



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2018 Volume I: An Introduction to Income Inequality in America: Economics, History, Law

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## **Economic and Other Inequalities In America: The Shrinking Middle Class?**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 18.01.01  
by James P. Brochin

Designed for a large urban high school's upperclassmen in a Journalism class, the unit's central thematic focus is the causes and effects of economic inequality on the middle class. In this country, we believe that everyone has a chance for prosperity, or at least a comforting sense of security: being able to pay our bills, send our children to college, succeed if we try hard enough, being able to afford health care. Taken together, we call this being middle class. Put another way, we call this The American Dream. Some of us aspire to great wealth, a mansion in the Hamptons. For the vast majority of Americans, making it is a simpler aspiration: doing better than our parents, living longer than our parents, being more educated than our parents. My topic is "The Shrinking Middle Class?" Within this topic are various subtopics/questions: 1) What is an accurate definition of "Middle Class?" (Is it defined by an income range or by a state of mind?) 2) What are the effects of periodic economic downturns on ordinary Americans? (confidence, conformity, fear of failure, mental health), 3) What effects do increases in the minimum wage have on the middle class? (decreased poverty, overall confidence in the future, the effect on the overall economy?) My own students are urban and many do not consider themselves, and are not, among the middle class. The topic should resonate.

(Developed for Journalism, grades 9-12; recommended for Economics, Civics, and U.S. History, grades 10-12)

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