

## **Proposed Title**

Income Inequality: Worlds Apart  
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## **Project Summary**

To produce innovative, thought-provoking stories to bring the statistic-driven issue of income inequality to life by comparing the lives of Washingtonians with those of people in Nairobi, Kenya -- two cities worlds apart that share one key thing: a similar rate of income inequality.

## **Project Proposal**

Although the issue of rising income inequality -- the growing divide between economic classes -- has been getting more attention recently, it remains a difficult concept for many people to understand fully. The issue has been gaining prominence since the economic crisis in 2008 and, very recently, thousands have joined the Occupy Wall Street movement. A majority of Americans polled say they agree with the demonstrators, but even the members of the movement themselves have difficulty articulating the issue.

The nation's capital is one of the most economically unequal cities in the country, and the United States is one of the most unequal countries in the developed world, but why should anyone in Washington care? Won't there always be a natural divide between rich and poor? People often blur the distinctly different issue of income inequality with severe poverty, but income inequality is much more complex than simply rich versus poor.

Social scientists describe the impact of rising income inequality through a whole raft of public health issues, mainly caused by the stress of trying to keep one's place on the economic ladder -- for rich and poor alike. The overall effect across all classes of an unequal society is increased rates of serious problems that tear at the very fabric of society, such as depression, suicide, hypertension, diabetes, drug abuse, teen births, violence and imprisonment rates. Poverty itself is a real problem, of course, but inequality affects people across the economic spectrum, and as one expert told me, "poverty becomes more insulting and aggravating in the face of inequality."

The United States has a greater number of highly unequal cities, including Washington, than any other developed country. The UN has found that such inequality in the US often corresponds with greater racial segregation, and their assessment is that "poor black families and the chronically unemployed are clustered in ghettos, lacking access to quality education, secure tenure, lucrative employment and political power."

Many of these corresponding issues -- such as suicide rates, drug use, race and income -- are difficult for Americans to confront and discuss. So income inequality and its effect on society remains largely hidden and deserves better, more nuanced coverage. It is not enough to simply depict the very rich and very poor and contrast the two. My idea is to produce innovative, thought-provoking stories to depict the issue of income inequality through the power of photojournalism. This important problem -- hard to define and difficult to talk about, yet threatening to the wealthy and poor and everyone in between in Washington and cities around the world -- needs more attention from visual journalists who can flesh out statistics with the faces of real people.

I would take readers out of the comfort of their living rooms in Washington to Nairobi, Kenya.

The two cities, which seem to be worlds apart in almost every way, share one key thing: a similar rate of inequality. Economists measure inequality via a statistic called the Gini coefficient, and Washington and Nairobi are on nearly the same place in the scale.

In photos and video interviews, I aim to tell the stories of average Washington and Nairobi residents as they confront income inequality through its corresponding problems such as infant mortality, response to HIV-AIDS and the geographic segregation of the poor, seeking intersecting themes. Many Americans want to believe that we have little or nothing in common with the developing world, but the reality is very different. And by seeing their own problems reflected in a faraway place, such as Nairobi's Kibera ghetto, the comparison could be a jarring catalyst for more discussion and greater understanding of their own condition.

Like many under-reported issues, this one isn't overtly sexy to very many editors. The WHNPA project grant would go a long way toward helping make nuanced reporting of a difficult-to-grasp concept possible. Ideally, I'll be able to publish the work across multiple platforms: using text and photos for publication, using photos with video interviews and natural sound for online presentations, or a combination of the two.

I have worked extensively in Africa, often with an eye to ward deep economic contrasts: from wealthy presidential candidates in impoverished Liberia to the struggle of underprivileged black golfers in a privileged white man's sport in South Africa, and from the gold mines of Ghana to the refugee camps of the Kenyan desert. I have confidence in my ability to research and report the story, with a proven record of putting together thoroughly-researched projects and getting them published.