stimulus.

- a. Annotations for the video will be written notes of important concepts from the video.

Pt. II: The Workbook

Complete the tasks found within your “AP SEMINAR SUMMER ASSIGNMENT WORKBOOK”.

Pt. III: “Outside Information”

Refer to the workbook for directions on Part III.

Official College Board Policy on Plagiarism and Artificial Intelligence

AP Capstone™ Policy on Plagiarism and Falsification or Fabrication of Information: A student who fails to acknowledge the source or author of any and all information or evidence taken from the work of someone else through citation, attribution or reference in the body of the work, or through a bibliographic entry, will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that fails to properly acknowledge sources or authors on the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation. A student who incorporates falsified or fabricated information (e.g. evidence, data, sources, and/or authors) will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that incorporates falsified or fabricated information in the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.

Source A:

Social Darwinism

History.com Editors

Updated: August 21, 2018; original April 6, 2018

Social Darwinism is a loose set of ideologies that emerged in the late 1800s in which Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was used to justify certain political, social, or economic views. Social Darwinists believe in "survival of the fittest"—the idea that certain people become powerful in society because they are innately better. Social Darwinism has been used to justify imperialism, racism, eugenics and social inequality at various times over the past century and a half.

Evolution and Natural Selection

According to Darwin's theory of evolution, only the plants and animals best adapted to their environment will survive to reproduce and transfer their genes to the next generation. Animals and plants that are poorly adapted to their environment will not survive to reproduce. Charles Darwin published his notions on natural selection and the theory of evolution in his influential 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*.

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was a scientific theory focused on explaining his observations about biological diversity and why different species of plants and animals look different.

Herbert Spencer

Yet in an attempt to convey his scientific ideas to the British public, Darwin borrowed popular concepts, including "survival of the fittest," from sociologist Herbert Spencer and "struggle for existence" from economist Thomas Malthus, who had earlier written about how human societies evolve over time.

Darwin rarely commented on the social implications of his theories. But to those who followed Spencer and Malthus, Darwin's theory appeared to be confirming with science what they already believed to be true about human society—that the fit inherited qualities such as industriousness and the ability to accumulate wealth, while the unfit were innately lazy and stupid.

Survival of the Fittest and Laissez-Faire Capitalism

After Darwin published his theories on biological evolution and natural selection, Herbert Spencer drew further parallels between his economic theories and Darwin's scientific principles. Spencer applied the idea of "survival of the fittest" to so-called *laissez faire* or unrestrained capitalism during the Industrial Revolution, in which businesses are allowed to operate with little regulation from the government. Unlike Darwin, Spencer believed that people could genetically pass learned qualities, such as frugality and morality, on to their children.

Spencer opposed any laws that helped workers, the poor, and those he deemed genetically weak. Such laws, he argued, would go against the evolution of civilization by delaying the extinction of the "unfit."

Another prominent Social Darwinist was American economist William Graham Sumner. He was an early opponent of the welfare state. He viewed individual competition for property and social status as a tool for eliminating the weak and immoral of the population.

Eugenics

As social Darwinist rationalizations of inequality gained popularity in the late 1800s, British scholar Sir Francis Galton (a half-cousin of Darwin) launched a new "science" aimed at improving the human race by ridding society of its "undesirables." He called it eugenics.

Galton proposed to better humankind by propagating the British elite. He argued that social institutions such as welfare and mental asylums allowed inferior humans to survive and reproduce at higher levels than their superior counterparts in Britain's wealthy class. Galton's ideas never really took hold in his country, but they became popular in America where the concepts of eugenics quickly gained strength.

Eugenics became a popular social movement in the United States that peaked in the 1920s and 1930s. Books and films promoted eugenics, while local fairs and exhibitions held "fitter family" and "better baby" competitions around the country.

The eugenics movement in the United States focused on eliminating undesirable traits from the population. Proponents of the eugenics movement reasoned the best way to do this was by preventing "unfit" individuals from having children.

During the first part of the twentieth century, 32 U.S. states passed laws that resulted in the forced sterilization of more than 64,000 Americans including immigrants, people of color, unmarried mothers and the mentally ill.

Nazi Germany

Adolf Hitler, one of the world's most notorious eugenicists, drew inspiration from California's forced sterilizations of the "feeble-minded" in designing Nazi Germany's racially based policies.

Hitler began reading about eugenics and social Darwinism while he was imprisoned following a failed 1924 coup attempt known as the Beer Hall Putsch.

Hitler adopted the social Darwinist take on survival of the fittest. He believed the German master race had grown weak due to the influence of non-Aryans in Germany. To Hitler, survival of the German "Aryan" race depended on its ability to maintain the purity of its gene pool.

The Nazis targeted certain groups or races that they considered biologically inferior for extermination. These included Jews, Roma (gypsies), Poles, Soviets, people with disabilities and homosexuals.

By the end of World War II, social Darwinist and eugenic theories had fallen out of favor in the United States and much of Europe—partly due to their associations with Nazi programs and propaganda, and because these theories were scientifically unfounded.

SOURCES

Social Darwinism; [American Museum of Natural History](#).

America's Hidden History: The Eugenics Movement; [Nature](#). September 18, 2014.

In the Name of Darwin; [PBS](#).

