



**The Great Polarization**  
Economics, Institutions and Policies in the Age of Inequality

*A conference sponsored by the Department of Economics at the University of Utah*

**At the roots of varying patterns of income inequalities  
(United States, 1915-2015):  
Relations of production and power configurations**

*Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy*

Abstract

The analysis is based on the available measures of income inequalities in the United States over the century 1915-2015. Two viewpoints are combined: (i) the distinction between wages and capital income, and (ii) the changing trends of inequalities over time. Three main periods are considered, namely prior to the Great depression, between the depression and the 1970s, and from the 1980s onward.

The patterns observed are interpreted on two grounds: (i) the historical transformation of relations of production with the increasing role of managers in managerial capitalism, accounting for the prominent role of wage inequality within the contemporary U.S. society, and (ii) the succession of three configurations of class hierarchies and alliances (configurations of power, in what we denote as “social orders”) during each of the elementary periods in the above sequence.