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Why has contemporary radical political theory remained virtually silent about the stunning rise in inequality in the United States over the past thirty years? Schwartz contends that since the 1980s, most radical theorists shifted their focus away from interrogating social inequality to criticizing the liberal and radical tradition for being inattentive to the role of difference and identity within social life. This critique brought more awareness of the relative autonomy of gender, racial, and sexual oppression. But, as Schwartz argues, it also led many theorists to forget that if difference is institutionalized on a terrain of radical economic inequality, unjust inequalities in social and political power will inevitably persist.

Schwartz cautions against a new radical theoretical orthodoxy: that "universal" norms such as equality and solidarity are inherently repressive and homogenizing, whereas particular norms and identities are truly emancipatory. Reducing inequality among Americans, as well as globally, will take a high level of social solidarity--a level far from today's fragmented politics. In focusing the left's attention on the need to reconstruct a governing model that speaks to the aspirations of the majority, Schwartz provocatively applies this vision to such real world political issues as welfare reform, race relations, childcare, and the democratic regulation of the global economy