

# Opportunities for Civic Inclusivity in the i.doc Form

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## Introduction

Imagine, just for a moment, that the last forty years had unfolded differently. The Reagan Administration never happened. Trickle-down economics was effectively debunked. Tax policy favored the middle class. Capital gains were taxed appropriately. Unions remained strong. The Supreme Court unanimously voted against *Citizens United*. This invitation to imagine an “alternative today” is, in part, what the interactive documentary (i-doc) *Inequality.Is* asks its viewers to do. At one point, it even presents viewers with a calculation of the wages they would be earning today if worker compensation had increased in proportion to productivity since 1979. Citing data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Inequality.Is* claims that economic policy favoring the wealthy has produced an average income shortcoming of \$22,529 per worker, per year.<sup>1</sup> In short, the i-doc argues that income inequality is damaging America and that the issue is both deeply personal and fixable.

Developed by the design company Periscope in collaboration with the Economic Policy Institute and economist Robert Reich,<sup>2</sup> the i-doc pairs playful animations, interactive graphs and videos with personalized information to present an exceptionally approachable, lucid, and engaging argument. *Inequality.Is* was originally released in June 2013 as a companion to the documentary *Inequality for All*, which took home the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Achievement in Filmmaking at the Sundance Film Festival that year.<sup>3</sup> In many

ways, the project is an exemplary attempt to use interactive documentary to motivate political action, but it also ignores key capabilities of the form.

This textual analysis will use Twitter data, user experience frameworks, and Ceasar McDowell's framework for civic inclusivity across the digital divide to analyze the effectiveness of *Inequality.Is* in achieving its goal of raising awareness about income inequality. The paper will ultimately argue that *Inequality.Is* effectively motivates user engagement for people who fall into the category of "political online participants," but it fails to utilize the unique affordances of the i.doc form to maximize civic inclusivity, particularly for people who are "political online nonparticipants."

### ***Inequality.Is*: Introduction and Background**

The *Inequality.Is* i-doc seems to have begun as an experiment in digital storytelling based on the advocacy work of economist Robert Reich, with supporting research from the Economic Policy Institute and design by Periscope. The project's front man, Reich, has dedicated his career to the advancement of progressive economic policy in America. As part of this work, he's authored sixteen books and served in several administrations, including a term as President Clinton's Secretary of Labor, for which *Time Magazine* honored him as one of the ten most distinguished Cabinet members of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> He currently serves as the Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blume Center for Developing Economies<sup>5</sup> and is, in other words, exceptionally qualified to lead a political movement. Reich is also extremely dedicated to his work. In the twelve months after Donald Trump was elected to the U.S. presidency, for just one of his many digital projects, Reich recorded over 100 videos from his home office in a series called *The Resistance Report*. After over 40 years of advocacy

and public service, Reich remains positive, with one reviewer even dubbing him “a happy warrior for economic reform.”<sup>6</sup>

Much like creator, the imagery and tone of *Inequality.Is* can best be described as playful and approachable, while still packing a punch. Light blues, greens and yellows dominate the visual experience in the form of cartoon scenes and characters. These cartoons are not hand-drawn, but instead consist of flat, vector-based graphics that contribute a clean, minimalist feeling to the experience. Since very little audio is used throughout the i-doc, most of its dialogue is conveyed in the form written text that utilizes simple sentence structure and an easy-to-read font. In summary, from its lighthearted visuals to its simple delivery, the Periscope designers who put this piece together succeeded in crafting a clean, playful, and pleasant user experience for viewers.

To access the *Inequality.Is* experience, viewers simple need to navigate to <http://inequality.is> from any non-mobile, internet-connected browser. After loading, the project opens with a 6-second video in which the i-doc’s silent, cartoon narrator - depicted as a female person of color of indeterminate age - points at a map of the contiguous United States. Over the map, the text “Economic **Inequality** is **Real**, **Personal**, **Expensive** and it was **Created**” appears (see Figure 1). These bolded words, the viewer will soon discover, represent four of the five sections included in the i-doc’s story. A blue speech bubble then pops up beside the narrator, stating “We’ll show you how.” When this is clicked, the next screen appears, revealing the first section of the i-doc: “Inequality is Real.” Alternately, the page will auto-advance after another four seconds if no action is taken by the viewer. The transition into the first section also reveals header and footer navigation bars that will remain static throughout the remainder of the experience.

Section 1, “Inequality is Real,” opens to cartoon scene of green rolling farmland, blue sky, and a light grey city skyline in the background. Ten cartoon characters stand beside each other in the middle of the screen in front of a cartoon pile of money. The first nine characters represent everyday workers, including a mailman, policewoman, construction worker, farmer and other professionals, all of varying ethnicities. To their right stands a businessman, depicted as a portly white man in a suit and top hat, who represents the top 10% of American earners.

This section introduces the concept of income inequality by asking the viewer to respond to a series of questions using a circular, pie-chart-style slider. The first question appears at the top of the screen above the slider, asking “If it were up to you, how would you split up income between the top 10% and the other 90%?” When the viewer rotates the slider around the circle, the pile of money behind the characters is distributed to each character accordingly. For example, if the slider is set to 50% to the top 10% of earners and 50% to the bottom 90% of earners, half of the money pile moves beside the businessman and the other half is distributed evenly among the remaining nine workers (see Figure 1a.5). After the slider is adjusted, a blue button appears that says, “That’s how I’d distribute it!” Clicking this reduces the size of the first slider and moves it to the left side of the screen. Next, a second circular slider appears with the text “Now, how do you think America’s income is actually distributed?” Moving the slider again shifts the placement of the piles of money behind the characters. Once the second slider is adjusted, another blue button appears that says, “That’s how I think it’s actually distributed.” When clicked, this second slider minimizes beside the first and a third pie-chart-circle appears, this one not interactive, revealing the actual distribution of income in America: 52% to the bottom 90% and 48% to the top 10% (see Figure 1a.6). Again, the pile of money adjusts accordingly and a new blue button appears, asking “Where do you fit into this picture?” Although no sources are



included on this page, at this point a square graph appears to the right of the main circle with the text, “Has income always been distributed like this? Get some context.”

Clicking this graph minimizes all three pie-circles to the left, bringing an interactive graph to the fore with the text “Income has become much less evenly distributed since the late 1970s.” The ten characters, their money piles, and the “Where do you fit into this picture?” button all remain static at the bottom of the page (see Figure 1b.1). This sub-section allows the viewer to dive deeper into the data behind the “Inequality is Real” section. The graph is based on data from two sources: a 2003 article published by French economist Thomas Piketty in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, and the *State of Working America Report* by the Economic Policy Institute, published by Cornell University Press in 2012. These sources and their links are revealed in a popup by clicking the “source” link at the bottom of the graph. The data is depicted using a somewhat complex bar graph with Years (from 1948 to 2011) plotted along the horizontal axis and Share of Total Income plotted along the Y axis (from 0% to 100%). Income that went to the bottom 90% is shown in light green, the top 10% in dark green, and brown represents income lost by the 90% to the 10% since 1979. When the viewer hovers the cursor over the graph, an additional, even darker green series of bars appears representing the increasing share of income held by the top 1% of earners. Hovering over the graph also triggers a popup with a one-sentence, written summary of its contents (see Figure 1b.2). This is important, as some viewers may not possess the graph literacy to understand the information being portrayed. In addition, three small information icons, represented by blue boxes with exclamation points, can be clicked to reveal additional popups with written explanations of different points in the graph.

To advance to the next section, “Inequality is Personal,” the viewer can click the blue “Where do you fit into this picture?” or the “personal” link in the header navigation bar. The second section of the story opens to a cartoon scene of a town’s main street featuring a government building, houses, green grass and blue sky. The text that appears read “Lots of things influence your income. Let’s explore some of them,” before taking viewers through an animated form in which they enter their gender, ethnicity, age, and level of education, personalizing a small, animated avatar (see Figure 2a). Next, a large dollar amount appears on the screen representing an average of what “people just like you” earn with a “source” button that opens a popup with citations and links to sources (see Figure 2a.5). A blue button in the form of a speech bubble emerges from the viewer’s avatar asking, “Where do I stand among people similar to me in all ways but one?” When clicked, two more avatars join the screen, along with their average salaries (see Figure 2b). For example, if the viewer is a Hispanic man, he may see the average income for a Hispanic woman (less than his) and a white man (more than his). The viewer can also choose the gender, ethnicity, age, and level of education variables to add up to two more custom comparisons to the screen (see Figure 2b.3). Another blue speech bubble button emerges from the viewer’s avatar asking, “What’s kept our wages down?” A square spectrum graph on the right side of the screen also appears with the viewer’s estimated income bracket asking, “How mobile are you?”

