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## The Undeserving Rich: American Beliefs about Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution

A Talk by Leslie McCall

December 3, 2012, 1-3 p.m.  
Room A 310

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## Invitation

It is widely assumed that Americans care little about income inequality, believe opportunities abound, admire the rich, and dislike redistributive policies. In her talk, Leslie McCall shows how such assumptions are based on misleading survey data and economic conditions rooted in the past. Using data from the General Social Survey, a systematic analysis of media coverage from 1980 to 2010, and other sources, she provides evidence that Americans have long desired less inequality, becoming most concerned about it in times of inequitable growth, when they view the rich as prospering while opportunities for good jobs, fair pay, and high quality education are restricted for everyone else.

This suggests that Americans do not pit equality of opportunity against equality of outcomes, favoring only the equality of opportunity, as is widely assumed, but see the two as interconnected. As a result, they favor policies to expand opportunity and redistribute earnings in the workplace, reducing inequality in the market rather than redistributing income after the fact with tax and spending policies. McCall helps to resolve the paradox of how Americans can express little enthusiasm for welfare state policies and yet still yearn for a more equitable society. She also forwards a new model of preferences about income inequality rooted in labor market opportunities rather than welfare state policies.

Leslie McCall is Professor of Sociology and Political Science, as well as Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research, at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Complex Inequality: Gender, Class, and Race in the New Economy* (2001). The lecture is organized by David Brady, Head of the newly established Inequality and Social Policy research unit at the WZB.

*To register, please reply by November 28, 2010, to [buero.brady-usp@wzb.eu](mailto:buero.brady-usp@wzb.eu).*

*The WZB provides child care during the lecture. If you are interested, please respond by November 21, 2012, indicating the number of children and their age.*

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