



White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making (Chicago Studies in American Politics)

Nicholas Carnes

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Eight of the last twelve presidents were millionaires when they took office. Millionaires have a majority on the Supreme Court, and they also make up majorities in Congress, where a background in business or law is the norm and the average member has spent less than two percent of his or her adult life in a working-class job. Why is it that most politicians in America are so much better off than the people who elect them— and does the social class divide between citizens and their representatives matter?

With *White-Collar Government*, Nicholas Carnes answers this question with a resounding—and disturbing—yes. Legislators' socioeconomic backgrounds, he shows, have a profound impact on both how they view the issues and the choices they make in office. Scant representation from among the working class almost guarantees that the policymaking process will be skewed toward outcomes that favor the upper class. It matters that the wealthiest Americans set the tax rates for the wealthy, that white-collar professionals choose the minimum wage for blue-collar workers, and that people who have always had health insurance decide whether or not to help those without. And while there is no one cause for this crisis of representation, Carnes shows that the problem does not stem from a lack of qualified candidates from among the working class. The solution, he argues, must involve a variety of changes, from the equalization of campaign funding to a shift in the types of candidates the parties support.

If we want a government *for* the people, we have to start working toward a government that is truly *by* the people. *White-Collar Government* challenges long-held notions about the causes of political inequality in the United States and speaks to enduring questions about representation and political accountability.

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