New foreword

Sam Pizzigati

We live in a trickle-down world, or so insist our world's richest and those who cheer them on. The enormous fortunes our rich are amassing, their story goes, eventually trickle down and benefit us all.

Danny Dorling agrees – to a point. We do live, as he relates in these remarkable pages, in a trickle-down world. But what's trickling down brings us no benefits. The reason? Wealth isn't trickling down from above. Myths are. Myths that rationalise our young century's colossal concentration of riches and power. Myths – Danny calls them the 'ideologies of inequality' – that aim to justify injustice.

This injustice envelops us today and assaults us from every direction. We can't escape it. Injustice lurks everywhere we look, everywhere we click. Week by week, only the particulars change.

These particulars just happened to cross my computer screen over the last several days.

In California's plush Beverly Hills, one news report informs us, enterprising developers now have under construction six luxury homes they plan to offer at an astounding $100 million each. In nearby Bel Air, another new home will soon go on the market at a projected $200 million. This impressive manse sports its own IMAX theatre and a master bedroom suite that spans 7,000 square feet, about triple the size of the average American home.

The average American family, meanwhile, can no longer afford to live in the nation's choicest cities. To buy a home in San Francisco, a family currently needs an annual income of at least $140,000, nearly triple the nation's median household take-home pay. With homes so expensive, rents in San Francisco have soared. A typical one-bedroom apartment now lets for $3,460 per month.

Not all landlords, to be sure, can cash in on these soaring rents. Some have long-time tenants still covered by San Francisco's rent-control restrictions. But those restrictions have a loophole. Landlords can legally raise the rents they charge by 3 per cent a year. The greediest among them are storing up these allowable annual rate hikes, then hitting tenants with one huge rent increase that incorporates multiple years. The blindsided tenants can't afford this 'legal' rent increase. They have to move out.

On paper, theft in the United States never rates as 'legal' — unless, apparently, you already have a great deal and attempt to steal a great deal more. Consider billionaire Ira Rennert. He diverted the proceeds from bonds one of his companies issued into a slush fund to build a 29-bedroom mansion in the Hamptons, the summer watering hole for Wall Street's deepest pockets. A federal grand jury found Rennert guilty of looting. His penalty? A judge has just ruled he has to pay back $213 million.

Rennert currently sits on a personal fortune worth $6.1 billion. Given merely a modest return on his annual investments, he should be able to pay off that $213 million 'penalty' and still end up this year with a higher net worth than he held when the year started.

But Rennert may still feel personally aggrieved when he contemplates the 'justice' just meted out to Conrad Hughes Hilton III, the great-grandson of the founder of the Hilton hotel corporate empire. The 21-year-old Hilton faced felony charges from a July 2014 incident that saw him threaten to kill the crew and pilot of a British Airways flight. Seems that Hilton, after getting caught smoking tobacco and marijuana in the plane's lavatory, unleashed what news reports have described as 'a series of profanity-laced tirades' and accused the flight crew of 'taking the peasants' side'. Hilton originally faced 22 years in prison on felony charges. Prosecutors instead have settled for a single misdemeanor charge. Poor kids in America who disrespect authority regularly get shot. For viciously disrespectful young Hilton, prosecutors accepted probation.

How can society keep young people like Conrad Hilton on the straight and narrow? The Florida billionaire William Koch has a character-building activity that he's promoting as a solution. Polo!

The Oxbridge Academy, an elite private school in Palm Beach County that Koch spent $60 million to create, is launching a polo team to ensure students 'a positive, life-changing opportunity'. This particular

life-changing opportunity doesn't come cheap. Oxbridge is supplying students with horse-riding lessons worth $250 an hour and $500 helmets. Students have to supply their own polo pants and $500-per-pair paddock boots.

Elsewhere in America, harried educators and parents aren't thinking horse-riding lessons. In Pennsylvania, the state with the widest per-student spending gap between poor and rich school districts, budget cuts are decimating educational offerings. In the city of Pittsburgh, Jessie Ramey's son sits in a classroom stuffed with 39 other students. The school's music, arts, and tutoring programmes have all been axed.

"Just about everything that isn't nailed down," says Ramey, "has been lost."

Lawmakers in Congress could, of course, tax the rich to help end the budget squeeze in America's public schools. Instead they're busy passing legislation that repeals what remains of the estate tax, the only federal level on grand fortunes like the $3 billion that William Koch sits atop.

