

AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Faces of America

Getting By in Our Economy

Foreword by
Anna Deavere Smith

Photographs by
**Cindy Elizabeth
Caroline Gutman
Maen Hammad
Adam Perez**

A PROJECT OF THE **COMMISSION ON REIMAGINING OUR ECONOMY**

A PROJECT OF THE
COMMISSION ON REIMAGINING OUR ECONOMY

Faces *of* America

Getting By in Our Economy

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES
Cambridge, Massachusetts

© 2023 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 0-87724-157-0

This publication is available online at www.amacad.org/project/reimagining-american-economy.

Suggested citation:

American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Faces of America: Getting By in Our Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2023).

Cover image:

Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez.

Photo credits:

See Appendix A on page 128 for a full list of photo credits.

Migrant Mother (1936) by Dorothea Lange and *American Gothic* (1942) by Gordon Parks: page iv;
Roadside Stand near Birmingham, Alabama (1936) by Walker Evans: page v; Courtesy of Katherine J. Cramer: page 133 (left); Courtesy of Ann M. Fudge: page 133 (middle); Courtesy of Nicholas B. Lemann: page 133 (right)

The views expressed in this publication are those held by the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Officers and Members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Please direct inquiries to:

American Academy of Arts and Sciences
136 Irving Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-1996
Telephone: (617) 576-5000
Facsimile: (617) 576-5050
Email: aaas@amacad.org
Visit our website at www.amacad.org

Contents

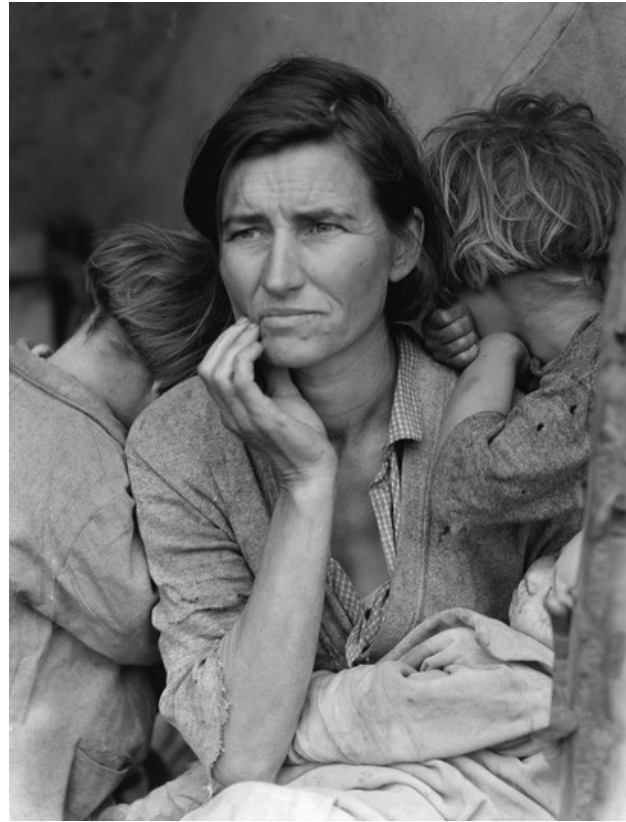
Foreword by Anna Deavere Smith	iv
Introduction	1
I. OPPORTUNITY AND MOBILITY	5
Work	7
Training	21
Small Business	27
II. SECURITY	39
Stability	57
Family	73
Time	85
Changing Communities	95
III. DEMOCRACY	109
Appendix A: Index of Photographs	128
Appendix B: Index of Listening Sessions	130
Appendix C: Instructions Provided to Photographers	131
About the Commission on Reimagining Our Economy	133

Foreword by Anna Deavere Smith

Dorothea Lange’s “Migrant Mother,” Gordon Parks’s “American Gothic,” and Walker Evans’s “Roadside Stand near Birmingham, Alabama” are photographs that not only chronicled American life—they helped define it. Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to capture America during the Depression years, these images of the 1930s and 1940s are now as much a part of our national identity as speeches, historical accounts, and holidays. Many of the photographs looked race and class disparity in the face. Some were critiques. They remain relevant to contemporary disparities. Sometimes the stories they capture are harsh, but you can’t look away from them. They hang in museums all over the world. They auction for high sums.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ decision to use pictures and documented words to animate the findings of its Commission on Reimagining Our Economy was an inspired one. Data is a necessary component of credibility and the food for lunchtime conversations in think tanks—but how often does it reach beyond the inner circle of those “in the know”? It is my hope that *Faces of America: Getting By in Our Economy*, though intended for a curated audience, will make its way to churches, YMCAs, locker rooms of high school football teams, colleges, and onto the pages of middle school essays.

The images are intriguing, often beautiful. Even though the sentiments evoked by the images and words throughout the book are not *America the beautiful for spacious skies*, viewers will find themselves engaged page after page. Beauty makes us sit up and take notice. The photographs, along with quotations



Dorothea Lange’s “Migrant Mother.”

from their subjects and excerpts from the Commission’s conversations with Americans at listening sessions across the country, tell the stories of those who are trying to “make it in America,” often without the supports they need: sufficient education, health care, a good night’s sleep.

It shouldn’t be so hard to make it. And that’s why we need imagination in addition to the evidence that data provides.



Gordon Parks’s “American Gothic.”

Even when you do think you’re doing right, you go get a job, and you’re trying to take care of your bills and everything. And then it’s always something that jumps in the way. . . . It’s just hard. I just feel like they don’t give you a chance out here.

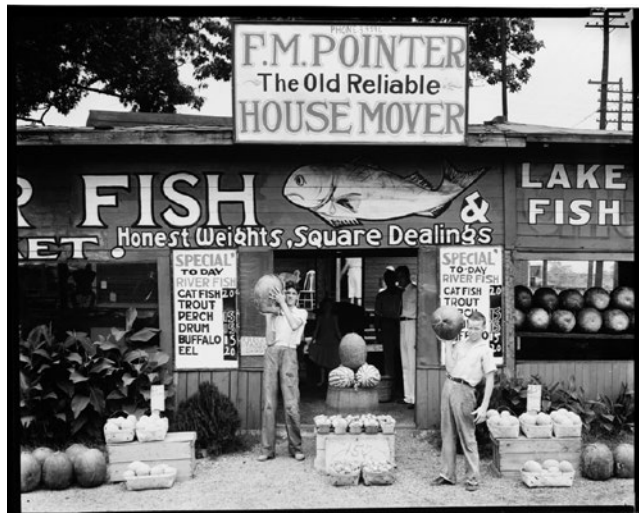
Who or what is “they”? The government? The people who “run” things? Those who dominate in the marketplace? Those in the know? In 1975, economist Arthur

Okun wrote, “the market has a place, and the market needs to be kept in its place.” Researchers usefully posit that the health of the American political economy requires three strong elements: markets, government, and a civil society. They say that the current outsized market has made this arrangement lopsided, and it threatens to be untenable for many.

