

Chapters are organized in three overarching Parts. The first part excavates the main conceptual issues and lays the platform for the argument I will use in later chapters to explicate the significance of inequality. Part 1 has an overarching argument, emphasizing how inequality needs to be placed in the context of space and time (scale and history, to use alternative terms). Each chapter will add a bit more to my primary claim that we need a better appreciation of history if we are to truly recognize the challenge of inequality. I show that there has been more success in bringing out a spatializing approach to inequality—the “stuff” of inequality—and that we need to complement this with a much richer appreciation of time, temporality, and history. I show that although there is frequently a genuflection to the significance of time, this approach tends to be reduced to linear measures that ultimately limit them. I see Chapter 3, where I recapitulate the importance of the concept of capital and accumulation and the concepts of time that come with this as the intellectual crux of the book.

Part 2—on the geopolitics of contemporary inequality—offers a synthesis of global inequality. These chapters cover varied topics. These are the power of ranking procedures and the weakening of nation spaces (Chapter 4); the reemerging power of empire (Chapter 5); the muted contemporary significance of social class, the enduring power of racism and sexism, and the rise of visceral inequalities (Chapter 6 and 7); and the growing significance of cities as crucibles of inequality (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 considers the significance of technological advance and innovation. Although these topics appear diverse, I argue that we can—and must—synthesize across them to unravel the renewed power of history and forces from the past. This leads to the recognition that modernizing projects, which in the later twentieth century seemed to carry all before them, are increasingly fragile. We are witnessing the return of older historical forces.

Part 3 of my book pulls these lessons out to address the contemporary politics of inequality. I seek to broaden our understanding of the range of stakes that this requires, so that rather than focusing on policy devices, or specific campaigns or movements, we recognize better the need for an all-encompassing politics of social sustainability. Thus, Chapter 10 reflects on the weakening of policy solutions amid the decline of the national political field, and my conclusion in Chapter 11 pushes home my arguments about the need for a politics of sustainability.