



7 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Important Interesting but flawedBy Benjamin FiedlerThis is an interesting, important, yet significantly flawed work. Professor Thompson does not fully explicate the thought of the Founding era in all its richness and subtlety. It's simply not true that Alexander Hamilton was the only major Founder who accepted inequality as a necessary condition of a modern republic (pp. 78-79). Nearly all the Founders understood that economic inequality was inevitable in a commercial society. As Benjamin Rush pointed out in his 1777 "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania" It has often been said, that there is but one rank of men in America, and therefore, that there should be only one representation of them in a government. I agree, that we have no artificial distinctions of men into noblemen and commoners among us, but it ought to be remarked, that superior degrees of industry and capacity, and above all, commerce, have introduced inequality of property among us, and these have introduced natural distinctions of rank in Pennsylvania, as certain and general as the artificial distinctions of men in. Federalist 10 makes this point clearly. Madison points out that "the diversity in the faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate, is not less an insuperable obstacle to an uniformity of interests. The protection of these faculties, is the first object of government." Not only is inequality the inevitable product of a free society, but the government's main job is protecting the conditions which produce it. Madison explicitly when he denounces "a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or "other improper and wicked projects," which the Constitution's restrictions on state government (Article I, Section 10) were intended to prevent. Yet Professor Thompson is correct to assert that the Founders would have been aghast at the radical individualism, the privileging market forces over public interest and the obscene concentration of economic and political power in the hands of small and irresponsible elite which mark our politics today. After all, Madison did say in Federalist 10 that "the regulation of these various and interfering interests, forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government." And the aim of that regulation was not to simply reward the wealthy. A few years later Madison argued that it might be needful for "the silent operations of laws, which without violating the rights of property, reduce extreme wealth towards a state of mediocrity, and raise extreme indigence towards a state of comfort." ("On Parties" Kurland Lerner's Founders Constitution at: [ ] Above all, the Founders, contrary to Mrs. Thatcher, did believe that there was such a thing as society and ultimately its interests trumped those of individuals. Society existed, as George Mason reminded the Fairfax Independent Company in April 1775 "to protect the weaker from the injuries and insults of the stronger." And to William Graham Sumner and other champions of laissez-faire, Benjamin Franklin offered what might justly deemed History's rebuke: Property in such a Society, and its Security to Individuals in every Society, must be an Effect of the Protection afforded to it by the joint Strength of the Society, in the Execution of its Laws. Private Property therefore is a Creature of Society, and is subject to the Calls of that Society, whenever its Necessities shall require it, even to its last Farthing; its Contributions therefore to the public Exigencies are not to be considered as conferring a Benefit on the Publick, entitling the Contributors to the Distinctions of Honour and Power, but as the Return of an Obligation previously received, or the Payment of a just Debt. The Combinations of Civil Society are not like those of a Set of Merchants, who club their Property in different Proportions for Building and Freighting a Ship, and may therefore have some Right to vote in the Disposition of the Voyage in a greater or less Degree according to their respective Contributions; but the important ends of Civil Society, and the personal Securities of Life and Liberty, these remain the same in every Member of the society; and the poorest continues to have an equal Claim to them with the most opulent, whatever Difference Time, Chance, or Industry may occasion in their Circumstances" (" Queries and Remarks respecting Alterations in the Constitution of Pennsylvania")

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Analysis of a Forgotten TopicBy John McClayThompson's book is not only laudable for its precise intellectual and historical command but for the topic it rejuvenates. The subject of inequality has been extant for as long as human beings have been around from Egypt to Greece to Rome to Imperial Britain to the industrious nation of America. Thompson's analysis traces the ideas and concepts of inequality through to today eloquently and smoothly. His command of literature, history, and ideas on inequality of the times is commendable in and of itself. However, the paramount reason for this book to deserve praise is the topic it attempts to revive. Inequality among people in a society causes social friction, unrest, disproportionate resources, and leads to eventual degradation and decay of a democratic state, in which the citizens are expected to be equal. Thompson makes the case, soundly, that since the New Deal era of state intervention and the creation of a welfare state, the country's opinions and politics have shifted and reacted against state intervention leading up to present times. The fear of state intervention (possibly linked to the Soviet Union's demise) creates greater inequality as businesses and corporations take advantage of the all but false concept of America's "free market" economy. This book begins a much-needed discussion on American politics in relation to economics, democracy, history, and our future as a country of equality.

Since the early days of the American republic, political thinkers have maintained that a grossly unequal division of property, wealth, and power would lead to the erosion of democratic life. Yet over the past thirty-five years, neoconservatives and neoliberals alike have redrawn the tenets of American liberalism. Nowhere is this more evident than in our current mainstream political discourse, in which the politics of economic inequality are rarely discussed. In

this impassioned book, Michael J. Thompson reaches back into America's rich intellectual history to reclaim the politics of inequality from the distortion of recent American conservatism. He begins by tracing the development of the idea of economic inequality as it has been conceived by political thinkers throughout American history. Then he considers the change in ideas and values that have led to the acceptance and occasional legitimization of economic divisions. Thompson argues that American liberalism has made a profound departure from its original practice of egalitarian critique. It has all but abandoned its antihierarchical and antiaristocratic discourse. Only by resuscitating this tradition can democracy again become meaningful to Americans. The intellectuals who pioneered egalitarian thinking in America believed political and social relations should be free from all forms of domination, servitude, and dependency. They wished to expose the antidemocratic character of economic life under capitalism and hoped to prevent the kind of inequalities that compromise human dignity and freedom—the core principles of early American politics. In their wisdom is a much broader, more compelling view of democratic life and community than we have today, and with this book, Thompson eloquently and adamantly fights to recover this crucial strand of political thought. In this impassioned book, Michael J. Thompson reaches back into America's rich intellectual history to reclaim the politics of inequality from the distortion of recent American conservatism. He begins by tracing the development of the idea of economic inequality as it has been conceived by political thinkers throughout American history. Then he considers the change in ideas and values that have led to the acceptance and occasional legitimization of economic divisions. Thompson argues that American liberalism has made a profound departure from its original practice of egalitarian critique; it has all but abandoned its antihierarchical and antiaristocratic discourse. Only by resuscitating this tradition can democracy again become meaningful to Americans. The intellectuals who pioneered egalitarian thinking in America believed political and social relations should be free from all forms of domination, servitude, and dependency. They wished to expose the antidemocratic character of economic life under capitalism and hoped to prevent the kind of inequalities that compromise human dignity and freedom—the core principles of early American politics. In their wisdom is a much broader, more compelling view of democratic life and community than we have today, and with this book, Thompson eloquently and adamantly fights to recover this crucial strand of political thought.

This is an important and original work, subtle and sophisticated in its analysis and unique in its scope. (Philip Green, professor of political science, New School University) Thompson provides a great service in revisiting—and reviving—the tradition of seeing extreme economic inequality and democracy as incompatible. (Daniel Brook *The Nation*) [A] sweeping intellectual history... Recommended. (CHOICE) About the Author Michael J. Thompson is assistant professor of political science at William Paterson University. His articles have appeared in *New Political Science*, *Radical Political Economics*, *Critical Sociology*, *New Politics*, *Owl of Minerva*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, and *Philosophy and Literature*. He is the founder and editor of *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture* and the editor of *Islam and the West: Perspectives on Modernity* as well as *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*.