Victims of the Nazi Era: Nazi Racial Ideology; [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

Source B:

Please watch the following video:

“We are not untouchable - End Caste Discrimination Now!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5eyXPAvGfM&t=87s>

Write your annotations here: You must have at least 6 pieces of information from the video.

Source C:

How music has responded to a decade of economic inequality

Popular music has always delivered social critique. But it's struggled to grapple with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

vox.com

By Scott Timberg Jul 30, 2018

Culture, especially popular culture, always has some relation to the conditions that surround it, and these days, there is no shortage of music that reflects our economic reality.

But that reflection isn't always quite what you'd expect. During the Great Depression, which saw widespread homelessness and US unemployment reaching 25 percent, popular films showed the very rich drinking cocktails in formal dress; cheery songs like "Pennies From Heaven" charted. And in the post-2008 decade of recession, instability, and income inequality, blockbuster acts spent a lot of time telling us the incredible time they were having.

The real story of the past decade has been harder to hear. A decade ago, as some Americans remember all too well, the US economy began to crumble, and took the rest of the world's markets along with it. First housing prices started to slide, revealing a nation caught in a deflating real estate bubble. Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers came next.

The cascade of damage was worldwide, but it took on an especially fierce pitch in the world's largest economy: Beginning in late 2008, the US was losing more than half a million jobs a month. By 2009, the Great Recession's first full year, national unemployment reached 15 million people, or 10 percent — the first double-digit rate since the early 1980s. Trillions of dollars of wealth disappeared from the economy, and 4 million Americans lost their homes in just two years.

Meanwhile, the nation's biggest songs in the year after the crash were numbers by Flo Rida, Chris Brown, and Coldplay that had little to do with economic strain. It takes any cultural form — movies, books, visual art, whatever — months, sometimes years, to respond to social, political, or economic change. But pop music has less lag time than most other genres.

(In previous centuries, folk songs about hangings or train crashes could appear almost instantly. And it wasn't for nothing that Public Enemy's Chuck D once called hip-hop black America's CNN.)

By the end of 2009, though, the biggest-selling singles were songs like Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind," Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance," and various party-hearty numbers by the Black Eyed Peas. And so it went, into the teeth of the recession.

Popular music, of course, becomes popular partly because it takes people away from their lives. Be it the blandness of affluence or the pain of personal difficulty, there has always been an element of aspiration and fantasy to popular culture.

But from Woody Guthrie singing about the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression's devastations in the 1930s to rock and soul bands of the '60s and '70s writing about war and civil rights to British punks shouting about unemployment and the working class to rappers spitting about injustice and racism, popular music has always also delivered social critique — much of the time including economic issues.

What we see in the decade following the 2008 stock market crash, though, is a relatively tame popular music world in which best-selling artists and left-of-the-dial "alternative" musicians share an apparent lack of interest in the nation's economic state.

"Most people in the mainstream music world — whether it's pop, indie, or country — don't want to offend any of their fans," says Margo Price, a country singer-songwriter who has been outspoken about economic structures. "Their big labels don't want them to, either."

After the pain of the '08 crash, the nation experienced an economic recovery that shifted a massive amount of income from the poor and middle class to the very rich. The big banks got bigger; huge bonuses returned. Just two years after the crash, the nation's Gini coefficient, the standard measure of wealth distribution, was at 46.9, making the US among the most unequal of modern democracies.

We can call the past 10 years the decade of inequality. So what, then, does the music of inequality sound like?

The tropes of mainstream pop music are far removed from audiences' economic realities

Part of the paradox here is simply that monetary wealth gives musicians — at least, the tiny minority experiencing material bounty — something to sing about.

Musicians are not unique here: In the years since the Reagan administration, a reveling in what used to be called heartless materialism has become *de rigueur*. (The shift in personal style from an old-school rich man like Warren Buffett, who made his early fortune in the 1950s, to Donald Trump, a product of the gilded '80s, is hard to miss.)

Artists singing about how much wealth they had accrued fit cleanly into a *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* culture. The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Marvin Gaye were filthy rich, but it's hard to imagine them crooning about their money and mansions. Nor can we imagine Joni Mitchell, Patti Smith, or Liz Phair posing in a bath of diamonds, as Taylor Swift does in the 2017 video for "Look What You Made Me Do."

Many of the songs about luxurious possessions and lavish lifestyles — the sonic equivalent of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* — are the descendants of "Mo Money Mo Problems," the 1997 Notorious B.I.G. song. But in many cases, there seem to be no serious problems besides having too many women or possessions to choose from.



The Notorious B.I.G. performs at the Riviera Theatre in Chicago in September 1994
Raymond Boyd/Getty Images

"When inequality is high, it's driven by the superrich, because [the poor] can't go lower than zero," says Keith Payne, a University of North Carolina psychology professor and author of *The Broken Ladder*, a recent book on wealth disparity. "People feel poorer but aspire to higher standards. This leads to a risk-taking kind of life: People are more likely to gamble, play the odds, use drugs or drink, commit crimes. It also orients people to the very wealthy as opposed to the poor."

These are the classic tropes of hip-hop, a musical style that, Payne points out, surged in ubiquity in the same years as the rise in inequality. A mixtape of

conspicuous consumption and runaway consumerism could be assembled from songs like Post Malone and Ty Dolla Sign's "Psycho" ("got diamonds by the boatload!"), Lil Uzi Vert's "Money Longer" ("money got longer, speaker got louder, car got faster"), and Lil Pump's "Gucci Gang" ("Spend 10 racks on a new chain / My bitch love do cocaine.")

