

[On the appalling inequality in the United States](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Wednesday 4 September 2013

It is true that when we look at the Gini index and other measurements of that type then the United States is highly unequal by the standards of the advanced countries. It's also true that if we look with a fresh pair of eyes then it's not that [unequal in fact](#) [3]:

Almost every single person in America has access to basic food, clothing, water and sanitation. I haven't been to states like Louisiana and cities like Detroit, but from what I can tell, nobody is scrambling for the basic necessities required for sustenance.

The US may indeed be unequal but it's only in the last 40 to 50 years that any society at all has been able to make such a claim. Something is being done right.

An almost-classless society: I've noticed that most Americans roughly have the same standard of living. Everybody has access to ample food, everybody shops at the same supermarkets, malls, stores, etc. I've seen plumbers, construction workers and janitors driving their own sedans, which was quite difficult for me to digest at first since I came from a country where construction workers and plumbers lived hand to mouth. Also, (almost) all sections of society are roughly equal. You'll see service professionals owning iPhones, etc. as well. This may be wrong but part of it has to do with the fact that obtaining credit in this country is extremely easy. Anybody can buy anything, for the most part, except for something like a Maserati, obviously. As a result, most monetary possessions aren't really status symbols. I believe that the only status symbol in America is your job, and possibly your educational qualifications.

It may well be that an Indian student isn't seeing everything in this society so new to him. But it is indeed true that while monetary inequality in the US is back up at the levels of the 1920s it simply isn't true that life as it is actually lived is as unequal as it was. That country, like others in the advanced capitalist world, has largely conquered the problem of providing the first set of Maslow's hierarchy of needs for all. After that the inequality in positional goods just isn't all that important.

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [5]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/economics/on-the-appalling-inequality-in-the-united-states>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/economics/on-the-appalling-inequality-in-the-united-states>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778>

[3] <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-weirdest-things-about-america-2013-8>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>