Clicking the “How mobile are you?” reduces the size of the comparison screen, moving it into a small square on the left. In its place, a spectrum chart appears. This chart represents the viewer’s estimated income bracket, based on the salary that was calculated in the personalization form. The graph initially depicts perfect economic mobility, in which people have the same 20% odds of moving into any of the five income brackets during their lifetimes(see Figure 2c.1). A

blue button beneath the graph says, “See your chances for economic mobility.” When clicked, the graph shifts, revealing the viewer’s true chances of ending up in each of the five income brackets. For example, a 40-year-old Hispanic man with a bachelor’s degree who earns a \$64,604 salary has a 4% chance of dropping into the lower income bracket, a 22% chance of dropping to the upper middle-income bracket, and a 61% chance of remaining in the upper income bracket (see Figure 2c.2). Hovering over each income bracket triggers a popup with further details. A source button beneath the graph also cites the Department of the Treasury data used in this calculation. Another blue button also appears, claiming “You can earn more than you do.” Both this button, and the “What’s kept our wages down” button from the previous screen advance the story to the next section.

Section 3, “Inequality is Expensive,” opens to the scene of a cityscape, with colorful buildings and, again, rolling green grass in the foreground. The text at the top of the page claims, “Your wages haven’t kept up with productivity. See for yourself. What’s your salary?” Below, a box containing the viewer’s estimated salary can be edited or calculated from an hourly rate to represent her actual salary (see Figure 3a). The viewer’s avatar again stands in the center of the screen with a blue button in the form of a speech bubble that says, “Show me what I could have been making.” When clicked, an identical viewer avatar appears on a higher plane with an estimate of what the viewer could be making “if American wages had grown with productivity over the past generation,” (see Figure 3a.4). The text at the top of the screen states, “The growing gap between wages and productivity has been expensive,” and a blue speech bubble button emerges from the first avatar, asking “How did this happen?”

Clicking this triggers a 15-second animation in which a dark grey factory appears over the colorful cityscape background and a line graph titled “Productivity vs. Compensation”

appears at the top of the page (see Figure 3b). The foreboding doors of the factory slide open revealing two workers at an assembly line. The businessman character from Section 1 sits at a desk beside them, smoking a cigar. The silent narrator from the landing screen returns, explaining the animation in a series of white speech bubbles. “For the generation after World War II, American wages rose in line with overall growth,” she explains. The assembly line begins to churn and, beneath the workers, small green bags of money stack up under the label “what you were paid.” Beneath the businessman and the label “what you weren’t [paid],” there are initially no bags of money. As years tick by in a box beside the workers, the graph at the top of the page plots cumulative growth in worker compensation, productivity, and top 1% wages. Initially these rise with relative uniformity but, after 1979, a gap appears between compensation for workers and the 1%. The narrator continues: “But then things changed. Our productivity continued to increase but less and less of this growth showed up in our paychecks and instead got claimed by those at the top.” Now, less money piles up below the workers, instead accumulating beneath the businessman. By 2011, worker compensation had grown by 113% and wages for the 1% had grown by 356%, with a total growth in productivity of 254%.

When the animation is complete, the viewer can hover over the graph at any year and the state of the factory will adjust to match the graph at that point (see Figure 3c). The graph can be further explored by hovering over a question mark icon, which triggers a popup with a simple, written explanation of methodology, and a source button with citations and links to the graph’s data. The narrator’s speech bubble then turns blue, asking “How do we fix this?” Clicking this skips Section 4 of the story, and advances to the final section: “Inequality is Fixable.”

Section 4, “Inequality is Created,” is the only section of the i-doc that is not sequentially triggered within the narrative. Instead, it can be accessed at any point by clicking the “created”

link in the header navigation bar. The content of this section is simple: a single animated video, narrated by Robert Reich, that plays on a cartoon billboard, perched above rolling green hills (see Figure 4). The same video can also be accessed as a popup at a variety of other points in the experience, triggered from both links within the interactive graphs, or from an ever-present “play” button in the middle of the footer navigation bar. After the video plays, four options appear: share via Twitter, share via Facebook, watch again, or click the narrator’s blue speech bubble, which says, “Like he said, let’s fix it,” which advances to the final section of the story.

The video, which is the only part of the story to incorporate spoken content, uses playful animations and video-game-style audio to summarize Reich’s argument using the same scene and character artwork used in the rest of the i-doc. In 2 minutes, it effectively reviews each section of the argument and then prompts the viewer to advance to the next section. The intention behind the video seems to have been to create a shorter, alternative path to get the viewer to the “Inequality is Fixable” section of the story, which is the only part of the i-doc that contains a call to action beyond sharing on social media.

The final section of the story, “Inequality is Fixable,” opens to a scene centered on the US Capitol Building and several other Washington D.C landmarks beneath the text “We let this happen, so how do we fix it?” A large seesaw stands in the foreground with five of the original worker characters on the raised left end, and the businessman character on the lowered right end. The positioning indicates that, today, power within government is dominated by the wealthy (see Figure 5a). Five circular icons hover above the characters, each representing a part of the proposed solution to income inequality. These are Trade, Full Employment, Labor Standards, Financial Regulation, and Tax Fairness. To the right, three additional icons, labeled as “myths,” include Mobility, Pamper the Rich, and Education. Hovering over any of the icons reveals a

popup with further details and also triggers the appearance of an explanatory subtitle beneath the main title. For example, hovering over the “Labor Standards” icon reveals a popup that states, “Key labor market institution that boosted bargaining power for low- and moderate-income workers have been steadily eroded,” and a subtitle that reads, “Give workers a real voice.”

Clicking any icon opens a popup with a graph, a 2-3 sentence description of the myth or solution, and a blue “Help Fix This” button (see Figure 5b). When clicked, this button opens a secondary popup with five categories listed on the left, and information for the selected category on the right. These categories include: 1) Know the Issue, which links to further data and information about the proposed solution, 2) Take action, which includes links to related activist networks and online petitions, 3) Stay informed, which reveals a signup form for the EPI newsletter, 4) Tell Your Friends How You Feel, which generates prewritten messages related to the issue that can be shared via Twitter or Facebook, and 5) Support the Site, which opens the EPI donation page in a new window. After reviewing, the viewer can click a blue “Go Back” button that returns her to the first popup window, an “x” in the top right closes the popups, or buttons linking to other issues directly from within the popup. Clicking on each issue incrementally shifts the balance of the seesaw, raising the businessman from the ground and signaling the increased power of the people.

As can be inferred from this walkthrough, the information architecture of *Inequality.Is* is primarily sequential, which helps simplify and control the intended experience and message. The header and footer navigation bars enable a small degree of matrix structure by allowing viewers to explore the story in a more self-directed manner (see Figure 6), but some sections may not make sense out of sequence. Additionally, backward navigation is enabled by buttons in the form of cartoon sign posts that allow the viewer to return to the previous section of the story.

Technically, the site is extremely well crafted. The transformations are clean and, even after four years, no bugs can be detected in the experience. By delivering the bulk of its information visually, the project sidesteps the challenge faced by many web documentaries of irritating viewers with unexpected audio. The site's only major downfall is its lack of mobile compatibility. Opening the i-doc on a phone reveals only half of the viewing window; although playable, this significantly detracts from the user experience. Since mobile-first, responsive web design was already relatively standard practice by 2013, there were likely financial or technical constraints that led to the decision to not accommodate mobile viewers. This is unfortunate, since 54% of internet use now takes place on mobile devices.<sup>7</sup>

Although today it represents only a small slice of the massive media campaign fronted by Reich, the *Inequality.Is* i-doc seems to have been produced during an important transitional moment in his approach to shifting public opinion. What began in 2009 as a series of short videos by Reich and Emmy-award-winning filmmaker Jacob Kornbluth has since evolved into a transmedia empire including two feature-length documentaries and the nonprofit production company Inequality Media, which boasts millions of followers across Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and an "average weekly reach of over 16 million."<sup>8</sup> Much of this work can be traced back to the *Inequality.is* i-doc, which was released only a few months after its companion documentary in 2013 and less than a year before Inequality Media was founded.

Reich's transition from traditional politics to the use of new media storytelling to achieve his policy goals has been motivated by "two realities:" the first being an urgent need for Americans to understand the devastating effects of inequality on the nation's

well-being, and the second being a recognition of the power of storytelling to shift opinions.<sup>9</sup> As stated on the Inequality Media About Page:

The importance of storytelling to policy change has been largely overlooked. All too often organizations and policy makers rely on data and facts to make their case, forgetting about the critical importance of storytelling to connect to and persuade audiences. This is especially true of economic policy, where policy leaders remain dumbfounded as to ‘why low-income Americans continue to vote against their economic interest.’ We need to take a new tactic. We need to engage both the head and the heart by telling stories that move and inspire, even as they inform and educate. Corporate America and the conservative movement have long understood and utilized the power of good storytelling to gain supporters, it is time progressives took notice and took action.

This statement represents an impressive transformation for someone who has been embedded in the political establishment since the Carter administration. However, as will be discussed in more detail later, Inequality Media’s primarily digital approach to storytelling may miss the audiences where his message could make the greatest impact.