The style became so ubiquitous that the satirical trio the Lonely Island parodied the genre of gold-plated gloat with "I'm on a Boat," a 2009 rap song featuring T-Pain that makes "yacht rock" numbers like Christopher Cross's 1980 hit "Sailing" look modest and egalitarian.

More cutting is Lorde's 2013 song "Royals," which seems to be aware of how mismatched the music is to the times: "But every song's like gold teeth, Grey Goose, trippin' in the bathroom / Bloodstains, ball gowns, trashin' the hotel room / We don't care, we're driving Cadillacs in our dreams ..."

Part of what looking across the genres shows you is that the big-selling, celebrity-driven mainstream of just about every style of music offers very little social or economic critique. If that's what you're looking for, look to the edges.

Music engaging with inequality tends to be on the fringes of popular genres

Mainstream country music, a genre rooted in the rural red-state South, is no stranger to poverty or songs about risk-taking. But it very rarely deals with inequality, says Payne, a native of Kentucky. "The only economic theme is, 'We grew up poor, but we didn't know it at the time, and now we've got everything we need.' That's the theme of countless country songs," he says.

The country songwriters interested in exploring economics more assertively don't find a receptive industry, whether radio, country labels, or other gatekeepers. "They are so scared of coming out on an issue that offends... America," says R.J. Smith, a music journalist and author of a recent biography of photographer Robert Frank. What you get, instead, is "good short story-ish songwriting about how people are living, but with little sense of why poverty happened."

To the extent that there's been a consistent protest, it comes, curiously, from the fringes of country... country has been the music of the poor and working class since the days of Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. And the alt-country movement,

which has co-opted the folk tradition, continued the grit and social criticism of the old days after the big-hatted mainstream moved into formula and political reaction.

This has led to what we could call empathy songs and plutocrat songs: The empathy song looks at the plight of someone crushed under the economic wheel, sometimes speaking in his or her voice; the plutocrat song is typically more overtly political, targeting the damage done by the very rich.



Loudon Wainwright III performs in Copenhagen in December 1976. Jorgen Angel/Redferns via Getty Images.

Honorary Americana artist Billy Bragg (who is British but has made several albums of Woody Guthrie's music with alt-country pioneers Wilco) began performing Guthrie's "I Ain't Got No Home" after the '08 crash. (The song is explicitly class-based, describing a "rich man [who] took my home and drove me from my door.")

And Margo Price's songs are among the strongest economic critiques post-Great Recession: Numbers like "Pay Gap," "About to Find Out," and "All American Made" ... sometimes combine feminism with scenes from the class struggle.

Veteran singer-songwriter Loudon Wainwright III worked in a vaguely country-folk tradition with his 2010 album, *10 Songs For the New Depression*. The songs alternated from despairing to lighthearted (the number "House" is both), and name-check Alan Greenspan and John Maynard Keynes. (One cheeky number is called "The Krugman Blues.") Peter Himmelman's "Rich Men Rule the World" is a brutal song in the same vein.

Two classics from the edges of country actually predate the Great Recession, perhaps because the rural South never quite caught the postwar boom like the rest of the nation did. James McMurtry's "We Can't Make It Here," from 2005, tells of a struggling, wounded Vietnam veteran, empty storefronts, a failing bar, and the pinch of a stagnant minimum wage. (The novelistic vision is appropriate for the son of *Lonesome Dove* author Larry McMurtry.) And while their most recent album is more about race and politics in general, Drive-By Truckers' 2005 album, *The Dirty South*, is a forceful look at American poverty and inequality, highlighted by the song "Puttin' People on the Moon."

“In our hometown,” Drive-By Truckers leader Patterson Hood says of Florence, Alabama, “the economy collapsed in the early ’80s: During the so-called Reagan boom years, we were like Flint, Michigan. They closed the Ford plant, and there was a domino effect.”

Along with the songs of the late Merle Haggard, Bruce Springsteen’s work serves as a template for bands like the Truckers. The Boss has written some of the best work about the way economics shapes and limits lives — songs like “My Hometown” and the Dust Bowl-inspired *Ghost of Tom Joad* LP. He has not quite matched these since; his energies have largely been elsewhere. But the 2012 *Wrecking Ball* LP, with songs like “We Take Care of Our Own” and the Wall Street-dissing “Death to My Hometown,” is a solid stab at addressing what much of the country has been through.

And while the late, great soul musician Charles Bradley largely sang about racism and his personal travails, his “Why Is It So Hard,” from 2011, may be the single most emotionally powerful recent song about poverty and income inequality...

Inequality is not a natural driver for slick, commercial pop songwriting

“There is very little in the mainstream music business about economic hardship,” says music historian Ted Gioia. “Are Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift trying to shake things up?” Some artists sing about race and gender, he says, but economics has largely been overlooked in the slick and commercial pop mainstream.

Gioia characterizes the lip service the music industry pays to social issues as a decades-old problem: MTV and the rest of the business largely slept through the AIDS crisis in the 1980s; this time, Gioia says, economic inequality has become the forgotten issue.

But some artists have made an end run around these forces.

