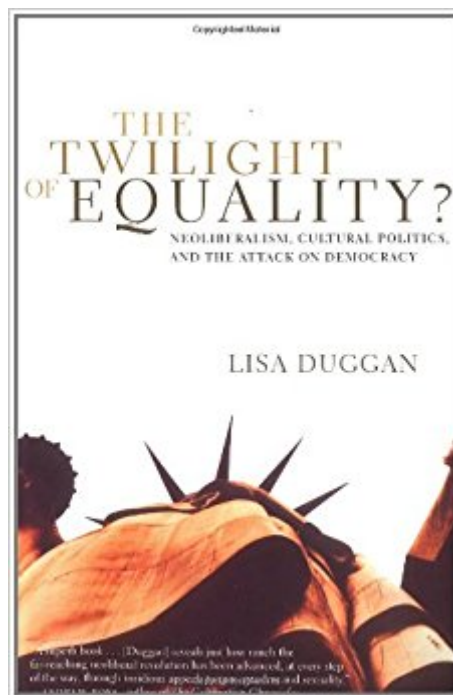




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The Twilight Of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, And The Attack On Democracy



Synopsis

By now, we've all heard about the shocking redistribution of wealth that's occurred during the last thirty years, and particularly during the last decade. But economic changes like this don't occur in a vacuum; they're always linked to politics. *The Twilight of Equality?* searches out these links through an analysis of the politics of the 1990s, the decade when neoliberalism-free market economics-became gospel. After a brilliant historical examination of how racial and gender inequities were woven into the very theoretical underpinnings of the neoliberal model of the state, Duggan shows how these inequities play out today. In a series of political case studies, Duggan reveals how neoliberal goals have been pursued, demonstrating that progressive arguments that separate identity politics and economic policy, cultural politics and affairs of state, can only fail. Ultimately, *The Twilight of Equality?* not only reveals how the highly successful rhetorical maneuvers of neoliberalism have functioned but, more importantly, it shows a way to revitalize and unify progressive politics in the U.S. today.

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Customer Reviews

Sometime during the 1990s, conservative Republicans adopted the rhetoric of multiculturalism, liberal Democrats announced the end of welfare and thus, neoliberalism was born. Duggan, a professor of American studies and history at New York University, offers a thoughtful study of how ongoing, bipartisan sponsorship of free market economics has eclipsed social democracy and culture over the past 20 years. But neoliberalism's most insidious characteristic, argues Duggan

(Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity), is its wolf-in-sheep's-clothing claim of multicultural neutrality, purporting to isolate the "natural" processes of capitalism from sticky issues of class, race and identity. President Clinton, for instance, publicly supported antiracist, inclusionary policy while simultaneously pushing through NAFTA-legislation that promoted, according to Duggan, the inherently racist, classist structures of global capitalism. In a provocative case study, the author examines the way conservative Republicans clamped down on a women's studies conference at SUNY New Paltz, threatening academic freedom with a battle cry for family values. Duggan sees this incident as part of a larger neoliberal project to erode and marginalize "downwardly distributive" social movements like feminism and civil rights that threaten the current social order. The result is a dangerous schism of leftist concerns: gay activists currently embrace a more mainstream direction instead of trying to disrupt the status quo, while NARAL focuses exclusively on abortion rights, ignoring the larger context of social, political, economic and cultural inequality. Duggan's well-reasoned argument is that true progressive change must occur not in parts but as a unified whole. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A superb book . . . [Duggan] reveals just how much the far-reaching neoliberal revolution has been advanced, at every step of the way, through insidious appeals to race, gender, and sexuality.--Andrew Ross, author of *The Celebration Chronicles* < br> Brilliantly bold and coherent. [Duggan] rebuts the puritanical and the implicit, and makes a potent case for various hues of the unrepresented or underrepresented in American politics."--Akinbola E. Akinwumi, *Politicalaffairs.net*"Duggan's well-reasoned argument is that true progressive change must occur not in parts but as a unified whole."--*Publishers Weekly*"Finally, a cogent and hard-hitting attack on the cultural politics of neo-liberalism . . . We need Duggan's book, now more than ever, to point the way to new progressive politics, real social justice and a revitalized public intellectual sphere."--Judith Halberstam, author of *Female Masculinity*"Lisa Duggan's insightful, carefully argued, and passionate book finally makes sense of neo-liberals' rise to power in the 1990s . . . Duggan leaves us with a brilliant analysis of where we are now and a map for how to get to a better, more just place."--Tricia Rose, author of *Longing to Tell: Black Women Talk About Sexuality and Intimacy*

This book is a great text if you wish to understand the basics of neoliberalism. Duggin's writing is very fluid and clear. The examples she uses perfectly highlight the ways in which neoliberalism has come about and how it hurts our country!