According to a June 2013 statement from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) announcing the release of the project, the original goal of *Inequality.Is* was to “show people that income inequality is personal and affects them in very real ways.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, EPI wanted to raise awareness among the American public about a critical but largely unknown economic issue. The best way to analyze the success of this goal would be to analyze the site’s Google Analytics data from the past four years. This would reveal total traffic, the locations of users, the number of sessions per user (how many times they visited the site), the average amount of time



spent on the site, and, most importantly, traffic patterns within the site, including landing pages, interactions, and drop-offs (the point at which a user chooses to leave the site). Since this data is not publically available, however, the project was instead evaluated using related Twitter activity.

Throughout the *Inequality.Is* story – and in the footer navigation bar of every page – viewers are encouraged to share the site by tweeting about it. When one of these prompts is clicked, a Twitter popup window appears with a single, pre-written tweet that says, “Inequality is real, expensive, and fixable. Find out how. <http://inequality.is> via @EconomicPolicy.” All the viewer has to do is enter her login credentials and click “tweet” to help spread the word. Scraping a Twitter search with the query “inequality is real, expensive, and fixable” yielded a total of 1,024 results between June 2013 and November 2017 (see Figures 7 and 8). This means that over 1,000 people shared the preformatted tweet from the *Inequality.Is* website, which is a relatively impressive outcome for digital engagement with an i-doc. However, 866 of those tweets were from 2013 while only 37 were from 2017. The overall results indicate an abrupt decline in interest less than six months after the project’s initial release.

Although many people undoubtedly visited the *Inequality.Is* i-doc, it remains unclear how long they engaged with its content or what political actions they took after leaving the site. Who engages with the site (and who doesn’t engage with it) is also unknown. The next section of the paper will explore these questions, ultimately arguing that, although *Inequality.Is* effectively engages internet-savvy users, the i-doc misses several key opportunities to both reach and engage with other audiences.

### **From “political online participants” to civic inclusivity**

The biggest challenge faced by web-based i-docs like *Inequality.Is* is inclusivity.

Although some researchers claim that media literacy is a necessary prerequisite for modern civic engagement,<sup>11</sup> the capabilities and preferences of everyday citizens do not always support this assumption. Ceasar McDowell of the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning explains that “efforts aimed at public engagement must also consider whether or not individuals have the skills needed to utilize technology and fully engage in civic action.”<sup>12</sup>

In a 2017 study, Swiss researchers Moritz Buchi and Florian Vogler surveyed over 2,000 people about their internet use and found that people can be grouped into two categories: political online participants, who made up 43% of the surveyed population, and political online nonparticipants, who made up 57% of the surveyed population. They also found that these two groups can largely be predicted based on demographic factors. Political online participants are characterized by “high education and income, high Internet skills, more men, and older age,” while nonparticipants are characterized by “low education and income, low Internet skills, more women, and young age.”<sup>13</sup> They continue by explaining that political interest and internet skills – two indicators of political online participation – are also “strongly predicted by social position.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, online political participation is *not* universally accessible and “the plethora of participatory opportunities enabled by the Internet cannot themselves mobilize new citizen groups.”<sup>15</sup> By choosing the format of a web documentary, *Inequality.Is* instantly skewed its audience toward political online participants and the typically privileged individuals who make up that category, likely leaving out people with lower education, income, and internet skills. Unfortunately, this second group represents the people who may most desperately need to hear Reich’s message.

To address challenges like this, McDowell introduces the idea of civic inclusion, which he defines as “the process by which groups, previously excluded, are incorporated into democratic processes as full citizens.”<sup>16</sup> He offers a five-part framework for designers who wish to use technology to increase civic inclusivity. First, projects must “bridge the digital and analog worlds” through skilled support, community partnership, and face-to-face interaction. Second, they must “bridge social divides” by addressing the fact that “greater heterogeneity results in lower levels of trust, participation in social activities, and community attachment.”<sup>17</sup> Third, projects must “support full-frame thinking” by avoiding issue-based initiatives that fail to see citizens as whole people. Fourth, projects should “address the hyper-local” by focusing on civic actions that impact people’s everyday lives. Finally, civically inclusive projects must “shift the locus of design” by co-designing with the communities they intend to serve. Unfortunately, short of co-design (which may have been conducted by Periscope in the form of human centered design), *Inequality.Is* fails to implement any of McDowell’s five suggestions to increase civic inclusivity.

### **Opportunities for civic inclusivity in the i.doc form**

Today there is no shortage of research related to user experience design for digital content. Only a small subset of the many theoretical frameworks available was selected to analyze the types of user experiences supported by *Inequality.Is*. These included Kruikemeier et al.’s passive versus active political internet use, Oh et al.’s “Empirical Model of User Engagement with Interactive Media,” which breaks the experience of engagement into the actions of clicking, assessing, immersing, and sharing,<sup>18</sup> Kate Nash’s distinction between “voice-as-authorship” and “voice-as-social,”<sup>19</sup> and, finally, Sandra Gaudenzi’s four interactive modes of the i-doc.<sup>20</sup>

In reviewing these frameworks, several patterns began to emerge in the way the user experience is described and categorized in relation to i-docs. It seems that, as an emerging form, i-docs can more accurately be described as spectrums of experience than a defined form. Four of these spectrums include: 1) group to individual, 2) author-directed to user-directed, 3) digital vs in-person, and 4) passive to interactive to co-creative (see Figure 9).

This first spectrum of experience, group to individual, describes the makeup of the audience for any given instance of the i-doc's performance. For example, *Inequality.Is* is a predominantly individual experience; its design is optimized to engage a single user through the technology of a standard web browser. A group experience within an i-doc, on the other hand, is designed for performance before larger audiences in either real-world (such as an installation) or digital environments. The group experience in a digital environment may best be described by Nash's "voice-as-social" for of participation, which enables social discourse between viewers, or, as she puts it, "participation *through* documentary."

The second spectrum, author-directed to user-directed experiences, refers to control of the story's design. In other words, who decides how the story will be told? Traditional media like films and television tend to be author-directed. A director or small creative team define both the content of the experience and how it will be navigated. I-docs that utilize Gaudenzi's "hypertext mode of interactivity" enable users to independently explore a (usually static) set of options within an archive, defining their own path through the experience.<sup>21</sup> Beyond navigation, Nash's concept of "voice-as-authorship," described as the ability for users to actively participate in the construction and representation of the story,<sup>22</sup> allows users to take part in higher-level decision making about the experience. These types of user-directed experiences represent one of the unique affordances of the i-doc form.

The third spectrum, digital to in-person, describes the environment in which the experience takes place. In other words, is it on a screen like *Inequality.Is*, in a purely non-digital environment, like a workshop, or is it somewhere in between, like on a phone in an augmented reality environment? This latter, “in-between” option can be described by Gaudenzi’s “experiential mode” of interactivity, in which technologies bring “digital content into physical space.”<sup>23</sup> Instances of all of these environments can be found in i-docs today.

Finally, the fourth spectrum of i-doc experience includes the passive, to the interactive, to the co-creative. The first two steps in this spectrum are best described by Kruikemeier et al. in their descriptions of passive and active political internet use (PIU). Passive PIU consists of one-way communication activities, such as reading or watching videos. This, in addition to basic interactivity such as clicking and hovering, describes the predominant experience in *Inequality.Is*. Active PIU, on the other hand, includes forms of two-way communication, such as forums, and overlaps in many ways with Nash’s description of “voice-as-social.” *Inequality.Is*’s frequent prompting of users to share content could be considered Active PIU, but only in a limited way, as social media posts are still often a form of one-way communication. The Kruikemeier et al. piece additionally claims that “active forms seem to have a bigger impact on political outcome variables than passive forms of PIU,” suggesting that *Inequality.Is* relies on the least impactful form of political internet use.

Beyond Active PIU and “voice as social” lies the most unique affordance of the i-doc form: its ability to support co-creation. This is more along the lines of what Gaudenzi calls the “participative mode” of interactivity. In this mode, she explains, “the documentary producer is called upon to ‘stage a conversation’, with a user community, with research subjects, with participants, co-producers and audiences.”<sup>24</sup> I-doc researcher Mandy Rose similarly argues that

the significance of i-docs “lies in their ability to address gaps in participation by creating interactive architectures and discursive structures that support different voices to speak with authority and purpose.”<sup>25</sup> Whether this is achieved through virtual platforms or in-person workshops, co-creation lies at the heart of interactive documentary.

