

# Why social inequality still persists: a short introduction to *INJUSTICE* by Danny Dorling

A small group of people believe great inequality is inevitable and even in some sense desirable. They often do not flout their beliefs publicly but they do make up a disproportionate share of those in power, especially where levels of economic inequalities are high and rising, as in the UK today.

These historic highs in income and wealth inequalities in the UK coincide with unprecedented

inequalities in how people vote according to where they live, with the 2015 general election resulting in the most segregated outcome of all time (see graph, p 9), reflecting five years of rapidly growing social divides.

Between 2010 and 2015 there has been a devastating increase in poverty, hunger and destitution in the UK. As a result food banks have

become vital and the housing crisis has deepened. As the newly elected UK Conservative government continues to pursue an agenda of austerity for the poor, it is inevitable that the vulnerable will suffer and Britain will see inequality and the injustices that follow continue to rise.

Social inequality occurs when resources are unevenly distributed. The richest 1% of people in the world will, within a few months, own more than the other 99% put together.<sup>1</sup>

In the world's richest countries, social inequality is not caused by having too few resources for everyone, instead it is driven by beliefs that perpetuate the inequality. The evidence shows that these beliefs are unfounded but they provide (false) justification for those who benefit most from inequality.

The fully updated 2015 edition of *Injustice* describes five social evils – **elitism**, **exclusion**, **prejudice**, **greed** and **despair** – and the myths that support the relentless rise of social and economic inequality. It also challenges the mantra that without growth we will all be doomed and highlights the relationship between inequality and climate change.

<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, p 386 (n 104, p 455)



# THE REAL CAUSES OF INEQUALITY AND INJUSTICE

It is generally accepted that the inequalities between poor and rich nations result in great injustice, and increasingly accepted that there are also huge inequalities within the rich nations. Some people still claim that these differences are 'natural' due to genetic differences, and many more think they are the inevitable effect of market forces and globalisation. However, there is no scientific basis for either of these opinions.

Since 1979 social and economic inequalities in the UK have risen year on year, while previously between 1918 to 1979, they had fallen.<sup>1</sup> *Injustice* looks at what may be driving this **increase in inequalities** and shows why it is not inevitable.

Inequality and injustice can be seen as the result of the **five social evils** – **elitism**, **exclusion**, **prejudice**, **greed** and **despair**. Underlying each social evil are myths which strengthen the harm done. Importantly these are views that most of us hold in small measure, and we often think they are harmless. However, when these views begin to pervade society from top to bottom, the results can be extremely damaging to the fabric of our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, Fig 14, p 213.

We live in an increasingly **hierarchical society** and we talk about some people being way 'above' and others way 'below' other people. And yet we are not that different from each other. This sham hierarchy has been created by elitism, exclusion, prejudice, and greed. The end result is increasing despair, and not only among the poor. If we want a content and happy society, we are currently going in the wrong direction.

**Direction is crucial.** It is not what you have at the moment that makes people most happy, it is whether you feel you are in a situation that is getting better or getting worse. Moreover this need not be a question of getting better for some, but consequently worse for others. Many changes can be better for almost everyone, others can be disastrous for society as a whole.

It was in January 2014 that the 'Masters of the Universe' (business 'leaders' who met in Davos) announced that growing inequality had become the most important world issue, alongside climate change.<sup>2</sup> This was a significant breakthrough in global recognition of the issue.

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<sup>2</sup> *Injustice*, p 376

**"Superb and invaluable ammunition in the fight against inequality and injustice"**

**Owen Jones, author and  
*Guardian* columnist**

**"Think twice before reading this book – you may well become an activist against social injustice, inequality and the exploitation of labour. Danny Dorling gives us words that are weapons."**

**Ken Loach, director**



# DISPELLING THE MYTHS THAT CAUSE INJUSTICE

## MYTH #1: ELITISM IS EFFICIENT

**In the richest, most unequal of countries in the world, it is often believed that only the most able, on merit, have got to the top. However, most of those who do 'make it' come from affluent backgrounds. Why?**

Almost 70 years ago in the UK, William Beveridge named 'ignorance' as one of his five social evils, but as ignorance has been overcome across the rich world, widespread **elitism** has taken its place and children who would have appeared to be of average ability in the 1940s are now called 'limited' today.<sup>1</sup> Despite long-standing and ever-improving compulsory education for all children in the UK, with rates of university access rising almost continuously, many young people are seen as failing because they are not reaching official targets.

