

The Undeserving Rich

Leslie McCall

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THE UNDESERVING RICH



*American Beliefs about
Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution*

LESLIE McCALL

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Leslie McCall : The Undeserving Rich before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Undeserving Rich:

2 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Reads more like conference paper than the general reader exposition I had ...By Roderick M. More technical than I had supposed. Reads more like conference paper than the general reader exposition I had expected.

It is widely assumed that Americans care little about income inequality, believe opportunities abound, admire the rich, and dislike redistributive policies. Leslie McCall contends that such assumptions are based on both misleading survey

data and economic conditions of the past. In fact, Americans have desired less inequality for decades, and McCall's book explains why. Americans become most concerned about inequality in times of inequitable growth, when they view the rich as prospering while opportunities for good jobs, fair pay and high quality education are restricted for everyone else. As a result, they favor policies to expand opportunity and redistribute earnings in the workplace, reducing inequality in the market rather than redistributing income after the fact with tax and spending policies. This book resolves the paradox of how Americans can express little enthusiasm for welfare state policies and still yearn for a more equitable society.

"The Undeserving Rich is a powerful and nuanced account of Americans' economic beliefs. Filled with new insights and provocative arguments, Leslie McCall shows that the conventional wisdom that Americans are unaware of or indifferent to inequality is wrong. Based on careful analyses of survey data and media content covering three decades, The Undeserving Rich traces the emergence of economic inequality as a social issue and subtly explores what Americans do and don't want their government to do in response. This timely and important book is required reading for anyone who cares about the politics of inequality in America." Martin Gilens, Princeton University

"There are rivers of analyses of Americans' attitudes toward the poor, and at least rivulets of analyses of Americans' attitudes toward the rich. But we have surprisingly little research on the crucial questions of how Americans understand the links between rich and poor and how they evaluate the fact of economic inequality. Leslie McCall bravely takes on those questions, and The Undeserving Rich yields fascinating insights. Americans seek more equality, but only if it is channeled through the appropriate use of equal opportunity; it is a curiously expansive and yet restrictive set of attitudes that McCall expertly parses." Jennifer Hochschild, Harvard University

"Everyone concerned with growing inequality in the United States should read this book as it challenges the myth that Americans have stable attitudes toward inequality or are indifferent to it. McCall looks at attitudes toward the undeserving rich to illuminate how Americans react to income inequality and how they understand the role of hard work and public redistribution in shaping inequality. We learn that for many Americans, income inequality functions as a signal of unequal opportunity and is tied to a concern about the lack of expanding opportunities for the population as a whole. Thus, this important book brings about crucial correctives to arguments often made by political economists about the primacy of economic growth over income inequality." Michele Lamont, coeditor of *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*

"In this carefully constructed study, McCall leverages public opinion survey data to challenge the traditional narrative concerning American attitudes about economic inequality ... Summing up: recommended." S. E. Horn, *Choice*

About the Author: Leslie McCall is Professor of Sociology and Political Science, as well as Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research, at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Complex Inequality: Gender, Class, and Race in the New Economy* (2001). Her work on economic inequality has been published in the *American Sociological*, *Demography*, *Signs*, the *Annual of Sociology*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Economic Geography* and the *Socio-Economic*, as well as in several edited volumes.