



THE PRICE WE PAY FOR INEQUALITY

IF THOSE WHO FAWN OVER FORTUNES were right, if letting wealth accumulate were indeed the prime prescription for a healthy, vigorous society, we ought today to be enjoying a new American golden age. Never before, after all, have grand fortunes accumulated as prodigiously as they have over recent decades, at least not in modern times. Our economy, given this awesome accumulation, ought to be vibrant, full of opportunity at every turn. Our enterprises should be generating wealth at extraordinary rates. We ourselves ought to be feeling stoked and energetic, confident that our hard work will be duly rewarded. Compassion ought to be flowing for the unfortunate, the arts ought to be blooming. We should be feeling absolutely terrific about ourselves and our country.

But we aren't. So what went wrong? What really happens when societies stand back and let great wealth accumulate in the pockets of a few? What has inequality cost us?

The pages ahead will search for answers to these questions, in places both self-evident and somewhat surprising. We'll explore the worksites where we labor and the neighborhoods where we live. We'll look at our families and our friendships. We'll examine what makes us happy and what makes us sick. We'll probe why our professions no longer leave us proud, why our pastimes no longer bring us pleasure. And we'll end our exploration by peering into two important worlds that now stand dangerously at risk, the natural world we have inherited and the democratic political world we have struggled to create.

Inequality impacts all these worlds, all these places. Now we see how.