

Social Stratification

Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective

2nd edition

Edited by
David B. Grusky



*Social Stratification:
Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*



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Sociological Perspective*
2nd edition

edited by

David B. Grusky

Cornell University

For my parents and
in memory of my grandparents

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Study Guide

This book is designed to be used in conjunction with study materials that are available at <http://www.inequality.com>. In the various pages of this site, readers will not only find materials that are explicitly devised for readers of *Social Stratification* (e.g., study questions, supplementary readings), but also a wealth of additional information more broadly relevant to issues of inequality and poverty. This site further reports on ongoing activities of the Center for the Study of Inequality at Cornell University and provides links to related centers as well. The materials provided in this site will of course be frequently revised to reflect changes in the field as well as reactions to the book by professors, students, and other readers.

In using this book, some professors may prefer to treat it as a stand-alone text, whereas others may instead treat it as a source of supplementary readings that are assigned in conjunction with other texts. Although most of the chapters are reprints of past and present classics in the field, many are newly commissioned pieces that provide students with the conceptual background and introductory commentary that a stand-alone text requires. The lead chapter was formulated with this didactic objective explicitly in mind, while the concluding chapters for each of the six substantive parts of the book provide further commentary on the main subfields of stratification research and the analytic orientations underlying them. In all cases, the contributing authors were permitted to write with their own “voice,” and the present book thus departs from conventional texts that seek to represent fields of research in (putatively) objective or balanced fashion.

In assembling this text, every effort was made to select articles that were both path-breaking *and* readable, yet on occasion it proved necessary to compromise on one of these two objectives. The following chapters, in particular, rest on concepts or methods that

might be challenging to some undergraduate students:

- Karl Marx, “Alienation and Social Classes”
- Edward Shils, “Deference”
- David L. Featherman & Robert M. Hauser, “A Refined Model of Occupational Mobility”
- David B. Grusky & Robert M. Hauser, “Comparative Mobility Revisited: Models of Convergence and Divergence in 16 Countries”
- Richard Breen & John H. Goldthorpe, “Explaining Educational Differentials: Towards a Formal Rational Action Theory”
- John Allen Logan, “Rational Choice and the TSL Model of Occupational Opportunity”
- Charles Hirschman & C. Matthew Snipp, “The State of the American Dream: Race and Ethnic Socioeconomic Inequality in the United States, 1970–1990”
- David B. Grusky & Maria Charles, “Is There a Worldwide Sex Segregation Regime?”
- Margaret Mooney Marini & Pi-Ling Fan, “The Gender Gap in Earnings at Career Entry”
- Barbara Stanek Kilbourne, Paula England, George Farkas, Kurt Beron, & Dorothea Weir, “Returns to Skill, Compensating Differentials, and Gender Bias: Effects of Occupational Characteristics on the Wages of White Women and Men”

Although the foregoing chapters present materials that should be mastered by all advanced students (both graduates and undergraduates), they can be safely excised for the purposes of a purely introductory course. The remaining readings were selected so as to ensure that introductory students will still be acquainted with the most important concepts, findings, and debates in the field.

D.B.G.

Preface and Acknowledgments

The standard rationale for publishing an anthology is that new concepts, theories, and findings have been accumulating so rapidly that some sort of organizing or synthesizing effort is needed. Indeed, given the frequency with which rhetoric of this kind appears in the prefaces of anthologies, the skeptical consumer of sociology might reasonably ask whether such a wide array of subfields and specialties can possibly be flourishing at once. In this context, there is something to be said for passing over the usual partisan rhetoric and providing, as much as possible, a more dispassionate reading of the current standing of stratification research. If, for example, one uses publication rates as an arbiter of disciplinary standing, the available evidence suggests that the position of stratification research has remained quite stable in recent decades (almost eerily so), with issues of inequality and mobility playing a featured role in roughly 25 percent of all articles published in major sociology journals since the 1960s (see Figure 1 in Mary Diane Burton and David B. Grusky, 1992, "A Quantitative History of Comparative Stratification Research," *Contemporary Sociology* 21, pp. 623–631). The appropriate conclusion is not that some sort of "take-off period" is still underway, but rather that stratification research is firmly institutionalized and has successfully consolidated its standing as one of the dominant approaches within sociology.

In the six years following the publication of the first edition of *Social Stratification*, the field has made substantial progress on a number of fronts, perhaps most obviously in the areas of race, ethnicity, and gender. Although it may be unfashionable to represent intellectual change as "progress," in the present case this characterization may have some merit, at least in the naive sense that much new evidence has accumulated and many old theories and hypotheses have been supplanted. This

rapid change has made it necessary to revise the first edition substantially. To be sure, virtually all of the so-called classics appearing in the first edition were retained, but a great many contemporary pieces were replaced with yet newer selections that provided important extensions, revisions, and even rebuttals of prior research. The second edition is therefore half-new; that is, of the 95 selections appearing in the second edition, 36 are fresh additions that cannot be found in the first edition, while another 10 are revised versions of pieces that appeared in the first edition. These new selections address issues such as the functions of postmodern inequality (Part II); the class structure of post-communist societies (Part III); the usefulness of neo-Marxian and post-Marxian concepts of exploitation (Part III); the rationale for abandoning or overhauling conventional socioeconomic scales of inequality (Part III); the effects of social capital and networks on finding jobs and "getting ahead" (Part IV); the amount of persistent poverty in advanced industrialism and the plausibility of the "welfare trap" hypothesis (Part IV); the viability of rational action and related choice-based models of mobility and attainment (Part IV); the alleged decoupling of individual attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles from objective class situations (Part V); the structure of recent trends in racial and ethnic inequality (Part VI); the life chances of second-generation immigrants who either assimilate or remain ensconced in their ethnic enclaves (Part VI); the contribution of spatial segregation to maintaining racial inequality (Part VI); the rise of a dual racial hierarchy in which the black-nonblack distinction intensifies even as inequality among nonblacks lessens (Part VI); the extent to which occupational segregation can explain the gender gap in wages (Part VI); the empirical case for policies of "comparable worth" that seek to eliminate wage discrimi-

nation against female-dominated occupations (Part VI); the sources and causes of recent increases in income inequality (Part VII); and the likely future of social inequality and mobility under postindustrialism or postmodernity (Part VII).

As this listing suggests, the research literature has become so large and complex that the task of reducing it to manageable form poses difficulties of all kinds, not the least of which is simply defining defensible boundaries for a field that at times seems indistinguishable from sociology at large. In carrying out this task, it was clearly useful to start off with some “priors” about the subfields and types of contributions that should be featured, yet much of the organizational structure of the first and second editions emerged more gradually in the course of sifting through the literature. As a result, one might view the prefatory comments that follow as a dissonance reduction exercise in which the goal is to infer, after the fact, the larger logic that presumably guided the project. The six organizing principles listed below should be interpreted accordingly:

1. In assembling this collection, the first and foremost objective was to represent the diversity of research traditions on offer, while at the same time giving precedence to those traditions that have so far borne the greatest fruit. As is often the case, the pool of disciplinary knowledge has developed in uneven and ramshackle fashion, so much so that any attempt to cover all subjects equally would grossly misrepresent the current strengths and weaknesses of contemporary stratification research.

2. This sensitivity to disciplinary fashion reveals itself, for example, in the relatively large number of selections addressing and discussing issues of race, ethnicity, and gender. These subfields rose to prominence in the 1970s and continue to be popular even after a quarter-century of intensive and productive research. If the concepts of class, status, and power formed the “holy trinity” of postwar stratification theorizing, then the (partly over-

lapping) concepts of class, race, and gender are playing analogous roles now.

3. The second disciplinary development of interest is the emergence of stratification analysis as the preferred forum for introducing and marketing new methods. Although the study of stratification has become increasingly technical in method, most of the articles selected for this anthology are nonetheless accessible to introductory sociology students and other novices who are committed to careful study and dissection of the texts (see the Study Guide for details).

4. The readers of this volume will thus be disproportionately exposed to contemporary approaches to analyzing stratification systems. However, given that most stratification research has a strongly cumulative character, there is didactic value in incorporating earlier sociological classics as well as some of the “near-classics” that were written well after the foundational contributions of Karl Marx or Max Weber. The latter body of intervening work is often ignored by editors of anthologies, thereby perpetuating (in some small way) the view that all sociological research can or should be stamped with an exclusively Marxian or Weberian imprimatur.

5. In most anthologies, the classics so chosen make the research literature appear more coherent and cumulative than it truly is, as the natural tendency is to emphasize those aspects of the sociological past that seem to best anticipate or motivate current disciplinary interests. The novice reader may be left, then, with the impression that all past sociological work leads directly and inevitably to current disciplinary interests. This form of academic teleology will likely always be popular, yet in the present case some inoculation against it was secured by commissioning a series of concluding essays that locate the selections within a broader historical and substantive context.

6. The final, and most difficult, task faced by editors of anthologies is to chart an optimal course between the Scylla of overly aggressive excerpting and the Charybdis of excessive editorial timidity. By the usual stan-

dards of anthologies, the course charted here was very much an average one, as the objective was to eliminate all inessential material while still preserving the analytic integrity of the contributions. To be sure, some of our readers and contributors would no doubt oppose *all* excerpting, yet the high cost of implementing such a radical stance would be a substantial reduction in the number of articles that could be reproduced.

The editing rules adopted throughout this anthology were in most cases conventional. For example, brackets were used to mark off a passage that was inserted for the purpose of clarifying meaning, whereas ellipses were used whenever a passage appearing in the original contribution was excised altogether. The latter convention was violated, however, if the excised text was merely a footnote or a minor reference to a table or passage (e.g., “see table 1”) that was itself excerpted out. When necessary, tables and footnotes were renumbered without so indicating in the text, and all articles that were cited in excised passages were likewise omitted, without indication, from the list of references appearing at the end of each chapter. The spelling, grammar, and stylistic conventions of the original contributions were otherwise preserved. In this respect, the reader should be forewarned that some of the terms appearing in the original contributions would now be regarded as inappropriate (e.g., “Negro”), whereas others have passed out of common usage and will possibly be unfamiliar. Although a strong argument could clearly be made for eliminating all language that is no longer acceptable, this type of sanitizing would not only exceed usual editorial license but would also generate a final text that contained inconsistent, and possibly confusing, temporal cues. At the end of the book, a special section can be found that details the more controversial editing decisions that in some circumstances had to be made, such as omitting tables, resequencing paragraphs, and smoothing out transitional prose between adjacent sections

(see “Supplementary Information on Sources and Excerpting”).

The truism that scholarly research is a collective enterprise probably holds for this book more so than others. Among the various functions that an anthology fills, one of more obvious ones is to define and celebrate what a field has achieved, and in so doing to pay tribute to those who made such achievement possible. I am duly grateful, therefore, to the dozens of scholars who allowed their work to be reproduced for this anthology or who agreed to write one of the commissioned essays that glue the various sections of it together. This book provides a well-deserved occasion to recognize the many successes of a field that is perhaps better known for its contentiousness and controversy.

The task of fashioning a book out of such a large and diverse field rested, in large part, on the careful labor of dedicated graduate research assistants. In assembling the first edition, I relied extensively on Karen Aschaffenburg and Ivan K. Fukumoto to locate and review hundreds of possible selections, while Mariko Lin Chang provided invaluable help in constructing the subject index and proofing the galleys. The same functions were filled admirably by Matthew Di Carlo, Gabriela Galescu, and Devah Pager in assembling the second edition. I have also profited from the advice and suggestions of the following scholars: James N. Baron, Monica Boyd, Mary C. Brinton, Mary Diane Burton, Phillip A. Butcher, Maria Charles, Paul J. DiMaggio, Thomas A. DiPrete, Mitchell Duneier, Paula England, Mariah Evans, John H. Goldthorpe, Oscar Grusky, Robert M. Hauser, Jerald R. Herting, Leonard J. Hochberg, Michael Hout, Jonathan Kelley, Harold R. Kerbo, Gerhard E. Lenski, Robert D. Mare, John W. Meyer, Martina Morris, Victor Nee, Trond Petersen, Barbara F. Reskin, Manuela Romero, Rachel A. Rosenfeld, Aage B. Sørensen, Jesper B. Sørensen, Eve B. Spangler, Kenneth I. Spenner, Iván Szélenyi, Marta Tienda, Nancy B. Tuma, Kim A. Weeden, Raymond S. Wong, and Morris Zelditch Jr. The seven anonymous reviewers of the first edition also provided con-

structive criticisms that were most helpful in assembling the second edition. If this book proves to be at all useful, it is in large part because my friends and colleagues guided me in fruitful directions.

The selections reproduced here have all been pre-tested in graduate and undergraduate stratification classes at the University of Chicago, Stanford University, and Cornell University. I am indebted to the many students in these classes who shared their reactions to the selections and thereby shaped the final product more than they may appreciate or realize. The students attending my first stratification class at Cornell University require special mention in this regard, as they were unusually dedicated in commenting on the selections appearing in the first edition and suggesting useful revisions and excisions.

The funding for this project came from the usual assortment of public and private sources. The first draft of my introductory essay was completed while I was on fellowship leave funded by the National Science Foundation through the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (NSF BNS-8700864). The honoraria for some of the commissioned essays were paid from Stanford University and Cornell University research funds, while the monies for research assistance were provided by the Presidential Young Investigator Program of the National Science Foundation (NSF SES-8858467), the

Stanford Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth, and my Stanford University and Cornell University research funds. Although I am most grateful for the monies that these organizations so generously provided, they are of course in no way responsible for the views and opinions expressed herein.

It is fitting to conclude by singling out those contributions that make the concept of altruism seem all the more necessary. I would like to give special thanks to Stanley Lieberman for his active assistance in assembling selections for the second edition and to Andrew Day, Thomas Kulesa, Michelle Mallin, David McBride, Adina Popescu, and Leo Wiegman of Westview Press for their advice and support throughout the ordeal that publishing a book inevitably becomes. At the latter stages of the production process, Jennifer Ballentine dealt with impossible deadlines with improbable calm, and Jill Rothenberg of Westview Press was likewise a steadying influence whose wise counsel averted many potential disasters. I am most appreciative, finally, of the grace with which Szonja Szelényi shouldered the triple burden of being a wife and mother, an academic, and an in-house scholarly advisor to her husband. This book bears her imprint in innumerable ways.

D.B.G.

Part I

Introduction



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The Past, Present, and Future of Social Inequality

In advanced industrial societies, much rhetoric and social policy have been directed against economic and social inequality, yet despite such efforts the brute facts of poverty and massive inequality are still everywhere with us. The human condition has so far been a fundamentally unequal one; indeed, all known societies have been characterized by inequalities of some kind, with the most privileged individuals or families enjoying a disproportionate share of power, prestige, and other valued resources. The task of contemporary stratification research is to describe the contours and distribution of inequality and to explain its persistence despite modern egalitarian or anti-stratification values.

