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Jacob H. Hacker and Paul Pierson's book demolishes any hope for democratic politics in the contemporary United States. Those who want to keep that hope alive, who want to continue to believe that elections and the will of the majority make a difference, should not read it. They will not find any rational deliberators or empowered grassroots participants pushing the system toward greater equality and responsiveness. Those determined to organize and fight for a more equitable society, those willing to struggle to create the conditions of possibility for democracy, need to read, study, and learn from it. Hacker and Pierson's compelling analysis of capital's deliberate and aggressive seizure of political power makes the so-called checks and balances of America's ostensibly democratic system appear as so many barriers to government for and by the people. Despite their reluctance to acknowledge the ideological dimensions of politics—why subjects participate in and even enjoy being exploited and co-opted—the authors nonetheless explain how contemporary US Americans have ended up in a society considered more unequal than the one we lived in a generation ago. Politics is organized combat. Winning requires organization, duration, and focus. The rich are organized and focused. The rest of us are not.

The fundamental, undeniable fact about the twenty-first-century United States is the stark increase in economic inequality. Since the late 1970s, wealth in the United States has been redistributed from poor, working, and middle-class households to the very, very rich. Relying on work by economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, Hacker and Pierson detail the sustained hyperconcentration of income at the top and the limited or flat gains for the middle and the bottom (most if not all of which was wiped out in 2008). Between 2001 and 2006, the top 1% seized over 53% of US income gains. Broadened out to 1979, the top 1% captured 36% of all household income gains. Within this top 1%, gains are similarly concentrated at the very top. The insanely rich benefit even more than the superrich. For instance, the top .1% of US households takes in more than a trillion dollars a year.

The vast increase in the wealth of the super and insanely rich has not benefited the other 90%, which for the most part have stagnated, fallen, or recently lost the little we had gained. Incomes in the lowest fifth of US households increased barely 10% over 27 years. For those in the middle, gains average out to less than 1% a year. These slight increases pale in comparison to the 256% rise in the top 1%'s household income. They also are easily attributed to the fact that middle- and lower-income households were working more hours (in part due to the rise in two-income households). If the economy had grown at the same rate and inequality had remained constant, working- and middle-class households would have been better off than they are now, taking home between 5,000 and 12,000 more dollars a year. In the words of the authors, "Other than the richest 10 percent of Americans, *every income group would have done better if they had experienced the average growth of household income,*" that is, if incomes had grown at the same rate across groups (p. 25; original emphasis). The rich got richer because they took it from the rest of us. Hacker and Pierson call this "trickle up." Another fitting term is "expropriation."

The primary mechanism for the redistribution of wealth to the rich has been changes in taxation. Over the last 30 years, tax rates on the rich have fallen dramatically. The rich are richer because they are taxed less heavily than they used to be (and our infrastructures are crumbling, schools are failing, and public services are diminishing because the rich are taxed less heavily than they used to be). Hacker and Pierson write: "[I]f the effects of taxation on income at the top had been frozen in place in 1970, a very big chunk of the growing distance between the superrich and everyone else would disappear" (p. 49). Combined with setbacks to unions, extravagant executive compensation schemes, and financial deregulation, regressive tax policy has made income inequality higher in the United States than in any other advanced industrial country.

How did we get here? Politically organized class warfare. Hacker and Pierson persuasively argue that the dramatic growth in inequality in the United States over the last 30 years is the result of organized political power. Political decisions, whether active or passive, have redistributed income, transformed Wall Street, and crippled unions. As the institutions bolstering the middle class have declined (unions, the American Legion, civic groups relying on active face-to-face participation, and dense social ties), those enhancing the power of business have risen. Everyday middle- and working-class voters have become less organized and, hence, less effective, while monied interests have been able to fund lobbying and pressure groups with the enduring attention to detail necessary to fight political battles on multiple terrains over the long haul.