I can work, struggle and do what I got to do every day, and as soon as I've done a whole lot and I get a little comfortable, there comes something else, boom, knock me right down.

Individuals do not feel secure or safe. They imagine that others do:

I mean, when we look at the wealthiest in American society, it's not that they have some intrinsic component to who they are that allows them to succeed. It's the fact that they can fail and still continue to survive and try other initiatives.



Walker Evans's “Roadside Stand near Birmingham, Alabama.”

And what does working like a dog do to a civil society? Is it conducive to participation in democracy? One man works sixteen hours a day in a bakery. What time would he have to answer the call of a political organizer, for example? When could he volunteer to coach a soccer team, to create belongingness for himself and others? Does he have time to vote? To register to vote? Another in a listening session said:

I work hard. . . . My family life important for me. I sleep only four hour. That is important. I have no community life.

The simplicity of needs as they are chronicled here is remarkable. There's a photograph of a man sitting at the bottom of a stairway in his Houston apartment complex with his no-doubt trustworthy companion, a stocky dog. He has no sidewalks.

Although I moved out of [Houston's] Third Ward from that apartment that was like an asphalt jungle, and now I live in a place that has more greenery and I can walk my dog, there's no neighborhood surrounding. So I can go walk around the parking lot, but I can't walk around my neighborhood. There are no sidewalks around the outside of my complex. And my friends who can afford to buy houses and live in neighborhoods—of course they have all that.

He just needs . . . a neighborhood.

One photograph stands out because unlike the others, it includes no faces (see page 96). It's a large indoor space—big windows, perfect light, a few buckets and some stools. At first, I thought it was an artist's studio. It's big enough for several artists. It was once a rubber factory, then a pajama factory in Pennsylvania; it

is now the unfinished floor of what will be a “mixed-use space.” Wouldn't it be wonderful if the mix were of different representatives of the community across race and class, reimagining our economy? *Faces of America: Getting By in Our Economy* was inspired by remnants of the past, the FSA photographs made by the likes of Parks, Lange, and Evans. It makes me think that the task of reimagining our economy is like a big room, once a factory, now a place to be creative. The very use of the word *reimagine* is inviting. It's welcoming. It's hospitable. The empty space with remnants of the past is hopeful.

Anna Deavere Smith is a writer and actress. She is credited with having created a new form of theater. Her plays, sometimes called “docudramas,” focus on contemporary issues from multiple points of view and are composed from excerpts of hundreds of interviews. Her plays, and films based on them, include *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles*, both of which deal with volatile race events in the 1990s; *Let Me Down Easy*, about the U.S. health care system; and *Notes from the Field*, which focuses on the school-to-prison pipeline. Her work as an actress on television includes *Inventing Anna*, *The West Wing*, *Nurse Jackie*, and *Black-ish*; and in mainstream movies includes *Philadelphia*, *The American President*, and *Rachel Getting Married*. She is a University Professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2019. In 2023, President Biden appointed her to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.



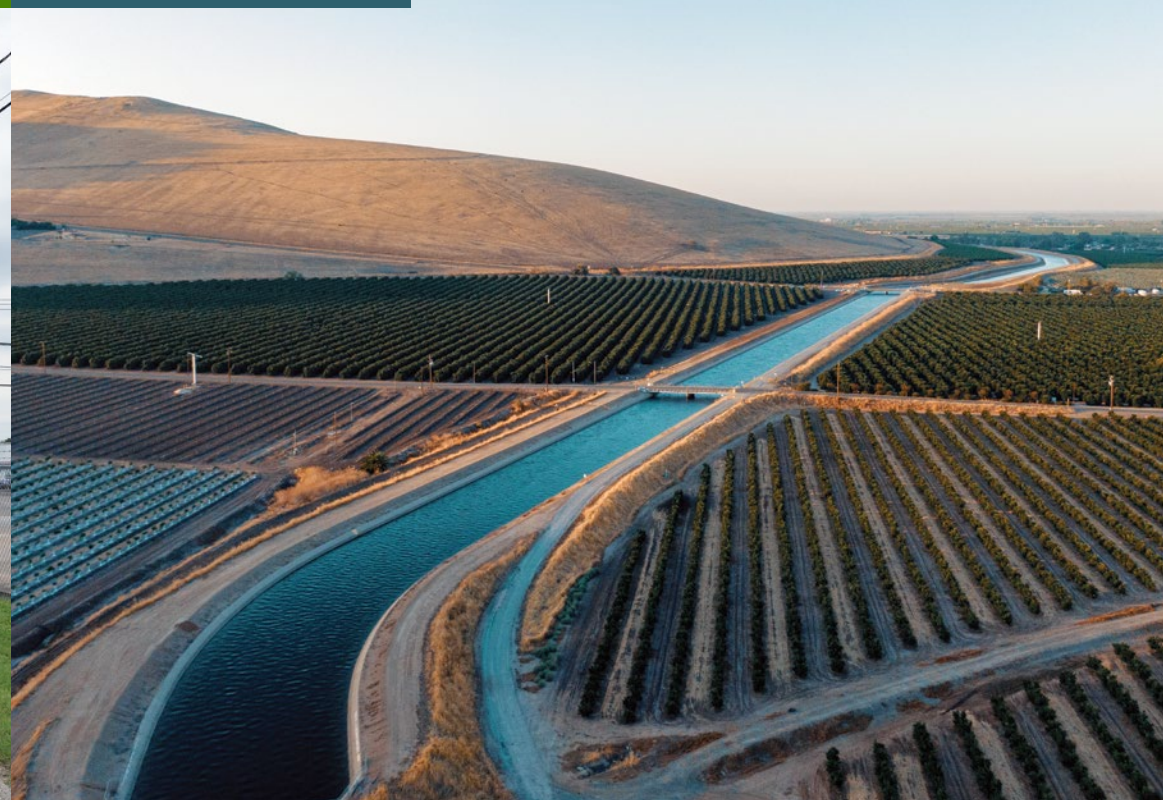
Williamsport, Pennsylvania



Dearborn, Michigan

Third Ward, Houston, Texas

Tulare County, California



Introduction

In the 1930s, amid the greatest economic crisis in American history, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched numerous initiatives to help the nation get back on its feet, among them a superb documentary photography project. Included in the alphabet soup of agencies and programs created by Roosevelt and Congress to fight the Great Depression was the Farm Security Administration (FSA). From 1935 to 1944, the FSA commissioned more than a dozen photographers to record conditions in the country's hard-hit rural areas, as well as government efforts to modernize American agriculture. Under the direction of economists Roy Stryker and Rexford Tugwell, the photographers—most famously Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Gordon Parks—captured images that came to define not just rural America but an entire period in the nation's history. Their mission was to “introduc[e] America to Americans,” to highlight people whose stories had long been overlooked but whose well-being was no less crucial to the state of the nation and its economy.¹

The economic situation in the United States in 2023 bears little resemblance to the catastrophic levels of unemployment, poverty, and displacement that defined the Great Depression. However, many challenges facing Americans today would feel familiar to the FSA photographers of the 1930s. The byword for the Roosevelt administration was improving financial “security.”² Even after significant improvements over the last few decades and renewed progress thanks to government programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, many households still lack financial stability. Census Bureau data show that, in October 2021, nearly one in

ten adults reported that their household did not have enough to eat, while one in seven reported that they were behind on their rent.³ The FSA focused on the South and Southwest because they had been left behind economically. Today, the nation still has many places—rural, suburban, and urban alike—that do not have the same access to opportunity and growth as other parts of the country.