The term *stratification system* refers to the complex of social institutions that generate observed inequalities of this sort. The key components of such systems are (1) the institutional processes that define certain types of goods as valuable and desirable, (2) the rules of allocation that distribute these goods across various positions or occupations in the division of labor (e.g., doctor, farmer, “housewife”), and (3) the mobility mechanisms that link individuals to occupations and thereby generate unequal control over valued resources. It follows that inequality is produced by two types of matching processes: The social roles in society are first matched to “reward packages” of unequal value, and individual members of society are then allocated to the positions so defined and rewarded.¹ In all societies, there is a constant flux of occupational incumbents as newcomers enter the labor force and replace dying, retiring, or out-

migrating workers, yet the positions themselves and the reward packages attached to them typically change only gradually. As Schumpeter (1953, 171) puts it, the occupational structure can be seen as “a hotel . . . which is always occupied, but always by different persons.”

The contents of these reward packages may well differ across modern societies, but the range of variability appears not to be great. We have listed in Table 1 the various goods and assets that have been socially valued in past or present societies (for related listings, see Kerbo 2000, 43–44; Rothman 1999, 2–4; Gilbert 1998, 11–14; Duncan 1968, 686–90; Runciman 1968; Svalastoga 1965, 70).² In constructing this table, we have followed the usual objective of including all those goods that are valuable in their own right (i.e., consumption goods) while excluding any “second-order goods” (i.e., investments) that are deemed valuable only insofar as they provide access to other intrinsically desirable goods. The resulting list nonetheless includes resources and assets that serve some investment functions. For example, most economists regard schooling as an investment that generates future streams of income (see Becker 1975), and some sociologists likewise regard cultural resources (e.g., Bourdieu 1977) or social networks (e.g., Coleman 1990) as forms of capital that can be parlayed into educational credentials and other goods.³ Although most of the assets listed in Table 1 are clearly convertible in this fashion, they are not necessarily regarded as investments by the individuals involved. In fact, many valuable

TABLE 1
Types of Assets, Resources, and Valued Goods Underlying Stratification Systems

<i>Asset Group</i>	<i>Selected Examples</i>	<i>Relevant Scholars</i>
1. Economic	Ownership of land, farms, factories, professional practices, businesses, liquid assets, humans (i.e., slaves), labor power (e.g., serfs)	Karl Marx; Erik Wright
2. Political	Household authority (e.g., head of household); workplace authority (e.g., manager); party and societal authority (e.g., legislator); charismatic leader	Max Weber; Ralf Dahrendorf
3. Cultural	High-status consumption practices; “good manners”; privileged lifestyle	Pierre Bourdieu; Paul DiMaggio
4. Social	Access to high-status social networks, social ties, associations and clubs, union memberships	W. Lloyd Warner; James Coleman
5. Honorific	Prestige; “good reputation”; fame; deference and derogation; ethnic and religious purity	Edward Shils; Donald Treiman
6. Civil	Rights of property, contract, franchise, and membership in elective assemblies; freedom of association and speech	T. H. Marshall; Rogers Brubaker
7. Human	Skills; expertise; on-the-job training; experience; formal education; knowledge	Kaare Svalastoga; Gary Becker

assets can be secured at birth or through childhood socialization (e.g., the “good manners” of the aristocracy), and they are therefore acquired without the beneficiaries explicitly weighing the costs of acquisition against the benefits of future returns.⁴

The implicit claim underlying Table 1 is that the listed assets exhaust all possible consumption goods and, as such, constitute the raw materials of stratification systems. Given the complexity of modern reward systems, one might expect stratification scholars to adopt a multidimensional approach, with the objective being to describe and explain the *multivariate distribution* of goods. Although some scholars have indeed advocated a multidimensional approach of this sort (e.g., Halaby and Weakliem 1993; Landecker 1981), most have instead opted to characterize stratification systems in terms of discrete classes or strata whose members are endowed with similar levels or types of assets. In the most extreme versions of this approach, the resulting classes are assumed to be real entities that pre-exist the distribution of assets, and many

scholars therefore refer to the “effects” of class location on the assets that their incumbents control (see the following section for details).

The goal of stratification research has thus been reduced to describing the structure of these social classes and specifying the processes by which they are generated and maintained. The following types of questions are central to the field:

- *Forms and sources of stratification:* What are the major forms of inequality in human history? Can the ubiquity of inequality be attributed to individual differences in talent or ability? Is some form of inequality an inevitable feature of human life?
- *The structure of contemporary stratification:* What are the principal “fault lines” or social cleavages that define the contemporary class structure? Have these cleavages strengthened or weakened with the transition to modernity and postmodernity?

- *Generating stratification:* How frequently do individuals move into new classes, occupations, or income groups? Is there a permanent “underclass?” To what extent are occupational outcomes determined by such forces as intelligence, effort, schooling, aspirations, social contacts, and individual luck?
- *The consequences of stratification:* How are the lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals shaped by their class locations? Are there identifiable “class cultures” in past and present societies?
- *Ascriptive processes:* What types of social processes and state policies serve to maintain or alter racial, ethnic, and sex discrimination in labor markets? Have these forms of discrimination weakened or strengthened with the transition to modernity and postmodernity?
- *The future of stratification:* Will stratification systems take on completely new and distinctive forms in the future? How unequal will these systems be? Is the concept of social class still useful in describing postmodern forms of stratification? Are stratification systems gradually shedding their distinctive features and converging toward some common (i.e., “postmodern”) regime?

The foregoing questions all adopt a critical orientation to human stratification systems that is distinctively modern in its underpinnings. For the greater part of human history, the existing stratification order was regarded as an immutable feature of society, and the implicit objective of commentators was to explain or justify this order in terms of religious or quasi-religious doctrines (see Bottomore 1965; Tawney 1931). It was only with the Enlightenment that a critical “rhetoric of equality” emerged in opposition to the civil and legal advantages of the aristocracy and other privileged status groupings. After these advantages were largely eliminated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the same egalitarian ideal was extended and recast to encompass not merely civil assets (e.g., voting

rights) but also economic assets in the form of land, property, and the means of production. In its most radical form, this economic egalitarianism led to Marxist interpretations of human history, and it ultimately provided the intellectual underpinnings for socialist stratification systems. Although much of stratification theory has been formulated in reaction and opposition to these early forms of Marxist scholarship,⁵ the field nonetheless shares with Marxism a distinctively modern (i.e., Enlightenment) orientation based on the premise that individuals are “ultimately morally equal” (see Meyer 2001; see also Tawney 1931). This premise implies that issues of inequality are critical in evaluating the legitimacy of stratification systems.

The purpose of the present volume is to acquaint readers with some of these modern theories and analyses. As has frequently been noted (e.g., Grusky and Takata 1992), the field of stratification covers an exceedingly diverse terrain, and we shall therefore delimit our review by first defining some core stratification concepts and then focusing on the six classes of empirical questions previously identified. The readings presented after this introductory essay are likewise organized around the same set of empirical questions.

Basic Concepts and Simplifying Strategies

The stratification literature has developed its own vocabulary to describe the distribution of assets, goods, and resources listed in Table 1. The key concepts of this literature can be defined as follows:

1. The degree of *inequality* in a given reward or asset depends, of course, on its dispersion or concentration across the individuals in the population. Although many scholars seek to characterize the overall level of societal inequality with a single parameter, such attempts will obviously be compromised insofar as some types of rewards are distributed more

equally than others. This complexity clearly arises in the case of modern stratification systems; for example, the recent emergence of “citizenship rights” implies that civil goods are now widely dispersed across all citizens, whereas economic and political goods continue to be disproportionately controlled by a relatively small elite (see, e.g., Marshall 1981).

2. The *rigidity* of a stratification system is indexed by the continuity (over time) in the social standing of its members. The stratification system is said to be highly rigid, for example, if the current wealth, power, or prestige of individuals can be accurately predicted on the basis of their prior statuses or those of their parents. It should again be emphasized that the amount of rigidity (or “social closure”) in any given society will typically vary across the different types of resources and assets listed in Table 1.
3. The stratification system rests on *ascriptive processes* to the extent that traits present at birth (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity, parental wealth, nationality) influence the subsequent social standing of individuals. If ascriptive processes of this sort are in operation, it is possible (but by no means guaranteed) that the underlying traits themselves will become bases for group formation and collective action (e.g., race riots, feminist movements). In modern societies, ascription of all kinds is usually seen as undesirable or discriminatory, and much governmental policy is therefore directed toward fashioning a stratification system in which individuals acquire resources solely by virtue of their achievements.⁶
4. The degree of *status crystallization* is indexed by the correlations among the assets in Table 1. If these correlations are strong, the same individuals (i.e., the “upper class”) will consistently appear at the top of all status hierarchies, while other individuals (i.e., the “lower

class”) will consistently appear at the bottom of the stratification system. By contrast, various types of status inconsistencies (e.g., a poorly educated millionaire) will emerge in stratification systems with weakly correlated hierarchies, and it is correspondingly difficult in such systems to define a unitary set of classes that have predictive power with respect to all resources.

The foregoing discussion suggests, then, that stratification systems are complex and multidimensional. However, many scholars are quick to argue that this complexity is mere “surface appearance,” with the implication being that stratification systems can in fact be adequately understood with a smaller and simpler set of principles. We shall proceed by reviewing three simplifying assumptions that have proved to be especially popular.

Reductionism

The prevailing approach is to claim that only one of the “asset groups” in Table 1 is truly fundamental in understanding the structure, sources, or evolution of societal stratification.⁷ There are nearly as many claims of this sort as there are dimensions in Table 1. To be sure, Marx is most commonly criticized (with some justification) for placing “almost exclusive emphasis on economic factors as determinants of social class” (Lipset 1968, 300), but in fact much of what passes for stratification theorizing amounts to reductionism of one form or another. Among non-Marxist scholars, inequalities in honor or power are frequently regarded as the most fundamental sources of class formation, whereas the distribution of economic assets is seen as purely secondary (or “epiphenomenal”). For example, Dahrendorf (1959, 172) argues that “differential authority in associations is the ultimate ‘cause’ of the formation of conflict groups” (see also Lenski 1966), and Shils (1968, 130) suggests that “without the intervention of considerations of deference position the . . . inequalities in the distribution of

any particular facility or reward would not be grouped into a relatively small number of vaguely bounded strata.” These extreme forms of reductionism have been less popular of late; indeed, even neo-Marxian scholars now typically recognize several stratification dimensions, with the social classes of interest then being defined as particular combinations of scores on the selected variables (e.g., Wright 1997; see also Bourdieu 1984). The contributions in Part III of this volume were selected, in part, to acquaint readers with these various claims and the arguments on which they are based.

Synthesizing Approaches

There is an equally long tradition of research based on synthetic measures that simultaneously tap a wide range of assets and resources. As noted above, many of the rewards in Table 1 (e.g., income) are principally allocated through the jobs or social roles that individuals occupy, and one can therefore measure the standing of individuals by classifying them in terms of their social positions. In this context, Parkin (1971, 18) has referred to the occupational structure as the “backbone of the entire reward system of modern Western society,” and Hauser and Featherman (1977, 4) argue that studies “framed in terms of occupational mobility . . . yield information simultaneously (albeit, indirectly) on status power, economic power, and political power” (see also Duncan 1968, 689–90; Parsons 1954, 326–29). The most recent representatives of this position, Grusky and Sørensen (1998), have argued that detailed occupations are not only the main conduits through which valued goods are disbursed but are also deeply institutionalized categories that are salient to workers, constitute meaningful social communities and reference groups, and provide enduring bases of collective action (see also Grusky and Sørensen 2001). Although occupations continue, then, to be the preferred measure within this tradition, other scholars have pursued the same synthesizing objective by simply asking community mem-

bers to locate their peers in a hierarchy of social classes (e.g., Warner 1949). Under the latter approach, a synthetic classification is no longer secured by ranking and sorting occupations in terms of the bundles of rewards attached to them, but rather by passing the raw data of inequality through the fulcrum of individual judgment.⁸

Classification Exercises

Regardless of whether a reductionist or synthesizing approach is taken, most scholars adopt the final simplifying step of defining a relatively small number of discrete classes.⁹ For example, Parkin (1971, 25) argues for six occupational classes with the principal “cleavage falling between the manual and non-manual categories,” whereas Dahrendorf (1959, 170) argues for a two-class solution with a “clear line drawn between those who participate in the exercise [of authority] . . . and those who are subject to the authoritative commands of others.”¹⁰ Although close variants of the Parkin scheme continue to be used, the emerging convention among quantitative stratification scholars is to apply either the 12-category neo-Marxian scheme fashioned by Wright (1997; 1989; 1985) or the 11-category neo-Weberian scheme devised by Erikson and Goldthorpe (2001; 1992). At the same time, new classification schemes continue to be regularly proposed, with the impetus for such efforts typically being the continuing expansion of the service sector (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1999; 1993) or the associated growth of contingent work relations (e.g., Perrucci and Wysong 1999). The question that necessarily arises for all contemporary schemes is whether the constituent categories are purely nominal entities or are truly meaningful to the individuals involved. If the categories are intended to be meaningful, one would expect class members not only to be aware of their membership (i.e., “class awareness”) but also to identify with their class (i.e., “class identification”) and occasionally act on its behalf (i.e., “class action”).¹¹ There is no shortage of debate about the condi-

tions under which classes of this (real) sort are generated.

The simplifying devices listed here are discussed in greater detail in our review of contemporary models of class and status groupings (see “The Structure of Modern Stratification”). However, rather than turning directly to the analysis of contemporary systems, we first set the stage by outlining a highly stylized and compressed history of the stratification forms that appear in premodern, modern, and postmodern periods.

Forms of Stratification

The starting point for any comparative analysis of social inequality is the purely descriptive task of classifying various types of stratification systems. The staple of modern classification efforts has been the tripartite distinction among class, caste, and estate (e.g., Tumin 1985; Svalastoga 1965), but there is also a long and illustrious tradition of Marxian typological work that introduces the additional categories of primitive communism, slave society, and socialism (see Wright 1985; Marx [1939] 1971). As shown in Table 2, these conventional approaches are largely (but not entirely) complementary, and it is therefore possible to fashion a hybrid classification that incorporates most of the standard distinctions (for related work, see Kerbo 2000; Rossides 1996; Runciman 1974).

The typology presented here relies heavily on some of the simplifying devices discussed earlier. For each of the stratification forms listed in Table 2, we have assumed not only that certain types of assets tend to emerge as the dominant stratifying forces (see column 2), but also that the asset groups so identified constitute the major axis around which social classes or status groupings are organized (see column 3). If the latter assumptions hold, the rigidity of stratification systems can be indexed by the amount of class persistence (see column 5), and the degree of crystallization can be indexed by the correlation between

class membership and each of the assets listed in Table 1 (see column 6).¹² The final column in Table 2 rests on the further assumption that stratification systems have (reasonably) coherent ideologies that legitimate the rules and criteria by which individuals are allocated to positions in the class structure (see column 7). In most cases, ideologies of this kind are largely conservative in their effects, but they can sometimes serve as forces for change as well as stability. For example, if the facts of labor market processes are inconsistent with the prevailing ideology (e.g., racial discrimination in advanced industrial societies), then various sorts of ameliorative action might be anticipated (e.g., affirmative action programs).