Ultimately, with its calls to action focused on resource discovery, donating, and tweeting, the experience offered by *Inequality.Is* sells itself short as an i-doc. This said, the project does seem to have been an important experiment for Reich, as his later digital media work with Inequality Media and other entities appear to have learned from some of the earlier work’s shortcomings. For example, in December 2017 Inequality Media asked viewers to submit and then vote on ideas for Reich’s next video.<sup>26</sup> Although the initiative appears to be far less about participation than it is about aiming eyeballs at a donation button, it at least enables two-way engagement with the audience. Reich’s digital media projects also make much more extensive and integrated use of social media today than *Inequality.Is* did in 2013, which certainly contributes to what Henry Jenkins would call the “spreadability” of his message.<sup>27</sup>

That said, designing a more civically inclusive ecosystem could bolster Inequality Media’s message with more diverse audiences. Further movement in this direction could be supported by adopting some of the unique affordances of the i-doc form, including community forums that enable more active political internet use, supporting community governance of the movement through “voice-as-authorship,” and crafting more free-form, exploratory experiences for users. Of course, the greatest opportunity missed by both Inequality Media’s efforts today and the *Inequality.Is* i-doc from 2013 is the opportunity to engage viewers in participatory, co-creative processes. This, as mentioned above, is the key affordance of the i-doc form and should become a top priority if the movement wishes to reach more diverse audiences.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *Inequality.Is* is an expertly-crafted interactive web experience that delivers a clear, playful and engaging message for political online participants. In many cases, however, this audience includes the same people who already engage with Reich's other work, including his books and documentaries. Although the novelty of the i-doc form likely succeeded in connecting Reich with a limited number of new followers, the project's lack of mobile accessibility or consideration for delivering a civically inclusive experience curtailed its potential to reach new audiences. Reich and his team at Inequality Media appear to have learned some crucial lessons since the 2013 release of *Inequality.Is*, but the movement's focus on one-way communication through digital media continues to limit its potential. For Inequality Media, civic inclusivity is still out of reach.

This, of course, is not an easy problem to solve. As McDowell himself admits, "it is still unclear how civic technologies might help build capacity and momentum for inclusive, collaborative, and boundary-crossing problem solving,"<sup>28</sup> but there is plenty of experimentation toward this goal. The field of i-docs today, with its relatively loose boundaries and collaborative ethos, offers a ripe opportunity to explore the potential of civic technology to create experiences that are both engaging and inclusive of a broader public audience.

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## Figures

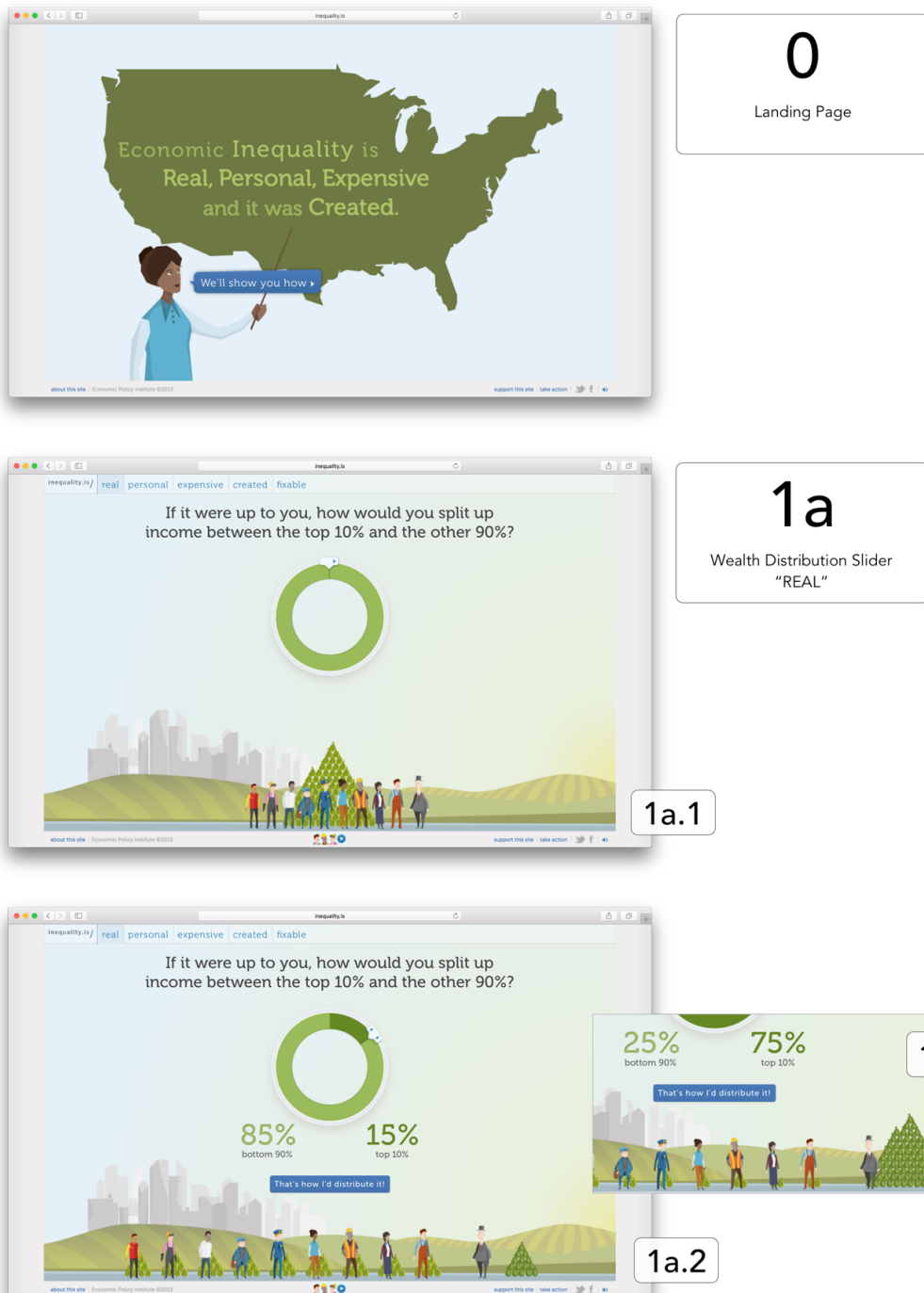


Figure 1 "Inequality Is Real" section screenshots,, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.



1a, cont.

Wealth Distribution Slider  
"REAL"

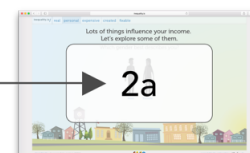


Figure 1a "Inequality Is Real" section screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

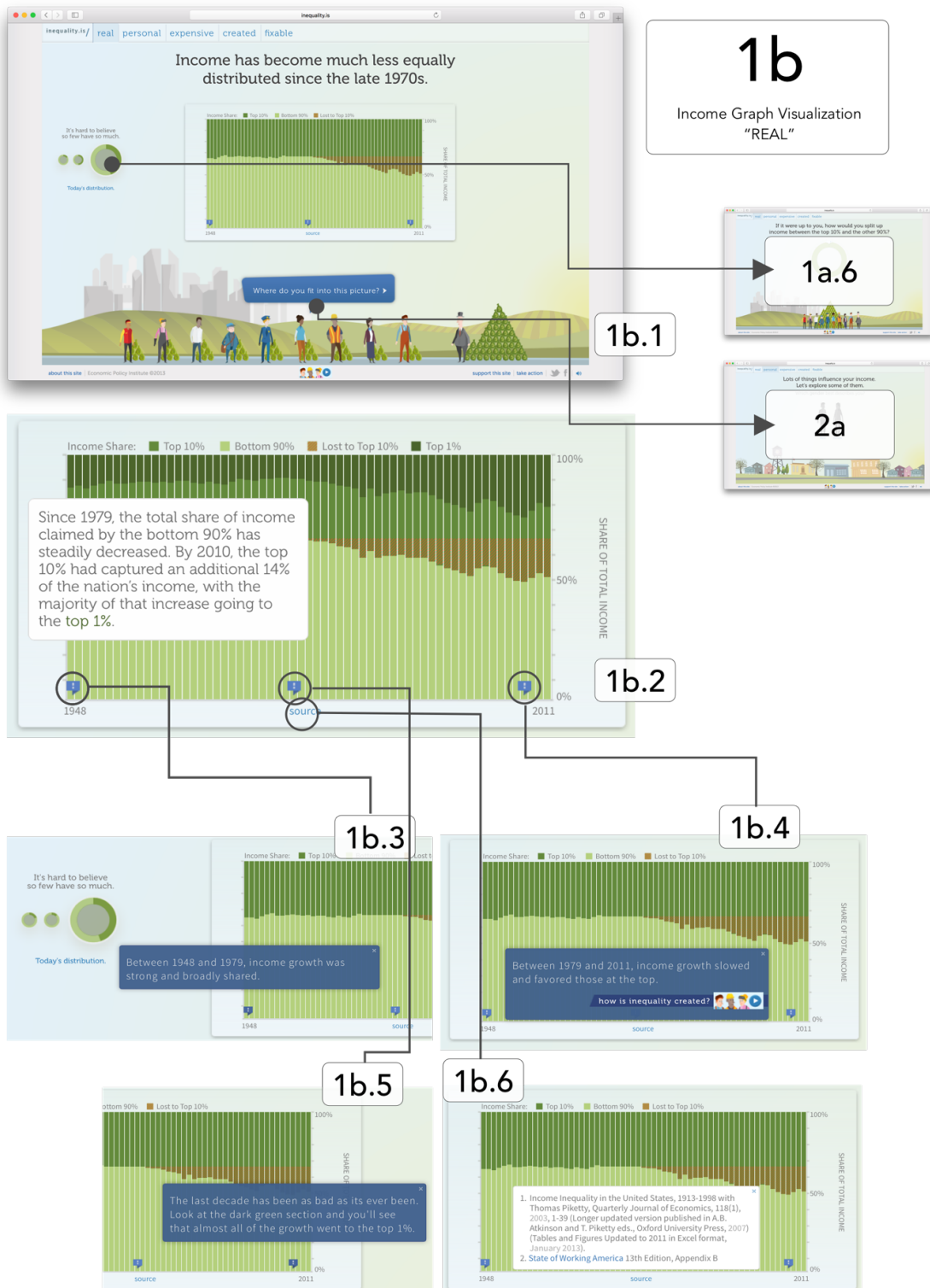


Figure 1b Interactive Graph Visualization screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.