One of the most realized looks at the Great Recession and its discontents may not be a political piece of hip-hop or an angry piece of outlaw country, but rather a musical. *Hadestown* was an off-Broadway “folk opera” in 2016, relocating the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in a post-apocalyptic Great Depression with a wink toward the present. It’s based on an album by folk singer Anais Mitchell that includes contributions from Ani DiFranco, the Haden Triplets, and Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon.

Finally, there was a four-disc compilation in 2012 called *Occupy This Album: 99 Songs for the 99 Percent*. The styles and quality range quite widely, from Michael Moore singing Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin’” to songs by Yoko Ono, Toots and the Maytals, and Nancy Griffith. (The video for “United Tribes,” a song by Thievery Corporation with rapper Mr. Lif, captures the energy of the movement it emerged from.) Still, it’s hard to miss that many of the songs are old, or only obliquely related to Occupy itself.

One reason songs about the recession and inequality are hard to find may be psychological. The Brooklyn musician Pauline Pisano lost her job as a web designer when the recession hit, and has struggled financially since. But it wasn’t until an NYU course and an exposure to the books of David Graeber that she focused on economic matters and the corrosive effects of debt. (“I feel like the people who cheated won,” she says now. “And for the people who played by the rules, the rules changed.”) She’s since led a musical tour of the South talking to people across the political spectrum about the subject, and her work has been politically energized...

What does it mean when popular music does not really express most Americans' lived experience?

One glaring irony here is that the past decade has also seen the vast majority of musicians struggling even more than they did previously: The collapse of the sale of recordings has made most of them all too aware of income inequality, especially when they compare themselves to one-percenters of the past (the Eagles) or present (Lady Gaga).

...The larger issue here — the lack of genuinely popular songs about the biggest economic event since 1929 — is pop culture's claims of being a democratic art. What if popular music does not really express and describe what the mass of Americans is experiencing? And in an era when the phrase "check your privilege" has become commonplace, does it matter if the biggest hits are being made, in many cases, by fantastically privileged people?

Taylor Swift, for instance, comes from a long line of bank presidents; her father relocated to Merrill Lynch's Nashville office and later bought a share of a record label to help her career. (See also "Uptown Funk" producer Mark Ronson, from one of Britain's wealthiest families.)

"If it becomes clear that our popular culture is a rich kids' project, it loses its legitimacy," UCLA's Fink says. "Even more than in Britain, we have Horatio Alger pretensions here." Once we get a sense that our popular culture is the preserve of the very rich, it's not quite "popular" in the democratic way we typically use the term.

..."I think that we are living in a very dangerous time," says Price. "People as a whole are distracted by social media, celebrities, unattainable wealth."

But things can change, and Price believes they might: "We're in a turning point right now, and musicians and visual artists have a chance to move mountains with their words. If they would only use them."

This article was supported by the [Economic Hardship Reporting Project](#).

Source D:

Why China's Censors Are Deleting Videos About Poverty

Xi Jinping says he has defeated poverty, but discussion of economic struggle is taboo, scrubbed from the internet and banished from the news.

By [Li Yuan](#)

The New York Times

May 4, 2023

A heartbreaking video of a retiree that showed what groceries she could buy with 100 yuan, or \$14.50 — roughly her monthly pension and sole source of income — went viral on the Chinese internet. The video was deleted.

A singer vented the widespread frustration among young, educated Chinese about their dire finances and gloomy job prospects, like gig work. “I wash my face every day, but my pocket is cleaner than my face,” he sings. “I went to college to help rejuvenate China, not to deliver meals.” His song was banned and his social media accounts were suspended.

A migrant worker toiling to support his family gained widespread sympathy and attention last year after he tested positive for Covid, and officials released extensive details of his movements. He became known as the hardest-working person in China. Censors blocked discussions about him, and local authorities were stationed outside his house to prevent journalists from visiting his wife.

China says it is a socialist country that aims to promote common prosperity. In 2021, its top leader, Xi Jinping, declared “a comprehensive victory in the battle against poverty.” Yet many people remain poor or live just above the poverty line. With the country’s economic prospects dimming and the people’s increasing anxiety about their future, poverty has become a taboo subject that can draw ire from the government.

In March, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the country's internet regulator, announced that it would crack down on anyone who publishes videos or posts that "deliberately manipulate sadness, incite polarization, create harmful information that damages the image of the Party and the government, and disrupts economic and social development." It bans sad videos of old people, disabled people and children.

Behind the ban is a government eager to keep all talk about China positive. The Communist Party brags about how many people it lifted out of poverty in the past four decades, while refusing to mention how it had thrown the entire nation into abject poverty under Mao Zedong.

Because of propaganda and censorship in China, many people in the country weren't aware of how prevalent poverty was in China.



Credit: Qilai Shen for The New York Times

Poverty alleviation is a medal the party flaunts to claim its legitimacy. But despite China's rise as an economic power, it has a drastically inadequate social safety net, and the government is eager to block any discussion of the conditions poor people face.

Searching the Chinese word "pinkun," or poverty, on the country's biggest news portal, qq.com, the top news item is about research that shows poverty is the fourth leading cause of death in the

United States. The news media seldom report about poverty's systemic causes in China.

Hu Chenfeng recorded the footage that was removed from the Chinese internet. On popular video sites, he had posted a recording showing an elderly woman living on barely \$15 a month. In the words of many social media commenters, he was revealing too much. "This subject is untouchable," one commenter wrote on a now-deleted discussion thread on Zhihu, a site similar to Quora. Another wrote, "His account was censored simply because he showed what life is like for many people."