The stratification forms represented in Table 2 should thus be seen as ideal types rather than as viable descriptions of real systems existing in the past or present. In constructing these categories, our intention is not to make empirical claims about how existing systems operate in practice, but rather to capture (and distill) the accumulated wisdom about how these systems might operate in their purest form. These ideal-typical models can nonetheless assist us in understanding empirical systems. Indeed, insofar as societies evolve through the gradual “overlaying” of new stratification forms on older (and partly superseded) ones, it becomes possible to interpret contemporary systems as a complex mixture of several of the ideal types presented in Table 2 (see Schumpeter 1951).

The first panel in this table pertains to the “primitive” tribal systems that dominated human society from the very beginning of human evolution until the Neolithic revolution of some 10,000 years ago. The characterizations of columns 2–7 necessarily conceal much variability; as Anderson (1974, 549) puts it, “merely in the night of our ignorance [do] all alien shapes take on the same hue.” These variable features of tribal societies are clearly of interest, but for our purposes the important similarities are that (1) the total size of the distributable surplus was in all cases quite limited, and (2) this cap on the surplus placed corresponding limits on the

TABLE 2
Basic Parameters of Stratification for Eight Ideal-Typical Systems

<i>System</i> (1)	<i>Principal Assets</i> (2)	<i>Major Strata or Classes</i> (3)	<i>Inequality</i> (4)	<i>Rigidity</i> (5)	<i>Crystalliza- tion</i> (6)	<i>Justifying Ideology</i> (7)
<i>A. Hunting and gathering society</i>						
1. Tribalism	Human (hunting and magic skills)	Chiefs, shamans, and other tribe members	Low	Low	High	Meritocratic selection
<i>B. Horticultural and agrarian society</i>						
2. Asiatic mode	Political (i.e., incumbency of state office)	Office-holders and peasants	High	Medium	High	Tradition and religious doctrine
3. Feudalism	Economic (land and labor power)	Nobility, clergy, and commoners	High	Medium-High	High	Tradition and Roman Catholic doctrine
4. Slavery	Economic (human property)	Slave owners, slaves, "free men"	High	Medium-High	High	Doctrine of natural and social inferiority (of slaves)
5. Caste society	Honorific and cultural (ethnic purity and "pure" lifestyles)	Castes and subcastes	High	High	High	Tradition and Hindu religious doctrine
<i>C. Industrial society</i>						
6. Class system	Economic (means of production)	Capitalists and workers	Medium-High	Medium	High	Classical liberalism
7. State socialism	Political (party and workplace authority)	Managers and managed	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	High	Marxism and Leninism
8. "Advanced" industrialism	Human (i.e., education, expertise)	Skill-based occupational groupings	Medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Classical liberalism

overall level of economic inequality (but not necessarily on other forms of inequality). It should also be noted that customs such as gift exchange, food sharing, and the like were commonly practiced in tribal societies and had obvious redistributive effects. In fact, some observers (e.g., Marx [1939] 1971) treated these societies as examples of "primitive communism," because the means of production (e.g., tools, land) were owned collectively and other types of property typically were distributed evenly among tribal members. This is not to suggest that a perfect equality prevailed; after all, the more powerful medicine men (i.e., shamans) often secured a disproportionate share of resources,

and the tribal chief could exert considerable influence on the political decisions of the day. However, these residual forms of power and privilege were never directly inherited, nor were they typically allocated in accord with well-defined ascriptive traits (e.g., racial traits).¹³ It was only by demonstrating superior skills in hunting, magic, or leadership that tribal members could secure political office or acquire status and prestige (see Kerbo 2000; Nolan and Lenski 1998; Lenski 1966). Although meritocratic forms of allocation are often seen as prototypically modern, in fact they were present in incipient form at the very earliest stages of societal development.

With the emergence of agrarian forms of production, the economic surplus became large enough to support more complex systems of stratification. Among Marxist theorists (e.g., Godelier 1978; Chesneaux 1964), the “Asiatic mode” is often treated as an intermediate formation in the transition to advanced agrarian society (e.g., feudalism), and we have therefore led off our typology with the Asiatic case (see line B2).¹⁴ In doing so, we should emphasize that the explicit evolutionary theories of Godelier (1978) and others have not been well received, yet many scholars still take the fallback position that Asiaticism is an important “analytical, though not chronological, stage” in the development of class society (Hobsbawm 1965, 37; see also Anderson 1974, 486; Mandel 1971, 116–39). The main features of this formation are (1) a large peasant class residing in agricultural villages that are “almost autarkic” (O’Leary 1989, 17); (2) the absence of strong legal institutions recognizing private property rights; (3) a state elite that extracts surplus agricultural production through rents or taxes and expends it on “defense, opulent living, and the construction of public works” (Shaw 1978, 127);¹⁵ and (4) a constant flux in elite personnel due to “wars of dynastic succession and wars of conquest by nomadic warrior tribes” (O’Leary 1989, 18; for more extensive reviews, see Brook 1989; Krader 1975).

Beyond this skeletal outline, all else is open to dispute. There are long-standing debates, for example, about how widespread the Asiatic mode was (see Mandel 1971, 124–28) and about the appropriateness of reducing all forms of Asian development to a “uniform residual category” (Anderson 1974, 548–49). These issues are clearly worth pursuing, but for our purposes it suffices to note that the Asiatic mode provides a conventional example of how a “dictatorship of officialdom” can flourish in the absence of private property and a well-developed proprietary class (Gouldner 1980, 327–28). By this reading of Asiaticism, the parallel with modern socialism looms large (at least in some quarters), so much so that various scholars have suggested

that Marx downplayed the Asian case for fear of exposing it as a “parable for socialism” (see Gouldner 1980, 324–52; see also Wittfogel 1981).

Whereas the institution of private property was underdeveloped in the East, the ruling class under Western feudalism was, by contrast, very much a propertied one.¹⁶ The distinctive feature of feudalism was that the nobility not only owned large estates or manors but also held legal title to the labor power of its serfs (see line B3).¹⁷ If a serf fled to the city, this was considered a form of theft: The serf was stealing that portion of his or her labor power owned by the lord (Wright 1985, 78). Under this interpretation, the statuses of serf and slave differ only in degree, and slavery thereby constitutes the “limiting case” in which workers lose all control over their own labor power (see line B4). At the same time, it would obviously be a mistake to reify this distinction, given that the history of agrarian Europe reveals “almost infinite gradations of subordination” (Bloch 1961, 256) that confuse and blur the conventional dividing lines between slavery, serfdom, and freedom (see Finley 1960 on the complex gradations of Greek slavery; see also Patterson 1982, 21–27). The slavery of Roman society provides the best example of complete subordination (Sio 1965), whereas some of the slaves of the early feudal period were bestowed with rights of real consequence (e.g., the right to sell surplus product), and some of the (nominally) free men were in fact obliged to provide rents or services to the manorial lord (Bloch 1961, 255–74).¹⁸ The social classes that emerged under European agrarianism were thus structured in quite diverse ways. In all cases, we nonetheless find that property ownership was firmly established and that the life chances of individuals were defined, in large part, by their control over property in its differing forms. Unlike the ideal-typical Asiatic case, the nation-state was largely peripheral to the feudal stratification system, because the means of production (i.e., land, labor) were controlled by a proprietary class that emerged quite independently of the state.¹⁹

The historical record makes it clear that agrarian stratification systems were not always based on strictly hereditary forms of social closure (see panel B, column 5). The case of European feudalism is especially instructive in this regard, because it suggests that stratification systems often become more rigid as the underlying institutional forms mature and take shape (see Kelley 1981; Hechter and Brustein 1980; Mosca 1939). Although it is well-known that the era of classical feudalism (i.e., post-twelfth century) was characterized by a “rigid stratification of social classes” (Bloch 1961, 325),²⁰ there was greater permeability during the period prior to the institutionalization of the manorial system and the associated transformation of the nobility into a legal class. In this transitional period, access to the nobility was not yet legally restricted to the offspring of nobility, nor was marriage across classes or estates formally prohibited (see Bloch 1961, 320–31, for further details). The case of ancient Greece provides a complementary example of a (relatively) open agrarian society. As Finley (1960) and others have noted, the condition of slavery was indeed heritable under Greek law, yet manumission (i.e., the freeing of slaves) was so common that the slave class had to be constantly replenished with new captives secured through war or piracy. The possibility of servitude was thus something that “no man, woman, or child, regardless of status or wealth, could be sure to escape” (Finley 1960, 161). At the same time, hereditary forms of closure were more fully developed in some slave systems, most notably the American one. As Sio (1965, 303) notes, slavery in the antebellum South was “hereditary, endogamous, and permanent,” with the annual manumission rate apparently as low as 0.04 percent by 1850 (see Patterson 1982, 273). The slave societies of Jamaica, South Africa, and rural Iraq were likewise based on largely permanent slave populations (see Rodriguez and Patterson 1999; Patterson 1982).

The most extreme examples of hereditary closure are of course found in caste societies (see line B5). In some respects, American slav-

ery might be seen as having “caste-like features” (see Berreman 1981), but Hindu India clearly provides the defining case of caste organization.²¹ The Indian caste system is based on (1) a hierarchy of status groupings (i.e., castes) that are ranked by ethnic purity, wealth, and access to goods or services, (2) a corresponding set of “closure rules” that restrict all forms of inter-caste marriage or mobility and thereby make caste membership both hereditary and permanent; (3) a high degree of physical and occupational segregation enforced by elaborate rules and rituals governing intercaste contact; and (4) a justifying ideology (i.e., Hinduism) that induces the population to regard such extreme forms of inequality as legitimate and appropriate (Smaje 2000; Bayly 1999; Sharma 1999; Sharma 1997; Jalali 1992; Brass 1985; 1983; Berreman 1981; Dumont 1970; Srinivas 1962; Leach 1960). What makes this system so distinctive, then, is not merely its well-developed closure rules but also the fundamentally honorific (and noneconomic) character of the underlying social hierarchy. As indicated in Table 2, the castes of India are ranked on a continuum of ethnic and ritual purity, with the highest positions in the system reserved for castes that prohibit behaviors that are seen as dishonorable or “polluting.” Under some circumstances, castes that acquired political and economic power eventually advanced in the status hierarchy, yet they typically did so only after mimicking the behaviors and lifestyles of higher castes (Srinivas 1962).

The defining feature of the industrial era (see panel C) has been the emergence of egalitarian ideologies and the consequent “delegitimation” of the extreme forms of stratification found in caste, feudal, and slave systems. This can be seen, for example, in the European revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that pitted the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment against the privileges of rank and the political power of the nobility. In the end, these struggles eliminated the last residue of feudal privilege, but they also made new types of inequality and stratifi-

cation possible. Under the class system that ultimately emerged (see line C6), the estates of the feudal era were replaced by purely economic groups (i.e., “classes”), and closure rules based on heredity were likewise supplanted by (formally) meritocratic processes. The resulting classes were neither legal entities nor closed status groupings, and the associated class-based inequalities could therefore be represented and justified as the natural outcome of competition among individuals with differing abilities, motivation, or moral character (i.e., “classical liberalism”). As indicated in line C6 of Table 2, the class structure of early industrialism had a clear “economic base” (Kerbo 1991, 23), so much so that Marx ([1894] 1972) defined classes in terms of their relationship to the means of economic production. The precise contours of the industrial class structure are nonetheless a matter of continuing debate (see “The Structure of Contemporary Stratification”); for example, a simple Marxian model focuses on the cleavage between capitalists and workers, whereas more elaborate Marxian and neo-Marxian models identify additional intervening or “contradictory” classes (e.g., Wright 1997; 1985), and yet other (non-Marxian) approaches represent the class structure as a continuous gradation of “monetary wealth and income” (Mayer and Buckley 1970, 15).²²

Whatever the relative merits of these models might be, the ideology underlying the socialist revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was of course explicitly Marxist. The intellectual heritage of these revolutions and their legitimating ideologies can again be traced to the Enlightenment, but the rhetoric of equality that emerged in this period was now directed against the economic power of the capitalist class rather than the status and honorific privileges of the nobility. The evidence from Eastern Europe and elsewhere suggests that these egalitarian ideals were only partially realized (e.g., Lenski 2000; Széleányi 1998; Connor 1991). In the immediate postrevolutionary period, factories and farms were indeed collectivized or social-

ized, and various fiscal and economic reforms were instituted for the express purpose of reducing income inequality and wage differentials among manual and nonmanual workers (Parkin 1971, 137–59; Giddens 1973, 226–30). Although these egalitarian policies were subsequently weakened through the reform efforts of Stalin and others, inequality on the scale of prerevolutionary society was never reestablished among rank-and-file workers (cf. Lenski 2001). There nonetheless remained substantial inequalities in power and authority; most notably, the socialization of productive forces did not have the intended effect of empowering workers, as the capitalist class was replaced by a “new class” of party officials and managers who continued to control the means of production and to allocate the resulting social surplus (see Eyal, Széleányi, and Townsley 2001). This class has been variously identified with intellectuals or intelligentsia (e.g., Gouldner 1979), bureaucrats or managers (e.g., Rizzi 1985), and party officials or appointees (e.g., Djilas 1965). Regardless of the formulation adopted, the presumption is that the working class ultimately lost out in contemporary socialist revolutions, just as it did in the so-called bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Whereas the means of production were socialized in the revolutions of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the capitalist class remained largely intact throughout the process of industrialization in the West. However, the propertied class may ultimately be weakened by ongoing structural changes, with the most important of these being (1) the rise of a service economy and the growing power of the “service class” (Esping-Andersen 1999; 1993; Goldthorpe 1982; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979), (2) the increasing centrality of theoretical knowledge in the transition to a new “information age” (Castells 1999; Bell 1973), and (3) the consequent emergence of technical expertise, educational degrees, and training certificates as “new forms of property” (Berg 1973, 183; Gouldner 1979). The foregoing developments all

suggest that human and cultural capital are replacing economic capital as the principal stratifying forces in advanced industrial society (see line C8). By this formulation, a dominant class of cultural elites may be emerging in the West, much as the transition to state socialism (allegedly) generated a new class of intellectuals in the East.