Figure 2a Personalization Form screenshots, captured from “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.” Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

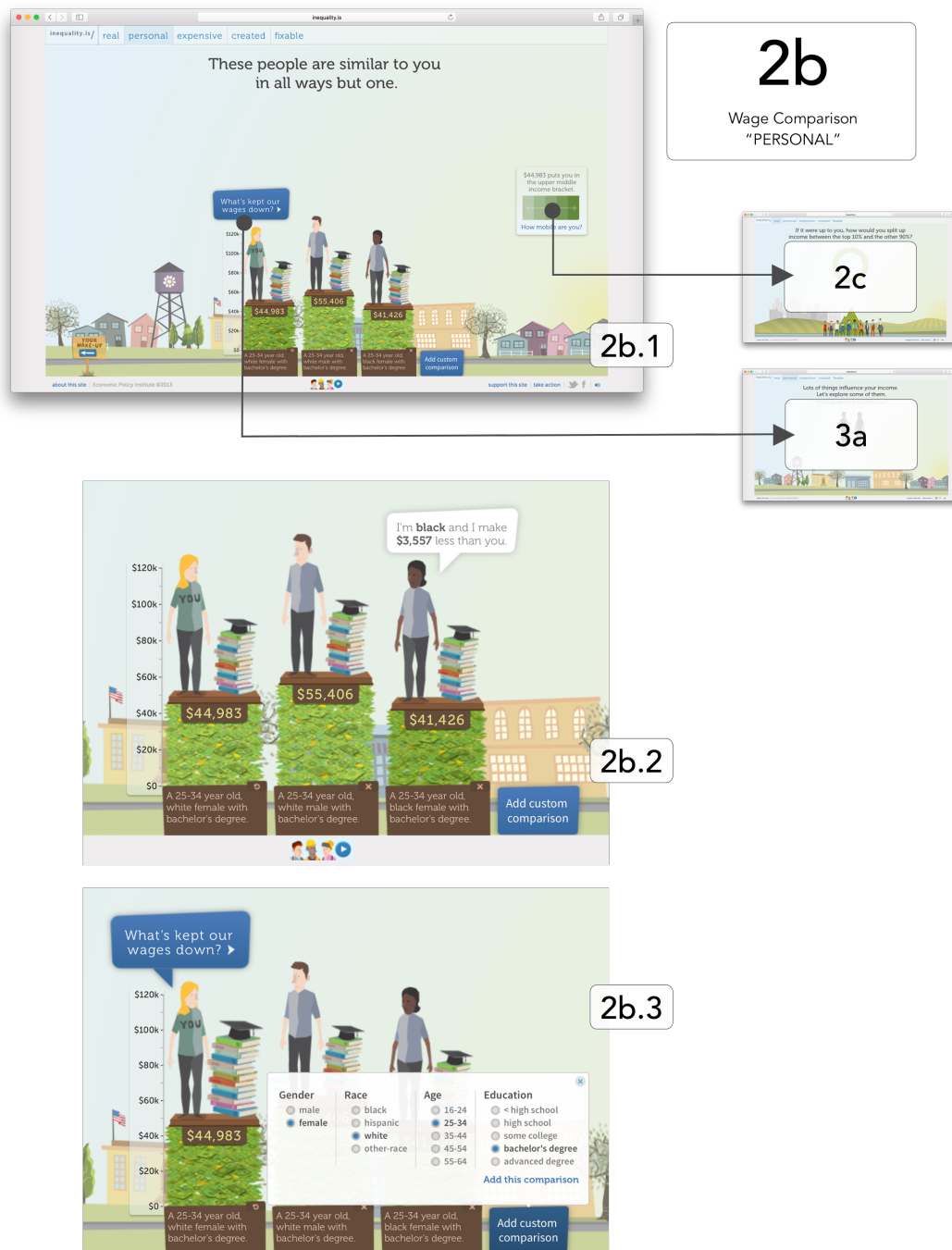


Figure 2b Wage Comparison screenshots, captured from “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.” Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

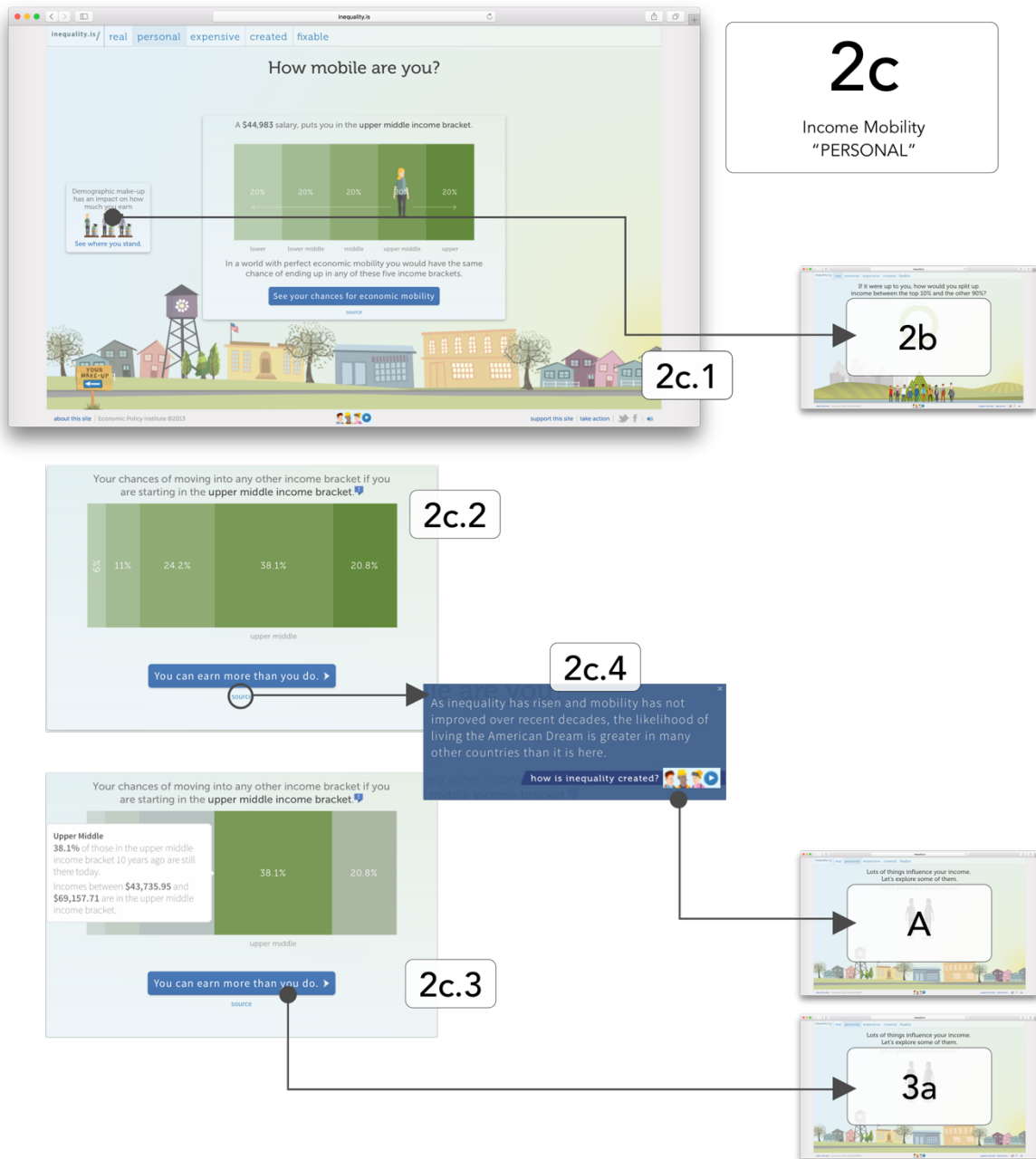


Figure 2c Income Mobility graph screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