In the video, which survives outside the Chinese internet on YouTube, Mr. Hu interviews the woman, a 78-year-old widow, on the street in the southwestern city of Chengdu. She said she planned to buy only rice, about the only thing she could afford. She hadn't eaten meat for a long time. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she recounted her financial hardship. The two walk through a grocery store. They bought rice, eggs, pork and flour. The bill came to 127 yuan (\$18). Mr. Hu insisted on paying. He was emotional, too, signing off with "a heavy heart."

The video was removed from the two biggest user-generated video platforms in China. Mr. Hu's accounts were suspended.

Even a discussion thread on Zhihu about why the government doesn't allow videos about the poor was censored. "Because theoretically there's no poor people in China," one social media user speculated in a written post before the thread disappeared. "China has eliminated poverty."

"Because this society only allows you to celebrate prosperity," another commenter wrote. "You have to shoulder all the sufferings yourself and not share them online."

Income inequality is a problem in many countries, including the United States. In China, the biggest divide in wealth is among rural and urban residents. The gap is created by government rules that peg social benefits, including schooling, health care and pensions, to where a person was born, not according to their residence, income or needs. The policy hurts retirees in particular.

In 2021, older people from the countryside received on average \$27 a month in social security benefits, according to a government report. That pension is merely about 5 percent of what the average urban retiree gets.

One viral video about seniors struggling to make ends meet took place in one of China's most populous provinces, Henan, where the government raised monthly pensions for rural residents from \$16 to \$18 this year. The video shows two porters in their 70s unloading a truckload of cement using their hands and shoulders.

In China's go-go years of miraculous economic growth, straddling the 1990s to mid-2010s, poverty wasn't a topic that people paid much attention to. Now, with the country's economic engine sputtering, Chinese who are new to the middle class are worried that they could fall back into poverty, part of the reason these videos attracted attention.



Credit: Qilai Shen for The New York Times

Poverty is seen as a novelty among the middle class in China partly because local governments chase homeless people off the streets.

Because of propaganda and censorship, many of them weren't aware of the depth and prevalence of poverty in the country.

When the premier at the time, Li Keqiang, said in 2020 that 600 million Chinese — 40 percent of the population — had monthly income of less than \$150, some people, who didn't know where the numbers came from, called it fake news. The official People's Daily had to call on the State Statistics Bureau to confirm it was true. The official Chinese press seldom mentioned the inconvenient number again.

Another reason poverty is seen as a novelty among the middle class is that local governments usually chase beggars and homeless people off the streets. They become invisible in big cities. A friend's daughter in Beijing asked her last year what a beggar was. I recently met a 13-year-old new Chinese immigrant in San Francisco who was shocked by the sight of homeless people. She said she'd never seen one in Beijing.

The Beijing government does not only bar beggars and homeless people from staying in the city. In the winter of 2017, it kicked many low-income people out of their apartments to get rid of what it called “low-quality population.”

Now with video streamers roaming the country, trying to find revealing facts that attract online attention, the public can see the poor and some of the unpleasant aspects of life in China. That is one reason for the censorship.

In addition to poverty, the government doesn't want the public to dwell on another big social problem: youth unemployment, which the government says has reached nearly 20 percent.

A songwriter used a well-known literary character, Kong Yiji, an educated but poor intellectual living during the Qing dynasty, to counter the government line that young people can't find work because they aren't trying hard enough. The song was censored and the singer's online accounts suspended. The official media, in turn, churned out articles about college graduates earning decent livings by collecting garbage or becoming street vendors. The government wants to “deny the prevalence of economic recession and unemployment” and avoid accountability, a commenter wrote.

The same can be said about poverty. By censoring videos and online discussions, the government is evading its responsibility to provide the most basic social safety net to the poor.

“I shot these videos in the hope of making some money while pushing our society to move forward just a little bit,” Mr. Hu, the videographer, said in a video posted in a backup social media account that had not been blocked. “But I never expected that this is forbidden.”

Source E:

Ferraris and Hungry Children: Venezuela's Socialist Vision in Shambles

After years of extreme scarcity, some Venezuelans lead lives of luxury as others scrape by. The nation of grinding hardship has increasingly become one of haves and have-nots.

*By Isayen Herrera and Frances Robles, The New York Times
Photographs by Adriana Loureiro Fernandez, Isayen Herrera reported and Adriana Loureiro Fernandez photographed from Caracas, Venezuela. Frances Robles reported from Key West, Fla.
March 21, 2023*

CARACAS, Venezuela — In the capital, a store sells Prada purses and a 110-inch television for \$115,000. Not far away, a Ferrari dealership has opened, while a new restaurant allows well-off diners to enjoy a meal seated atop a giant crane overlooking the city.

“When was the last time you did something for the first time?” The restaurant’s host boomed over a microphone to excited customers as they sang along to a Coldplay song. This is not Dubai or Tokyo, but Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, where a socialist revolution once promised equality and an end to the bourgeoisie.

Venezuela’s economy imploded nearly a decade ago, prompting a huge outflow of migrants in one of the worst crises in modern Latin American history. Now there are signs the country is settling into a new, disorienting normality, with everyday products easily available, poverty starting to lessen — and surprising pockets of wealth arising.