This is not to suggest that all theorists of advanced industrialism posit a grand divide between the cultural elite and an undifferentiated working mass. In fact, some commentators (e.g., Dahrendorf 1959, 48–57) have argued that skill-based cleavages are crystallizing throughout the occupational structure, with the result being a finely differentiated class system made up of discrete occupations (Grusky and Sørensen 1998) or a continuous gradation of socioeconomic status (e.g., Parsons 1970; see also Grusky and Van Rompaey 1992). In nearly all models of advanced industrial society, it is further assumed that education is the principal mechanism by which individuals are sorted into such classes, and educational institutions thus serve in this context to “license” human capital and convert it to cultural currency.²³ The rise of mass education is sometimes represented as a rigidifying force (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), but the prevailing view is that the transition to advanced industrialism has equalized life chances and produced a more open society (see line C8, column 5).²⁴

As postmodernism gains adherents, it has become fashionable to argue that such conventional representations of advanced industrialism, both in their Marxian and non-Marxian form, have become less useful in understanding contemporary stratification and its developmental tendencies (e.g., Pakulski and Waters 1996; Bradley 1996; Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992; Beck 1992; Bauman 1992). Although the postmodern literature is notoriously fragmented, the variants of postmodernism that are relevant for our purposes invariably proceed from the assumption that class identities, ideologies, and organization are attenuating and that “new theories, perhaps more cultural than structural, [are] in

order” (Davis 1982, 585). In the parlance of Table 2, the core claim is that postmodern stratification involves a radical decline in status crystallization, as participation in particular life-styles or communities is no longer class-determined and increasingly becomes a “function of individual taste, choice, and commitment” (Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992, 222).²⁵

This line of argument has not yet been subjected to convincing empirical test and may well prove to be premature (for critiques, see Marshall 1997; Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1993). However, even if lifestyles and life chances are truly “decoupling” from economic class, this ought not be misunderstood as a more general decline in stratification *per se*. The brute facts of inequality will of course still be with us even if social classes of the conventional form are weakening. As is well-known, some forms of inequality have increased in recent years (see Levy 1998; Danziger and Gottschalk 1993; 1995), and others clearly show no signs of disappearing or withering away.

Sources of Stratification

The preceding sketch makes it clear that a wide range of stratification systems emerged over the course of human history. The question that arises, then, is whether some form of stratification or inequality is an inevitable feature of human society. In taking on this question, one turns naturally to the functionalist theory of Davis and Moore (1945, 242), as it addresses explicitly “the universal necessity which calls forth stratification in any system” (see also Davis 1953; Moore 1963a; 1963b). The starting point for any functionalist approach is the premise that all societies must devise some means to motivate the best workers to fill the most important and difficult occupations. This “motivational problem” might be addressed in a variety of ways, but perhaps the simplest solution is to construct a hierarchy of rewards (e.g., prestige, property, power) that privileges the incumbents of func-

tionally significant positions. As noted by Davis and Moore (1945, 243), this amounts to setting up a system of institutionalized inequality (i.e., a “stratification system”), with the occupational structure serving as a conduit through which unequal rewards and perquisites are allocated. The stratification system may be seen, therefore, as an “unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons” (Davis and Moore 1945, 243).

The Davis-Moore hypothesis has of course come under criticism from several quarters (see Huaco 1966 for an early review). The prevailing view, at least among postwar commentators, is that the original hypothesis cannot adequately account for inequalities in “stabilized societies where statuses are ascribed” (Wesolowski 1962, 31; Tumin 1953). Indeed, whenever the vacancies in the occupational structure are allocated on purely hereditary grounds, one cannot reasonably argue that the reward system is serving its putative function of matching qualified workers to important positions. What must be recognized, however, is that a purely hereditary system is rarely achieved in practice; in fact, even in caste societies of the most rigid sort, one typically finds that talented and qualified individuals have some opportunities for upward mobility. With the Davis-Moore formulation (1945), this slow trickle of mobility is regarded as essential to the functioning of the social system, so much so that elaborate systems of inequality have evidently been devised to ensure that the trickle continues (see Davis 1948, 369–70, for additional and related comments). Although the Davis-Moore hypothesis can therefore be used to explain stratification in societies with *some* mobility, the original hypothesis is clearly untenable insofar as there is complete closure.

The functionalist approach has been further criticized for neglecting the “power element” in stratification systems (Wrong 1959, 774). It has long been argued that Davis and Moore failed “to observe that incumbents [of functionally important positions] have the

power not only to insist on payment of expected rewards but to demand even larger ones” (Wrong 1959, 774; see also Dahrendorf 1968). The stratification system thus becomes “self-reproducing” (see Collins 1975) insofar as incumbents of important positions use their power to preserve or extend their privileges. By this argument, the distribution of rewards reflects not only the latent needs of the larger society but also the balance of power among competing groups and their members. The emerging neo-Marxian literature on exploitative “rents” is directly relevant to such anti-functionalist formulations, because it identifies the conditions under which workers enjoy economic returns that are greater than training costs (e.g., schooling, wages foregone) and hence in excess of the functionally necessary wage. The standard rent-generating tactic among modern workers is to create artificial labor shortages; that is, excess returns can be secured by restricting opportunities for training or credentialing, as doing so prevents additional rent-seeking workers from entering the field and driving wages down to the level found elsewhere (Sørensen 2001; 1996; Roemer 1988; Wright 1985). These excess returns therefore arise because occupational incumbents can use their positional power to limit the supply of competing labor.

It bears emphasizing that the foregoing position operates outside a functionalist account but is not necessarily inconsistent with it. Under a Davis-Moore formulation, the latent function of inequality is to guarantee that labor is allocated efficiently, but Davis and Moore (1945) acknowledge that excess inequality may also arise for other reasons and through other processes. The extreme forms of stratification found in existing societies may thus exceed the “minimum . . . necessary to maintain a complex division of labor” (Wrong 1959, 774). There are of course substantial cross-national differences in the extent and patterning of inequality that are best explained in historical and institutional terms (Fischer et al. 1996). Most notably, there is much institutional variability in the conditions under which rent-generating closure is

allowed, especially those forms of closure involving manual labor (i.e., unionization). As argued by Esping-Andersen (1999; 1990), countries also “choose” different ways of allocating production between the market and the state, with market-based regimes typically involving higher levels of inequality. The American system, for example, is highly unequal not merely because union-based closure has historically been suppressed, but also because state-sponsored redistributive programs are poorly developed and market forces are relied on to allocate services that in other countries are provided universally (e.g., healthcare).

Obversely, the egalitarian policies of state socialism demonstrate that substantial reductions in inequality are achievable through state-mandated reform, especially during the early periods of radical institutional restructuring (see Kelley 1981). It is nonetheless possible that such reform was pressed too far and that “many of the internal, systemic problems of Marxist societies were the result of inadequate motivational arrangements” (Lenski 2001). As Lenski (2001) notes, the socialist commitment to wage leveling made it difficult to recruit and motivate highly skilled workers, and the “visible hand” of the socialist economy could never be calibrated to mimic adequately the natural incentive of capitalist profit-taking. These results lead Lenski (2001) to the neo-functionalist conclusion that “successful incentive systems involve . . . motivating the best qualified people to seek the most important positions.” It remains to be seen whether this negative reading of the socialist “experiments in destratification” (Lenski 1978) will generate a new round of functionalist theorizing and debate.

The Structure of Contemporary Stratification

The history of stratification theory is in large part a history of debates about the contours of class, status, and prestige hierarchies in advanced industrial societies. These debates

might appear to be nothing more than academic infighting, but the participants treat them with high seriousness as a “necessary prelude to the conduct of political strategy” (Parkin 1979, 16). For example, considerable energy has been devoted to identifying the correct dividing line between the working class and the bourgeoisie, because the task of locating the oppressed class is seen as a prerequisite to devising a political strategy that might appeal to it. It goes without saying that political and intellectual goals are often conflated in such mapmaking efforts, and the assorted debates in this subfield are thus infused with more than the usual amount of scholarly contention. These debates are complex and wide-ranging, but it suffices for our purposes to distinguish the following five schools of thought (see Wright 1997 for a more detailed review).

Marxists and Post-Marxists

The debates within the Marxist and neo-Marxist camps have been especially contentious, not only because of the foregoing political motivations, but also because the discussion of class within *Capital* (Marx [1894] 1972) is too fragmentary and unsystematic to adjudicate between various competing interpretations. At the end of the third volume of *Capital*, the now-famous fragment on “the classes” (Marx [1894] 1972, 862–63) breaks off just when Marx appeared ready to advance a formal definition of the term, thus providing precisely the ambiguity needed to sustain decades of debate. It is clear, nonetheless, that his abstract model of capitalism was resolutely dichotomous, with the conflict between capitalists and workers constituting the driving force behind further social development. This simple two-class model should be viewed as an ideal type designed to capture the developmental tendencies of capitalism; indeed, whenever Marx carried out concrete analyses of existing capitalist systems, he acknowledged that the class structure was complicated by the persistence of transitional classes (e.g., landowners), quasi-class group-

ings (e.g., peasants), and class fragments (e.g., the lumpen proletariat). It was only with the progressive maturation of capitalism that Marx expected these complications to disappear as the “centrifugal forces of class struggle and crisis flung all *dritte Personen* [third persons] to one camp or the other” (Parkin 1979, 16).

The recent history of modern capitalism reveals that the class structure has not evolved in such a precise and tidy fashion. As Dahrendorf (1959) points out, the old middle class of artisans and shopkeepers has indeed declined in relative size, yet a new middle class of managers, professionals, and nonmanual workers has expanded to occupy the newly vacated space (see also Wright 1997; Steinmetz and Wright 1989). The last 50 years of neo-Marxist theorizing can be seen as the intellectual fallout from this development, with some commentators seeking to minimize its implications, and others putting forward a revised mapping of the class structure that accommodates the new middle class in explicit terms. Within the former camp, the principal tendency is to claim that the lower sectors of the new middle class are in the process of being proletarianized, because “capital subjects [nonmanual labor] . . . to the forms of rationalization characteristic of the capitalist mode of production” (Braverman 1974, 408; see Spenner 1995 for a review of the “deskilling” literature). This line of reasoning suggests that the working class may gradually expand in relative size and therefore regain its earlier power. In an updated version of this argument, Aronowitz and DiFazio (1994, 16) also describe the “proletarianization of work at every level below the [very] top,” but they further suggest that such proletarianization proceeds by eliminating labor as well as deskilling it. The labor-saving forces of technological change thus produce a vast reserve army of unemployed, underemployed, and intermittently employed workers.

At the other end of the continuum, Poulantzas (1974) has argued that most members of the new intermediate stratum fall outside the working class proper, because they

are not exploited in the classical Marxian sense (i.e., surplus value is not extracted). The latter approach may have the merit of keeping the working class conceptually pure, but it also reduces the size of this class to “pygmy proportions” (see Parkin 1979, 19) and dashes the hopes of those who would see workers as a viable political force. This result has motivated contemporary scholars to develop class models that fall somewhere between the extremes advocated by Braverman (1974) and Poulantzas (1974). For example, the neo-Marxist model proposed by Wright (1978) generates an American working class that is acceptably large (i.e., approximately 46 percent of the labor force), yet the class mappings in this model still pay tribute to the various cleavages and divisions among workers who sell their labor power. That is, professionals are placed in a distinct “semi-autonomous class” by virtue of their control over the work process, and upper-level supervisors are located in a “managerial class” by virtue of their authority over workers (Wright 1978; see also Wright 1985). The dividing lines proposed in this model rest, then, on concepts (e.g., autonomy, authority relations) that were once purely the province of Weberian or neo-Weberian sociology, leading Parkin (1979, 25) to claim that “inside every neo-Marxist there seems to be a Weberian struggling to get out.”²⁶

These early class models, which were once quite popular, have now been superseded by various second-generation models that rely more explicitly on the concept of exploitation. As noted previously, Roemer (1988) and others (especially Sørensen 2000; 1996; Wright 1997) have redefined exploitation as the extraction of “rent,” where this refers to the excess earnings that are secured by limiting access to positions and thus artificially restricting the supply of qualified labor. If an approach of this sort is adopted, one can then test for skill-based exploitation by calculating whether the cumulated lifetime earnings of skilled labor exceeds that of unskilled labor by an amount larger than the implied training costs (e.g., school tuition, forgone earnings).

In a perfectly competitive market, labor will perforce flow to the most rewarding occupations, thereby equalizing the lifetime earnings of workers and eliminating exploitative returns. However, when opportunities are limited by imposing restrictions on entry (e.g., qualifying exams), the equilibrating flow of labor is disrupted and the potential for exploitation within the labor market emerges. This approach was devised, then, to recognize various dividing lines within the working class and to understand them as the outcome of exploitative processes. There is of course no guarantee that these internal fractures can be overcome; that is, a rent-based model appreciates that workers have potentially differing interests, with more privileged workers presumably oriented toward preserving and extending the institutional mechanisms (e.g., credentialing) that allow them to reap exploitative returns (cf. Wright 1997).

Weberians and Post-Weberians

The rise of the “new middle class” has proven less problematic for scholars working within a Weberian framework. Indeed, the class model advanced by Weber suggests a multiplicity of class cleavages, given that it equates the economic class of workers with their “market situation” in the competition for jobs and valued goods (Weber [1922] 1968, 926–40). Under this formulation, the class of skilled workers is privileged because its incumbents are in high demand on the labor market, and because its economic power can be parlayed into high wages and an advantaged position in commodity markets (Weber [1922] 1968, 927–28). At the same time, the stratification system is further complicated by the existence of “status groupings,” which Weber saw as forms of social affiliation that can compete, coexist, or overlap with class-based groupings. Although an economic class is merely an aggregate of individuals in a similar market situation, a status grouping is defined as a community of individuals who share a style of life and interact as status equals (e.g., the nobility, an ethnic caste). In

some circumstances, the boundaries of a status grouping are determined by purely economic criteria, yet Weber ([1922] 1968, 932) notes that “status honor normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property.”

This formulation has been especially popular in the United States. During the postwar decades, American sociologists typically dismissed the Marxist model of class as overly simplistic and one-dimensional, whereas they celebrated the Weberian model as properly distinguishing between the numerous variables that Marx had conflated in his definition of class (see, e.g., Barber 1968). In the most extreme versions of this approach, the dimensions identified by Weber were disaggregated into a multiplicity of stratification variables (e.g., income, education, ethnicity), and the correlations between these variables were then shown to be weak enough to generate various forms of “status inconsistency” (e.g., a poorly educated millionaire). The resulting picture suggested a “pluralistic model” of stratification; that is, the class system was represented as intrinsically multidimensional, with a host of cross-cutting affiliations producing a complex patchwork of internal class cleavages. The multidimensionalists were often accused of providing a “sociological portrait of America as drawn by Norman Rockwell” (Parkin 1979, 604), but it should be kept in mind that some of these theorists also emphasized the seamy side of pluralism. In fact, Lenski (1954) and others (e.g., Lipset 1959) have argued that modern stratification systems might be seen as breeding grounds for personal stress and political radicalism, given that individuals with contradictory statuses may feel relatively deprived and thus support “movements designed to alter the political *status quo*” (Lenski 1966, 88). This line of research ultimately died out in the early-1970s under the force of negative and inconclusive findings (e.g., Jackson and Curtis 1972).