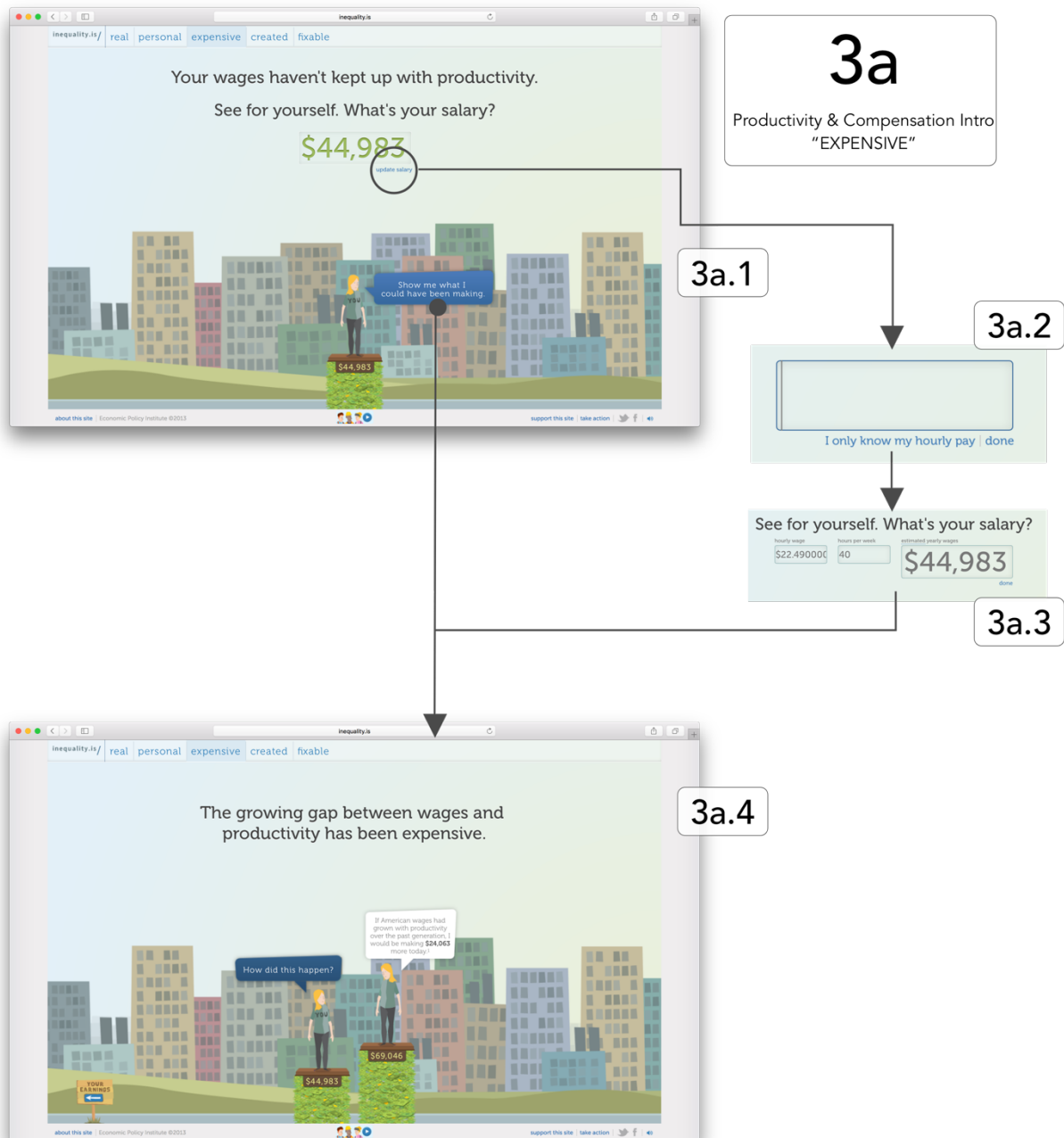


Figure 3a Productivity & Compensation Intro screenshots, captured from “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.” Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.



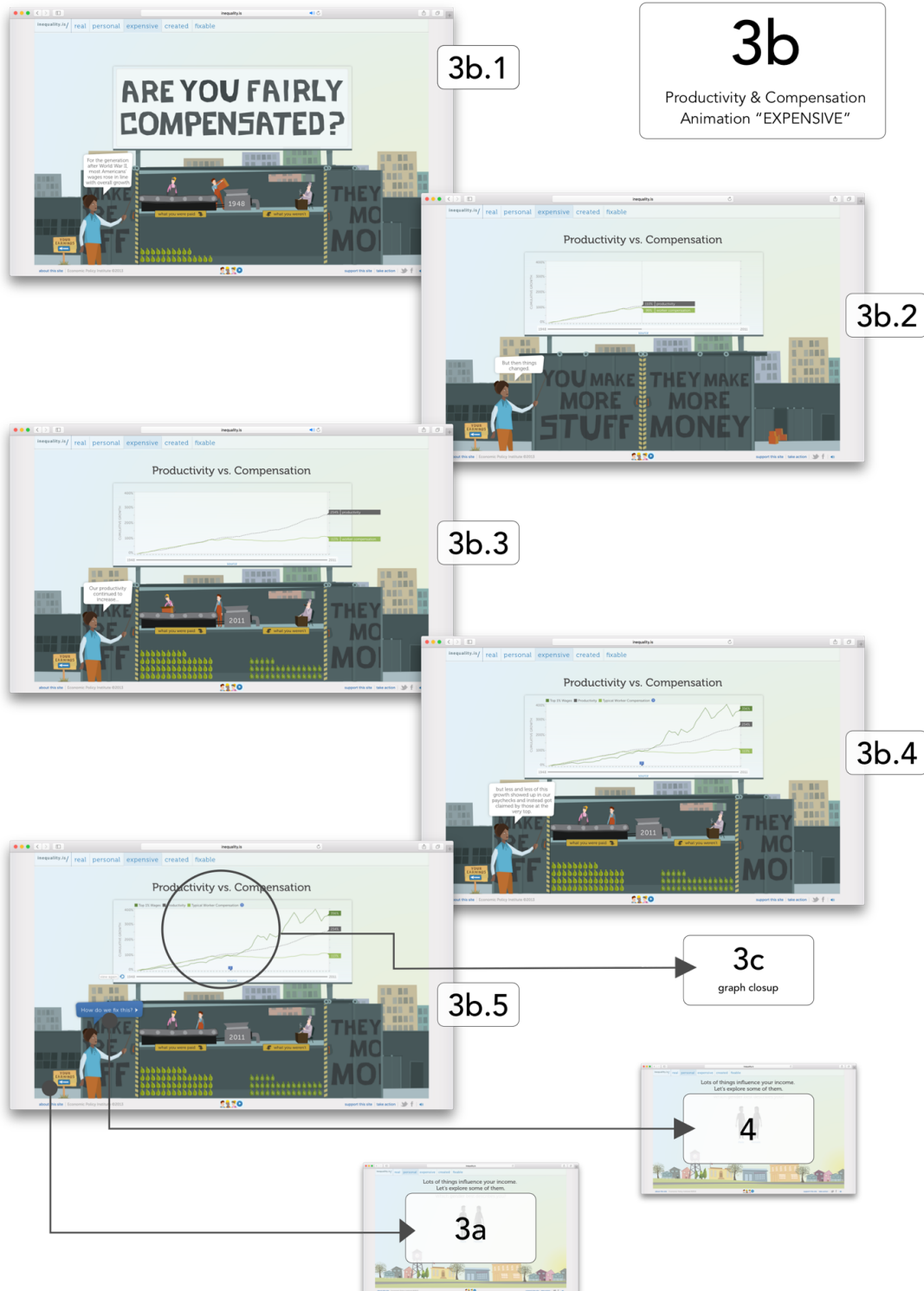


Figure 3b Productivity and Compensation animation screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

3c

Productivity & Compensation  
Graph "EXPENSIVE"

3c.1

## Productivity vs. Compensation



3c.4

Productivity is measured as the amount of goods or services created per hour worked. We present worker compensation data for "non-supervisory workers" because this category of employment comprises 80% of the workforce and leaves out higher-paid managers and supervisors. This data also allows wage analysis for lower paid workers back to 1947, matching the start date for the data on the top 1% of workers. We show the cumulative growth in earnings for the top 1% of wage earners on the same graph to illustrate that gains in wages have not been equitable over the past 60+ years.

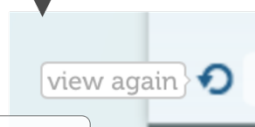
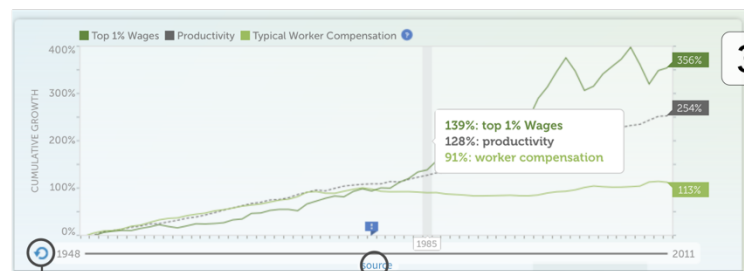
3c.2



3c.5

From 1948-1979 workers across-the-board saw compensation rise as productivity rose. In the years since 1979, the vast majority of workers saw compensation increasingly lag behind productivity; and this was no accident. Rather, it was the predictable outcome of a range of policy choices that tilted the playing field against most workers.