A television on sale for over \$100,000 at a store in Caracas.

That has left the socialist government of the authoritarian President Nicolás Maduro presiding over an improving economy as the opposition is struggling to unite and as the United States has scaled back oil sanctions that helped decimate the country's finances.

Conditions remain dire for a huge portion of the population, and while the hyperinflation that crippled the economy has moderated, prices still triple annually, among the worst rates in the world.

But with the government's ease of restrictions on the use of U.S. dollars to address Venezuela's economic collapse, business activity is returning to what was once the region's wealthiest nation.



A street vendor selling produce at \$1 for each bagged vegetable in a busy downtown market in Caracas.

As a result, Venezuela is increasingly a country of haves and have-nots, and one of the world's most unequal societies, according to Encovi, a respected national poll by the Institute of Economic and Social Research of the Andrés Bello Catholic University in Caracas.

Mr. Maduro has boasted that the economy grew by 15 percent last year over the previous year and that tax collections and exports also rose — though some economists stress that the economy's growth is misleading because it followed years of huge declines.

For the first time in seven years, poverty is decreasing: Half of the nation lives in poverty, down from 65 percent in 2021, according to the Encovi poll.

But the survey also found that the wealthiest Venezuelans were 70 times richer than the poorest, putting the country on par with some countries in Africa that have the highest rates of inequality in the world.

And access to U.S. dollars is often limited to people with ties to the government or those involved in illicit businesses. A study last year by Transparency International, an anti-corruption watchdog, found that illegal businesses such as food, diesel, human and gas smuggling represented more than 20 percent of the Venezuelan economy.

Though parts of Caracas bustle with residents who can afford a growing array of imported goods, one in three children across Venezuela was suffering from malnutrition as of May 2022, according to the National Academy of Medicine.

Up to seven million Venezuelans have simply given up and abandoned their homeland since 2015, according to the United Nations.



After years of a roller-coaster economy, Venezuela has settled into a new, disorienting normality fueled by U.S. dollars.

And despite the Maduro administration's new slogan — “Venezuela is fixed” — many scrape by on the equivalent of only a few dollars a day, while public-sector employees have taken to the streets to protest low salaries. “I have to do back flips,” said María Rodríguez, 34, a medical lab analyst in Cumaná, a small city 250 miles east of the capital, explaining that, to pay for food and her daughter's school tuition, she relied on two jobs, a side business selling beauty products and money from her relatives.



Yrelys Jiménez with her son and daughter in their shared bedroom.

Yrelys Jiménez, a preschool teacher in San Diego de los Altos, a half-hour drive south of Caracas, joked that her \$10 monthly salary meant “food for today and

hunger for tomorrow.” (The restaurant that allows diners to eat 150 feet above the ground charges \$140 a meal.)

Despite such hardship, Mr. Maduro, whose administration did not respond to requests for comment, has focused on promoting the country's rising economic indicators. "It seems that the sick person recovers, stops, walks and runs," he said in a recent speech, comparing Venezuela with a suddenly cured hospital patient.

The United States' shifting strategy toward Venezuela has in part benefited his administration. In November, after the Maduro administration agreed to restart talks with the opposition, the Biden administration issued Chevron an extendable six-month license to pump oil in Venezuela. The deal stipulates that the profits be used to pay off debts owed to Chevron by the Venezuelan government.



Ms. Jiménez during the long walk home with her children from her job as a teacher.

And while the United States still bans purchases from the state oil company, the country has increased black-market oil sales to China through Iran, energy experts said.

Mr. Maduro is also emerging from isolation in Latin America as a regional shift to the left has led to a thaw in relations. Colombia and Brazil, both led by recently elected leftist leaders, have restored diplomatic relations. Colombia's new president, Gustavo Petro, has been particularly warm to Mr. Maduro, meeting with him repeatedly and agreeing to a deal to import Venezuelan gas.



A ceiling of floating sculptures in a luxury department store in Caracas.

With presidential elections planned next year and the opposition's parallel government having recently disbanded, Mr. Maduro seems increasingly confident about his political future.

Last year's inflation rate of 234 percent ranks Venezuela second in the world, behind Sudan, but it pales in comparison to the hyperinflation seen in 2019, when the rate ballooned to 300,000 percent, according to the World Bank.

With production and prices up, Venezuela has also started to see an increase in revenues from oil, its key export. The country's production of nearly 700,000 barrels a day is higher than last year's, though it was twice as high in 2018 and four times as high in 2013, said Francisco J. Monaldi, a Latin America energy policy fellow at Rice University.

The Venezuelan government's loosening of restrictions on dollars has made it easier for some people to use money sent from abroad. In many cases, no cash is actually exchanged. Venezuelans with means increasingly use digital apps like Zelle to use dollars in accounts outside the country to pay for goods and services.

A survey found that the wealthiest Venezuelans were 70 times richer than the poorest residents.

Still, U.S. officials call Venezuela's economic picture somewhat illusory. "They were able to adjust to a lot of their problems after sanctions were implemented through dollarization," according to Mark A. Wells, a deputy assistant secretary of state, "and so it starts to look over time that they are able to reach a status that basically helps the elites there, but the poor are still very, very poor."

"So, it's not that everything is more stable and better there," Mr. Wells added. Mr. Maduro took office nearly 10 years ago and was last elected in 2018 in a vote that was widely considered a sham and was disavowed by much of the international community.