Although postmodernists have not explicitly drawn on classical multidimensionalist accounts, there is nonetheless much similarity,

apparently inadvertent, between these two lines of theorizing. Indeed, contemporary postmodernists argue that class-based identities are far from fundamental or “essential,” that individuals instead have “multiple and cross-cutting identities” (Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992, 222), and that the various contradictions and inconsistencies among these identities can lead to a “decentered self” and consequent stress and disaffection (see Bauman 2000; Bradley 1996; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Beck 1992; 1987). There are of course important points of departure as well; most notably, postmodernists do not regard status affiliations as fixed or exogenous, instead referring to the active construction of “reflexive biographies that depend on the decisions of the actor” (Beck 1992, 91–101). The resulting “individualization of inequality” (Beck 1992) implies that lifestyles and consumption practices could become decoupled from work identities as well as other status group memberships. Despite these differences, postmodern commentators might well gain from reexamining this older neo-Weberian literature, if only because it addressed the empirical implications of multidimensional theorizing more directly and convincingly.

It would be a mistake to regard the foregoing multidimensionalists as the only intellectual descendants of Weber. In recent years, the standard multidimensionalist interpretation of “Class, Status, and Party” (Weber 1946, 180–95) has fallen into disfavor, and an alternative version of neo-Weberian stratification theory has gradually taken shape. This revised reading of Weber draws on the concept of social closure as defined and discussed in the essay “Open and Closed Relationships” (Weber [1922] 1968, 43–46, 341–48; see also Weber 1947, 424–29). By social closure, Weber was referring to the processes by which groups devise and enforce rules of membership, with the purpose of such rules typically being to “improve the position [of the group] by monopolistic tactics” (Weber [1922] 1968, 43). Although Weber did not directly link this discussion with his other contributions to stratification theory,

subsequent commentators have pointed out that social classes and status groupings are generated by simple exclusionary processes operating at the macrostructural level (e.g., Manza 1992; Murphy 1988; Goldthorpe 1987; Parkin 1979; Giddens 1973).²⁷ Under modern industrialism, there are no formal sanctions preventing labor from crossing class boundaries, yet various institutional forces (e.g., private property, union shops) are nonetheless quite effective in limiting the amount of class mobility over the life course and between generations. These exclusionary mechanisms not only “maximize claims to rewards and opportunities” among the incumbents of closed classes (Parkin 1979, 44), they also provide the demographic continuity needed to generate distinctive class cultures and to “reproduce common life experience over the generations” (Giddens 1973, 107). As noted by Giddens (1973, 107–12), barriers of this sort are not the only source of “class structuration,” yet they clearly play a contributing role in the formation of identifiable classes under modern industrialism.²⁸ This revisionist interpretation of Weber has reoriented the discipline toward examining the sources and causes of class formation rather than the (potentially) fragmenting effects of cross-cutting affiliations and cleavages.²⁹

Durkheim and Post-Durkheimians

Although Marx and Weber are more frequently invoked by contemporary scholars of inequality, the work of Durkheim ([1893] 1933) is also directly relevant to issues of class. In his preface to *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim ([1893] 1933, 28) predicted that interdependent corporate occupations would gradually become “intercalated between the state and the individual,” thereby solving the problem of order by regulating industrial conflict and creating local forms of “mechanical solidarity” (i.e., solidarity based on shared norms and values). As the occupational structure differentiates, Durkheim argued that shared values at the societal level would become more abstract and less constraining,

while compensating forms of local solidarism would simultaneously emerge at the level of detailed occupations. For Durkheim ([1893] 1933, 27), the modern order is thus characterized by “moral polymorphism,” where this refers to the rise of multiple, occupation-specific “centers of moral life” that provide a counterbalance to the threat of class formation on one hand and that of state tyranny on the other (see Grusky 2000).

This line of argumentation may well have contemporary relevance. Indeed, even if class-based organization is an increasingly “spent force” in the postmodern period (e.g., Pakulski and Waters 1996), it is well to bear in mind that occupation-level structuration of the sort emphasized by Durkheim is seemingly alive and well (Grusky and Sørensen 2001; 1998; Barley 1996; Barley and Tolbert 1991; see also Bourdieu 1984). The conversion of work-based distinctions into meaningful social groupings occurs at the disaggregate level because (1) the forces of self-selection operate to bring like-minded workers into the same occupation; (2) the resulting social interaction with coworkers tends to reinforce and elaborate these shared values; (3) the homogenizing effects of informal interaction may be supplemented with explicit training and socialization in the form of apprenticeships, certification programs, and professional schooling; and (4) the incumbents of occupations have common interests that may be pursued, in part, by aligning themselves with their occupation and pursuing collective ends (e.g., closure, certification). The foregoing processes all suggest that social closure coincides with occupational boundaries and generates *gemeinschaftlich* communities at a more disaggregate level than neo-Marxian or neo-Weberian class analysts have appreciated (Weeden 1998; Sørensen and Grusky 1996; Van Maanen and Barley 1984). In effect, a neo-Durkheimian mapping allows for a unification of class and *Stand* that, according to Weber ([1922] 1968), occurs only rarely in the context of conventional aggregate classes.

The neo-Marxian concept of rent can likewise be recast in Durkheimian terms (see

Grusky and Sørensen 2001; 1998; Sørensen 2001; 1996). In some neo-Marxian schemes, aggregate “class” categories are formed by grouping together all workers who profit from similar types of exploitation (e.g., Wright 1997), with the apparent claim being that incumbents of these categories will ultimately come to appreciate and act on behalf of their shared interests. If a neo-Durkheimian approach is adopted, such aggregation becomes problematic because it conceals the more detailed level at which social closure and skill-based exploitation occurs. The key point in this context is that the working institutions of closure (i.e., professional associations, craft unions) restrict the supply of labor to occupations rather than aggregate classes. As a result, the fundamental units of exploitation would appear to be occupations themselves, whereas neo-Marxian “classes” are merely heterogeneous aggregations of occupations that have similar capacities for exploitation.

The main empirical question that arises in this context is whether the contemporary world is becoming “Durkheimianized” as local structuration strengthens at the expense of aggregate forms of class organization. The prevailing “postoccupational view” is that contemporary firms are relying increasingly on teamwork, cross-training, and multiactivity jobs that break down conventional skill-based distinctions (e.g., Casey 1995; Baron 1994; Drucker 1993). At the same time, this account is not without its critics, some of whom (especially Barley 1996) suggest that pressures for an occupational logic of organizing may be rising because (1) occupationally organized sectors of the labor force (e.g., professions) are expanding in size, (2) occupationalization is extending into new sectors (e.g., management) that had previously been resistant to such pressures, and (3) the spread of outsourcing replaces firm-based ties and association with occupation-based organization (see also Barley and Bechky 1994; Freidson 1994, 103–4). In this regard, the archetypal organizational form of the future may well be the construction industry, relying as it does on

the collaboration of independent experts who guard their occupationally defined bodies of knowledge jealously.

The Ruling Class and Elites

With elite studies, the focus shifts of course to the top of the class structure, with the typical point of departure again being the economic analysis of Marx and various neo-Marxians. The classical elite theorists (Mills 1956; Mosca 1939; Pareto 1935) sought to replace the Marxian model of economic classes with a purely political analysis resting on the distinction between the rulers and the ruled. As Mills (1956, 277) put it, Marx formulated the “short-cut theory that the economic class rules politically,” whereas elite theorists contend that the composition of the ruling class reflects the outcome of political struggles that may not necessarily favor economic capital. In their corollary to this thesis, Pareto and Mosca further claim that the movement of history can be understood as a cyclical succession of elites, with the relative size of the governing minority tending to diminish as the political community grows (Mosca 1939, 53). The common end point of all revolutions is therefore the “dominion of an organized minority” (Mosca 1939, 53); indeed, Mosca points out that all historical class struggles have culminated with a new elite taking power, while the lowliest class invariably remains as such (see also Gouldner 1979, 93). Although Marx would have agreed with this oligarchical interpretation of presocialist revolutions, he nonetheless insisted that the socialist revolution would break the pattern and culminate in a dictatorship of the proletariat and ultimately a classless state.³⁰ The elite theorists were, by contrast, unconvinced that the “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels 1949) could be so conveniently suspended for this final revolution.

As elite theory evolved, this original interest in the long-term dynamics of class systems was largely abandoned, and emphasis shifted to describing the structure and composition

of modern elites (cf. Lachmann 1990). The research agenda of contemporary elite theorists is dominated by the following types of questions:

1. Who wields power and influence in contemporary society? Is there an “inner circle” of powerful corporate leaders (Useem 1984), a “governing class” of hereditary political elites (Shils 1982; Mosca 1939), or a more encompassing “power elite” that cuts across political, economic, and military domains (Domhoff 1998; Mills 1956)?
2. How cohesive are the elite groupings so defined? Do they form a unitary “upper class” (Domhoff 1998, 2), or are they divided by conflicting interests and unable to achieve unity (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman 1996; Keller 1991)?
3. Are certain sectors of the elite especially cohesive or conflictual? Is the business elite, for example, fractured by competition and accordingly weakened in pressing its interests? Or have interlocking directorates and other forms of corporate networking and association unified the business elite (Mizruchi 1996; 1982)? How has the separation of ownership and control affected elite unity (e.g., Fligstein and Brantley 1992)?
4. How much elite mobility is there? Are elites continuously circulating (Shils 1982; Pareto 1935), or have hereditary forms of closure remained largely intact even today (see Baltzell 1991; 1964; 1958)?
5. What are the prerequisites for elite membership? Are elites invariably drawn from prestigious schools (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman 1996; Useem and Karabel 1986)? Are women and minorities increasingly represented in the economic, political, or cultural elite of advanced industrial societies (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998)?
6. How do elites adapt and react to revolutionary change? Were socialist elites

successful, for example, in converting their discredited political capital into economic or cultural power (see Nee 2001; Eyal, Szélenyi, and Townsley 1998; Rona-Tas 1997; 1994; Szélenyi and Szélenyi 1995)?

There are nearly as many elite theories as there are possible permutations of responses to questions of this sort. If there is any unifying theme to contemporary theorizing, it is merely that subordinate classes lack any meaningful control over the major economic and political decisions of the day (Domhoff 1998). Although it was once fashionable to argue that “ordinary citizens can acquire as much power . . . as their free time, ability, and inclination permit” (Rose 1967, 247), such extreme versions of pluralism have of course now fallen into disrepute.

Gradational Measurements of Social Standing

The foregoing theorists have all proceeded by mapping individuals or families into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories (e.g., “classes”). As the preceding review indicates, there continues to be much debate about the location of the boundaries separating these categories, yet the shared assumption is that boundaries of some kind are present, if only in latent or incipient form. By contrast, the implicit claim underlying gradational approaches is that such “dividing lines” are largely the construction of overzealous sociologists, and that the underlying structure of modern stratification can, in fact, be more closely approximated with gradational measures of income, status, or prestige (Nisbet 1959; see also Clark and Lipset 1991; cf. Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1993). The standard concepts of class action and consciousness are likewise typically discarded; that is, whereas most categorical models are based on the (realist) assumption that the constituent categories are “structures of interest that pro-

vide the basis for collective action” (Wright 1979, 7), gradational models are usually represented as taxonomic or statistical classifications of purely heuristic interest.³¹

There is no shortage of gradational measures that might be used to characterize the social welfare or reputational ranking of individuals. Although there is some sociological precedent for treating income as an indicator of class (e.g., Mayer and Buckley 1970, 15), most sociologists seem content with a disciplinary division of labor that leaves matters of income to economists. It does not follow that distinctions of income are sociologically uninteresting; after all, if one is truly intent on assessing the “market situation” of workers (Weber [1922] 1968), there is much to recommend a direct measurement of their income and wealth. The preferred approach has nonetheless been to define classes as “groups of persons who are members of effective kinship units which, as units, are approximately equally valued” (Parsons 1954, 77). This formulation was first operationalized in the post-war community studies (e.g., Warner 1949) by constructing broadly defined categories of reputational equals (e.g., “upper-upper class,” “upper-middle class”).³² However, when the disciplinary focus shifted to the national stratification system, the measure of choice soon became either (1) prestige scales based on popular evaluations of occupational standing (e.g., Treiman 1977; 1976), or (2) socioeconomic scales constructed as weighted averages of occupational income and education (e.g., Blau and Duncan 1967). The latter scales have served as standard measures of class background for nearly 40 years (for reviews, see Wegener 1992; Grusky and Van Rompaey 1992).

The staying power of prestige and socioeconomic scales is thus impressive in light of the faddishness of most sociological research. This long run may nonetheless be coming to an end; indeed, while a widely supported alternative to socioeconomic scales has yet to appear, the socioeconomic tradition has been subjected to increasing criticism on various

fronts. The following four lines of questioning have attracted special attention:

- *Are conventional scales well-suited for the purpose of studying social mobility and socioeconomic attainment?* There is much research suggesting that conventional prestige and socioeconomic scales overstate the fluidity and openness of the stratification system (Hauser and Warren 1997; Rytina 1992; Hauser and Featherman 1977). This finding has motivated various efforts to better represent the “mobility chances” embedded in occupations; for example, Rytina (2000; 1992) has scaled occupations by the mobility trajectories of their incumbents, and Hauser and Warren (1997) have suggested that attainment processes are best captured by indexing occupations in terms of education alone (rather than the usual weighted combination of education and earnings).³³
- *Is the underlying desirability of jobs adequately indexed by conventional scales?* In a related line of research, some scholars have questioned whether the desirability of jobs can be adequately measured with any occupation-based scale, given that much of the variability in earnings, autonomy, and other relevant job attributes is located within detailed occupational categories rather than between them (see Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988).³⁴ This criticism implies that new composite indices should be constructed by combining job-level data on all variables relevant to judgments of desirability (e.g., earnings, fringe benefits, promotion opportunities).
- *Can a unidimensional scale capture all job attributes of interest?* The two preceding approaches share with conventional socioeconomic scaling the long-standing objective of “gluing together” various dimensions (e.g., education, income) into a single composite scale of social standing (cf. Hauser and Warren

1997, 251). If this objective is abandoned, one can of course construct any number of scales that separately index such job-level attributes as authority, autonomy, and substantive complexity (Halaby and Weakliem 1993; Kohn and Schooler 1983; see also Bourdieu 1984). This multidimensionality has appeal because the attributes of interest (e.g., earnings, authority, autonomy) are imperfectly correlated and do not perform identically when modeling different class outcomes.

- *Should occupations necessarily be converted to variables?* The latter approach nonetheless retains the conventional assumption that occupations (or jobs) should be converted to variables and thereby reduced to a vector of quantitative scores. This assumption may well be costly in terms of explanatory power foregone; that is, insofar as distinctive cultures and styles of life emerge within occupations, such reductionist approaches amount to stripping away precisely that symbolic content that presumably generates much variability in attitudes, lifestyles, and consumption practices (Grusky and Sørensen 1998; Aschaffenburg 1995).

These particular lines of criticism may of course never take hold and crystallize into competing traditions. Although socioeconomic scales are hardly optimal for all purposes, the advantages of alternative scales and purpose-specific measurement strategies may not be substantial enough to overcome the forces of inertia and conservatism, especially given the long history and deep legitimacy of conventional approaches.