3c.3



3c.6

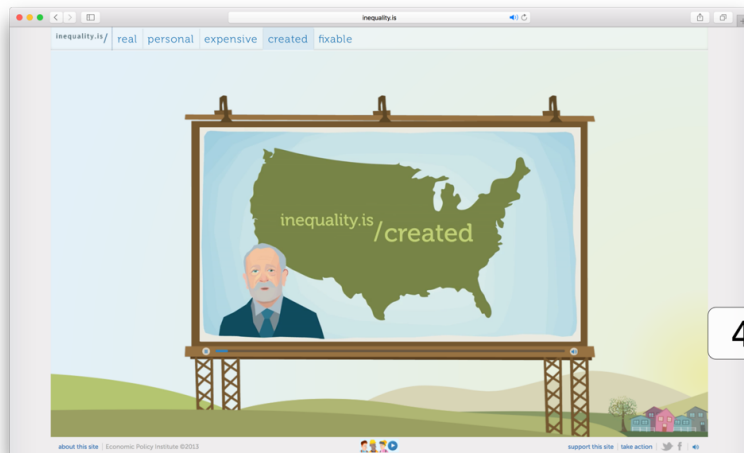
1. Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata. Various years. Survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics [machine-readable microdata file]. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.  
[http://www.bls.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html#cpsbasic](http://www.bls.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html#cpsbasic)
2. Mishel, Lawrence, Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, and Heidi Shierholz. 2012. The State of Working America, 12th Edition. An Economic Policy Institute book. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

3c.7

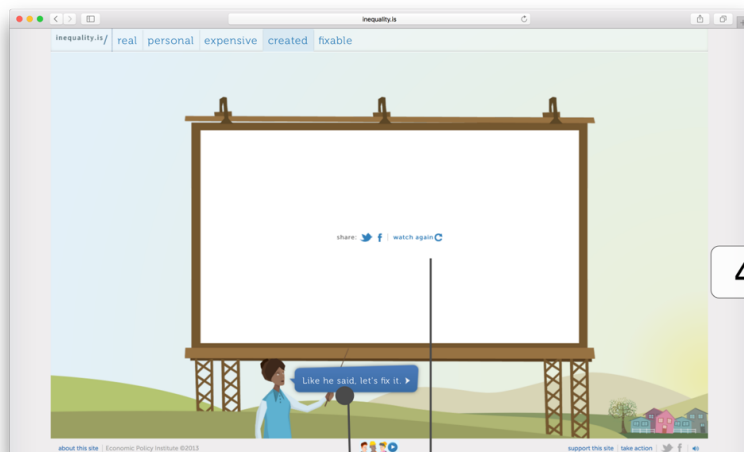
Figure 3c Productivity and Compensation graph screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

# 4

Summary Video  
"CREATED"



4.1



4.2

share: | watch again



Figure 4 “Inequality Is Created” section screenshots, captured from “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.” Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

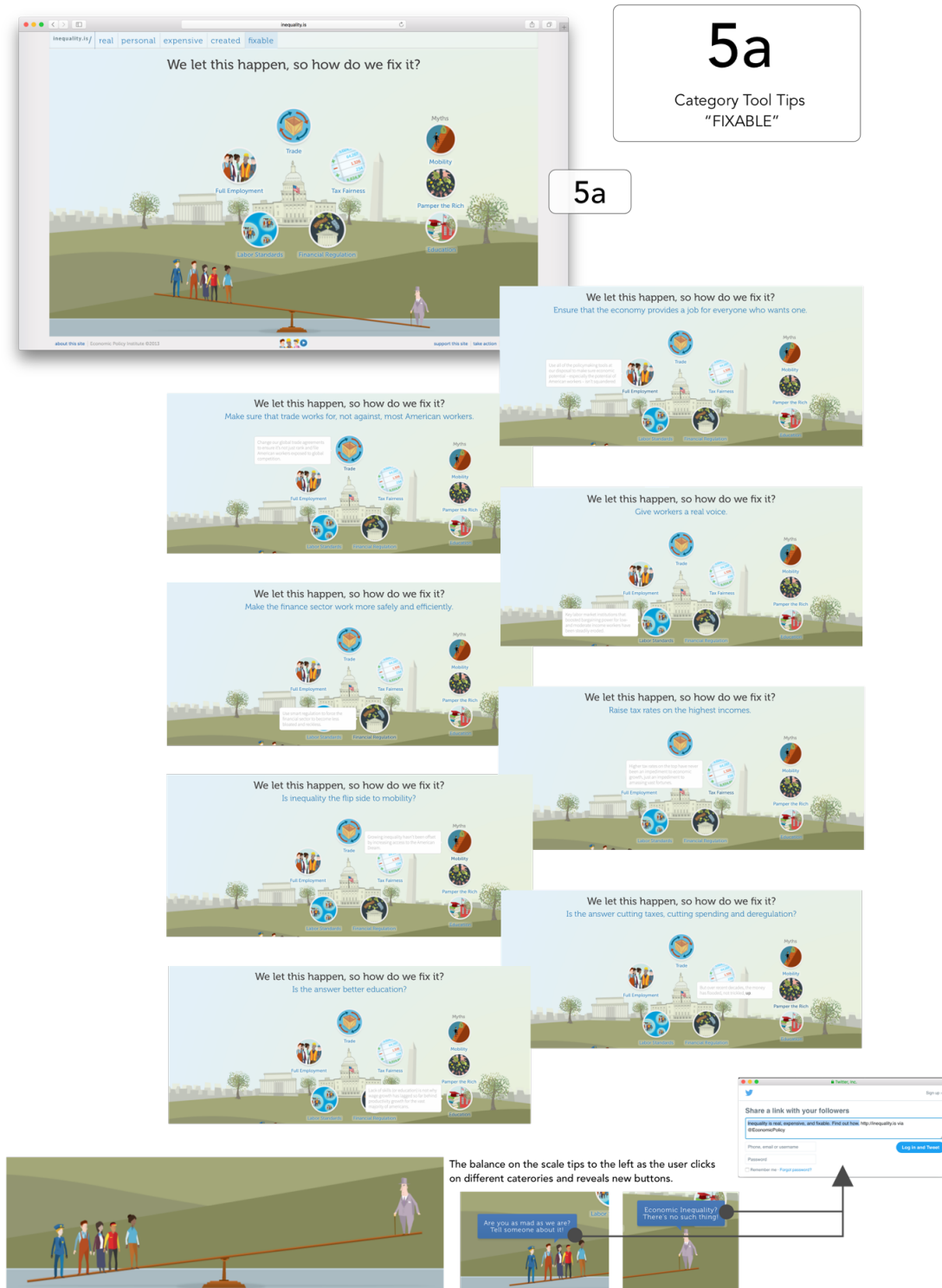


Figure 5a "Inequality Is Fixable" section screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

Popup:



Figure 5b "Inequality Is Real" section screenshots, captured from "Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We'll Show You How." Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