These economic problems are intertwined with a host of challenges facing American democracy. Since the nation's founding, the American economy has been strongly shaped by government policies, though the degree to which the government should shape the market is a matter of ongoing debate. Over the last half-century, the nation's economic arrangements produced overall growth, which benefited many people. However, many of those who did not benefit from this growth—and even many who did—feel left out of institutions they believe do not look after their interests. Or their financial situation means they are unable to spare the time and resources to get involved in their government and community. As Americans become less civically engaged, their institutions become even less representative, leading more people to disengage, and so on. These challenges are not only institutional: in a period of political polarization and persistent inequality, Americans increasingly feel they have little in common with one another.⁴

At this moment, it is important once again to introduce America to Americans.

Faces of America: Getting By in Our Economy sets out to do just that. A product of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on Reimagining

Our Economy (CORE), this book is made up of images and quotes that capture life in the twenty-first-century American economy. As the FSA documentarians understood, the nation's financial well-being cannot be adequately represented in charts, graphs, and regression analyses. Vital to understanding the economy is understanding the people who make it work: their struggles, their values, their aspirations. While policymakers and journalists often track how the *economy* is doing, the aim of the CORE project is to direct a focus onto how *Americans* are doing. *Faces of America* represents the Commission's effort to redefine typical images of the economy and to ensure that the voices of everyday Americans are placed at the center of policy discussions.

The photographs and quotes that compose this book derive from two distinct Commission undertakings. Over the course of its work, the Commission identified a lack of images that truly reflect the state of the American economy. Stock images too often offer dramatized depictions of the very rich, the very poor, or the contrast between the two. Though photographers and photojournalists capture moving images of individual Americans, stories about specific economic issues (for example, a baby-formula shortage) may feature particular characters (an anxious mother holding an infant) without providing additional context about the subject's life.

To provide a more complete look at Americans' well-being, the Commission engaged four photographers to capture what it looks like to try to get by in the United States today. Specifically, the photographers were assigned to photograph Americans

Introduction

earning around the national median income (\$70,784 for a household in 2021), creating images that reflect the themes of economic security and insecurity, economic opportunity, economic distribution, and political voice (see Appendix C for the instructions the Commission provided to the photographers).⁵ These categories offer the opportunity to generate a nuanced picture of how Americans are faring in the twenty-first century: the stability of their finances, how they feel about their chances for the future, how well off they are relative to each other, and their ability to participate in the nation's democratic systems. The photographers—Caroline Gutman, Maen Hammad, Cindy Elizabeth, and Adam Perez—worked under the direction of Nina Berman (Columbia Journalism School), who provided guidance for their fieldwork and helped curate the images submitted to the Academy.

Each photographer was assigned a single location, which they visited multiple times between July and September 2022. The Commission identified four specific sites, all of which fall around the national median income but differ from each other in other ways:

Williamsport, Pennsylvania

A small city in the Northeast

Photographer: Caroline Gutman

Dearborn, Michigan

A suburb in the Midwest

Photographer: Maen Hammad

Third Ward, Houston, Texas

A neighborhood in a large city in the South

Photographer: Cindy Elizabeth

Tulare County, California

A rural area in the West

Photographer: Adam Perez

Each location has notable characteristics. Williamsport is internationally known as the home of the Little League World Series; Dearborn, a major suburb of Detroit, is the city with the largest percentage of Muslim residents in the country; Houston is the nation's fourth-largest city and its historically Black Third Ward is at the forefront of the city's changing urban landscape; and Tulare is the second-most-productive agricultural county in the United States. Given the differences in geography and community type, these four areas, though hardly representative of the entire nation, offer a useful cross section. At these sites, the photographers found images that reflect the experiences of Americans from all walks of life and from many parts of the country.

In addition to photographs, *Faces of America* features quotes from Americans collected by the Commission. Between February and September 2022, the Commission convened thirty-one listening sessions: recorded conversations with small groups of people to discuss their lives and the ways they would reimagine the American economy. Many of these conversations were with people whose perspectives are not typically central to economic policy, including service, care, and airport workers; tribal leaders; teachers; small business owners; community college students; and people experiencing homelessness and mental and physical health challenges.⁶

The sessions provided a rich view of Americans' economic experiences, expressed in their own words and in conversation with people like themselves. Session leaders asked participants to share the values that are important to them, to discuss what they thought contributes to their well-being and the well-being of their communities, and to state one thing they wanted other people—including their elected representatives—to hear. Many of the same themes showed up across very different groups: for example, how current

economic structures offer logistical and emotional barriers that prevent mobility; criticisms of the design and administration of programs created to assist the neediest Americans; and the belief that greed sits at the heart of the economy. As in the photography project, the Commission did not seek to capture a statistically representative cross sample of the country, but to ensure it heard from a diverse array of voices.

While most of the quotes are taken from the Commission's listening sessions, none of the pictures in *Faces of America* show listening session participants. Some quotes are taken from the photographers' conversations with their subjects. But unless explicitly indicated, the person in the photograph is not the person who provided the quote, even if the quote and photograph appear on opposite pages. The portions of the quotes featured in the book are transcribed almost exactly as they were said in the listening sessions, with some light editing—primarily by AI—of repeated words, filler words (“um,” “like”), and pauses. Ellipses indicate where a quote has been shortened for the purposes of brevity. Some pages offer a QR code that links to an audio recording of the designated quote. Additionally, listening session participants are identified using their first name, how they said they spend their time (their job, for example), and their location. Some participants also shared their race, gender, immigration status, tribal affiliation, or other details when they introduced themselves. In most cases, these details are not included. The inclusion of certain details about one speaker should not be used to interpret details about other speakers (for instance, only some speakers who are immigrants are explicitly identified as such).

Faces of America is divided into three sections that correspond to the values that inform the Commission's work. The first section, Opportunity and Mobility, features the ways Americans are building better lives for

themselves: through their work, through training and education, and by starting businesses. Section two, Security, highlights the ways Americans are meeting their basic needs, as well as their efforts to achieve stability, to provide for their families, to carve out time that is their own, and to craft a foothold in communities undergoing dramatic changes. The final section, Democracy, is concerned with the extent to which Americans feel their voice matters and how much power they have to improve their local government and their nation.

