**ERWC AOW 4 Period: Name:**

**Instructions**: Annotate the following using the S U C Q R process. Then add a one-page reflection to the article with your thoughts about what it says. If the reflection is hand-written, it must be a single-spaced page, taking into account the size of your handwriting. If it is typed, it must be Times New Roman, 12 point font, and double spaced.

# The Meritocracy Is Ripping America Apart

How savage exclusion tears the social fabric.

By [David Brooks](https://www.nytimes.com/by/david-brooks), Opinion Columnist, New York Times, Sept. 12, 2019

There are at least two kinds of meritocracy in America right now. Exclusive meritocracy exists at the super-elite universities and at the industries that draw the bulk of their employees from them — Wall Street, Big Law, medicine and tech. And then there is the more open meritocracy that exists almost everywhere else.

In the exclusive meritocracy, prestige is defined by how many people you can reject. The elite universities reject 85 to 95 percent of their applicants. Those accepted spend much of their lives living in neighborhoods and attending conferences where it is phenomenally expensive or hard to get in. Whether it’s the resort town you vacation in or the private school you send your kids to, exclusivity is the pervasive ethos. The more the exclusivity, the thicker will be the coating of P.C. progressivism to show that we’re all good people.

People in this caste work phenomenally hard to build their wealth. As Daniel Markovits notes in his powerful new book, “[The Meritocracy Trap](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/548174/the-meritocracy-trap-by-daniel-markovits/9780735221994),” between 1979 and 2006, the percentage of workers in the top quintile of earners who work more than 50 hours a week nearly doubled. People in this caste are super-skilled and productive. There are more than 70 law firms, Markovits notes, that generate over $1 million in annual profit per partner. When Instagram was bought by Facebook for $1 billion, it had only 13 full-time employees.

A few years ago, people in this elite professional caste seized on research by Thomas Piketty, who argued that rising inequality is caused by the shift in income away from labor and toward capital. The investors are to blame! But, Markovits argues, roughly 75 percent of the increase in the top 1 percent of earnings is caused by shifts in income within labor. These highly educated professionals attract vast earnings while everybody else gets left behind. A cardiologist used to earn four times as much as a nurse; now it’s seven times as much.

Parents in the exclusive meritocracy raise their kids to be fit fighters within it. Markovits calculates how much affluent parents invest on their kids’ human capital, over and above what middle-class parents can afford to invest. He concludes that affluent parents invest $10 million more per child. The resulting highly honed, high-performing young people are amazing — and endure the stresses you’d expect. At the best law school in the country, Yale, 70 percent of the students say they experience mental health challenges.

You don’t have to travel far to get outside the exclusive meritocracy. For example, last spring I spent a few days at Arizona State University, which is led by Michael Crow. A.S.U. defines itself not by how many people it can exclude but by how many it can include. The need for higher education is greater than ever, so A.S.U. has rapidly expanded to meet that need. Between 2013 and 2018, undergraduate enrollment rose by 45 percent. Between 2009 and 2018, the number of engineering students grew to 22,400 from about 6,400.

A.S.U. has done it by increasing its reach into those who are underserved. The number of first-generation students has more than quadrupled since 2002. Everything is on a mass scale. A.S.U.’s honors college alone is bigger than Stanford’s entire undergraduate enrollment. It graduates more Jews than Brandeis and more Muslims than Jews. The quality has risen along with the size. Research expenditures double every six to eight years, and a number of academic departments are nationally recognized as among the best for the quality of their research.

The atmosphere is much more democratic and accessible to all. Faculty members are treated less as scholars within rarefied disciplines and more as interdisciplinary intellectual entrepreneurs. The goal is immediate social impact as much as expanding knowledge, so, for example, A.S.U.’s Watts College of Public Service & Community Solutions is enmeshed with local residents to transform a Phoenix neighborhood. Starbucks pays for eligible employees to attend A.S.U. online. Many of the graduates I met had dropped out of three or four colleges before finally being able to get a degree at A.S.U. It’s an open place, where they can move up.

Similarly, last week I was in Wichita to observe the Kansas Leadership Center. The center teaches people how to create social change and hopes to saturate the state with better leaders. But the center doesn’t focus on traditional “leaders.” Its mantra is: “Leadership is an activity, not a position. Anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere.” The atmosphere is one of radical inclusion. The enrollees I met included business leaders, teachers, line workers and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The center equips people at every level of society with organizational skills — for example, to understand when it is necessary to turn up the heat to force change, and when it is necessary to turn down the heat to encourage reconciliation.

People in both the exclusive and open meritocracies focus intensely on increasing skills. But it’s jarring to move from one culture to the other because the values are so different. The exclusive meritocracy is spinning out of control. If the country doesn’t radically expand its institutions and open access to its bounty, the U.S. will continue to rip apart.

**Reflection instructions**: Using your annotations, write a one-page reflection on the points made within the article. This is not a formal essay, but be sure to reflect on and refer to the contents of the article, whether positively or otherwise.