This move to make all inherited wealth tax-free will cost the federal government $250 billion dollars in lost revenue over the next ten years. The same lawmakers who blessed this move have also voted to cut food stamps for America's poorest families by $125 billion.

What will future generations think about these sorts of injustices – and about us? Will they wonder how civilised societies could accept realities this grotesque? Will they even us consider us civilised?

Taxes, the great American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes once noted, represent the price we pay for civilisation. In the United States and Britain, the developed world's two most unequal major nations, elites have been unwilling to pay this price. The rich grab as much and as furiously as they can. Virtually untaxed, the wealth they grab multiplies and metastasises – into a cancer on our culture.

Danny Dorling labels our staggeringly unequal distribution of income and wealth the 'disease behind injustice', a disease that binds the elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed, and despair that define our epoch. But why do we let inequality define us? And that brings us full-circle back to the trickle-down essence of our contemporary age: we have simply imbibed too many myths from those who lord over us.

A century ago, amid the struggle for social insurance to protect workers injured on the job, men of wealth and power argued that workers insured

against disability would cut off their own limbs to reap the rewards disability protection would provide. Today's rich and their hired hands seldom get that crude. They spin more sophisticated myths. Danny Dorling examines – and exposes – them all in the pages that follow. Sometimes with figures and charts. Sometimes with history. Sometimes with unrelenting logic.

Some words of warning about this second edition of *Injustice* for my fellow American readers: this noble work invites you – indeed, expects you — to take a leap out of your book-reading comfort zone.

We Americans have a reputation for not paying much attention to the lives people beyond our shores live – and even less attention to the lessons these lives may have for us. Danny Dorling and the good folks who have published this book have fixed on the notion that this reputation may be undeserved. This second *Injustice* edition does add a bountiful amount of material about the United States. But these pages also abound with stories and stats from the UK, that proverbial 'other side of the pond'.

Dorling and his fellow Brits are, in effect, betting that we Americans can learn as much from their experience as they can learn from ours. To me, that sounds like a fairly reasonable proposition.

But go ahead and decide for yourself. Read this book with an open mind. Let Danny Dorling, a social geographer by trade, guide you through our unequal, unjust world. You may never be the same. And if enough of us read and take inspiration from these pages, maybe that world will never be the same either.

Sam Pizzigati edits Too Much, a commentary on excess and inequality published by the Washington, DC-based Institute for Policy Studies. His most recent book is: *The rich don't always win: The forgotten triumph over plutocracy that created the American middle class, 1900–1970.*

Updated foreword

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

Money exists objectively as coins and bank notes. But it only works as money, as a medium of exchange and store of wealth, while people have confidence in its value and other people's willingness to accept it as payment. Without that subjective element, coins, banknotes and cheques are nothing more than a collection of metal discs or piles of paper. The same is true of the social structure and functioning of our society. Our society has an objective, physical reality – the existence of rich and poor, living in larger or smaller houses, the different schools their children go to, the towns and villages, police, hospitals, judicial systems, prisons, and so on. What holds them all in place, like the mortar between bricks, and gives each society its particular character, is the subjective collective beliefs and behaviour of the people in that society.

What Danny Dorling has done in this book is to show that these subjective elements – the beliefs and conceptions which justify the wealth differences, elitism and structure of inequality in our modern society – are based on falsehoods. He has, in effect, shown that the bricks of society are held in place not with proper mortar containing cement, but with wet sand. It is, for instance, false to think that we have to go on paying the rich huge salaries and bonuses because they have rare talents which we will not be able to replace if they emigrate. It is false to think that their greed somehow benefits the rest of society. It is false to think that elitist societies which stigmatise a large proportion of the population as inferior are more efficient. And it is false to think that people's position in the social hierarchy reflects how they have been sorted according to genetic differences in ability. How could we have fallen for a set of such improbable stories so obviously promulgated to justify and support privilege?

As individuals we tend to understand ourselves, and to explain our actions to others, in ways which are self-justifying. We try to present ourselves in a good light, as if to recruit people to a personal supporters club. The same thing happens at a societal scale. The dominant ideology always favours beliefs, conceptions and interpretations of reality which justify the system of social organisation and the position of the privileged. Societal ideologies typically suggest that their structure is a reflection of human nature, and so could not be other than it is.

