



# Workshop/Classroom Study Guide Questions

Suggestions for a workshop, class discussion or study group using *You Call This a Democracy?: Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides*

by **Paul Kivel**

---

**THERE ARE MANY POSSIBLE QUESTIONS** and exercises to use to explore the issues of power, wealth, and democracy raised in this book. The curriculum resources listed in the back of the book (pp. 168-218) can provide helpful tools. These issues are not abstract—they impact our everyday lives. As much as possible, help people make the connections to their own situations and the conditions in their communities. Be creative. Get people out into the neighborhoods to see the impact of wealth and class—how it looks and feels. Use videos (see pp. 208-214), exercises, articles, and local speakers (see pp. 216-218) to enhance the discussions. Help people think about what they want to do with the information they've gained from the book.

**Where are you in the class system?** (pp. xix-xxii) (handout pp. xix-xxii)

Have people read, or group members read out loud, some of the sections in this assessment. Have people break into small groups so that each person can have a few minutes to talk about their current class situation and the situation of their family of origin.

**Class Chart** (p. xxii) (handout p. xxii)

Pass out copies of this handout and have people discuss the complexities of class. What practical, emotional, and historical issues make it difficult to sort out? Have people discuss the choices or lack of choices that people in different classes have.

**What are the costs of having a ruling class?** (pp. 4-5) (handout pp. 4-5)

Have people look through the Checklist on pp. 4-5 and talk about what costs they and their communities pay from having a ruling



class in the United States. Ask why these costs are not more apparent to people. Ask what costs there are to the rest of the world from the policies and actions of the U.S. ruling class.

**The importance of wealth** (pp 32-43) (handout p 37)

Ask the group:

What is the difference between income and wealth?

Why is wealth so important?

Where does wealth come from?

**Wealth, race, and gender** (pp. 43-47)

What are the connections between racism and sexism and the accumulation of wealth? What are specific ways that the ruling class and power elite use racism and sexism to accumulate wealth and power?

**The Constitution, corporations and the courts** (pp. 48-55)

What are some current examples of how the Constitution, corporations, and the courts are used by the ruling class to remain in power? What would need to change in the Constitution, the structure of corporations, or in the function of the courts to democratize our country? Describe current efforts to affect these institutions?

**How do they stay in power?** (pp. 69-78)

How do the ruling class and power elite stay in power? How does this undermine democracy in the U.S.? What is one specific way that your political power has been increased or decreased because of these mechanisms?

**How do members of the ruling class increase their wealth?** (pp. 79-89) (handout p. 88)

What mechanisms does the ruling class use to increase their wealth? What is one form of domestic debt that has affected your life?

**How does the ruling class pass on its wealth?** (pp. 93-100)

What are current ways that the ruling class is trying to change the law to pass on more wealth to their children? How are these efforts being resisted?



**Protecting their power** (pp. 104-106) (handout p. 105)

What are examples of ways that the ruling class has responded to democratic movements for social justice in your community? What are ways it has responded to democratic movements in other countries? Who has provided leadership for these movements for democracy in the U.S. and in other countries?

**The ruling class and the buffer zone** (pp. 114-119) (handout p. 115)

What are the three roles of the buffer zone? Give examples of organizations that play each role in your community. How are race and gender played out in the work of the buffer zone?

**Philanthropy** (pp. 120-124) (handout p. 123)

What are the advantages of philanthropy to the ruling class? How has philanthropy affected your life and that of your community?

**Distractions** (pp. 128-140) (handout p. 140)

Name some of the systems that the ruling class uses to keep us distracted? What are distractions for you and other family members? How much money do you spend each year on distractions? Which distractions are most popular in your community? What are activities that people engage in that are not distractions but that build our communities? Which of these activities are you and other family members involved in?

**Which side are you on?** (pp. 144-150) (handout p. 150)

Take a current public policy issue and do a “who benefits, who pays, and who really decides” analysis by class, race, and gender (see p. 150).

**Beyond survival—getting together** (pp. 153-154) (handout pp. 153-154)

Which strategies have you used to survive in this system? When have you gotten together with others for change? What are historical examples of people acting together? What are current examples from your community? What information, skills, understanding, and resources do people need to act together? What are ways that you could implement more democratic processes in your family, work, school, or community life? What is your next step in doing so? What is your next step in participating in local or national struggles for social justice and democracy? Identify



persons who have worked for economic justice and democracy who have inspired you. Give a current example of something that gives you hope for the possibility of a more just and sustainable world.

Please send comments, feedback, resources, and suggestions for distribution to [paul@paulkivel.com](mailto:paul@paulkivel.com). Further resources are available at [www.paulkivel.com](http://www.paulkivel.com).