Perhaps the most familiar example of capitalists' efforts to organize as a class in the 1970s is a memo sent by then–corporate lawyer and future Supreme Court Justice Louis Powell to the director of the US Chamber of Congress. Written in 1971 (just a few months before Richard Nixon appointed Powell to the Court), the memo urged business to pursue political power, aggressively and determinedly. Powell advised, "Strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through united action

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and national organizations" (p. 117). Business agreed. Both the Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business doubled in membership size during the seventies. In 1972, the Business Roundtable was formed out of the merger of three other groups; its membership was comprised of corporate chief executive officers. By the end of the decade, 113 of the top *Fortune* 200 companies would be members.

Hacker and Pierson are too quick to refer to the economic struggles of the 1970s as "forgotten." Scholars focused on the rise of neoliberalism—a term that does not appear in this study—have produced valuable work on these struggles, documenting their global expanse. The situation in the United States, while severe, is not unique. David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) is exemplary here. Nonetheless, one of the most provocative components of Hacker and Pierson's focus on the organized politics of economic combat is their contention that too many political scientists have been looking in the wrong places.

Too many scholars of American politics have followed "politics as electoral spectacle" instead of analyzing public policy and organized interest groups. A problem with this "blinkered vision," better suited to sports than politics, is its misreading of when American politics really changed. Caught up in the back and forth of elections, politics as electoral spectacle says that 1968 is the turning point. According to the authors, it is not.

Preoccupation with elections contributes to a second mistake, a focus on culture war to the omission of class war. The conventional narrative holds that Nixon marks the point of conservative, populist, racist backlash against liberal, New Deal, pluralists. But this Nixonland story flies in the face of policy evidence. Nixon signed laws expanding Social Security, creating a national food stamp program, and transforming Old Age Assistance into national Supplemental Security Income. He also expanded regulatory policy, approving legislation establishing the Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Traffic Safety Commission, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Fundamental policy shifts do not appear until 1977–78, when Jimmy Carter was president and both the House and the Senate continued to be held by Democratic majorities. These are the years that matter, the point when US economic policy starts to look dramatically different, as liberal proposals such as tax reform, health-care reform, a new consumer protection agency, Election Day voter registration, and the overhaul of labor relations law are all defeated.

Accordingly, the third mistake of conventional accounts of American politics, a mistake that compounds their failure to attend to policy, is the neglect of organized combat, the steady slog of lobbyists seeking to shape policies to suit the interests that fund them. Fixated on elections, scholars examine public opinion and popularity, the drama of individuals and their mass appeal. If a conservative politician is popular, it must be because the population has moved to the right. This argument is easy to understand, but Hacker and Pierson say that it is wrong. It presumes a connection among voters, elected officials, and policy outcomes that simply is not there. Most voters have minimal political knowledge. And most policies are outcomes of long-drawn-out struggles between organized political actors. To think in terms of participatory or deliberative democracy is to assume that politicians respond to voters' concerns. They do not—at least not to those of the bottom 90%. Drawing from work by Larry Bartels and Martin Gilens, Hacker and Pierson point out that most policy changes with majority support do not become law. In fact, when poor people support a policy, their representatives are *less* likely to vote for it (p. 111).

Additionally, when it comes to economic matters, voters do not have a choice. Democrats and Republican alike support the interests of business, corporate, and financial elites. Republicans urge tax cuts. Democrats urge deficit reduction. Both eat away at the provisions supposed to protect and secure the poor, working, and middle class. The elite have two parties. The rest of us have none. When Democratic voters lament their party's morbid tendency to concede in advance, to compromise with the uncompromising, they would do better to recognize the inner truth of the contemporary Democratic Party—its support for and reliance on corporate money.

So the United States got to our current point of extreme inequality because capital organized and mobilized in political pursuit of its economic interests. When political scientists study elections, culture war, and public opinion they miss this. When we study public policy, class struggle, and organized combat, however, it is right before our eyes.