The widespread belief that Mr. Maduro won fraudulently led the National Assembly to deem the presidency vacant and use a provision in the Constitution to name a new leader, Juan Guaidó, a former student leader. He was recognized by dozens of countries, including the United States, as Venezuela's legitimate ruler. But as the figurehead of a parallel government that had oversight over frozen international financial accounts, he had no power within the country.



Juan Guaidó led a parallel government that was recognized by the United States but held no power.

In December, the National Assembly ousted Mr. Guaidó and scrapped the interim government, a move some observers considered a boost to Mr. Maduro. A number of opposition figures have announced that they will run in a primary scheduled for October, even though many political analysts are skeptical that Mr. Maduro will allow a credible vote.

“What Maduro does have today is an opposition that is disjointed and dispersed,” Mr. Guaidó said in an interview. “He also has a majority of the

people against him. He continues being a dictator without popular support, a destroyed economy, which was his own fault, with professors, nurses, older people and workers protesting right now as we speak.”

Even people like Eugenia Monsalves, who owns a medical supply company in Caracas and sends her two daughters to private schools, is frustrated with the country’s direction.

Though she is upper middle class, she said she still had to watch how she spends her money.

She goes out to eat occasionally and has visited some of the city’s new luxury stores, but without buying anything. “The vast majority of Venezuelans live in a complicated situation, very complicated,” she said.

Ms. Monsalves believes the Maduro administration needs to go, but she worries that the best candidates were forced into exile or disqualified. The opposition, she said, has not coalesced around what it most needs: a leader who can energize the electorate.



*Scavenging a large garbage bin at a street market in Caracas.
Half of the nation lives in poverty, down from 65 percent in 2021.*

“That’s what I most want, like many other Venezuelans,” she said. “But the truth is that without a clear vision from the opposition, a clear platform from a single candidate, I think it’s going to be hard.”



An upscale restaurant built inside a recently renovated hotel in Caracas.

Nayobis Rodríguez contributed reporting from Sucre, Venezuela, and Julie Turkewitz from Necoclí, Colombia. Frances Robles is a Florida-based correspondent who also covers Puerto Rico and Central America. Her investigation of a Brooklyn homicide detective led to more than a dozen murder convictions being overturned and won a George Polk award.

Source F:

In America’s Cities, Inequality is Ingrained in the Trees

A new study finds that low-income blocks have less tree cover and hotter average temperatures than high-income ones.



*Adam Mahoney
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Published
May 05, 2021*

The amount of greenery on your street depends on the amount of green in your pockets, according to a new study.

You'd have hard luck trying to convince someone that trees are somehow biased. Their sprawling roots, awning-like leaves, and huggable trunks offer protection and solace to everybody and everything, big and small. For humans, they help clean our air and water, and offer cover in the summer from blistering heat.

But a new study published in the journal PLOS ONE shows that their distribution often depends on race and class, a result of exclusionary zoning laws, racial segregation, and the country's stark wealth inequality.

In the two-year-long study, a team of researchers from the Nature Conservancy found that 92 percent of low-income blocks in the U.S. have less tree cover and hotter average temperatures than high-income blocks. The inequality is most rampant in the Northeast, with some low-income blocks in urban areas having 30 percent less tree cover and average temperatures 4 degrees Celsius higher than high-income blocks. Five of the ten worst discrepancies are found in Connecticut, home to the most economically unequal metropolitan area in the country and known to be one of the most residentially segregated states in America.

When it comes to tree cover, the biggest disparity in the country is found in the metro area of Bridgeport, Connecticut — the metropolitan area with the greatest income inequality. Rob McDonald, lead scientist at the Nature Conservancy, said that's no coincidence. The poorest blocks in the area have 54 percent less tree cover and are 5 Celsius hotter on average. "For the most part, income inequality will always correlate with other major health, environmental, and social inequities," McDonald told Grist.

In Connecticut, roughly 90 percent of housing tracts are zoned for single-family homes, which combined with policies that barred people of color in the state from owning certain homes and even living in certain public housing projects, has kept many areas segregated by class and race. "Bridgeport is a perfect example of the issue we were trying to highlight," McDonald said. "It is a product of exclusionary zoning which has reinforced a pattern of inequality forcing poor people into dense areas."

Across the country, low-income neighborhoods had 62 million fewer trees than comparable high-income neighborhoods. On average, tree cover was 15 percent less for low-income blocks compared to high-income ones, which resulted in those low-income blocks having an average temperature that was hotter by 1.5 Celsius. The study, which examined the amount of tree cover in the 100 largest urban areas in the country, home to more than 5,700 communities and 167 million people, is the first-ever national survey of tree cover and temperature inequality — and it showed exactly what the authors expected.

"We knew this inequality existed but we wanted to see the whole picture because we know heatwave events are getting more frequent and more intense," said McDonald. "So understanding which neighborhoods are more vulnerable is the first part of harm reduction planning."

The research, McDonald says, was meant to explain how past economic and social policies continue to permeate even unexpected aspects of American life. Historically racist policies have made homeownership and economic mobility less attainable for Black and Latino people forcing them into heavily polluted and more densely populated neighborhoods — and made them much more unlikely to have generational wealth. Gaps in ownership also correlate to tree cover inequality, McDonald said, because people owning private land have the power and ability to plant more trees on their property. Other cities with large tree cover gaps include Baltimore, home to a huge homeownership gap and relentless heatwaves, and Boston, which has served as a flashpoint for residential desegregation for decades.