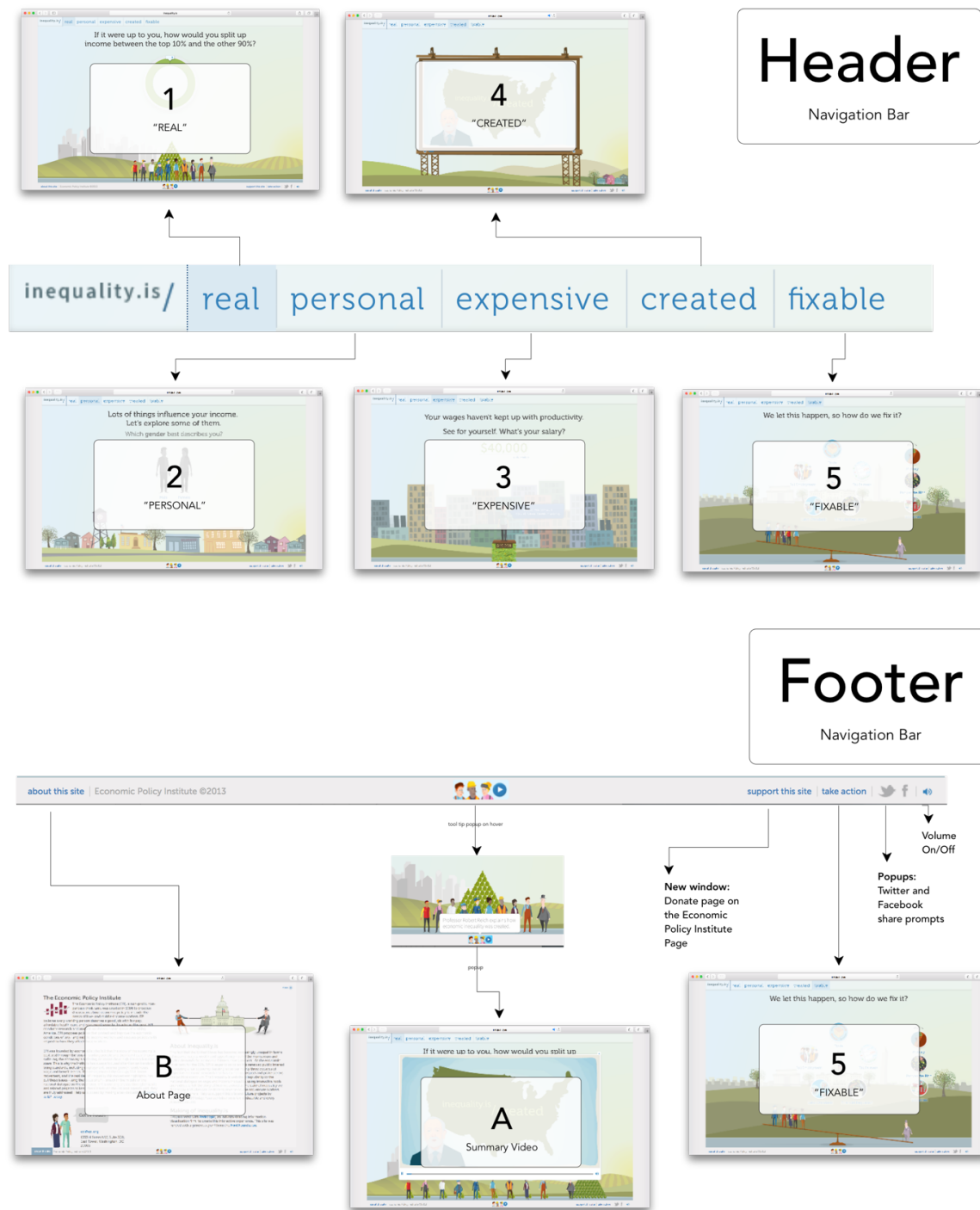


Figure 6 Navigation Bars, captured from “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.” Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://inequality.is>.

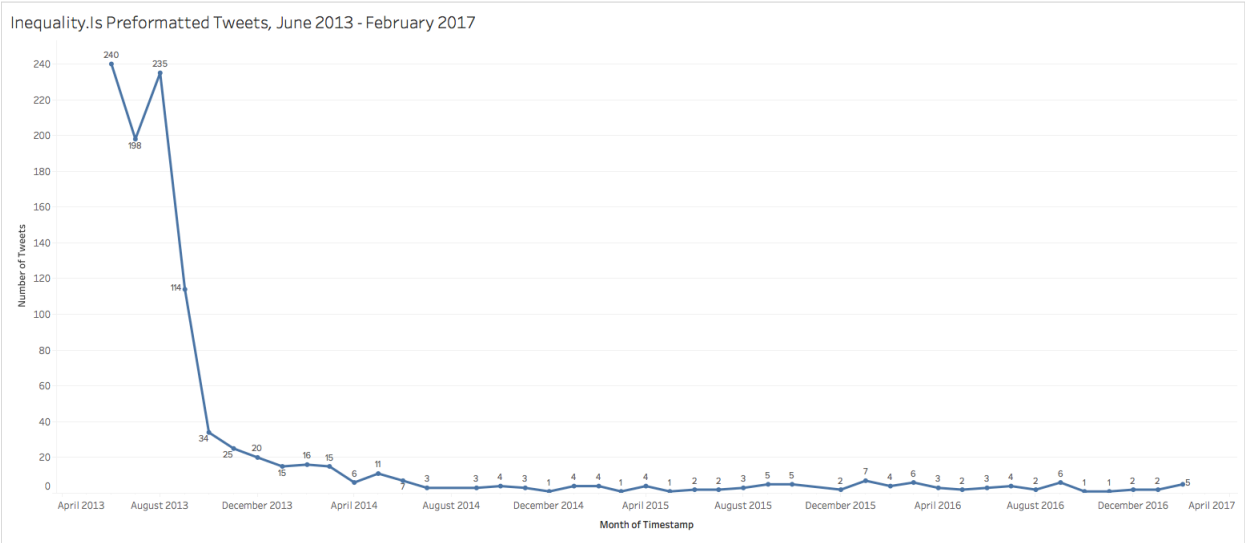


Figure 7, Preformatted Tweets by Month, sourced from Twitter.com and graphed using Tableau

Inequality.Is Preformatted Tweets, By Year 2013-2016

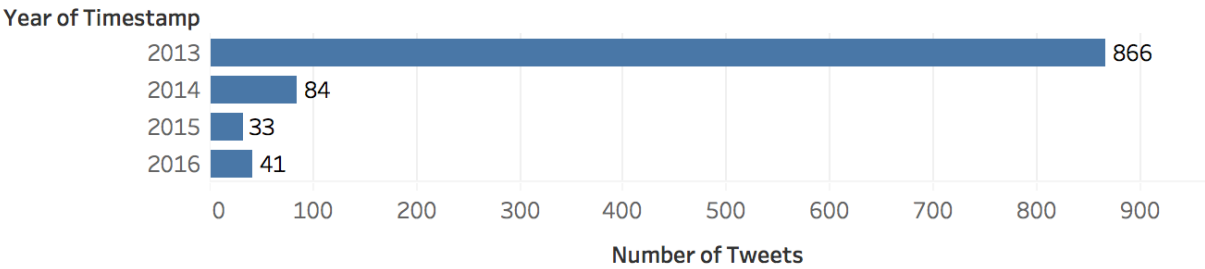


Figure 8, Preformatted Tweets by Year, sourced from Twitter.com and graphed using Tableau

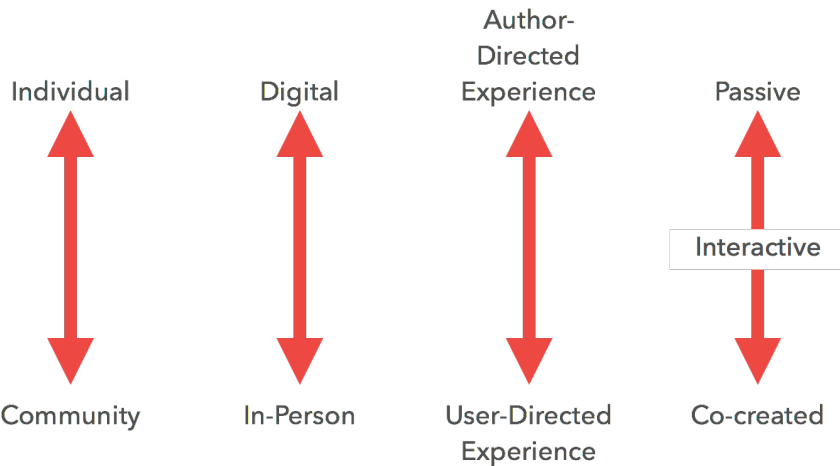


Figure 9 Spectrums of Experience in the i-doc Form

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- <sup>1</sup> “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.”
  - <sup>2</sup> “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.”
  - <sup>3</sup> “Economic Inequality Is Real, Personal, Expensive, and It Was Created. We’ll Show You How.”
  - <sup>4</sup> “Top 10 Best Cabinet Members.”
  - <sup>5</sup> Vidani, “Robert Reich.”
  - <sup>6</sup> SRAGOW, “Reich a Happy Warrior for Economic Reform.”
  - <sup>7</sup> “Desktop vs Mobile vs Tablet Market Share Worldwide.”
  - <sup>8</sup> “Inequality Media | Robert Reich Weighs in on Fixing the Wealth Gap.”
  - <sup>9</sup> “Inequality Media | Robert Reich Weighs in on Fixing the Wealth Gap.”
  - <sup>10</sup> “EPI Launches Inequality.Is.”
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  - <sup>16</sup> McDowell, Ceasar and Chinchilla, Melissa Yvonne, “Partnering with Communities and Institutions,” 462.
  - <sup>17</sup> McDowell, Ceasar and Chinchilla, Melissa Yvonne, 466.
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  - <sup>19</sup> Nash, “What Is Interactivity For?”
  - <sup>20</sup> Kruikemeier et al., “Unraveling the Effects of Active and Passive Forms of Political Internet Use.”
  - <sup>21</sup> Aston and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary,” 127.
  - <sup>22</sup> Nash, “What Is Interactivity For?”
  - <sup>23</sup> Aston and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary,” 127.
  - <sup>24</sup> Aston and Gaudenzi, 127.
  - <sup>25</sup> Nash, Kate, “I-Docs and the Documentary Tradition: Exploring Questions of Citizenship,” 11.
  - <sup>26</sup> “Inequality Media | Robert Reich Weighs in on Fixing the Wealth Gap.”
  - <sup>27</sup> Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*.
  - <sup>28</sup> McDowell, Ceasar and Chinchilla, Melissa Yvonne, “Partnering with Communities and Institutions,” 467.