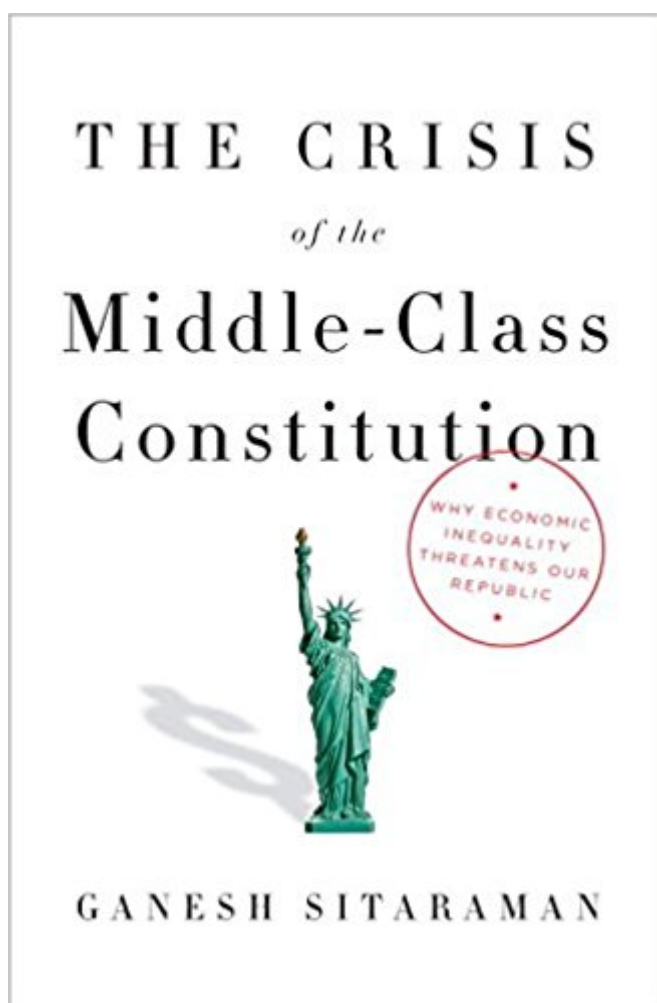


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# The Crisis Of The Middle-Class Constitution: Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic



## Synopsis

In this original, provocative contribution to the debate over economic inequality, Ganesh Sitaraman argues that a strong and sizable middle class is a prerequisite for America's constitutional system. For most of Western history, Sitaraman argues, constitutional thinkers assumed economic inequality was inevitable and inescapable—and they designed governments to prevent class divisions from spilling over into class warfare. The American Constitution is different. Compared to Europe and the ancient world, America was a society of almost unprecedented economic equality, and the founding generation saw this equality as essential for the preservation of America's republic. Over the next two centuries, generations of Americans fought to sustain the economic preconditions for our constitutional system. But today, with economic and political inequality on the rise, Sitaraman says Americans face a choice: Will we accept rising economic inequality and risk oligarchy or will we rebuild the middle class and reclaim our republic? The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution is a tour de force of history, philosophy, law, and politics. It makes a compelling case that inequality is more than just a moral or economic problem; it threatens the very core of our constitutional system.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In his fine book, both history and a call to arms, Ganesh Sitaraman argues that the contemporary explosion of inequality will destroy the American Constitution. . . . He has done all of us a great service, taking an issue of overwhelming public importance, delving into its history, helping understand how our forebears handled it and building a platform to think about it

today. • Angus Deaton, The New York Times Book Review (cover review) “Ganesh Sitaraman is a bold and visionary thinker whose new book, *The Crisis of the Middle Class Constitution*, shows that the disappearing American dream is more than a policy problem—it is a constitutional crisis. In our age of growing inequality, the stakes couldn’t be higher. Every American needs to read this book.” • Senator Elizabeth Warren “The *Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution* may well prove to be the most important political book of the year.” • The Huffington Post “In a powerful new book, the legal scholar Ganesh Sitaraman argues that America’s government will fall apart as inequality deepens.” • Rebecca Rosen, The Atlantic “Sitaraman’s valuable book invites a set of questions that it alone cannot resolve. But they are the right questions, and part of the proof is that they’re hard to answer.” • The Nation “In a wonderfully concise and well-documented chapter, ‘How Economic Inequality Threatens the Republic,’ [Sitaraman] explains the dynamics of rising inequality and its impact on the political system. . . . [P]athbreaking exploration. . . . The book succeeds in its central objective: presenting a strong case that economic inequality isn’t just a matter of fairness or economic efficiency; it’s about the survival of our constitutional order. Americans who value the republic can only hope that judges, legislators and we the people take heed.” • James Gray Pope, The Washington Post “Mr. Sitaraman is onto an important insight, or at least a pressing question. Evidence from around the world strongly suggests that liberal constitutions do not fare well in countries with oligarchic social structures. Today, America’s middle class is indeed beleaguered. . . . [This] book provides a much-needed reminder: For all our legendary good luck, nothing ordains that all our constitutional stories will have a happy ending.” • The Wall Street Journal “Sitaraman provides us with a much-needed reminder of how economic inequality has been adjudicated in the past—and how it can be more effectively alleviated in the future.” • Win McCormack, The New Republic “Sitaraman . . . brings a fresh eye and an impressive range of historical thinking to an ageless question: What are the conditions for freedom? He tours the intellectual struggles of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as progressives worked to reconcile industrialization and democracy. He gives us a glimpse of episodes that led to the progressive creation of the income tax, the development of antitrust laws and enforcement, the creation of a welfare state . . . and through the demise of those achievements—a generation in which we’ve reduced taxes, stopped investing in public infrastructure, and stopped enforcing antitrust. According to Sitaraman, we’ve lost