Taken together, the photographs and images that make up *Faces of America* aim to encapsulate the feeling of economic life in the United States today. The people included in these pages are often overlooked when policymakers, journalists, and others talk about the economy. And yet the economy should exist to serve the people featured in this book. By introducing these Americans to America, the Commission hopes to offer a new portrait of how Americans are doing and how the nation's economy and democracy might be reimagined.

Endnotes

1. The photography project began in 1935 under the Resettlement Administration, which was reconstituted into the FSA two years later. See Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 23.
2. David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 245, 365.
3. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Tracking the COVID-19 Economy's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships," <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-economys-effects-on-food-housing-and>.

Outside Frazier's Barber College in Houston, Texas. A community member reported that the College was recently closed. All he knew was that one day "there was a 24-hour eviction notice on the door."



4. American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020), <https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report>.
5. Jessica Semega and Melissa Kollar, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income in the United States: 2021* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-276.pdf>.

6. The Commission held listening sessions both in person and virtually. To recruit participants, Commission members drew on personal and professional networks. In addition, the Academy hired four University of Wisconsin students to conduct listening sessions, and staff drew on the Academy's network to ensure that the participant list included diversity along lines of geography, race, ethnicity, age, political beliefs, and occupation. For most listening sessions, the Commission offered participants gift cards as compensation for their time.

I. OPPORTUNITY AND MOBILITY

Work

“The essential workers . . . the people who work at the grocery stores, fast-food restaurants, the gas stations. People who work at [utility companies], that keep the electric on, the water on, those type of people. The people who get the least, the little people. We’re the ones that keep the world moving.”

– Whitney, Cosmetologist and Waitress, Kentucky



Super Burger in Porterville, California.





“I work hard. . . . My family life important for me. I sleep only four hour. That is important. I have no community life . . . I work two job. I change that life matter for me. I’m here for my kids. Tomorrow I be, maybe one day, grandma. Maybe I work one job like everyone. Sleep eight hour. That’s my dream.”

– Meseret, Airport Worker, Washington, D.C.



Farm worker in Tulare County,
California, after an eight-hour shift.



“Getting food on a table is one thing,
but feeding your soul and stuff like that
is very important, right?”

— Nia, College Professor,
Pacific Islander, Immigrant, Utah

Bakers in Tulare County, California.



“It seems like this idea about fulfillment through work is something that is being sold, and very intentionally. . . . Before the 1980s, that wasn’t the mindset. You weren’t going to work to get fulfilled. There wasn’t this language around your work being your family.”

— Austin, Community Organizer, Tennessee

Aircraft maintenance technician towing a medical evacuation helicopter in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.





A volunteer at the Bicycle Recycle, a bike shop in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



Amazon warehouse worker who packs over 2,000 products a day outside the warehouse after a shift in Visalia, California.

Training

“I feel like there’s a lot of children . . . and they see a higher institution of learning here but they’re not getting that support that they need from kindergarten to twelfth grade. We need more people to care about pouring into the next generation of leaders.”

– Kynnedi, College Student, Texas

Woman in Tulare County, California,
who recently began an apprenticeship
to train as a web developer.







Left and right: Students at Pennsylvania College of Technology inspect airplane engines as part of their degree in aviation maintenance technology, Montoursville, Pennsylvania.

Small Business

“Our area is full of small businesses because of our community, and we want to go eat at that restaurant and that mom and pop shop and boutiques and stuff, just supporting each other.”

— Nada, Teacher, Texas

Tea shop in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



“Before the pandemic, I could see a tremendous difference in the suppliers, the companies that I buy from, in that the price of shipping has just gone out. It is just shocking what it costs to get something shipped, and that is a major impact because what I’ve got to do then is turn around and raise the price up on that product before I put it out to sell to my customers. And economically, what is killing my business along with a lot of other people is online sales, is literally killing my business.”

– Mildred, Small Business Owner, Kentucky

Shipping fulfillment center
in Visalia, California.



Hoyer's PHOTO SUPPLY

An empty storefront formerly occupied by Hoyer's Photo Supply in downtown Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



Amazon fulfillment center
in Visalia, California .

A baker in Tulare County, California, works in his nephew's bakery after his own burnt down. He works an average of 16 hours a day, seven days a week.





A barber in Dearborn, Michigan. His salary allows him to support his family in Lebanon.

“To be able to be in a neighborhood where I can have a business and not have to say, ‘Oh I wish there was a bakery or I wish there was a grocery store in this neighborhood.’ I not only get to be in this neighborhood as a business, a Black-owned business, but as a successful business, a business that has been able to thrive during the pandemic. I was able to keep my doors open and my bills paid. I was able to survive in the neighborhood. . . .

So that’s the win. The win is being an example. There are kids who were in elementary school that I’ve seen grow up and they know that somebody that looks like them can own a business because they know me. And I’m not somebody above them. They come in and they’re like my nephew or my niece or my cousin. They feel a sense of community when they come in.”

— Ella, Owner of Crumbville, TX Bakery, Houston, Texas (pictured, far right)

Crumbville, TX Bakery
in Houston, Texas.



Vegan
Treats

Now leaving
CRUMBVILLE, TX
We hope you follow
the crumbz back to us!
@dubalicious treats

II. SECURITY



“We really live in a world of abundance, but the abundance is misdistributed. And so yes, on the ground level, in our communities, there’s individual strategies that we could employ to do better, but on a macro level, we really have to talk about systemic change.”

— Barbara, Historian and Activist, Illinois

A prolonged drought and the detection of hexavalent chromium in the water supply have forced the residents of Tooleville, California, to rely on bottled water since 2014. The nearby town of Exeter has blocked proposals to share its water supply with Tooleville.



“During the first six months of the pandemic, my family relied a lot on the free food that the local schools would give students for lunch and then eventually for breakfast, too. And that was really nice because then my family didn’t have to buy stuff. But at the same time, it’s every day you get the same thing. And it’s one of two options. You don’t get to choose. And while you get food which you need to live, how much say did you have in that versus someone whose family had money and they could just go to the grocery store and buy something?”

– Juliet, College Student, Hmong American, Wisconsin





“Having a roof over your head and food in your stomach should be a human right.”

– Wanda, Community Activist, Massachusetts

Woman receiving food at the Central Valley Empowerment Alliance, a nonprofit in Poplar, California.



“How much amazing stuff are we missing from all the people who live in this country who could do anything if they weren’t just struggling to stay alive all the time? It’s utterly ridiculous. It’s a travesty. If they were put in a place where they weren’t pulling themselves up by their bootstraps all the time, what could they actually do for humanity? I think the potential is just unimaginable.”

— Alex, Administrative Assistant and Graduate Student, Montana

Cook at the Sojourner Truth Ministries
food pantry in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



“We’re the only leading economy that does not have universal health care and that just is such an incredible strain on its people.”