In fact people are remarkably similar in ability. There are people, especially in politics, celebrity (now a field of work) or business, who appear to truly believe they are especially gifted and that they should be rewarded appropriately. They are just as much victims of elitism as those who are told they are, in effect, congenitally stupid, fit for little but taking orders and performing menial toil, despite having been required to spend over a decade in school.

Under elitism, education is less about learning and more about dividing people, sorting out the supposed wheat from the chaff, and conferring high status upon a minority. It is the poorest who are

most clearly damaged by elitism: by the shame that comes with being told that their ability borders on inadequacy, that there is something wrong with them because of who they are, that they are poor because they lack the ability to be anything else.

Those who are elevated by elitism often lack respect for those who are seen to be inferior, even to the point of thinking that people in full employment do not deserve a living wage, one high enough to maintain a normal standard of living. A living wage is not only fair but enhances the quality of the work of employees, reduces absenteeism and improves recruitment and retention of staff. How much better would the lives of the children of the poorest be if their parents were not constantly stressed?

In contrast to the poor, the elevated feel they deserve huge salaries enabling them to afford things that most people consider unnecessary, even silly, which thereby deprive others of basic comforts and opportunities such as free education beyond secondary level. These gross disparities in income and respect result in many jobs that amount to little more than acting as servants to the better off, labour which could be employed much more profitably in other more equitable ways.

There is an increasing backlash. Many of the very well paid are not respected nowadays precisely because people are realising that those 'above them' don't deserve so much.



<sup>1</sup> See *Injustice*, p 50 (and also Figs 1 and 2).

## MYTH #2: EXCLUSION IS NECESSARY

**The most terrible result of elitism is that it can be used to justify the exclusion of so many people from normal social activity.**

In January 2015, nearly 40 per cent of British households with children relied on a level of income lower than the minimum needed to participate in society;<sup>1</sup> such **exclusion** is not tolerated in France, Germany or most other OECD countries to the same extent. But in the UK it is seen to be acceptable for almost half of all children to grow up in poverty rather than for the taxes of the affluent to be raised.

It is estimated that in the UK, as 2015 draws to a close, almost 7.1 million of the nation's 13 million children will be in homes with incomes less than is needed for a decent standard of living.<sup>2</sup> In Britain and the US, relative and now absolute rates of poverty have grown greatly in recent decades, simply because inequality has grown. In contrast, relatively few people would describe themselves as poor and needing to take out loans 'just to get by' in countries as diverse as Japan and the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

The social evil described by Beveridge as 'want' has now been replaced by an increased reliance on debt to finance the necessities of life. Today, one in six of all UK households are excluded from social norms due to poverty, and are poor in at least two of the ways of assessing poverty.<sup>4</sup> Even after equalising for household size, the poorest fifth of households

<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, p 386 (n 103, p 455)

<sup>2</sup> *Injustice*, p 99 (n 2, p 402)

<sup>3</sup> *Injustice*, p 100

<sup>4</sup> *Injustice*, p 103



in the UK were still the poorest in Western Europe by 2014.<sup>5</sup> What now makes those households poor is the effects of the riches of others. In his budget on 8 July 2015 the Chancellor, George Osborne, introduced measures that will ensure the poorest fifth of UK households become even poorer.

The media plays an increasingly important role in our perceptions of exclusion and poverty. In 2014, the findings of a group of University of Manchester researchers showed that in political and media debates, food bank users have been variously described as: 'opportunists', 'not able to cook or budget' and 'living like animals'. However, the main reason for referring a person to a food bank was a delay in benefit payments.<sup>6</sup>

You need to look to the US to see how far a rich country can go in excluding people totally. In 1940 there were ten times fewer people locked up in jail in the US than there are now, and of the two million imprisoned, 70 per cent are black. In the UK more people are imprisoned, when measured both absolutely and relatively, than in any other country in Europe. In Sweden they have had to close jails because of a lack of prisoners.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Arnold Abbott, a 90-year-old charity worker in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was threatened with 60 days in jail if he insisted on continuing to feed homeless people with a team of church volunteers.<sup>8</sup> What is seen as 'necessary' in one country is viewed as incomprehensible in another.

