Inequality has come roaring back onto the public agenda, punctuated by Barack Obama’s December 2013 claim that income inequality is “a defining challenge of our time”. But if the new object of civil concern is economic, the nature of that concern remains centrally cultural. In a special double-length issue of the American Journal of Cultural Sociology, nine original articles explore the social meanings that inform contemporary discussions about inequality. Examining prisoner re-entry narratives, racialized exclusion, support programs for former foster youth, discourses of cultural mobility, and elite parenting strategies, these articles provide important new resources for thinking about culture and inequality.

In this issue:

Conflicted cultivation: Parenting, privilege, and moral worth in wealthy New York families
Rachel Sherman

A critical strong program: Cultural power and racialized civil exclusion
Stephen F. Ostertag, Lucas Diaz

Cultural implications of historical exclusion for the racial wealth gap: How ideal financial behavior varies by race
Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana

Perceived positions along the social spectrum: The subjective social status of contemporary Chinese in a coastal metropolis
Chi Phoenix Wang

The unbalanced theoretical toolkit: Problems and partial solutions to studying culture and reproduction but not culture and mobility
Jessi Streib

“I’m not gonna be another statistic”: The imagined futures of former foster youth
Julianne M. Smith

Work, welfare, and the values of voluntarism: Rethinking Anscombe’s “action under a description” in postwar markets for human subjects
Laura Stark

Historicizing social inequality: A Victorian archive for contemporary moral discourse
Michael Strand

Narrative change, narrative stability, and structural constraint: The case of prisoner reentry narratives
David J. Harding, Cheyney C. Dobson

To complement and extend this special issue, we are pleased to present a series of podcasts from our contributors, exploring their articles. All podcasts are available at palgrave-journals.com/AJCS. We hope you enjoy them!