— Jess, First-Generation College Student, Wisconsin

Left: an artist in his studio in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Right: A patient receives an annual check-up at the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) Community Health and Research Center in Dearborn, Michigan.

FAMILY DOLLAR



“My mom’s disabled. My stepdad’s working a manufacturing job trying to take care of my mom’s medical bills [and] student loans. And on top of that, they live in the middle of nowhere. . . . A lot of your groceries are coming from, ‘Oh, here’s a magical Dollar General.’ Like [here’s] all of the sugar-filled food that’s going to contribute to your declining health.”

— Liv, Special Education Teacher, Tennessee



Gray ST
2400 2300

ECONOMIC CORRIDOR
Emancipation AVE
2000 2100

BIKE
SIGNAL

POINT EAST
close to everything.
close to each other. *live point east*
713-425-3902

“The rental prices are doubling within the past six months. A lot of people are getting kicked out of their homes and resigning jobs and leaving [town] altogether because of the exorbitant costs of housing along with all the other costs of food going up, gas prices going up.”

— Carmen, Yoga Instructor, Montana

New homes being constructed
in Houston's Third Ward.



“I don’t have money to live in the types of neighborhoods in which I would like to live. Although I moved out of [Houston’s] Third Ward from that apartment that was like an asphalt jungle, and now I live in a place that has more greenery and I can walk my dog, there’s no neighborhood surrounding. So I can go walk around the parking lot, but I can’t walk around my neighborhood. There are no sidewalks around the outside of my complex. And my friends who can afford to buy houses and live in neighborhoods—of course they have all that. I’m not sure what the implications of that healthwise or mentally are, but I’m sure some are there. I’m sure they gain certain benefits by having a sidewalk. Another thing is at some point I’m not going to be able to afford my apartment because it goes up every year while my salary hasn’t.”

— J’Qualin, Research Coordinator, Texas (pictured)

Stability

99¢
only
STORES

Private Property
NO

99¢
only
STORES

Please return
shopping
carts here
Thank you

99¢
only
STORES

99¢
only
STORES



“I wouldn’t say I want to be rich. I don’t want to be poor either. I just want to be okay. I don’t want to chase the mansion on the hill, but I just want to live freely. To not have to worry about something tearing up or some family member getting in trouble . . . I just want to be less stressed.”

— Zach, in Active Substance Abuse Recovery, Kentucky



“I guess financial well-being is for me is basically being able to take care of my everyday expenses and also having emergency savings because the way the economy is going right now, you don’t know where it’s going to be tomorrow, next week. . . . So it’s basically about being financially stable. It’s not about being rich, but it’s about being able to take care of your everyday needs without stressing.”

– Marsha, Human Resources Generalist, Indiana



Fixing a broken AC condenser on a used car in Dearborn, Michigan.

“Even when you do think you’re doing right, you go get a job, and you’re trying to take care of your bills and everything. And then it’s always something that jumps in the way. . . . It’s just hard. I just feel like they don’t give you a chance out here.”

— Kim, Mother, Kentucky

“You can economize, but you really can’t control what happens to you if there’s a medical expense. So that uncertainty really affects your well-being, it affects what you do, it affects how you behave.”

— Shambu, Airport Worker and Tutor, Virginia

“I’m fascinated with the time we’re in right now. I feel extremely fortunate to just be employed and raising a family. And I know we’re one paycheck away from a completely different situation.”

— Melvin, Nonprofit Employee, Illinois

“What contributes most to the economic well-being of people in the United States, I would say it’s fair wages. Or even just livable wages. When we work minimum wage jobs, you’re living at the minimum wage. You’re living by necessity. Paycheck to paycheck.”

– Imaltzen, Community Organizer, Illinois

“I can work, struggle and do what I got to do every day, and as soon as I’ve done a whole lot and I get a little comfortable, there comes something else, boom, knock me right back down to where I was.”

– Nicole, Line Cook, Kentucky

“I like the feeling of not living on the edge of disaster, [but] I’m still one doctor’s visit away from not being there, and pretty much most people I know are.”

– Stephanie, Manufacturing Facility Worker, Tennessee



Sacred
fig 
vintage

“Most Americans have been told to be vigilant in saving, to consider retirement, to not rack up too much debt. . . . On the flip side, a lot of people fail to realize that a large portion of Americans aren’t able to even think about the future because they don’t even have enough to live tomorrow or the next week.

I think it’s common for those that have done well with investments to think, ‘Well, millennials or the younger generation just needs to learn how to budget better or make wiser choices with their money.’ I think those things just fall quite short of exactly the direness of the wages, financial circumstances in today’s economy.”

— Alex, College Student and Restaurant Worker, New Jersey

Woman in Dearborn, Michigan,
with her vintage thrifting business.



“The fastest way to secure economic stability in this country is through home ownership. So [Black Americans] could fight for this country, go to World War II like my family members did, get a GI Bill and you can go to school with it, but because of redlining, which was coupled with FHA loans, we couldn’t buy homes in communities that were appreciating. And so that was very systemic, very subtle, but that was designed to give a group of people a real head start. We have to acknowledge that.”

— Alex, Pastor and African American Community Leader, Wisconsin



“The Bottoms,” a historically poor area in the Third Ward in Houston, Texas.



“When you have a home,
you have a sense of stability.”

— Whitney, Cosmetologist and Waitress, Kentucky

Woman outside her home in the West End neighborhood of Dearborn, Michigan. In June 2021, catastrophic flooding covered her basement in three inches of sewage water, requiring thousands of dollars in repairs.



“What contributes to economic well-being? I would say it’s stability. I mean, when we look at the wealthiest class in American society, it’s not that they have some intrinsic component to who they are that allows them to succeed. It’s the fact that they can fail and still continue to survive and try other initiatives.”

— Dave, Leader of a Native American Community Development Organization, New Mexico



Tea shop in downtown Williamsport, Pennsylvania. During the height of the pandemic, the shop shifted focus to its delivery business, but in-store business still has not returned to pre-2020 levels, and inflation has eaten away at the shop’s margins.

Family



“I think that there was an acknowledgement at least when my parents and grandparents came about, there were supports and solidarity for people that were at risk. Or there were protections that were put in place, either through the workplace, through labor protections, either through short-term benefits for families and actual welfare. Retirement and public pensions that would guarantee someone’s economic well-being for years to come.

And what I think and others have documented is that all of those have eroded that have placed just an enormous amount of risk on the current generation and risks on people that are probably low income, probably communities of color.”

— Andrew, Public Policy Advocate, Arizona

Top (both) and bottom left: Resident of the Third Ward in Houston, Texas, with the “ancestral altar” in his home.

Bottom right: S.H.A.P.E. Community Center, Houston, Texas.



“There comes a time, maybe [when you’re in your] early 20s, college, where you realize even to get to the point where your parents were or to emulate the life that you had for your kids, you’re going to have to really focus. It’s not a guarantee. That is a big turning point in a lot of younger people’s lives that nothing is really guaranteed.”