<sup>5</sup> *Injustice*, p 133

<sup>6</sup> *Injustice*, pp 99-100

<sup>7</sup> *Injustice*, p 370

<sup>8</sup> *Injustice*, p 156



### MYTH #3: PREJUDICE IS NATURAL

**As elitism and inequality rise, and as more people become socially excluded, or are able to exclude themselves by using their wealth to avoid mixing, those at the top look down on others with ever greater disdain and fear. Those at the bottom are also more likely to be fearful in a society that values them so little. Lack of respect for people seen as beneath you and as above you is widespread, and the banker with his high salary and the cleaner with her low one are both despised.**

Racism rises in just these kinds of circumstances of fear, and a wider form of racism – a new social Darwinism – quietly spreads. **Prejudice** grows like mould and based on elitist myths, people preach that inequalities are simply reflections of individual differences. Racism, as it is applied to people of different skin colours, or different nationalities or different religions, is easily recognised and can easily be inflamed by stoking up fear. Such fear is often hard to quell because of a lack of social mixing.

In 2014 in the UK there was a 55 per cent increase in religious hate crimes as the politics of identity turned nasty;<sup>1</sup> anti-immigration rhetoric is used by the media and politicians to divert attention away from the real reasons for falling standards of living for the majority of people. In the run-up to the 2015 election prejudice against migrants was taken to new extremes when UKIP leader Nigel Farage tried

<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, p 180 (n 46, p 423)



to link migrants to disease. One in eight people voted for UKIP. The myth that prejudice is somehow a natural response to migration is used to defend intolerance. It is not poor migrants but the affluent who are taking a growing share of educational resources, housing, income, wealth and health care.

The fact that human societies can change their collective behaviour over very short periods of time suggests that our destinies are not in our genes. In just a few generations we can change from being feudal or cooperative, to being competitive or totalitarian. People are persuaded to take part in wars and embrace conscription and then within decades are marching and singing for others' rights.

Prejudices rise and fall as we promote them or teach against them. Prejudice is nurtured, it does not rise unaided. One manifestation of prejudice is that when great numbers are seen as less deserving, whether as slaves, paupers, or just 'average', a minority can describe their own behaviour not as greed, but as simply receiving higher rewards because they are different and deserve to be above those on whom they look down.

**“Impassioned, empirical and hopeful second edition, powerfully updated with new data, Dorling skewers the ideologies that justify injustice. He reminds us that to create a better world we have to collectively imagine it is possible.”**

**Nancy Krieger, Harvard University**



## MYTH #4: GREED IS GOOD

**The rise of elitism, exclusion and prejudice were all precursors of the age of greed ushered in during the 1980s when personal gain, rather than collective good, was seen positively.**

By late 2014, chief executives of UK FTSE 100 firms were paid, on average, 342 times more than their minimum wage employees. Their pay had risen by 243 per cent since the minimum wage was introduced in 1999, three times faster than the percentage rise in the minimum wage, and by many times more in just one year than many others can expect to receive in a lifetime of work.<sup>1</sup> This level of disparity between the boss and worker is unprecedented. There were no signs of any slowdown in growing inequality by mid-year 2015.

Most people realise that suggesting that greed is good is seen as immoral, and do not openly say this. However, the current extraordinarily high cost of housing is due to **greed**. What do the extremely wealthy do with spare money – they invest in property, houses they do not need, but out of which they make yet more money from massively indebted mortgagees and all those who are privately renting (with a big chunk coming from that special landlord benefit – housing benefit).

In 2015, the houses and flats of the borough of Westminster were valued at £120.5 billion, whilst those of neighbouring Kensington and Chelsea

<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, p 233



were said to be worth £110.5 billion. According to the estate agent Savills these two London boroughs combined appeared to be worth more than the entire annual product of Denmark, the 35th largest economy in the world, the GDP of which was 'just' £222 billion at that point in time.<sup>2</sup> Shockingly there was a 40 per cent rise in homes being left empty in the Kensington borough in 2014 as investors brought property purely as an investment, not even to rent.

Another way for the rich to get richer is to fabricate need and to encourage what is termed credit – which is actually debt. Advertising is an industry that makes people feel unhappy or jealous until they possess the advertised products. Products are frequently 'upgraded' so that what you bought last year can be presented as second-rate. Credit is a way of extracting money from those that have less: not so much a trickle-up effect, but a gushing up, especially from the very poorest when they have to resort to pay-day lending and similar schemes.

The 2010 UK Coalition government supported the wealthy by reducing the top tax rate to 45 per cent. (They aimed to reduce it to 40 per cent, as it had been between 1988 and 2009.) It was suggested that these tax cuts for the mostly highly rewarded were good because the rich were driven by greed and their greed created jobs and opportunities for others. However, the opposite is true and in countries with far higher top tax rates, the average family is much better off and fewer people have precarious and/or low wage work.