Hacker and Pierson are at their best when detailing the organization of the class power of the very rich, "the relentless effectiveness of modern, efficient organizations operating in a much less modern and efficient political system" (p. 115). In a "domestic version of Shock and Awe," corporations amped up their Washington offices and number of lobbyists. Moreover, they began to build coalitions, working from the standpoint of the interests of business as a whole instead of their own narrow industry-specific concerns. Corporations upped their contributions to political action committees and began cultivating opposition candidates as well as cozying up to incumbents. By the 1990s, business, while deeply involved with both political parties, was working through radical elements of the Republican Party relentlessly focused on tax cuts. Two groups, "elite rather than mass organizations" stand out: Americans for Tax Reform and the Club for Growth. Despite overwhelming voter doubt about the benefits of tax cuts, these groups kept the Republicans unified and focused on tax cuts as the one solution to any and all political problems.

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At precisely those moments when Hacker and Pierson's tale of ruthless efficiency is most compelling, they have to draw from political science's ostensible mistakes. That is, they cannot tell their story without also highlighting elections, culture war, and public opinion. They need these supplements for their own narrative's coherence. Thus, they acknowledge that business increased its political giving "at precisely the time when the cost of campaigns began to skyrocket" (p. 121). Wealthy conservatives endowed think tanks, developing arguments directly aimed at pushing the mainstream to the right. At this point, though, where attention to the content of the ideological product of the Heritage Foundation, the Coors Foundation, and the Scaife Family Foundation would enhance their account of the multiple links connecting business and conservative networks, the authors underplay culture war. In fact, it sometimes seems as if their America is not one riddled by racism, sexism, and homophobia—none appears as politically significant (in fact, none appears at all).

This omission is particularly bizarre in a section called "Dixie Rising," which discusses the conservatism of southern Democrats without saying a word about race. It also hinders their ability to account for how an alliance between Christian conservatives and organized capital was possible at all. Reducing culture war to media rhetoric about red states and blue states, NASCAR versus sushi, Hacker and Pierson fail to treat this very dichotomy as a product of class war rather than an example of it. They neglect the ways in which class war is fought through deployments of sex and race, familiar and strange, industrious and lazy, saved and damned. Hence, they leave unexplored the political mobilization of resentment as well as our investment in subjugation, clear factors in Americans' odd acquiescence to growing inequality and diminishing life chances.

Hacker and Pierson are somewhat less persuasive when they consider the other side of their story, namely, the disorganization of the middle and working class. On the one hand, they are right to emphasize institutional changes, such as the decline in labor unions and civic organizations. To the extent that they view economic inequality as a direct result of the political disorganization of the middle class, they pose an enormous challenge to those political scientists who assert the democratic strength and vitality of civil society. At the exact same moment that some political analysts and social theorists champion for the rise of new social movements and the renewal of democracy, the authors locate the consolidation of corporate and business power against middle- and working-class interests. Because the newly active elements of civil society do not concern themselves with economic issues but, instead, focus on environmental and lifestyle concerns, the intensifying hold of capital goes ignored.

On the other hand, Hacker and Pierson do not link the decline of unions and voluntary associations in any substantial way to changes in production (from Fordist to post-Fordist), family structure (rise in divorce rates, increased numbers of women entering the wage-labor force), or racial desegregation. One is left with a weird sense of asymmetry: If, as the authors assert, business took as its model the organizing tactics that had worked well for consumer, environmental, and labor activists in the sixties and seventies—tactics that had restrained corporations—how is it that there is no substantial push-back from these groups? Where did they go? How is it that business just wins? To use a specific example, after substantial losses on the 1978 tax bill—which cut the capital gains tax rate in half—and after failing to get the Labor Law Reform bill passed, why does it seem as if labor gives up? Why do these defeats not galvanize opposition? For this part of their story to be as compelling as that of relentless, efficient, determined capital, Hacker and Pierson need to attend more to the material changes in the capitalist economy and their ideological counterparts. How, in other words, did pro-business think tanks change the ways that Americans understand freedom and opportunity in a diverse and changing work environment?