– Ben, Consultant, Illinois



“Every day you got to go up out there, you got all the aches and pains and bodies in the world but you know you got to keep a roof over your head, your kids got to have food, clothes, school, all that. And that’s my focus in my mind, it doesn’t matter how I feel, I got to make sure they [are] okay. That’s how I feel with the financial needs, it’s all about my children.”

– Nicole, Line Cook, Kentucky



TRUE VINE
2408 HOLMAN ST.

2408



“We tell these poor kids, ‘If you just pick yourself up by the bootstraps, you can make that much money someday too.’ But what if I don’t have boots? If I don’t have any shoes on my feet, what straps am I going to be pull them up by?”

— Alex, Librarian, Tennessee



“I think just to be able to obtain a home that you actually own and life insurance to leave for my babies. [Making] sure they don’t have to worry about [these things] in the way that I did. . . . For me, that’s the dream. Having your own home. A car that’s paid off. Something to leave the babies.”

— Tasha, Mother and Grandmother, Kentucky

Time



“Just the fact that you have to work multiple long hours means that your family’s important to you. So you support the family, but you don’t actually get to spend time with them, right? . . . They have the various events [in] their lives. And you don’t notice it going by. And suddenly you realize they’re almost graduating high school and you realize there are a lot of things you missed and you can’t get that back.”

— Shambu, Airport Worker and Tutor, Virginia





“My brain is working 24 hours a day.”

– Nicole, Works in Marketing and
Holds Multiple Side Jobs,
California (pictured)



“To me, a much bigger picture is this question of time and having the ability to spend our time, to have the freedom to be able to spend our time, as we want. And right now, we don’t live in a society where that’s possible. Most folks are having to work 45, 50, 60 hours a week just to put food on the table, and that’s not in any way, shape, or form, free.”

— Austin, Community Organizer, Tennessee

Top: Houston, Texas (left).
Williamsport, Pennsylvania (right).

Bottom: Dearborn, Michigan (left).
Williamsport, Pennsylvania (right).



“There’s no jobs within our community so we have to travel. We have to spend our time. We have to spend money on whether it be gas, on bus cards getting to those jobs and then coming back home and barely even making livable wage. I feel like that’s a big part of economic well-being is having those basic life necessities [and] maybe even having assets on top of that. It’s creating your wealth and having your basic life necessities met.”

– David, Program Administrator, Illinois

Changing Communities



BLDG. 8
FLOOR 5
FLOOR LOAD
160 lb. per sq. ft.
FIRE CODE
6-4-2

“Twenty years ago, you didn’t have to work two jobs to get by because we still had [factory jobs]. There’s no factories or anything around here [anymore].

I grew up and we had the coal booming. I built power plants for sixteen years in the union. That’s a thing in the past.

I don’t want to work out of town eight months a year. I like being with my son. . . . There used to be steel mills. We used to do all this stuff. And there is zero for anybody, that if you don’t have a college education, good luck. And people don’t have the opportunities to get those educations.”

— George, Restaurant Worker, Kentucky



An unfinished floor of the Pajama Factory in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Once a rubber factory, later converted into a pajama factory, the facility is currently being developed into a mixed-use space.



An industrial train in the South End neighborhood of Dearborn, Michigan. The area has some of the highest rates of pollution in Michigan.

A section of the Pajama Factory
in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.





“Homes are becoming more expensive in [Houston’s] Third Ward because more people are wanting to stay in the city. Third Ward’s only so big and you can’t keep building in Third Ward. The economy is stressful in that, you have so many real estate companies and investors coming in buying everything and throwing out money, it’s hard to keep up with that . . .”

— Timothy, Community Organizer, Texas



“A lot of [Black people in Houston] owned land [that] was taken away from us and then [we’re] trying to go back in and regain that land. A lot of us don’t know how to do that. Or if we’ve had land that was passed down to us, how do we hold on to it not understanding the value of it? And sometimes it’s not just necessarily the immediate monetary value. This land may be worth today \$50,000, but just what can this land do for me? How can this land actually help me and my family build generational wealth?”

— Dayna, Realtor, Texas

A Houston native who works in workforce development poses outside new homes under construction across the street from where she grew up in the Third Ward. “These houses looked nothing like this when we lived here.”

UNION
STATE BANK
GENERAL BANKING
3½% On Savings Deposits 4% On Time Deposits ...

AVAILABLE
RE/MAX
COMMERCIAL
YUSEF BEYDOUN
313-525-1101

AGENCY
METROPOLITAN
MORTGAGE LOANS

For Lease

MANSON



“What I can’t do is go somewhere else and have the impact that I can have in this community having lived here all my life, developed all the relationships that I have developed. People are like, ‘Well go somewhere else.’ Yeah. But then you have to start not just all over economically, but you have no community net. You never can be as impactful going to a new place where you’ve never been before. Who wants to do that? I don’t think that’s a thing people want to do generally.”

— Alex, Administrative Assistant and Graduate Student, Montana



Top: Williamsport, Pennsylvania (left).
Houston, Texas (right).

Bottom: Dearborn, Michigan (left).
Tulare County, California (right).

III. DEMOCRACY

“There’s a lot of poor in this area and there are some areas where there is no support. What can we do? We don’t have advocates to help us or stand up for us. And if we do, we can’t find them. We can’t get in touch with them because we don’t have phones. And when you do finally get back in touch with them, they can’t follow through. . . . We’re so far down on the economic chain that we don’t have nothing. It seems like our voices don’t matter.”

— Reuben, Former Welder, Texas (pictured)



3RD
WORLD

“We can make things happen
if we are just given the resources
and education to do it.”

– Liv, Special Education Teacher, Tennessee

Top: Dearborn, Michigan (both).

Bottom: Houston, Texas (left).
Dearborn, Michigan (right).



“In my democracy, I’d like to see us get rid of Republicans, Democrats. Just people. Just stand up there, tell me what you can do. If you can do it, I don’t have to care what you are. I think we’ll start seeing some differences. I mean you can’t keep living with the same old, same old, with the same old belief. I tell people, ‘I’m nobody. I vote for who I just think is going do the job. If you don’t do it, the next time you’re not getting my vote.’”

— Dora, Retired Nurse, Kentucky

United Farm Worker marches to
Sacramento. Terra Bella, California.



“I also have to work . . . two jobs. . . . I think the one value important to me . . . is the family and also community. To be able to raise your kids, not to have a better life not just in terms of their financial status, but also being to contribute to the community, to make it a better place.”

— Shambu, Airport Worker and Tutor, Virginia

High school student working on a mural in Dearborn, Michigan, as part of a local initiative to bring together young residents from different parts of the city.



“I really value helping others in need and giving other people who haven’t had the opportunities that I’ve had an equal footing in life.”