<sup>2</sup> *Injustice*, pp 365–6 (n 30, p 450)



## MYTH #5: DESPAIR IS INEVITABLE

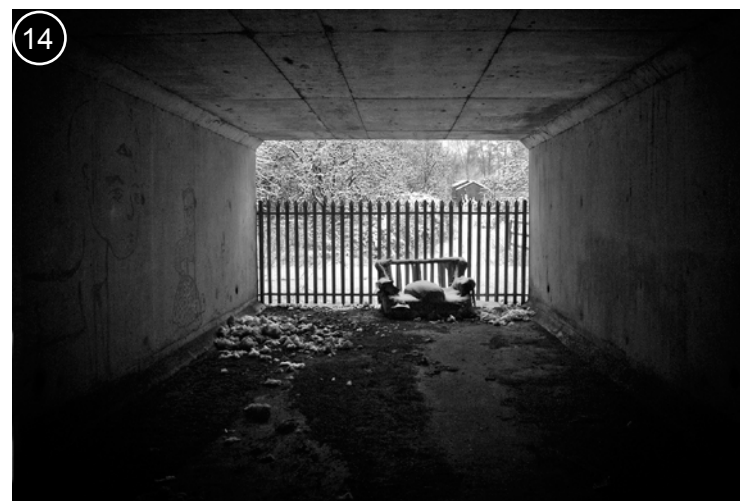
**Unsurprisingly growing despair is the result of living in the most elitist of affluent societies where inequalities are allowed and encouraged to rise, where more people are excluded or living in fear of being so, and where greed is commonly seen as good implicitly, if not explicitly.**

In countries such as Britain, people last lived lives as unequal as today, if measured by wage inequality, in 1854 when Charles Dickens was writing *Hard Times*.<sup>1</sup> Today our living standards are far higher, but they only rose steadily for most people in the decades when inequalities fell. When inequalities are allowed to rise it is the majority who lose out.

Human beings are not mentally immune to the effects of rising elitism, exclusion, prejudice and greed. They react like rats in cages to having their social environments made progressively more unpleasant. Part of the mechanism behind the worldwide rise in diseases of **despair** – depression and anxiety – is the insecurity caused when particular forms of competition are enhanced. In the UK despair reached a new high by 2006 when it was reported that a third of families had at least one family member who was suffering from depression or a chronic anxiety disorder.<sup>2</sup> The powerful also have little immunity from the effects of despair if they live in more unequal countries.

<sup>1</sup> *Injustice*, p 370

<sup>2</sup> *Injustice*, p 10 (n 26, p 397)



The human condition – our drive, our questioning, our angst and our concern – means that we cannot always be happy, but learning to live better with each other is starting to be seen as the key to living better within our own minds, to be happier or at least more at ease with ourselves. Not making children and adults anxious, fearful and stressed in the first place is the best place to start.

Two of the most shocking graphs in *Injustice* concern deteriorating mental health. One<sup>3</sup> shows the rapid rise in clinically diagnosed depression among adolescent girls in North America from 1984 onwards. The other<sup>4</sup> shows the growing use of antidepressants in Scotland over the period 1992–2014. In both cases there is no sign of a slowdown in the growing symptoms of despair.

By looking at different places and at different countries, and by noting the extraordinarily rapid increase in despair in the UK and the US, it is apparent that the proportion of desperately unhappy people is currently so high because of policies and attitudes that can be changed; it is not inevitable that so many should despair.

<sup>3</sup> *Injustice*, Figure 21, p 311

<sup>4</sup> *Injustice*, Figure 25, p 350

**“Dorling has given us a guide through the dark, twisted and changing forest of injustice. A must-read for anyone fighting for justice”**

**Dr Faiza Shaheen, Head of Inequality, Save the Children**



# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

The purpose of *Injustice* was to look at those attitudes and beliefs that increase inequality, at how much people supported those beliefs and their validity.

Do not think what is happening now is normal. Beware people who say it is just human nature, that situations are inevitable, that you just have to face up to reality, that there is no such thing as society. Social attitudes are created by us and can change remarkably quickly. How many people we lock up in prison and for how long is dependent on us, not on some preordained level of wickedness in the world.

People say that the poor will always be with us, and claim that without the threat of poverty, large numbers of people would be idle. They do not see unemployment as being due to a lack of worthwhile jobs, for many people, or that we no longer need everyone to work long hours.