the policies essential to the preservation of the middle class. — Zephyr Teachout, *The American Prospect* — “What Piketty was to economics, this book is to our constitutional tradition. Sitaraman uncovers the lost essence to our constitutional past, and renders it as important today as it ever was. His beautifully written and powerfully argued book will change the discourse of constitutionalism — for the better. — Lawrence Lessig, author of *Republic, Lost*, and Furman Professor of Law and Leadership, Harvard Law School — “A pathbreaking effort to rethink the past, present, and future of American constitutional development. — Bruce Ackerman, Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science, Yale University — “Ganesh Sitaraman has reached broadly into history, economics, and politics to provoke concern about the risks that wealth inequality poses to the stability of our constitutional system. This is a brilliantly inventive argument, especially sobering in light of the populism of the right and the left during the last presidential election. — David K. Shipler, author of *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* — “Can American democracy survive the decline of the American middle class? With *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution*, Ganesh Sitaraman has provided a strikingly original, provocative and timely intervention in this urgent debate. — Michael Lind, author of *Land of Promise: An Economic History of the United States* — “American democracy cannot stand too much economic inequality. In fact, American democracy is built on a robust idea of economic fairness among citizens. In this new Gilded Age, these principles have been easy to neglect. In his timely and important book, Ganesh Sitaraman makes a strong case that economic fairness is a constitutional principle, and that if we give up on it, we will have given up on our democracy altogether. In making this argument, he gives readers a powerful and useful narration of the long American struggle for genuine self-government. He also pays close and valuable attention to the concrete reforms that can move us closer to real democracy. — Jedediah Purdy, author of *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* and Everett Professor of Law, Duke University School of Law

GANESH SITARAMAN is Professor of Law at Vanderbilt Law School and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He has been a longtime advisor to Senator Elizabeth Warren, serving as her policy director and senior counsel. Sitaraman has commented on foreign and domestic policy in *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Christian Science Monitor* and is the author of *The Counterinsurgent's Constitution: Law in the Age of Small Wars*, which won the 2013 Palmer Civil Liberties Prize. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School, where he was an editor on the *Harvard Law Review*.

Thorough research and reasonably well written. I'm captivated by the premise and wish I was a bit more strongly convinced. Not that his arguments aren't convincing, but they'd likely mainly convince those who already agree. Like myself. The problem is we live in times when it's nearly unimaginable to think of leaders seriously pressing for the types of changes that were commonplace 60-80 years ago. And I was around 60 years ago to attest that overall the country was a happier less nasty and greedy place. The problem we face is how to attract a strong majority of voters to the cause -- and frankly the opposite seems to be happening in my state. All that said, Worth reading to understand the middle class issue through the ages, and to not fall prey to common argument that the country was made for the wealthy.

This book is not only important, it couldn't be more topical with the recent change in presidency. The middle class in US is shrinking and not only is it worrying the average person who doesn't know which side of the middle class divide, but also academics like Ganesh Sitaraman. The book steps through how economic presence was built into the US constitution dating all the way back to the ancient Greeks. If you're a student of the classics, you'll find the thread that the author pulls from the Greek government and relation between land owners and plebs through Machiavelli, then through a 17th century Scottish philosopher, all the way to the founding fathers fascinating. But let's go out on the limb and say that most people won't be fascinated on why the middle class is important in the constitution and the health of our country, you may be interested in better understanding how it is affecting us today and what we can do about it (the shrinking middle class) In particular, aspiring professionals finishing college are faced with a dilemma today due to the completely changed landscape for jobs and long term viability. It's been quite some time since Friedman pronounced the earth as flat, but has anything really changed since then? Is the EU crumbling? What effect will a billionaire(?) president have on the viability of the country and the real prospects of the people that voted for him. This book is essentially addressing these basic problems (although the presidency is never directly referenced, so please don't think this is a jab at the 2016 election). It's really about searching for the real answers and solutions based on the real world economics and addressing how the constitution and the protection of rights is rooted in economic classes. This book is very nerdy and not an "easy" read, but it is the type of book that makes you think, and better yet, expand your thinking.

This book makes a persuasive case that the decay of the American middle class is the primary

threat to our republic, and that the founders, like many political thinkers and leaders before and since, recognized that a large and stable middle class is necessary for a democracy like ours to survive and flourish. The book is especially helpful now, because it offers a path forward in light of the capture of Congress and the courts by our economic elites as well as the populist surge that helped elect Trump.

Sitaraman began with a position and carries it throughout the book. He argues that the U.S. Constitution is a middle-class constitution with ties going back to Rome and more recently, Harrington. The colonies were middle class because the situation in North America did not support the European class system. The relatively rich could go from riches to rags very quickly. With that qualification, the book is a very good read and makes one think.

You will be a lot more knowledgeable on history and economics after reading this deeply thought out book. An essential read for anyone who is interested in getting an understanding of how we got here to middle class crisis mode and how to get out of it. This is a book written in depth, starting at the very beginning of democratic thought and discussing ramifications of decisions, legal and otherwise over time, right down to here and now in the US of A. The author also talks about corrective measures and concrete reforms that may help us return to a more robust economy that will reduce inequality. A book for the times we are in, and a book that will remain as a reference and essential read well into the future for the serious student of economics, law and life.

Very fine book! An education in the history of constitutional democracy, how they fail and how they are reformed. Gives me much to think about in these times where we are taking a look at our own constitution. Interesting discussion about how congress members have been selected throughout history - by lottery mostly! The content is deep but the book is well written.

Reminds us of what America stands for and that the Founding Fathers knew we cannot have a Republic without relative equality of wealth.

Ganesh clearly outlines why America and the Constitution is facing an existential crisis. This book should be a wake up call to anyone who thinks inequality doesn't have an impact on our form of government.

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