— Izzy, College Student, Wisconsin

Undergraduate and graduate students from Wayne State University and the University of Michigan serving as fellows in Dearborn’s new Department of Public Health.



DPH
FELLOWS

DEPARTMENT
OF
PUBLIC
HEALTH

“When I think about economic wealth, I think about the wealth of our lifestyle, the wealth of how we live and our network of families across our communities that never let anyone go hungry or cold despite having a housing crisis, an economic crisis, no water and sewer.”

— Megan, Tribal Services Leader, Alaska

Community development specialists recording water pressure in Tooleville, California.



Volunteers at Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, which distributes an average of 5.5 million tons of food every month.





An undergraduate at Wayne State University canvassing in Dearborn, Michigan. She works two jobs to support her studies, but feels it is important to also be politically engaged.

“I think [a value] for me is the power of collective action, and the need for people’s representation, both in their workplaces and in their communities, with their local governments and the power that comes with folks working together, having a vision together.”

– Austin, Community Organizer, Tennessee

United Farm Workers
march to Sacramento.
Terra Bella, California.





Tulare County, California.



Dearborn, Michigan; the orange flag bears an honorific for Abbas ibn Ali, a son of the first imam of the Shia tradition.

Appendix A: Index of Photographs

Cover: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

vi (top left): Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

vi (top right): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

vi (bottom left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

vi (bottom right): Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

3: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

I. OPPORTUNITY AND MOBILITY

Work

9: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

11: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

13: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

15: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

17: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

18: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

19: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

Training

23: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

24: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

25: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

Small Business

29: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

31: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

32: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

33: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

34: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

35: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

37: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

II. SECURITY

40: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

42: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

44: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

46: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

48 (Left): Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

48 (Right): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

50: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

52: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

54: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

Stability

58: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

60: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

64: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

66: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

68: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

70: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

Family

74 (top left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

74 (top right): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

74 (bottom left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

74 (bottom right): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

76: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

78: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

80: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

82: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

Time

86: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

88: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

90 (top left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

90 (top right): Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

90 (bottom left): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

90 (bottom right): Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

92: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

Changing Communities

96: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

98: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

99: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

100 (top left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

100 (top right): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

100 (bottom left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

100 (bottom right): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

102: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

104: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

106 (top left): Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

106 (top right): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

106 (bottom left): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

106 (bottom right): Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

III. DEMOCRACY

111: Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

113 (top left): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

113 (top right): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

113 (bottom left): Houston, Texas, photograph by Cindy Elizabeth

113 (bottom right): Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

115: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

117: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

119: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

121: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

122: Williamsport, Pennsylvania, photograph by Caroline Gutman

123: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

125: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

126: Tulare County, California, photograph by Adam Perez

127: Dearborn, Michigan, photograph by Maen Hammad

Appendix B: Index of Listening Sessions

Session 1: February 10, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota,
New Mexico, South Dakota, and Virginia

Sessions 2-3: February 15 and 18, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Illinois

Session 4: February 23, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in California and Utah

Session 5: February 24, 2022 (in-person)
All participants in Tennessee

Session 6: March 4, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Session 7: April 25, 2022 (in-person)
All participants in Massachusetts

Session 8: June 22, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Session 9: June 23, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in California, Idaho, Montana,
and New Mexico

Session 10: July 1, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Illinois

Session 11: July 13, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in North Carolina and Virginia

Session 12: July 18, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Session 13: July 18, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in Illinois and Wisconsin

Session 14: July 26, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Arizona

Sessions 15-16: July 27, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Sessions 17-18: August 4 and 6, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Session 19: August 16, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in New Jersey

Session 20: August 17, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Wisconsin

Session 21: August 25, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Illinois

Sessions 22-24: September 8 and 9, 2022 (in-person)
All participants in Montana

Session 25-28: September 14 and 15, 2022 (in-person)
All participants in Kentucky

Session 29: September 16, 2022 (virtual)
Participants in Colorado and Virginia

Session 30: September 23, 2022 (virtual)
All participants in Indiana

Session 31: September 24, 2022 (in-person)
All participants in Texas

Appendix C: Instructions Provided to Photographers

Background

The Commission on Reimagining Our Economy (CORE) aims to rethink the policies and the values that shape the American political economy. A key aspect of that work is reimagining how the economy is typically represented. While policymakers and journalists often track how the *economy* is doing, the Commission seeks to direct a focus onto how *Americans* are doing, elevating the human stakes of our economic and political systems. The Commission will measure, observe, and understand the American political economy in new ways.

Project Summary

To complement the Commission's collection of everyday Americans' economic experiences through listening sessions and its work to create the CORE score, a new measurement of economic well-being, the Commission has asked photojournalists to capture American economic life in four different kinds of communities across the United States.

The photojournalists will be tasked with documenting the lived experiences of moderate-income Americans of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, genders, political ideologies, and religious beliefs. While the Commission understands that photographers may not always be able to capture all forms of diversity in the communities to which they are assigned, it does ask that photojournalists do their best to photograph the kinds of variation that exist in each community.

The Commission is not seeking photographs of the extremes of wealth and poverty, but rather images of the everyday lives of Americans at or just below the area median income. The goal is not to capture a typical moderate-income person, but to uncover a range of experiences of people with incomes at this level. The Commission hopes that this project will help elevate and amplify the kinds of challenges, joys, and tasks of daily living that many Americans experience but that often go unnoticed or overlooked, especially by those who make economic policy.

Photographers are asked to capture images that evoke each of the following four categories: economic security, economic opportunity, economic distribution, and political efficacy. Taken together, these categories can offer a more nuanced picture of how Americans are faring in the twenty-first century—the stability of their finances, their chances for the future, how well off they are relative to each other, and their ability to influence and participate in the nation's democratic systems. In addition to images that evoke these four categories, photographers should capture the characteristics of the community and geographic area to which they have been assigned.

Details

Economic Security: The ability of households to consistently meet their needs sustainably and with dignity.

People experiencing economic security likely have:

- Stable income at a living wage; safe, well-maintained housing; access to healthcare, food, and education; affordable and reliable transportation; sufficient savings to weather a sudden emergency; sufficient private savings or pension for retirement; access to credit and a low debt-to-income ratio.

In contrast, people experiencing economic insecurity likely have:

- Irregular or nonexistent income, income that is below a living wage, or multiple jobs; a high housing cost burden or unstable, poorly maintained, or nonexistent housing; a lack of consistent access to food, healthcare, and transportation; a lack of adequate savings for both emergencies and long-term expenses; a lack of access to credit; and a high debt-to-income ratio.

Economic Opportunity: A realistic possibility, open to all Americans, of creating a life of meaningful work and freedom from economic need.

People with access to economic opportunity are likely to have:

- Access to a quality education; a well-paying job; the ability to start a business, access to technology, information, and professional networks; opportunities to achieve upward mobility; and access to community health and wellness services.