Propaganda spread by the richest in society frequently prevents us recognising when policies will increase inequality and benefit the affluent. Tax cuts are seen by most as something that can only be beneficial, and shrinking the state is claimed by the most affluent (and most dependent) to reduce dependency.

Many wait for a great leader, failing to realise that past great leaders were never more than the product of their times: ordinary people pushed forward by the

people around them and the society in which they lived. No one can truly know what will be sufficient to change deeply held and institutionally transmitted beliefs. But perhaps, slowly, collectively, with one step back for every two taken forward, we can inch onwards to progress.

Our current great injustices have in many ways arisen from the solutions to the great injustices of the past. In the UK this is from the solutions to Beveridge's five social evils of ignorance, want, idleness, squalor and disease in the 1940s. Those solutions, right for their times, resulted in decades of progress and a narrowing of the divides. It can be done. Everything it takes to defeat injustice lies in the mind. First we need to see things as they are, not as a few with great wealth would have the rest of us believe. Then what matters most is how we think, and how we think is changing because – everywhere – there are signs of hope.

The final chapter in *Injustice* asks how it is possible to be optimistic in the face of rising social injustices, a financial crash and its aftermath. Although the subtitle of this revised edition has added the word 'still' to read 'why inequality **still** persists', the conclusion is not pessimistic.

Most of us have little understanding of the lives of people outside their own social sphere. Many readers of this ebook will find it difficult to believe that some people with an income much higher than theirs say that their household financial situation is bad or very bad

“For decades researchers have shown the damage inequality does to all society and Dorling’s wonderful book extends this. With brilliance and passion Dorling analyses the mind-set of entitlement among those who hold ever tighter to money, power and life’s best rewards, generation to generation.”

**Polly Toynbee, *Guardian***





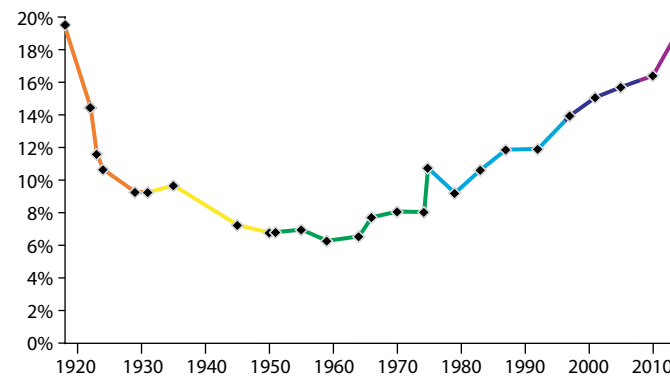
# WHY THE 2015 UK ELECTION RESULTS MATTER

The book *Injustice* demonstrates a correlation between changes over time in health and wealth inequalities, and the fall and rise of political polarisation in the UK. The general election held on 7 May 2015 resulted in the greatest polarisation in voting ever seen in the UK. As countries move apart economically and socially, within them, people also begin to separate more and more politically. The rapid rise in votes for the Scottish National Party was just a miniscule part of this increasing political polarisation.

One figure<sup>1</sup> in the second edition of *Injustice* shows the segregation index of Conservative votes across the UK, that is the proportion of Conservative voters who would have to move to a new constituency if there were to be an even distribution of Conservative voters across mainland Britain. It has been updated here to include the results of the 2015 election when the segregation measure of voting rose to a historic high of 19.89%. The rise in political polarisation in the five years between 2010 and 2015 (+3.49%) has been much greater than the increase in the 13 years from 1997 to 2010 (+2.46%).

The voting segregation index had fallen steadily with each election from 1918 up to 1964 (apart from a slight stalling in both 1935 and 1951) and remained very low until 1979 (9.17%). After 1979 the measure rose and rose. The Conservatives became more and more popular where they were already most

**Figure 13:** Concentration of Conservative votes, British general elections, 1918–2015



Source: Drawn initially in Dorling, D. (2006) 'Class alignment renewal': *The Journal of Labour Politics*, vol 41, no 1, p 849, showing the spatial segregation index. Updated in Dorling, D. (2013) Crises and turning points: the pivots of history, *Renewal*, 21, 4, pp11-20.