Generating Stratification

The language of stratification theory makes a sharp distinction between the distribution of social rewards (e.g., the income distribution) and the distribution of opportunities for se-

curing these rewards. As sociologists have frequently noted (e.g., Kluegel and Smith 1986), it is the latter distribution that governs popular judgments about the legitimacy of stratification: The typical American, for example, is quite willing to tolerate substantial inequalities in power, wealth, or prestige provided that the opportunities for securing these social goods are distributed equally across all individuals (Hochschild 1995; 1981). Whatever the wisdom of this popular logic might be, stratification researchers have long sought to explore its factual underpinnings by monitoring and describing the structure of mobility chances.

In most of these analyses, the liberal ideal of an open and class-neutral system is treated as an explicit benchmark, and the usual objective is to expose any inconsistencies between this ideal and the empirical distribution of life chances. This is not to suggest, however, that all mobility scholars necessarily take a positive interest in mobility or regard liberal democracy as “the good society itself in operation” (Lipset 1959, 439). In fact, Lipset and Bendix (1959, 286) emphasize that open stratification systems can lead to high levels of “social and psychic distress,” and not merely because the heightened aspirations that such systems engender are so frequently frustrated (Young 1958). The further difficulty that arises is that open stratification systems will typically generate various types of status inconsistency, as upward mobility projects in plural societies are often “partial and incomplete” (Lipset and Bendix 1959, 286) and therefore trap individuals between collectivities with conflicting expectations. The nouveaux riches, for example, are typically unable to parlay their economic mobility into social esteem and acceptance from their new peers, with the result sometimes being personal resentment and consequent “combative-ness, frustration, and rootlessness” (Lipset and Bendix 1959, 285). Although the empirical evidence for such inconsistency effects is at best weak (e.g., Davis 1982), the continuing effort to uncover them makes it clear that mobility researchers are motivated by a wider

range of social interests than commentators and critics have often allowed (see Goldthorpe 1987, 1–36, for a relevant review).

The study of social mobility continues, then, to be undergirded by diverse interests and research questions. This diversity complicates the task of reviewing work in the field, but of course broad classes of inquiry can still be distinguished, as indicated below.

Mobility Analysis

The conventional starting point for mobility scholars has been to analyze bivariate “mobility tables” formed by cross-classifying the class origins and destinations of individuals. The tables so constructed can be used to estimate densities of inheritance, to map the social distances between classes and their constituent occupations, and to examine differences across sub-populations in the amount and patterning of fluidity and opportunity (e.g., Sørensen and Grusky 1996; Biblarz and Raftery 1993; Hout 1988; Featherman and Hauser 1978). Moreover, when comparable mobility tables are assembled from several countries, it becomes possible to address classical debates about the underlying contours of cross-national variation in stratification systems (e.g., Ishida, Müller, and Ridge 1995; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Western and Wright 1994; Grusky and Hauser 1984; Lipset and Bendix 1959). This long-standing line of analysis, although still underway, has nonetheless declined of late, perhaps because past research (especially Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) has been so definitive as to undercut further efforts (cf. Hout and Hauser 1992; Sørensen 1992). In recent years, the focus has thus shifted to studies of income mobility, with the twofold impetus for this development being (1) concerns that poverty may be increasingly difficult to escape and that a permanent underclass may be forming (e.g., Corcoran and Adams 1997), and (2) the obverse hypothesis that growing income inequality may be counterbalanced by increases in the rate of mobility between income groups (e.g., Gottschalk 1997). The bulk of

this work has been completed by economists (e.g., Birdsall and Graham 2000), but the issues at stake are eminently sociological and have generated much sociological research as well (e.g., DiPrete and McManus 1996).

The Process of Stratification

It is by now a sociological truism that Blau and Duncan (1967) and their colleagues (e.g., Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969) revolutionized the field with their formal “path models” of stratification. These models were intended to represent, if only partially, the process by which background advantages could be converted into socioeconomic status through the mediating variables of schooling, aspirations, and parental encouragement. Under formulations of this kind, the main sociological objective was to show that socioeconomic outcomes were structured not only by ability and family origins but also by various intervening variables (e.g., schooling) that were themselves only partly determined by origins and other ascriptive forces. The picture of modern stratification that emerged suggested that market outcomes depend in large part on unmeasured career contingencies (i.e., “individual luck”) rather than influences of a more structural sort (Jencks et al. 1972; Blau and Duncan 1967, 174; cf. Hauser, Tsai, and Sewell 1983; Jencks et al. 1979). This line of research, which fell out of favor by the mid-1980s, has been recently reinvigorated as stratification scholars react to the controversial claim (i.e., Herrnstein and Murray 1994) that inherited intelligence is increasingly determinative of stratification outcomes (e.g., Hauser and Huang 1997; Fischer et al. 1996). In a related development, contemporary scholars have also turned their attention to ongoing changes in family structure, given that new non-traditional family arrangements (e.g., female-headed households) may in some cases reduce the influence of biological parents and otherwise complicate the reproduction of class. This new research literature ad-

resses such topics as the effects of family disruption on mobility (e.g., Biblarz and Raftery 1999), the consequences of childhood poverty for early achievement (e.g., Hauser and Sweeney 1997), and the role of mothers in shaping educational aspirations and outcomes (e.g., Kalmijn 1994).

Structural Analysis

The foregoing “attainment models” are frequently criticized for failing to attend to the social structural constraints that operate on the stratification process independently of individual-level traits (e.g., Sørensen and Kalleberg 1981). The structuralist accounts that ultimately emerged from these critiques initially amounted, in most cases, to refurbished versions of dual economy and market segmentation models that were introduced and popularized many decades ago by institutional economists (e.g., Piore 1975; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Averitt 1968; see also Smith 1990). When these models were redeployed by sociologists in the early 1980s, the usual objective was to demonstrate that women and minorities were disadvantaged not merely by virtue of deficient human capital investments (e.g., inadequate schooling and experience) but also by their consignment to secondary labor markets that, on average, paid out lower wages and offered fewer opportunities for promotion or advancement. In recent years, more deeply sociological forms of structuralism have appeared, both in the form of (1) meso-level accounts of the effects of social networks and “social capital” on attainment (e.g., Lin 1999; Burt 1997; Podolny and Baron 1997), and (2) macro-level accounts of the effects of institutional context (e.g., welfare regimes) on mobility processes and outcomes (DiPrete et al. 1997; Fligstein and Byrkjeflot 1996; Kerckhoff 1996; Brinton, Lee, and Parish 1995). Although there is of course a long tradition of comparative mobility research, these new macro-level analyses are distinctive in attempting to theorize more rigor-

ously the institutional sources of cross-national variation.

* * *

The history of these research traditions is arguably marked more by statistical and methodological signposts than by substantive ones. Indeed, when reviews of the field are attempted, the tendency is to identify methodological watersheds, such as the emergence of structural equation, log-linear, and event-history models (e.g., Ganzeboom, Treiman, and Ultee 1991). The more recent rise of sequence analysis, which allows researchers to identify the normative ordering of events, may also redefine and reinvigorate the study of careers and attainment (e.g., Han and Moen 1999; Blair-Loy 1999; Stovel, Savage, and Bearman 1996). At the same time, it is often argued that “theory formulation in the field has become excessively narrow” (Ganzeboom, Treiman, and Ultee 1991, 278), and that “little, if any, refinement of major theoretical positions has recently occurred” (Featherman 1981, 364; see also Burton and Grusky 1992, 628). The conventional claim in this regard is that mobility researchers have become entranced by quantitative methods and have accordingly allowed the “methodological tail to [wag] the substantive dog” (Coser 1975, 652). However, the latter argument can no longer be taken exclusively in the (intended) pejorative sense, because new models and methods have often opened up important substantive questions that had previously been overlooked (Burton and Grusky 1992).

It also bears emphasizing that mobility and attainment research has long relied on middle-range theorizing about the forces making for discrimination (e.g., queuing, statistical discrimination); the processes by which educational returns are generated (e.g., credentialing, human capital, signaling); the mechanisms through which class-based advantage is reproduced (e.g., social capital, networks); and the effects of industrialism, capitalism, and socialism on mobility processes

(e.g., thesis of industrialism, transition theory). The subfield is thus highly theory driven in the middle range. To be sure, there is no grand theory here that unifies seemingly disparate models and analyses, but this is hardly unusual within the discipline, nor necessarily undesirable. The main contenders, at present, for grand theory status are various forms of rational action analysis that allow middle-range theories to be recast in terms of individual-level incentives and purposive behavior. Indeed, just as the assumption of utility maximization underlies labor economics, so too a theory of purposive behavior might ultimately organize much, albeit not all, of sociological theory on social mobility and attainment. The two “rational action” selections reprinted in this volume (i.e., Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Logan 1996) reveal the promise (and pitfalls) of this formulation.

The Consequences of Stratification

We have so far taken it for granted that the sociological study of classes and status groupings is more than a purely academic exercise. For Marxist scholars, there is of course a strong macrostructural rationale for class analysis: The defining assumption of Marxism is that human history unfolds through the conflict between classes and the “revolutionary reconstruction of society” (Marx 1948, 9) that such conflict ultimately brings about. In recent years, macrostructural claims of this sort have typically been deemphasized, with many scholars looking outside the locus of production to understand and interpret ongoing social change. Although some macrostructural analyses can still be found (e.g., Portes forthcoming), the motivation for class analysis increasingly rests on the simple empirical observation that class background affects a wide range of individual outcomes (e.g., consumption practices, lifestyles, religious affiliation, voting behavior, mental health and deviance, fertility and mortality, values and attitudes). This analytical approach makes for

a topically diverse subfield; in fact, one would be hard pressed to identify any aspect of human experience that has not been linked to class-based variables in some way, thus prompting DiMaggio (2001) to refer to measures of social class as modern-day “crack troops in the war on unexplained variance.”

The resulting analyses of “class effects” continue to account for a substantial proportion of contemporary stratification research (see Burton and Grusky 1992). There has long been interest in studying the effects of class origins on schooling, occupation, and earnings (see prior section); by contrast, other topics of study within the field tend to fluctuate more in popularity, as developments in and out of academia influence the types of class effects that sociologists find salient or important. It is currently fashionable to study such topics as (1) the structure of socioeconomic disparities in health outcomes and the sources, causes, and consequences of the widening of some disparities (Williams and Collins 1995; Pappas et al. 1993); (2) the extent to which social class is a subjectively salient identity and structures perceptions of inter-class conflict (Wright 1997; Kelley and Evans 1995; Marshall et al. 1988); (3) the effects of social class on tastes for popular or high culture and the role of these tastes in establishing or reinforcing inter-class boundaries (Bryson 1996; Halle 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996; Lamont 1992; DiMaggio 1992; Bourdieu 1984); (4) the relationship between class and political behavior and the possible weakening of class-based politics as “postmaterialist values” spread and take hold (Evans 1999; Manza and Brooks 1999; Abramson and Inglehart 1995); and (5) the influence of working conditions on self-esteem, intellectual flexibility, and other facets of individual psychological functioning (Kohn et al. 1997; Kohn and Slomczynski 1990).

The relationship between class and these various class outcomes has been framed and conceptualized in diverse ways. We have sought to organize this literature below by distinguishing between such diverse traditions as market research, postmodern analysis, re-

production approaches, and structuration theory (for detailed reviews, see Crompton 1996; Chaney 1996; Gartman 1991).

Market Research

The natural starting point for our review is standard forms of market research (e.g., Michman 1991; Weiss 1988; Mitchell 1983) that operationalize the Weberian concept of status by constructing detailed typologies of modern lifestyles and consumption practices. It should be kept in mind that Weber joined two analytically separable elements in his definition of status; namely, members of a given status group were not only assumed to be honorific equals in the symbolic (or “subjective”) sphere, but were also seen as sharing a certain style of life and having similar tastes or preferences in the sphere of consumption (see Giddens 1973, 80, 109). The former feature of status groups can be partly captured by conventional prestige scales, whereas the latter can only be indexed by classifying the actual consumption practices of individuals as revealed by their “cultural possessions, material possessions, and participation in the group activities of the community” (Chapin 1935, 374). This approach has been operationalized either by (1) analyzing market data to define status groups that are distinguished by different lifestyle “profiles” (e.g., “ascetics,” “materialists”), or (2) examining the consumption practices of existing status groups that are defined on dimensions other than consumption (e.g., teenagers, fundamentalists). The status groups of interest are in either case analytically distinct from Weberian classes; that is, the standard Weberian formula is to define classes within the domain of *production*, whereas status groups are determined by the “*consumption* of goods as represented by special styles of life” (Weber [1922] 1968, 937; italics in original).

Postmodern Analysis

The postmodern literature on lifestyles and consumption practices provides some of the

conceptual underpinnings for market research of the above sort. This is evident, for example, in the characteristic postmodern argument that consumption practices are increasingly individuated and that the Weberian distinction between class and status thus takes on special significance in the contemporary context (e.g., Pakulski and Waters 1996; Beck 1992; Featherstone 1991; Saunders 1987). The relationship between group membership and consumption cannot for postmodernists be read off in some deterministic fashion; indeed, because individuals are presumed to associate with a complex mosaic of status groups (e.g., religious groups, internet chat groups, social movements), it is difficult to know how these combine and are selectively activated to produce (and reflect) individual tastes and practices. The stratification system may be seen, then, as a “status bizarre” (Pakulski and Waters 1996, 157) in which identities are reflexively constructed as individuals select and are shaped by their multiple statuses. Although postmodernists thus share with market researchers a deep skepticism of class-based analyses, the simple consumption-based typologies favored by some market researchers (e.g., Michman 1991) also fall short by failing to represent the fragmentation, volatility, and reflexiveness of postmodern consumption.

Reproduction Theory

The work of Bourdieu (e.g., 1984; 1977) can be read as an explicit effort to rethink the conventional distinction between class and status groupings (for related approaches, see Biernacki 1995; Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone 1993; Lamont 1992). If one assumes, as does Bourdieu, that classes are highly efficient agents of selection and socialization, then their members will necessarily evince the shared dispositions, tastes, and styles of life that demarcate and define status groupings (see Gartman 1991; Brubaker 1985). Although it is hardly controversial to treat classes as socializing forces (see, e.g., Hyman 1966), Bourdieu takes the more extreme

stance that class-based conditioning “structures the whole experience of subjects” (1979, 2) and thus creates a near-perfect correspondence between the objective conditions of existence and internalized dispositions or tastes.³⁵ This correspondence is further strengthened because Bourdieu defines class so fluidly; namely, class is represented as the realization of exclusionary processes that create boundaries around workers with homogeneous dispositions, thus implying that classes will *necessarily* overlap with consumption-based status groupings. The key question, then, is whether such boundaries tend to emerge around objective categories (e.g., occupation) that are typically associated with class. For Bourdieu, occupational categories define some of the conditions of existence upon which classes are typically formed, yet other conditions of existence (e.g., race) are also implicated and may generate class formations that are not entirely coterminous with occupation. It follows that class boundaries are not objectively fixed but instead are like a “flame whose edges are in constant movement” (Bourdieu 1987, 13).

