



# ENQUIRY

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## Review: Thomas Sowell's *Wealth, Poverty and Politics*

By WILL UTZSCHNEIDER  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Politicians love to raise the income inequality banner. "Wealth and income inequality is the greatest economic, political and moral issue of our time," tweeted Senator Bernie Sanders during his bid to become the Democratic presidential nominee. Indeed others, such as New York City mayor Bill de Blasio and Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren, have traveled the country advancing the cause.

Thomas Sowell, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, argues this is a fool's errand. His recent book *Wealth, Poverty and Politics* suggests that the roots of wealth inequality are more complex than politicians realize. Sowell dismantles many widely held progressive dogmas with a surgeon's precision. Although brief, the book is thorough and broad in scope.

"Vast disparities in wealth, and in wealth creating capacity, have been common for millennia," Sowell writes. These disparities, he stresses, are not permanent. While the ancient Greeks thrived, making significant advances in philosophy and the sciences, Britain was full of illiterate tribal people. But it would later dominate the world in the industrial age. The ancient Chinese, similarly, basked in prosperity compared with their European counterparts, inventing the compass and producing chinaware. During the 15th century, however, the emperors in the Ming dynasty cut off ties from the world. China no longer prospered, and it fell behind in the sciences and technology.

This ebb and flow of wealth occurs in today's world and America as well. Studies by both the University of Michigan and the Internal Revenue Service show the extent to which wealth changes hands. The IRS, for example, found that of the people who filed tax returns from 1996 to 2005, those in the bottom 20 percent saw their

incomes rise by 91 percent, while the incomes of those in the often-discussed "one percent" fell by 26 percent. Sowell also finds that 56 percent of American households will be in the top decile, or ten percent, at some point in their lives. Much of this correlates with age.

He dismisses victim ideology, emphasizing cultural differences, which influence income disparities. "Cultures include skills and talents that more directly affect economic outcomes," Sowell writes. Groups such as the Chinese, the Lebanese,

*None of these groups prospered because of any kind of "privilege" or "rigged system."*

and Jews escaping Nazi Germany all faced poverty and hardship, including language barriers.

They also came from cultures that valued education. It is no coincidence that Jews in 19th and 20th century Germany were overrepresented in universities relative to their population. "The Jewish immigrants then pushed their children on to educational achievements." Sowell jokes that the first word of English learned by Fujianese Chinese was "Harvard."

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## Self-Proclaimed "Nasty Woman" Gets Nasty

By SAM BENEVELLI  
STAFF WRITER

One of the most popular videos shared on Facebook last week was of Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) "schooling," "grilling," or "snubbing" Betsy DeVos, President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education. During a contentious three-hour hearing, the senator took the opportunity to display her classless charm by asking reductionist questions and interrupting DeVos in her attempts to answer them.

Betsy DeVos, a businesswoman and philanthropist, is the child of self-made billionaires Edgar and Elsa Prince. Her business history includes seats on the boards of educational advocacy organizations, which focus on

## This Week's News in 140 Characters

### EDITORIAL REPORT

-  **Department of State** @StateDept · 11m  
The United States welcomes the on-going peaceful transition of power in The Gambia. [go.usa.gov/x9fYe](http://go.usa.gov/x9fYe)  
22 replies · 41 retweets · 87 likes
-  **Ben Shapiro** @benshapiro · 10h  
I am ecstatic when conservatives call out media for their lies. I am not ecstatic when they call out media for telling the truth. Not hard.  
80 replies · 493 retweets · 1.8K likes
-  **Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump · 37m  
Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views.  
8.4K replies · 11K retweets · 42K likes
-  **ThatsHowYouGotTrump** @AceofSpadesHQ · 14h  
It took literally less than 24 hours for the media to decide a president lecturing the media -- which Obama did monthly -- is now a CRISIS!!  
22 replies · 444 retweets · 699 likes
-  **The First Lady** @FLOTUS · 9h  
Thinking of Dr. King and great leaders like @repjohnlewis who carry on his legacy. May their example be our call to action. -m  
1.3K replies · 22K retweets · 60K likes

"NASTY WOMAN" GETS NASTY *cont.*

improving access to charter schools in underprivileged areas like Detroit. Former senator Joe Lieberman, a Democrat, has lauded her as a "champion of at-risk children."

Senator Warren's grandstanding and value-signaling performance at DeVos's confirmation hearing was unnecessary and unproductive. She began by asking about DeVos's background in higher education and how she will navigate the current student loan dilemma. The senator's questions, however, had nothing to do with the nominee's experience with issues in higher education, only her personal experience in paying for it. Warren peppered DeVos with yes-or-no questions like: "Have you ever taken out a student loan from the federal government to help pay for college?"

She went on to ask if DeVos's children had to take out loans. The answer to both questions was no, but DeVos added that her children are "fortunate" in not having to do this. As Senator Warren continued with these privilege-checking questions, she interrupted DeVos's attempt to explain her (admittedly distant) personal experience with receiving federal Pell Grants. This general yes-or-no line of questioning showed more about Warren's

## Misguided Social Justice

By ERICH WOHL  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) often choose to focus on invisible issues rather than on more egregious problems that impact the world as a whole. More specifically, many SJWs conflate the concepts of social justice and microaggression in an attempt to identify with those around the globe who actually suffer hardships.

Additionally, the actions that Social Justice Warriors often take are inherently selfish. They use their privileged positions in the media and academia as platforms to talk about issues that are more likely to affect them rather than marginalized groups. Muslim women living in Iran, for example, don't care about "manspreading." Instead, they're concerned about the possibility of being harassed or raped if and when they venture into public without their husbands.