Appendix C: Instructions Provided to Photographers

In contrast, people without access to economic opportunity may experience:

- Scarcity of educational and employment opportunities; limited access to health and wellness services; lack of access to technology, information, and professional networks; and a low likelihood of achieving upward mobility relative to their parents.

Economic Distribution: The way in which wealth, income, and other assets and liabilities are distributed within a population.

A relatively even economic distribution might be characterized by:

- Communities where the income and wealth gaps between the wealthiest and poorest members are relatively small; there is a robust and stable middle class supported by a healthy and diverse local economy; and community members of all income and wealth levels have access to and share the same kinds of resources (parks, libraries, schools, grocery stores, transit, etc.).

In contrast, a relatively uneven economic distribution might be characterized by:

- Communities where the income and wealth gap between the wealthiest and poorest members is high and there is not a large middle class or a diversified, stable economy. These communities might lack shared resources and assets that are accessible to all members. Assets and resources may be privatized or concentrated in more affluent areas due to economic segregation. Liabilities, such as environmental hazards, may be similarly concentrated in poorer areas.

Political Efficacy: Americans' trust in government, ability to participate in democracy (through voting, civic engagement, etc.), and belief that their voice has the power to influence elected officials and affect public policy.

Examples of political efficacy include, but are not limited to:

- High voter turnout; strong involvement in political campaigns; high attendance at local public meetings and school board meetings; high rates of volunteerism; high levels of peaceful participation in political protest; high levels of trust in government institutions and in people's own ability to change public policy.

In contrast, examples of low political efficacy may include:

- Barriers to voting and other forms of political participation; low voter turnout; low trust in government institutions; disengagement in local political or civic life; low confidence in elected officials' ability to represent their interests; low confidence in their own ability to effect change within the existing political system

About the Commission on Reimagining Our Economy

Economic uncertainty is a disruptive force in American life. Too many families are unable to achieve the life they want despite their best efforts, too many communities have not benefited fully from national economic growth, and too many Americans believe the economy does not work for people like them. In a 2021 Pew Research Center survey, 66 percent felt that the nation's economy needs major reforms, while just 6 percent felt it should remain unchanged. Coupled with the current challenges facing American democracy, these trends contribute to the growing distrust of political and economic institutions. While it often seems that the nation cannot agree on much, there is widespread agreement that changes are needed to bolster opportunity and to allow more Americans to share in the nation's prosperity.

The specific policies needed to reform the economy, and the values that should inform those policies, are

subject to intense disagreement. With this challenge in mind, the Academy launched the Commission on Reimagining Our Economy (CORE) in October 2021. The goal of the Commission is to rethink the principles, metrics, narratives, and policies that shape the nation's political economy. While policymakers and journalists often track how the *economy* is doing, the Commission seeks to direct a focus onto how *Americans* are doing, elevating the human stakes of our economic and political systems.

The interdisciplinary and cross-partisan Commission comprises scholars, journalists, artists, and leaders from the faith, labor, business, and philanthropic communities. A premise of the Commission's work is that questions of political economy are inextricable from conversations about democracy. Individual well-being is not simply a matter of dollars and cents. Other factors need to be accounted for, particularly the degree to which people feel

that their voice is valued. The widespread belief that the economy does not give everyone a fair chance threatens the nation's social fabric and its constitutional democracy.

To that end, the CORE project will build on *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*. That report acknowledges that economic conditions influence public faith in government, political participation, and civic engagement. While *Our Common Purpose* does not offer recommendations specifically targeted at economic issues, the Commission on Reimagining Our Economy will face these issues head on.

Through listening sessions, data collection, and a commitment to crosspartisan work, the Commission will develop bold, achievable recommendations that rethink the values that should drive the economy and advance practices and policies that would enable opportunity, mobility, and security for all.

COMMISSION CHAIRS



Katherine J. Cramer
University of Wisconsin-Madison



Ann M. Fudge
Young & Rubicam Brands



Nicholas B. Lemann
Columbia Journalism School

About the Commission on Reimagining Our Economy

COMMISSION MEMBERS

K. Daron Acemoglu

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Elizabeth S. Anderson

University of Michigan

Cornell William Brooks

Harvard Kennedy School

Whitney Kimball Coe

Center for Rural Strategies

Jane Delgado

National Alliance for Hispanic Health

James M. Fallows

Our Towns Civic Foundation

Helene D. Gayle

Spelman College

Jacob S. Hacker

Yale University

Tom Hanks

Actor and Filmmaker

Mary Kay Henry

Service Employees International Union

Kelly Lytle Hernández

University of California, Los Angeles

Megan Minoka Hill

Ash Center, Harvard Kennedy School

Reid G. Hoffman

Greylock Partners

Serene Jones

Union Theological Seminary

Julius Krein

American Affairs

Goodwin H. Liu

Supreme Court of California

Maya MacGuineas

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget

James M. Manyika

Google-Alphabet

Katherine S. Newman

University of California

Viet Thanh Nguyen

University of Southern California

Sarah Ruger

Stand Together

Ruth Simmons

Prairie View A&M University

Matthew J. Slaughter

Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth

Anna Deavere Smith

New York University Tisch School of the Arts

Joseph E. Stiglitz

Columbia University

Michael R. Strain

American Enterprise Institute

Mark Neil Trahan

Indian Country Today

Kenneth L. Wallach

Central National Gottesman, Inc.

FUNDERS OF THE COMMISSION ON REIMAGINING OUR ECONOMY

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The C&P Battenwieser Foundation

Omidyar Network

David M. Rubenstein

Patti Saris

ACADEMY STAFF WHO HELPED PREPARE *FACES OF AMERICA*

Phyllis S. Bendell

Director of Publications,
Managing Editor of *Dædalus*

Key Bird

Assistant Editor

Jonathan D. Cohen

Joan and Irwin Jacobs Senior Program Officer for
American Institutions, Society, and the Public Good

Kelsey Ensign

Louis W. Cabot Fellow

Alison Franklin

Chief Communications Officer

Eduardo Gonzalez

Program Officer for Civil Justice

Darshan Goux

Program Director for American Institutions, Society,
and the Public Good

Michele Lavoie

Director of Archives

Victor Lopez

Program Associate for American Institutions, Society,
and the Public Good

Tania Munz

Chief Program Officer

Scott Raymond

Creative Director

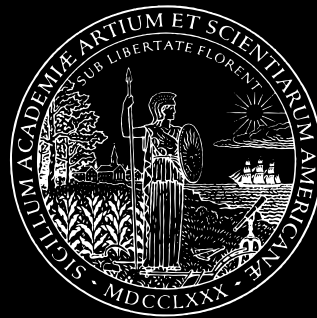
Peter Walton

Associate Editor

Elizabeth Youngling

Carl & Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Fellow

Special thanks to: Nina Berman, Cindy Elizabeth,
Caroline Gutman, Maen Hammad, Adam Perez, and
all our listening session participants and photograph
subjects.



AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

 @americanacad

www.amacad.org