Structuration Theory

The foregoing approach is increasingly popular, but there is also continuing support for a middle-ground position that neither treats status groupings in isolation from class (e.g., Pakulski and Waters 1996) nor simply conflates them with class (e.g., Bourdieu 1984). The starting point for this position is the proposition that status and class are related in historically specific and contingent ways. For example, Giddens (1973, 109) adopts the usual assumption that classes are founded in the sphere of production, yet he further maintains that the “structuration” of such classes depends on the degree to which incumbents are unified by shared patterns of consumption and behavior (also see Weber [1922] 1968, 932–38). The twofold conclusion reached by Giddens is that (1) classes become distinguishable formations only insofar as they *overlap* with status groupings, and (2) the degree of

overlap should be regarded as an empirical matter rather than something resolvable by conceptual fiat (cf. Bourdieu 1984). This type of formula appears to inform much of the current research on the consequences of class (e.g., Kingston forthcoming; Wright 1997; see also Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992). If contemporary commentators are so often exercised about the strength of “class effects,” this is largely because these effects (purportedly) speak to the degree of class structuration and the consequent viability of class analysis in modern society.

* * *

The empirical results coming out of these various research programs have been interpreted in conflicting ways. Although some researchers have emphasized the strength and pervasiveness of class effects (e.g., Marshall 1997; Bourdieu 1984; Fussell 1983; Kohn 1980), others have argued that consumption practices are becoming uncoupled from class and that new theories are required to account for the attitudes and lifestyles that individuals adopt (e.g., Kingston forthcoming; Pakulski and Waters 1996). The evidence adduced for the latter view has sometimes been impressionistic in nature. For example, Nisbet (1959) concluded from his analysis of popular literature that early industrial workers could be readily distinguished by class-specific markers (e.g., distinctive dress, speech), whereas their postwar counterparts were increasingly participating in a “mass culture” that offered the same commodities to all classes and produced correspondingly standardized tastes, attitudes, and behaviors (see also Hall 1992; Clark and Lipset 1991, 405; Parkin 1979, 69; Goldthorpe et al. 1969, 1–29). The critical issue, of course, is not merely whether a mass culture of this sort is indeed emerging, but also whether the resulting standardization of lifestyles constitutes convincing evidence of a decline in class-based forms of social organization. As we have noted earlier, some commentators would regard the rise of mass culture as an important force for class destructure (e.g., Gid-

dens 1973), whereas others have suggested that the “thin veneer of mass culture” (Adorno 1976) only obscures and conceals the more fundamental inequalities upon which classes are based (see also Horkheimer and Adorno 1972).

Ascriptive Processes

The forces of race, ethnicity, and gender have historically been relegated to the sociological sidelines by class theorists of both Marxist and non-Marxist persuasion.³⁶ In early versions of class analytic theory, status groups were treated as secondary forms of affiliation, whereas class-based ties were seen as more fundamental and decisive determinants of social and political action. This is not to suggest that race and ethnicity were ignored altogether in such treatments; however, when competing forms of communal solidarity were incorporated into conventional class models, they were typically represented as vestiges of traditional loyalties that would wither away under the rationalizing influence of socialism (e.g., Kautsky 1903), industrialism (e.g., Levy 1966), or modernization (e.g., Parsons 1975). Likewise, the forces of gender and patriarchy were of course frequently studied, yet the main objective in doing so was to understand their relationship to class formation and reproduction (see, e.g., Barrett 1980).

The first step in the intellectual breakdown of such approaches was the fashioning of a multidimensional model of stratification. Whereas many class theorists gave theoretical or conceptual priority to the economic dimension of stratification, the early multidimensionalists emphasized that social behavior could only be understood by taking into account all status group memberships (e.g., racial, gender) and the complex ways in which these interacted with one another and with class outcomes. The class analytic approach was further undermined by the apparent reemergence of racial, ethnic, and nationalist conflicts in the late postwar period. Far from withering away under the force of in-

dustrialism, the bonds of race and ethnicity seemed to be alive and well: The modern world was witnessing a “sudden increase in tendencies by people in many countries and many circumstances to insist on the significance of their group distinctiveness” (Glazer and Moynihan 1975, 3). This resurgence of status politics continues apace today. Indeed, not only have ethnic and regional solidarities intensified with the decline of conventional class politics in Eastern Europe and elsewhere (see Jowitt 1992), but gender-based affiliations and loyalties have likewise strengthened as feminist movements diffuse throughout much of the modern world.

The latter turn of events has led some commentators to proclaim that ascribed solidarities of race, ethnicity, and gender are replacing the class affiliations of the past and becoming the driving force behind future stratificational change. Although this line of argumentation was initially advanced by early theorists of gender and ethnicity (e.g., Firestone 1972; Glazer and Moynihan 1975), the recent diffusion of postmodernism has infused it with new life (especially Beck 1992, 91–101). These accounts typically rest on some form of zero-sum imagery; for example, Bell (1975) suggests quite explicitly that a trade-off exists between class-based and ethnic forms of solidarity, with the latter strengthening whenever the former weakens (see Hannan 1994, 506; Weber 1946, 193–94). As the conflict between labor and capital is institutionalized, Bell (1975) argues that class-based affiliations typically lose their affective content and that workers must turn to racial, ethnic, or religious ties to provide them with a renewed sense of identification and commitment. It could well be argued that gender politics often fill the same “moral vacuum” that the decline in class politics has allegedly generated (Parkin 1979, 34).

It may be misleading, of course, to treat the competition between ascriptive and class-based forces as a sociological horse race in which one, and only one, of these two principles can ultimately win out. In a pluralist society of the American kind, workers can choose

an identity appropriate to the situational context; a modern-day worker might behave as “an industrial laborer in the morning, a black in the afternoon, and an American in the evening” (Parkin 1979, 34). Among recent postmodernists, the “essentialism” of conventional theorizing is rejected even more forcefully, so much so that even ethnicity and gender are no longer simply assumed to be privileged replacement statuses for class. This leads to an unusually long list of competing statuses that can become salient in situationally specific ways. As the British sociologist Saunders (1989, 4–5) puts it, “On holiday in Spain we feel British, waiting for a child outside the school gates we are parents, shopping in Marks and Spencer we are consumers, and answering questions, framed by sociologists with class on the brain, we are working class” (see also Calhoun 1994). The results of Emison and Western (1990) on contemporary identity formation likewise suggest that manifold statuses are held in reserve and activated in situation-specific terms.

Although this situational model has not been widely adopted in contemporary research, there is renewed interest in understanding the diverse affiliations of individuals and the “multiple oppressions” (see Wright forthcoming) that these affiliations engender. It is now fashionable, for example, to assume that the major status groupings in contemporary stratification systems are defined by the *intersection* of ethnic, gender, or class affiliations (e.g., black working-class women, white middle-class men). The theoretical framework motivating this approach is not well-specified, but the implicit claim seems to be that these subgroupings shape the experiences, lifestyles, and life chances of individuals and thus define the social settings in which interests and subcultures typically emerge (Cotter, Hermesen, and Vanneman 1999; Hill Collins 1990; see also Gordon 1978; Baltzell 1964). The obvious effect of this approach is to invert the traditional post-Weberian perspective on status groupings; that is, whereas orthodox multidimensionalists described the stress experienced by individuals in inconsistent sta-

tuses (e.g., poorly educated doctors), these new multidimensionalists emphasize the shared interests and cultures generated within commonly encountered status sets (e.g., black working-class women).

The sociological study of gender, race, and ethnicity has thus burgeoned of late. In organizing this literature, one might usefully distinguish between (1) macro-level research addressing the structure of ascriptive solidarities and their relationship to class formation, and (2) attainment research exploring the effects of race, ethnicity, and gender on individual life chances. At the macro-level, scholars have typically examined such issues as the social processes by which ascriptive categories (e.g., “white,” “black”) are constructed; the sources and causes of ethnic conflict and solidarity; and the relationship between patriarchy, racism, and class-based forms of organization. The following types of research questions have thus been posed:

- *Awareness and consciousness:* How do conventional racial and ethnic classification schemes come to be accepted and institutionalized (Waters 2000; Cornell 2000)? Under what conditions are racial, ethnic, and gender identities likely to be salient or “activated” (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Ferrante and Brown 1996)?
- *Social conflict:* What generates variability across time and space in ethnic conflict and solidarity? Does modernization produce a “cultural division of labor” (Hechter 1975) that strengthens communal ties by making ethnicity a principal arbiter of life chances? Is ethnic conflict further intensified when ethnic groups compete for the same niche in the occupational structure (Waldinger 1996; Hannan 1994; Olzak 1992; Bonacich 1972)?
- *Class and ascriptive solidarities:* Are class-based solidarities weakened or strengthened by the forces of patriarchy and racism? Does housework serve to

reproduce capitalist relations of production by socializing children into submissive roles and providing male workers with a “haven in a heartless world” (e.g., Lasch 1977; see Baxter and Western forthcoming; Szelenyi 2001)? Are capitalists or male majority workers the main beneficiaries of ethnic antagonism and patriarchy (e.g., Tilly 1998; Wright 1997; Hartmann 1981; Reich 1977; Bonacich 1972)?

These macro-level issues, although still of interest, have not taken off in popularity to the extent that attainment issues have. The literature on attainment is unusually rich and diverse; at the same time, there is much faddishness in the particular types of research questions that have been addressed, and the resulting body of work has a correspondingly haphazard and scattered feel (Lieberson 2001). The following questions have nonetheless emerged as (relatively) central ones in the field:

- *Modeling supply and demand:* What types of social forces account for ethnic, racial, and gender differentials in income and other valued resources? Are these differentials attributable to supply-side variability in the human capital that workers bring to the market (Marini and Fan 1997; Polachek and Siebert 1993; Marini and Brinton 1984)? Or are they produced by demand-side forces such as market segmentation, statistical or institutional discrimination, and the (seemingly) irrational tastes and preferences of employers (e.g., Reskin 2000; Nelson and Bridges 1999; Piore 1975; Arrow 1973; Becker 1957)?
- *Valuative discrimination:* Are occupations that rely on stereotypically female skills (e.g., nurturing) “culturally devalued” and hence more poorly remunerated than occupations that are otherwise similar? What types of organizational and cultural forces might

produce such valuatative discrimination? Will this discrimination disappear as market forces gradually bring pay in accord with marginal productivity (Nelson and Bridges 1999; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Tam 1997)?

- *Segregation*: What are the causes and consequences of racial, ethnic, and gender segregation in housing and in the workplace? Does segregation arise from discrimination, economic forces, or voluntary choices or “tastes” for separation (Reskin, McBrier, and Kmec 1999; Reskin 1993; Bielby and Baron 1986)? Are ghettoization and other forms of segregation the main sources of African American disadvantage (e.g., Wilson 1999a; Massey and Denton 1993)? Under what conditions, if any, can ethnic or gender segregation (e.g., enclaving, same-sex schools) assist in socioeconomic attainment or assimilation (Waters 1999; Portes and Zhou 1993; Sanders and Nee 1987)?
- *The future of ascriptive inequalities*: What is the future of ethnic, racial, and gender stratification (Ridgeway and Correll 2000; Bielby 2000; Johnson, Rush, and Feagin 2000)? Does the “logic” of industrialism (and the spread of egalitarianism) require universalistic personnel practices and consequent declines in overt discrimination (Sakamoto, Wu, and Tzeng 2000; Hirschman and Snipp 1999; Jackson 1998; Wilson 1980)? Can this logic be reconciled with the persistence of massive segregation by sex and race (e.g., Massey 1996), the loss of manufacturing jobs and the associated rise of a modern ghetto underclass (Wilson 1996; Waldinger 1996), and the emergence of new forms of poverty and hardship among single women and recent immigrants (e.g., Waters 1999; Edin and Lein 1997; Portes 1996)?
- *Social policy*: What types of social policy and intervention are likely to reduce

ascriptive inequalities (Johnson, Rush, and Feagin 2000; Nelson and Bridges 1999; Leicht 1999; Reskin 1998; Burstein 1998; 1994; England 1992)? Is there much popular support for affirmative action, comparable worth, and other reform strategies (e.g., Schuman et al. 1998)? Does opposition to such reform reflect deeply internalized racism and sexism (e.g., Kluegel and Bobo 1993)? Could this opposition be overcome by substituting race-based interventions (e.g., affirmative action) with class-based ones (e.g., Wilson 1999b; Kluegel and Bobo 1993)?

The preceding questions make it clear that ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities are often classed together and treated as analytically equivalent forms of ascription. Although Parsons (1951) and others (e.g., Tilly 1998; Mayhew 1970) have indeed emphasized the shared properties of “communal ties,” one should bear in mind that such ties can be maintained (or subverted) in very different ways. It has long been argued, for example, that some forms of inequality can be rendered more palatable by the practice of pooling resources (e.g., income) across all family members. As Lieberman (2001) points out, the family operates to bind males and females together in a single unit of consumption, whereas extrafamilial institutions (e.g., schools, labor markets) must be relied on to provide the same integrative functions for ethnic groups. If these functions are left wholly unfilled, one might expect ethnic separatist and nationalist movements to emerge (e.g., Hechter 1975). The same “nationalist” option is obviously less viable for single-sex groups; indeed, barring any revolutionary changes in family structure or kinship relations, it seems unlikely that separatist solutions will ever garner much support among men or women. The latter considerations may account for the absence of a well-developed literature on *overt* conflict between single-sex groups (cf. Firestone 1972; Hartmann 1981).³⁷

The Future of Stratification

It is instructive to conclude by briefly reviewing current approaches to understanding the changing structure of contemporary stratification. As indicated in Figure 1, some commentators have suggested that future forms of stratification will be defined by structural changes in the productive system (i.e., structural approaches), whereas others have argued that modernity and postmodernity can only be understood by looking beyond the economic system and its putative consequences (i.e., cultural approaches). It will suffice to review these various approaches in cursory fashion because they are based on theories and models that have been covered extensively elsewhere in this essay.