Similarly, the Liberal media bring forth the issue of microaggression when describing the hardships of people of color. Journalists selfishly emphasize the perceived discriminations they have experienced, for example

The Lebanese introduced their children to family businesses from an early age. None of these groups prospered because of any kind of “privilege” or “rigged system.”

Geographic factors also play a role, Sowell argues. Geography is not egalitarian. In tropical Africa, for example, the crop yields per acre are a fraction of those in the United States and China. One geographical production factor is that areas with mountains and few waterways isolate people from commerce and foreign language acquisition.

Finally, Sowell asks whether politicians should reduce productivity, wealth creation, and improvements in living standards in order to make incomes more equal. The fortunes made by Ford, Bezos, Buffett, and others are by-products of many consensual economic transactions, which have raised people’s standards of living. Consider that before Ford mass-produced relatively inexpensive cars, “most Americans lived out their entire lives and died within a fifty mile radius of where they were born.” After making this point, Sowell laments: “Why third parties should imagine themselves entitled to intervene in such processes [as Ford’s], to which they contributed nothing, and to preempt the decisions of others, is one of the many mysteries of our time.” He acknowledges that the market has imperfections, but stresses that the alternative, state control of a nation’s resources, shows a sobering record of misery. Major examples are Maoist China and the Soviet Union.

Dr. Sowell frames the income inequality issue in historical, sociological, and cultural terms, while others too often don’t. As in his other books, he examines causal arguments instead of moral ones, and points out that people often are unaware of the unintended consequences of their decisions. Regardless of whether one agrees with his conclusions, one will learn about economic history from reading the book

Alleviating poverty and improving economic opportunity are noble goals. Politicians, however, exploit the reality of income disparities to amass more power. This is foolhardy and dangerous.

*“NASTY WOMAN GETS NASTY” cont.*

character than DeVos’s experience.

Senator Warren also got into the issue of fraud in higher education. She opened this part of the questioning with a knock or two against President Trump – using a previous comment by DeVos. Early in the primary season, DeVos donated millions to Carly Fiorina before ultimately supporting Marco Rubio. During the primary season, she also called candidate Trump an “interloper” who “does not represent the Republican Party.”

After this gratuitous aside, Senator Warren pushed DeVos to promise to directly hold for-profit colleges and universities accountable for providing students a sufficient education. DeVos clearly explained that she will have the Department of Education enforce proper rules and regulations for educational standards and government oversight, but Warren accused her of planning to “subcontract” such responsibilities in her position as Secretary of Education.

This subcontracting or delegation really is not a problem at all. It is indicative of the approach of a good businesswoman, and the likely approach of President Trump’s cabinet as a whole. Capable CEOs do not involve themselves in every detail of their companies. They delegate, or hire, qualified experts to inform

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them of the details of most issues. With this information, the CEO makes an informed decision about how to steer the company or department. President Trump may be incompetent, unprepared, and often unintelligible, but he is surrounding himself with an intelligent, skilled, and economically savvy cabinet. His nominees are generally outsiders to Republican politics, and in some cases even dissenters from it. There are also major Trump appointees who disagree with him on certain important issues. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, for instance, disagrees with President Trump on the Iran nuclear deal and Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson dislikes Trump’s previous calls for a ban on Muslim immigrants. These are the kind of people who will effect change in this or any presidency – those who are willing to put aside personal differences, while also standing by their own views and values, to set productive policy.

One name missing from the social media outcry following the confirmation hearing is that of Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH). Senator Hassan also had the opportunity to pepper Betsy DeVos with questions, in this case about her experience with students with disabilities. Unlike Warren, Senator Hassan was clear and respectful -- allowing DeVos to complete her answers -- and managed to extract

some meaningful information. She helped reveal to the committee that DeVos is wholly unfamiliar with a number of federal statutes related to the situation, and

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potential problem, of students with disabilities signing away certain rights when they enter charter schools. She did not interrupt DeVos, but asked open-ended questions and allowed her to tie herself into a knot attempting to explain her position on the issue.

This is how it should be done. This is how you resist a cabinet nominee who seems somewhat undereducated about public school systems. This is how you resist a president who may threaten the rights you believe in. You don’t get nasty and rude. You use patient cunning to allow unqualified

*MISGUIDED SOCIAL JUSTICE cont.*

focusing on and perhaps twisting comments their opponents make, rather than tackling the more serious issues marginalized groups face on a daily basis. Mass incarceration is a huge issue among black communities. The average African American is in far greater danger from being questionably arrested for a petty crime than from a white person petting their afro.

When microaggressions are brought to the forefront of social justice issues, many Americans begin to view such issues as insignificant or petty. People are even beginning to dismiss real issues of racism and sexism because

they are downplayed by the Liberal media. Additionally, paying too much attention to microaggressions further marginalizes, and in an indirect sense even mocks, those who experience true discrimination. Upon ascending to high positions in both the media and academia, it seems as though Social Justice Warriors fight to maintain their privilege rather than speak out about serious kinds of discrimination.

One can argue that implicit discrimination, including microaggression, is at the forefront in academia because it is more fixable than explicit discrimination. Successfully eliminating implicit discrimination, however, would not fix any of the more significant problems. Assuming that all forms of implicit discrimination were eliminated, only a small segment of the population -- those who learned about it in institutions of higher education -- would even notice.

In addition, I think it is a far greater task to police people’s words and behaviors through pretentious critique than it is to dismantle institutional barriers. Both tasks are difficult, but the former is effectively impossible. In contrast, the latter -- changing laws to even the playing field for marginalized groups -- has been one of the most positive developments of the last century.

Ironically, those who write about discrimination are unlikely to experience the brunt of it, thanks to their socioeconomic position. Instead of writing about the really serious issues, like mass incarceration or rape, SJWs somewhat selfishly use their safer, more privileged position to address microaggressions, which are more likely to happen to them. This is a shameful phenomenon that should stop immediately.

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