Perhaps due to their neglect of ideology (inclusive of their reduction of culture war to its mass-media terms and their inattention to the content of the ideas served up by pro-business think tanks), Hacker and Pierson's appreciation for the organizational capacities of capital obscures real contradictions. For example, given the high costs of health insurance, why would business not want to see these costs transferred to the government? Why would immediate and short-term interests in stock valuation replace longer-term interest in market share and future development? Why would capital tolerate declines in infrastructures on which it depends but for which it does not have to pay? Why would the losers in any particular deal among the insanely rich not want to stick it to those who made out like bandits? And why would they not present their proposals as mechanisms for restoring efficiency and ending bubbles? Might it not be possible that the extreme capitalism and radical economic policy that brought about the 2008 economic crisis (not to mention the preceding crisis in the housing and mortgage markets and the following and continuing jobs crisis) are reaching a breaking point? Even if one insists on the infinite flexibility of capital, these questions signal the fact that there is nothing inevitable about the paths that the interests of the super and insanely rich take. Attunement to tensions here may well suggest points of dissensus worth exploiting, an inquiry that requires consideration of ideology.

Despite the miserable outlook for democracy in the winner-take-all economy, Hacker and Pierson think that reform and renewal are possible. The first two of their three suggestions are not convincing—"reduce the capacity of entrenched elites to block needed reform" and "facilitate broader participation among those whose voices are

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currently drowned out" (p. 303). The first suggestion ignores the problem it aims to solve—how are we supposed to reduce the capacity of entrenched elites if entrenched elites are blocking our efforts to reduce their capacity? In fact, this suggestion is only plausible the day after elites are no longer entrenched, that is to say, the day after the revolution. The second suggestion flies in the face of their analysis of winner-take-all politics—participation has not been an issue; in fact, they have said that the views of most of us do not make a difference. Yet, again, maybe this is a suggestion for democracy the day after.

Their third suggestion is more promising: "encourage the development of groups that can provided a continuing, organized capacity to mobilize middle-class voters and monitor government and politics on their behalf" (p. 303). But why would we want to monitor rather than change government? Should not the suggestion be to build organizations of sufficient duration and radicality to fight against organized capital? On this score, why not urge that the poor, working, and middle classes unite through a movement or party devoted to taxing the rich? Anyone who refuses to raise taxes on those making more than $250,000 a year, anyone granting any corporation a tax break, and anyone accepting money from a corporation failing to pay its taxes will be opposed. One issue, one outcome, no excuses. This third suggestion fits better with their analysis of the politics of organized combat. Under conditions of radical inequality where capital uses state power to protect its interests, the rest of us have to organize and fight as well.

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Like many political scientists, I am an avid mystery novel reader. So, I found Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson's framing of the questions of the book in the form of a mystery to be creative. The pemise of the book is that the economy of the United States over the past thirty years has been "hijacked" by the broad area of American politics, defined as business lobbies, labor unions, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, and presidents, both Democrats and Republicans, and structured to benefit the very wealthy to the detriment of the American middle class. As intriguing as the conclusions are, I wonder how surprised scholars of American politics will be by them? Another question that arises: How complete is a picture of the effects of legislative and executive decisions on the economic plight of the middle class when racial differences are not explored?

Hacker and Pierson find that the top 1% of income earners received 36% of all gains in household income from 1979 to 2007. Looking only at the period between 2001 and 2006, this group's share of income gains stood at over 53%. Also during the 1979 to 2007 period, the top 0.1% of households received over 20% of all after-tax gains (p. 3). Those in the poorest 20% of American households realized a paltry 10% increase over the 27 years, $14,900 to $16,500. For those in the middle quintile (20%) of households, average inflation-adjusted income rose from $42,900 to $52,100, a gain of 21%, but this equates to just 0.7% per year over the period under discussion. Much of the gain came not from raises but from longer working hours in 2000 than in 1979.

One of the early reasons for the differential examined here is the widely accepted theory that income inequality is the result of globalization and technological changes. The argument is that these changes require a highly educated workforce and that education inequality accounts for the observed income inequality. Hacker and Pierson dismiss this theory early on as they find that many of those in the middle class who are falling farther and farther behind in household income are also highly educated, for example, those with bachelors and advanced degrees. These individuals believe that education is the key to success, yet find that their degrees do not earn them salaries as high as those at the top who also have college degrees. This effect is known as within-group inequality; those at the top also have college degrees but are earning substantially more than those in the middle with the same level of education.

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