Duggan articulately connects social and economic issues to each other, arguing that neoliberal politics have divided the two when in actuality, they cannot be separated from one another. In the introduction, Duggan argues that politics have become neoliberal - while politics operate under the guise of promoting social change or social stability, in reality, she argues, politicians have failed to make the connection between economic and social/cultural issues. She uses historical background to prove the claim that economic and social issues can be separated from each other is false. For example, she discusses neoliberal attempts to be "multicultural," but points out that economic resources are constantly redistributed upward. Neoliberal politics, she argues, has only reinforced and increased the divide between economic and social political issues. After the introduction, Duggan focuses on a specific topic in each chapter: downsizing democracy, the incredible shrinking public, equality, and love and money. In the first chapter (downsizing democracy), she argues that through violent imperial assertion in the Middle East, budget cuts in social services, and disillusionments in political divides, "capitalists could actually bring down capitalism" (p. 2). Because neoliberal politicians wish to save neoliberalism by reforming it, she argues that proposing alternate visions and ideas have been blocked. Duggan provides historical background that help the reader connect early nineteenth century U.S. legislation (regarding voting rights and slavery) to perpetuated institutional prejudices. In chapter 2, Duggan discusses an annual conference held at Barnard College in 1982 regarding women's sexual freedom, and how it became a widely publicized controversy. She explains that by 1997, these types of conferences became "routine," so the public eye no longer focused on them, therefore "unexpected attention" became focused on a conference in 1997 at SUNY (p. 23). When a conservative trustee of SUNY attended the conference and became "disturbed" by the conference workshops and presentations, she alerted SUNY chancellor John Ryan, a group of political figures worked to have the President at that SUNY campus removed. A panel set up by Ryan protected Bowen and the campus on the grounds of academic freedom. Professors defending the women's studies department and the conferences asserted that the controversy was a result of backlash against the feminist movement. Duggan argues that mainstream reporting framed the controversy as a battle of "culture wars" on college campuses. She argues that this left out the larger political and economic (conservative) context in which the debate occurred. In the third chapter, Duggan discusses the tragedy of 9/11, and how the tragedy appeared to shift public attitude toward lesbian and gay Americans towards greater acceptance. However, she notes, public acceptance was already highest for gays and lesbians who seemed "assimilated, [and] gender appropriate" (p. 44). She discusses HRC as an assimilation gay and

lesbian rights organization which failed to recognize the connection between different kinds of sexual freedom when it endorsed an anti abortion candidate. She argues that gay activism has often been confused as single issue, or in some cases, been pushed as a single issue, when equality cannot be single-issued.

Lisa Duggan is intensely interested in American politics, and has found political life in the United States to have been "such a wild ride, offering moments of of dizzying hope along with long stretches of political depression." She is grateful for "many ideas about political depression, and how to survive it," and she has written a excellent short book that helps make sense of many widely divergent political trends. Her book is well-summarized by its concluding paragraph, which I am breaking up into additional paragraphs for greater clarity: "Now at this moment of danger and opportunity, the progressive left is mobilizing against neoliberalism and possible new or continuing wars." "These mobilizations might become sites for factional struggles over the disciplining of troops, in the name of unity at a time of crisis and necessity. But such efforts will fail; the troops will not be disciplined, and the disciplinarians will be left to their bitterness." "Or, we might find ways of think, speaking, writing and acting that are engaged and curious about "other people's" struggles for social justice, that are respectfully affiliative and dialogic rather than pedagogical, that that look for the hopeful spots to expand upon, and that revel in the pleasure of political life." "For it is pleasure AND collective caretaking, love AND the egalitarian circulation of money--allied to clear and hard-headed political analysis offered generously--that will create the space for a progressive politics that might both imagine and create...something worth living for." The titles of her four chapters--Downsizing Democracy, The Incredible Shrinking Public, Equality, Inc., Love AND Money--summarize her argument. She expected upon her high school graduation in 1972, she writes, that "active and expanding social movements seemed capable of ameliorating conditions of injustice and inequality, poverty, war and imperialism....I had no idea I was not perched at a great beginning, but rather at a denouement, as the possibilities for progressive social change encountered daunting historical setbacks beginning in 1972...." Her target is neoliberalism, which she sees as a broadly controlling corporate agenda which seeks world domination, privatization of governmental decision-making, and marginalization of unions, low-income people, racial and sexual minorities while presenting to the public a benign and inclusive facade. Neo-liberalism seeks to upwardly distribute money, power, and status, she writes, while progressive movements seek to downwardly distribute money, power, and status. The unity of the downwardly distribution advocates should match the unity of the upwardly distribution advocates in order to be effective, she writes. Her belief is that all groups

threatened by the neoliberal paradigm should unite against it, but such unity is threatened by endless differences of perspectives. By minutely analyzing many of the differences, and expanding understanding of diverse perspectives, she tries to remove them as obstacles towards people and organizations working together to achieve both unique and common aims. This is a good book for those interested in the history and current significance of numerous progressive ideological arguments. It is a good book for organizers of umbrella organizations and elected officials who work with diverse social movements. By articulating points of difference, the author depersonalizes them and aids in overcoming them. Those who are interested in electoral strategies, however, will be disappointed. The interrelationship between neoliberalism as a governing ideology and neoliberalism as a political strategy is not discussed here. It is my view that greater and more focused and inclusive political organizing has the potential to win over a good number of those who see support of neoliberalism's policy initiatives as a base-broadening tactic more than as a sacred cause. "There is nothing stable or inevitable in the alliances supporting neoliberal agendas in the U.S. and globally," she writes. "The alliances linking neoliberal global economics, and conservative and right-wing domestic politics, and the culture wars are provisional--and fading...." Reading this book adds to one's understanding of labels, and political and intellectual distinctions. It has too much jargon for my taste, but not so much as to be impenetrable. It is an excellent summarization and synthesis of the goals, ideologies, and histories of numerous social movements, both famous and obscure.

Lisa Duggan's *THE TWILIGHT OF EQUALITY* is, hands down, the best in recent cultural theory. Her ability to connect queer theory and cultural studies with social and political concerns is breathtaking! It is hard to dispute Duggan's arguments about the necessity of identity politics in struggles for social change. Neoliberalists and holier-than-thought lefties take note: you can't dismiss identity if you're truly committed to justice, says Duggan. She is compellingly correct. Duggan also provides a much needed critique of the knee-jerk responses to identity by critics like Wendy Brown and Paul Gilroy. In short, the book sets a new standard for all of us engaged in critical thinking.

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