But the truth is that human beings have lived in every kind of society, from the most egalitarian to the most tyrannical and we are equipped to behave in different ways according to the social context. The assumption that modern societies are a direct expression of human nature reflects a remarkable ignorance of the fact that, throughout at least 90 per cent of the time that humans have existed as 'anatomically modern', they lived in remarkably egalitarian societies, based on food sharing and gift exchange with little or no sign of differences in rank. The modern pattern of inequality was largely absent among hunters and gatherers and began to develop only with the beginnings of agriculture. In some parts of the world agriculture dates back around 10,000 years, but in most places it is very much more recent – just a moment in human existence.

We do of course have characteristics which have enabled us to adapt to living in highly unequal, stratified, societies, but these are almost certainly pre-human in origin. Dominance hierarchies, like animal ranking systems and pecking orders, are, in an important sense, a throwback to an evolved psychological and behavioural repertoire which has pre-human – or subhuman – foundations. Social relationships in animal ranking systems are little more than hierarchies based on who is strong enough to bully whom – the strongest animal ends up at the top and the weakest at the bottom. Disputes about status are resolved by trials of strength which continue until one of the combatants backs off, accepting inferiority.

With an impressive body of evidence, Christopher Boehm shows in his book, *Moral Origins: The evolution of virtue, altruism and shame* (2012), that it was only as humans started to hunt big game that assertively egalitarian societies, with a fully human social morality – respecting the needs of the weak as well as the strong – began to replace dominance hierarchies and their 'might is right' social structure.

The contrast between the behavioural logic of dominance hierarchies and of egalitarian societies could hardly be greater. The core of the difference is whether we are all rivals, in competition with each other, or whether we recognise each other's needs and cooperate. Dominance hierarchies are about self-advancement, everyone out for themselves – regardless of the needs of others. But greater equality is about sharing, cooperation and reciprocity. The fundamental issue is whether we compete for scarce resources, the strongest getting the lion's share, or whether we cooperate and share more equally. Because, as members of the same species, we all have the same needs, there is always the potential for conflict over access to scarce resources. The Hobbesian 'war of each against all' reflects our potential to compete like animals for access to food, sexual partners, territories, nesting sites and so on. But unlike animals, we not only have the potential to be each other's worst rivals; we can also be each other's best source of cooperation, assistance, love and learning. Other people can be the best or the worst, depending on the nature of our relationships.

The structure of social relations has always been so fundamental to human wellbeing that we have evolved an extraordinary sensitivity to their quality – to hierarchy and social status on the one hand and to friendship and equality on the other. That is why study after study shows that friendship is highly protective of health and happiness while social status differentiation and low social status are damaging. The nature of social relationships has always been of paramount importance and it all hinges on whether we recognise each other's needs or whether we pursue our own interests regardless of others. That is why, in the words of the anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins: 'Friends make gifts and gifts make friends'. The gift is the most concrete symbol that we recognise each other's needs and will not fight for possession. It is also why to refuse a gift is, in some societies, tantamount to a declaration of war. The ancient truth of the link between the nature of social relations and whether or not we share access to scarce resources is spelt out in words like 'companion' (combining '*com*' meaning together and '*panis*' meaning bread) which reminds us that our friends are those with whom we share food. The religious symbolism of the communion and the fact that we still eat meals together both reflect the importance of sharing access to the necessities of life.

Rather than social behaviour being based either wholly on equality and sharing or wholly on self-advancement and status competition, every society contains a mixture of both, but the balance between the two differs radically according to the level of inequality and the way it appears to rank us according to degrees of apparent superiority and inferiority. What is crucial is whether we find ourselves in a world in which we depend on cooperation and reciprocity, in which empathy is important, or in a world where we have to fend for ourselves, in which some people appear supremely important and others almost worthless, in which we feel our outward wealth is taken as the marker of our inner 'worth' and we all become highly sensitive to being put down and disrespected.

As a result, greater inequality brings out the worst in us. Research repeatedly shows that more unequal societies suffer more violence, community life weakens, bullying is more common in schools, people trust each other less, mental health suffers, standards of child wellbeing are lower, people are less willing to help each other, the penal system is harsher, there is more status anxiety and people spend more of their incomes on the rivalry of conspicuous consumption that fuels consumerism.

As we become more aware of the forces which shape human social behaviour and of the key role of inequality, we realise that we have, as never before, the possibility of creating a society better for all of us. Injustice is not only the stuff of which large-scale inequality is built, it is also a major obstacle to sustainability. With this book Danny Dorling has struck a powerful blow against it and taken us towards a better future.

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