

America Used to Grow Together; Now We're Growing Apart

5 facts about the hollowing out of the middle class

Distinguished Professor Joan C. Williams

University of California, Hastings, williams@uchastings.edu

1. **The disappearing American dream.** Virtually all Americans used to do better than their parents. No more. Since 1970, the percentage of middle-class Americans who earn more than their parents has fallen 45%—from over 90% to under 50%. Only about 40% of men born in the 1980s will out-earn their fathers ([Equality of Opportunity](#)).
2. **Economic anxiety is widespread.** Half of Americans say that their family's income has fallen behind the cost of living ([Pew](#)). 76% think automation will worsen inequality ([Pew](#)).
3. **Why are wages so low?** In the decades after World War II, wages used to rise when productivity did. If that trend had continued, wages would be *double* what they are today ([EPI](#)).
4. **Who *has* gotten a raise?** Since 1979, high-earners saw a 41% increase, while middle-class wages increased only 6% ([EPI](#)).
5. **Growth is uneven, with large swaths of the country left behind.** In 2016, Hillary Clinton won fewer than 500 counties—but they generate two-thirds of America's GDP. Donald Trump won over 2,600 counties—but they generate only one-third ([Brookings](#)).

To access links and distribute this document, please visit:
www.joancwilliams.com/hollowingout