The Segregation Index of Conservative voters in Britain\*, 1885–2015

Election	Concentration	Election	Concentration
1885	7.11%	1951	6.77%
1886	5.53%	1955	6.93%
1892	5.81%	1959	6.24%
1895	4.70%	1964	6.51%
1900	4.39%	1966	7.69%
1906	6.67%	1970	8.04%
1910 Dec	6.24%	1974 Feb	8.01%
1910 Jan	7.91%	1974 Oct	10.72%
1918	19.30%	1979	9.17%
1922	14.44%	1983	10.59%
1923	11.57%	1987	11.84%
1924	10.62%	1992	11.88%
1929	9.24%	1997	13.94%
1931	9.23%	2001	15.05%
1935	9.65%	2005	15.69%
1945	7.21%	2010	16.40%
1950	6.74%	2015	19.89%

\*Northern Irish seats are not included.

popular, in South East England. Everywhere else they became progressively less popular.

By 2010 there were hardly any Conservative voters left in Scotland so the huge, unprecedented, increase in the segregation index of voting is due almost entirely to incredible changes in voting patterns within England in very recent years. Within rich parts of the Home Counties and the South West of England the Conservative vote rose. In May 2015 it rose just enough and in the right places for that party to capture seats previously held by their former Liberal Democrat coalition partners and form a government with a very small majority. However, only one in four of the registered UK electorate voted for them.

The last time the UK was so politically divided was in 1918, in the period just before the Republic of Ireland finally fully separated and after which taxes were increased and economic inequalities fell. History never repeats itself, but levels of inequality as great as we see today are never sustained for long.

No other country in Western Europe manages to maintain economic inequalities as wide as those in the UK. In no other democracy in the world has a governing party been put into power by such a tiny proportion of the electorate. Never before has a political extreme such as we see today in the UK been maintained for any length of time. There is all to play for and much to be shocked by.

<sup>1</sup> Figure 13, p 195

The colour figures from the book, a Powerpoint for use in teaching, numerous reviews of the book, related videos and audio files, and much more, can be found here: <http://www.dannydorling.org/books/injustice/>

## REASONS YOU SHOULD READ *INJUSTICE*

**KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.** Knowing why our society is so unequal allows us to start thinking about how to redress the balance.

**ALLEVIATE DESPAIR.** The realisation that the power of the elite at the expense of the rest of society is founded on myth rather than reality is empowering for those who want to challenge that power.

**ARM YOURSELF WITH STATISTICS.** *Injustice* presents hundreds of national and international statistics and dozens of graphics, enabling us to prove that society need not be so unequal.

**PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE DAMAGING RHETORIC THAT PERPETUATES THESE MYTHS ABOUT INEQUALITY.** *Injustice* reveals the truth behind political messages and newspaper headlines.

**FUEL YOUR HOPE OF A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY.** Something that's not natural or inevitable can be changed.

**WORK OUT WHERE YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.** The arguments and examples in *Injustice* address almost every aspect of inequality in our society. Use the book to identify areas where you can make a change.

**BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER.** Many thousands of people have already read *Injustice*. The more people who take these kinds of ideas on board, the more likely it is that positive change will happen soon.

***INJUSTICE* IS DANNY DORLING'S SEMINAL WORK.** Read *Injustice* to understand what underlies the social trends he has written about elsewhere.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

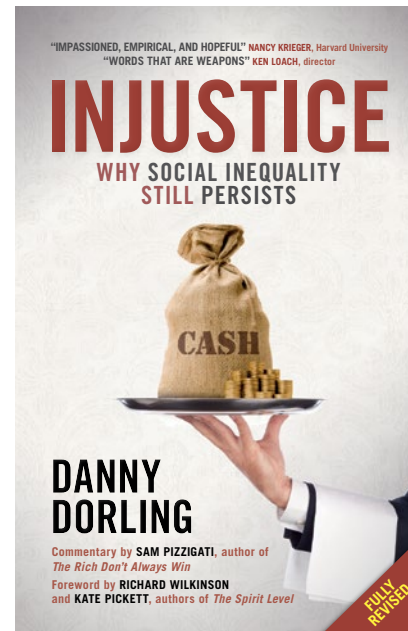


Danny Dorling is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford. He is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and Honorary President of the Society of Cartographers.

With a group of colleagues he helped create the website [www.worldmapper.org](http://www.worldmapper.org) which shows who has most and least in the world. Find out more at [www.dannydorling.org](http://www.dannydorling.org)



@dannydorling #dorlingsinjustice



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Foreword by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, authors of *The Spirit Level*.

Commentary by Sam Pizzigati, author of *The Rich Don't Always Win*

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