Beyond reversing the economic impacts of discriminatory housing policies, a more equal distribution of trees could help revitalize neighborhoods. The research suggests that a \$17.6 billion investment in tree planting and natural regeneration could correct these disparities and benefit 42 million people by protecting them from heatwaves — shown to cause the most harm to poor people of color — and lowering air pollution levels while improving both physical and mental health.

“There are many problems facing the US, so I’m not going to pretend like tree cover is the most important problem,” McDonald said. “But it relates to all these conversations about climate adaptation, climate change risks, and also health outcome and income inequalities that we’ve seen play a big role during the pandemic.”

“As the US is starting to talk more seriously from a policy perspective about climate change, we have to think about adaptation and also think about how inequality amplified climate risk, starting with the nature in our backyards,” he added.

Source G:

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT BLOOD DIAMONDS PERPETUATING POVERTY

The Borgen Project
By– Emily Degn
March 19, 2018



Blood diamonds, or “conflict diamonds,” have been a hot topic since the 1990s. After civil war broke out in central and western Africa, diamond profits were used to fund wars, weapons, slavery and anti-government rebellions. Children and families were forced into slavery to mine diamonds, and the gemstone funded extreme violence and war among communities, destroying stability and peace. To this day, blood diamonds are perpetuating poverty in areas around Africa especially.

The Kimberley Process

The Kimberley Process was initiation in an effort to eradicate this cycle of slavery and violence surrounding the stone. This process was designed to turn blood diamonds into conflict free gems, and entailed certification of place of origin, how it was mined, where it was cut, who was involved in all processes and the intended destination of export.

The idea was to create a sort of passport for the diamond, so that buyers and consumers would be able to verify the ethical sourcing of the product; making sellers accountable for the diamonds they handled was a way to increase ethical practices.

While the Kimberley Process was a good theory, there were a few problems with it: since many people were involved in the process, sellers were still able to use bribery and violence to fake certification, and the process only regulated how the proceeds were used.

As long as it was not funding a war, weapons or means of overthrowing a government, the diamonds were given the stamp of approval. This leaves a huge problem that still runs rampant today — the inhumane conditions of which miners endure.

Worker Treatment and Fair Trade

Many workers are actually slaves, taken for the purpose of harvesting blood diamonds. Those who came to work willingly are underpaid, mistreated, abused and working under backbreaking conditions. While the Kimberley Process addresses the crisis of blood diamonds funding war and slaughter, the giant blank space remains that diamonds are unethical under the certification.

The need for ethical sourcing is as relevant as ever, especially with the millennial push for fair trade. While other luxury items like electronics and fine wines are booming, the diamond market has been stagnant for years. The current generation cares about ethical conditions, sustainability, and environmentally responsible practices. Knowing that blood diamonds are perpetuating poverty, millennials are abstaining from consuming the product at all.

This push has led big companies such as Tiffany and Co. and De Beer's Forevermark to enforce stringent standards on their diamonds. Whether they choose to only buy from Canada, or work directly with the diamond sellers, they are listening to the push for fair trade.

Ethical Sourcing

While this is a great start, the issue remains that it is very hard for even experts to tell a diamond's origin. Not knowing where the diamond came from makes it difficult to tell if it came from somewhere practicing conflict-free practices or not. While things like the coffee bean have been bursting with fair trade market placement, diamonds have remained an emotionally heavy issue — people are still dying over these goods. Blood diamonds are perpetuating poverty, even now.

While many argue to simply stop buying from problematic countries all together, the issue remains that a lot of poverty-stricken people rely on the mines for food. Children drop out of school to work in the diamond mines so they can contribute to feeding their families.

While they are working in inhumane conditions, boycotting the diamonds would also mean boycotting a family's dinner, or a child's milk for the week.

Possible Solutions

A solution discussed by committees for human rights has often been to enforce fair trade standards, as done with coffee. While cutting off the problem would also cut off the poverty stricken workers, working with the sellers would help them keep their jobs.

Involving the sellers in the process, and making them a part of the solution, would not only ensure humane practices and improve the lives of the workers and decrease the slave trade, but would it would also motivate sellers to enforce ethical practices.

Such methods worked in the coffee industry, and many propose that it could work in this industry as well. Such moves would turn a corrupt business into a viable income for those entrapped in it.

While the line is a fine one, finding the balance between helping sustain diamond workers and holding sellers accountable is attainable. Places like Botswana and Namibia are already starting to put stricter and more humane standards into place. In time, the hope is to ensure consumers that their gems are ethically traded, just like their espresso beans and fair trade clothing.

A Conscientious Future

This generation is a conscientious one, and that alone might be enough to propel the fight for ethics forward in the diamond industry. Rather than omitting diamonds in luxury, consumers need to either buy from ethically conscious sources, or demand higher standards from those not yet practicing conflict free practices. The demand and need for diamonds must remain in order to make a difference in the lives of those who mine them.

Blood diamonds are perpetuating poverty now, but with the pressure of loud voices and those with deep pockets, the tide will hopefully shift more dramatically in favor of ethical sourcing and humane worker treatment.