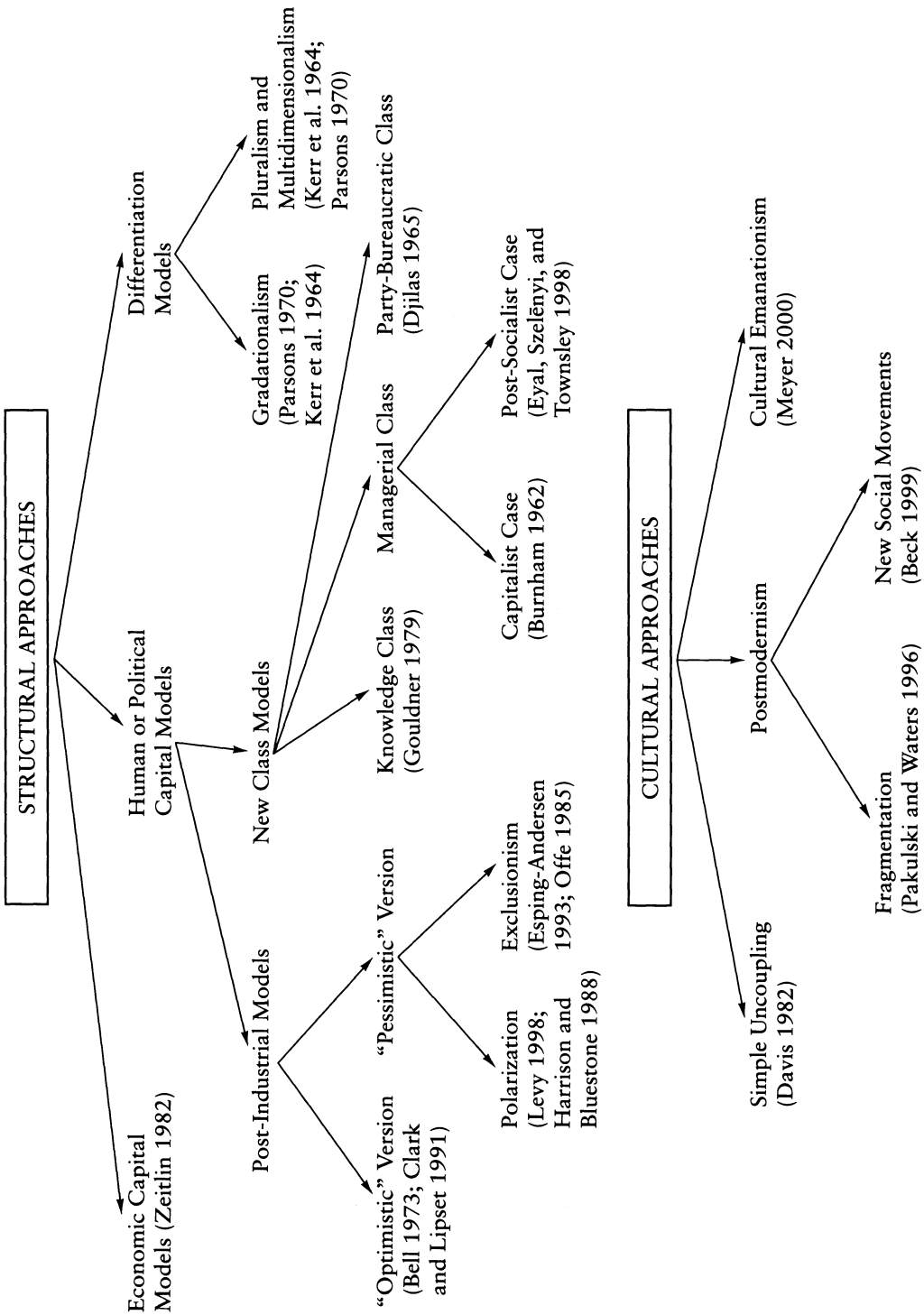
The starting point for our discussion is the now-familiar claim that human and political capital are replacing economic capital as the principal stratifying forces in advanced industrial society. In the most extreme versions of this claim, the old class of moneyed capital is represented as a dying force, and a new class of intellectuals (e.g., Gouldner 1979), managers (e.g., Burnham 1962), or party bureaucrats (e.g., Djilas 1965) is assumed to be on the road to power. There is still much new class theorizing; however, because such accounts were tailor-made for the socialist case, the fall of socialism complicates the analysis and opens up new futures that are potentially more complex than past theorists had anticipated. By some accounts, the rise of a new class was effectively aborted by market reform, and transitional societies will ultimately revert to a classical form of capitalism with its characteristically powerful economic elite. This scenario need not imply a wholesale circulation of elites during the transitional period; to be sure, the old elite may well oversee the creation of new entrepreneurs from agents other than itself (e.g., Nee 2001), but alternatively it might succeed in converting its political capital into economic capital and install itself as the new elite (Walder 1996; Rona-Tas 1997). It is also possible that post-socialist managers will re-

tain considerable power even as the transition to capitalism unfolds. Under the latter formulation, Central European elites take a "historic short cut and move directly to the most 'advanced' stage of corporate capitalism, never sharing their managerial power (even temporarily) with a class of individual owners" (Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 1998, 2). This implies, then, an immediate transition in Central Europe to advanced forms of "capitalism without capitalists" (Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 1998).

There is also much criticism of standard "new class" interpretations of Western stratification systems. The (orthodox) Marxist stance is that "news of the demise of the capitalist class is . . . somewhat premature" (Zeitlin 1982, 216),³⁸ whereas the contrasting position taken by Bell (1973) is that neither the old capitalist class nor the so-called new class will have unfettered power in the postindustrial future. Although there is widespread agreement among postindustrial theorists that human capital is becoming a dominant form of property, this need not imply that "the amorphous bloc designated as the knowledge stratum has sufficient community of interest to form a class" (Bell 1987, 464). The members of the knowledge stratum have diverse interests because they are drawn from structurally distinct situses (e.g., military, business, university) and because their attitudes are further influenced (and thus rendered heterogeneous) by noneconomic forces of various sorts. The postindustrial vision of Bell (1973) thus suggests that well-formed classes will be replaced by the more benign divisions of situs.

As is well-known, Bell (1973) also argues that human capital (e.g., educational credentials) will become the main determinant of life chances, if only because job skills are upgraded by the expansion of professional, technical, and service sectors. Although the returns to education are indeed increasing as predicted (e.g., Grusky and DiPrete 1990), the occupational structure is evidently not upgrading quite as straightforwardly as Bell (1973) suggested, and various "pessimistic versions" of postindustrialism have accord-

FIGURE 1
Possible trajectories of change in advanced stratification systems



ingly emerged. In the American variant of such pessimism, the main concern is that postindustrialism leads to a “declining middle” and consequent polarization, as manufacturing jobs are either rendered technologically obsolete or exported to less-developed countries where labor costs are lower (e.g., Perrucci and Wyson 1999; Levy 1998; Harrison and Bluestone 1988). These losses are of course compensated by the predicted growth in the service sector, yet the types of service jobs that have emerged are quite often low skill, routinized, and accordingly less desirable than Bell (1973) imagined. In Europe, the same low-skill service jobs are less commonly found, with the resulting occupational structure more closely approximating the highly professionalized world that Bell (1973) envisaged. The European pessimists are nonetheless troubled by the rise of mass unemployment and the associated emergence of “outsider classes” that bear disproportionately the burden of unemployment (Esping-Andersen 1999; Brown and Crompton 1994; see also Aronowitz and DiFazio 1994). In both the European and American cases, the less-skilled classes are therefore losing out in the market, either by virtue of unemployment and exclusion (i.e., Europe) or low pay and poor prospects for advancement (i.e., the United States). The new pessimists thus anticipate a “resurgent proletarian underclass and, in its wake, a menacing set of new class correlates” (Esping-Andersen 1999, 95).

The foregoing variants of structuralism frequently draw on the quasi-functionalist premise that classes are configured around control over dominant assets (e.g., human capital) and that class constellations therefore shift as new types of assets assume increasingly prominent roles in production. The just-so histories that new class theorists tend to advance have a correspondingly zero-sum character in which stratificational change occurs as old forms of capital (e.g., economic capital) are superseded by new forms (e.g., human capital).³⁹ This framework might be contrasted, then, to stratification theories that treat the emergence of multiple bases of solidarity and affiliation as one of the distinctive

features of modernity. For example, Parsons (1970) argues that the oft-cited “separation of ownership from control” (e.g., Berle and Means 1932) is not a unique historical event, but instead is merely one example of the broader tendency for ascriptively fused structures to break down into separate substructures and create a “complex composite of differentiated and articulating . . . units of community” (Parsons 1970, 25). This process of differentiation is further revealed in (1) the emergence of a finely graded hierarchy of specialized occupations (Parsons 1970; Kerr et al. 1964); (2) the spread of professional and voluntary associations that provide additional and competing bases of affiliation and solidarity (e.g., Parsons 1970; Kerr et al. 1964); and (3) the breakdown of the “kinship complex” as evidenced by the declining salience of family ties for careers, marriages, and other stratification outcomes (e.g., Parsons 1970; Featherman and Hauser 1978, 222–32; Treiman 1970; Blau and Duncan 1967, 429–31). The latter tendencies imply that the class standing of modern individuals is becoming “divorced from its historic relation to both kinship and property” (Parsons 1970, 24). As Parsons (1970) argues, the family may have once been the underlying unit of stratification, yet increasingly the class standing of individuals is determined by all the collectivities to which they belong, both familial and otherwise (see also Szelenyi 2001). This multidimensionalist approach thus provides the analytic basis for rejecting the conventional family-based model of stratification that Parsons himself earlier espoused (e.g., Parsons 1954).⁴⁰

The driving force behind these accounts is, of course, structural change of the sort conventionally described by such terms as *industrialism* (Kerr et al. 1964), *post-industrialism* (Bell 1973), *post-fordism* (Piore and Sabel 1984), and *differentiation* (Parsons 1970). By contrast, cultural accounts of change tend to deemphasize these forces or to cast them as epiphenomenal, with the focus thus shifting to the independent role of ideologies, social movements, and cultural practices in changing stratification forms. The culturalist tradi-

tion encompasses a host of accounts that have not, as yet, been fashioned into a unitary or cohesive whole. The following positions within this tradition might therefore be distinguished:

1. The weakest form of culturalism rests on the straightforward claim that economic interests are no longer decisive determinants of attitudes or lifestyles (e.g., Davis 1982; see Goldthorpe et al. 1969 on the “embourgeoisement” hypothesis). This “uncoupling” of class and culture is not necessarily inconsistent with structuralist models of change; for example, Adorno (1976) has long argued that mass culture only serves to obscure the more fundamental class divisions that underlie all historical change, and other neo-Marxians (e.g., Althusser 1969) have suggested that some forms of ideological convergence are merely transitory and will ultimately wither away as economic interests reassert themselves in the “last instance.” The uncoupling thesis can therefore be rendered consistent with assorted versions of structuralism, yet it nonetheless lays the groundwork for theories that are fundamentally anti-structuralist in tone or character.
2. In some variants of postmodernism, the cultural sphere is not merely represented as increasingly autonomous from class, but the underlying dynamics of this sphere are also laid out in detail. The characteristic claim in this regard is that lifestyles, consumption practices, and identities are a complex function of the multiple status affiliations of individuals and the correspondingly “permanent and irreducible pluralism of the cultures” in which they participate (Bauman 1992, 102; see also Pakulski and Waters 1996; Hall 1989). This account cannot of course be reduced to structuralist forms of multidimensionalism (Parsons 1970); after all, most postmodernists argue that status affiliations do not mechanically determine consumption practices, as the latter are subjectively constructed in ways that allow for “respecification and invention of preferences . . . and provide for continuous regeneration” (Pakulski and Waters 1996, 155). It follows that lifestyles and identification are “shifting and unstable” (Pakulski and Waters 1996, 155), “indeterminate at the boundaries” (Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992), and accordingly “difficult to predict” (Pakulski and Waters 1996, 155).
3. In more ambitious variants of postmodernism, the focus shifts away from simply mapping the sources of individual-level attitudes or lifestyles, and the older class-analytic objective of understanding macro-level stratificational change is resuscitated. This ambition underlies, for example, all forms of postmodernism that seek to represent “new social movements” (e.g., feminism, ethnic and peace movements, environmentalism) as the vanguard force behind future stratificatory change. As argued by Eyerman (1992) and others (e.g., Touraine 1981), the labor movement can be seen as a fading enterprise rooted in the old conflicts of the workplace and industrial capitalism, whereas new social movements provide a more appealing call for collective action by virtue of their emphasis on issues of lifestyle, personal identity, and normative change. With this formulation, the proletariat is stripped of its privileged status as a universal class, and new social movements emerge as an alternative force “shaping the future of modern societies” (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992, 17). Although no self-respecting postmodernist will offer up a fresh “grand narrative” to replace that of discredited Marxism, new social movements are nonetheless represented within this subtradition as a potential source of change, albeit one that plays out in fundamentally unpredictable ways (e.g., Beck 1999).

4. The popularity of modern social movements might be attributed to ongoing structural transformations (e.g., the rise of the new class) rather than to any intrinsic appeal of the egalitarian ideals or values that these movements typically represent. Although structural arguments of this kind continue to be pressed (see, e.g., Eyerman 1992; Brint 1984), the alternative position staked out by Meyer (2001) and others (e.g., Eisenstadt 1992) is that cultural premises such as egalitarianism and functionalism are true generative forces underlying the rise and spread of modern stratification systems (see also Parsons 1970). As Meyer (2001) points out, egalitarian values not only produce a real reduction in some forms of inequality (e.g., civil inequalities), they also generate various societal subterfuges (e.g., differentiation) by which inequality is merely concealed from view rather than eliminated. The recent work of Meyer (2001) provides, then, an extreme example of how classical idealist principles can be deployed to account for modern stratificational change.

The final, and more prosaic, question that might be posed is whether changes of the preceding sort presage a general decline in the field of stratification itself. It could well be argued that Marxian and neo-Marxian models of class will decline in popularity with the rise of postmodern stratification systems and the associated uncoupling of class from lifestyles, consumption patterns, and political behavior (see Clark and Lipset 1991). This line of reasoning is not without merit, but it is worth noting that (1) past predictions of this sort have generated protracted debates that, if anything, have reenergized the field (see, e.g., Nisbet 1959); (2) the massive facts of economic, political, and honorific inequality will still be with us even if narrowly conceived models of class ultimately lose out in such de-

bates; and (3) the continuing diffusion of egalitarian values suggests that all departures from equality, no matter how small, will be the object of considerable interest among sociologists and the lay public alike (see Meyer 2001). In making the latter point, our intent is not merely to note that sociologists may become “ever more ingenious” (Nisbet 1959, 12) in teasing out increasingly small departures from perfect equality, but also to suggest that entirely new forms and sources of inequality will likely be discovered and marketed by sociologists. This orientation has long been in evidence; for example, when the now-famous *Scientific American* studies (e.g., Taylor, Sheatsley, and Greeley 1978) revealed that overt forms of racial and ethnic prejudice were withering away, the dominant reaction within the discipline was to ask whether such apparent change concealed the emergence of more subtle and insidious forms of symbolic racism (see, e.g., Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979). In similar fashion, when Beller (1982) reported a modest decline in occupational sex segregation, other sociologists were quick to ask whether the models and methods being deployed misrepresented the structure of change (e.g., Charles and Grusky 1995) or whether the classification system being used disguised counteracting trends at the intra-occupational level (e.g., Bielby and Baron 1986). The rise of personal computing and the Internet has likewise led to much fretting about possible class-based inequalities in access to computers (e.g., Nie and Erbring, 2000; Bosah 1998; Luke 1997). The point here is not to suggest that concerns of this kind are in any way misguided, but only to emphasize that modern sociologists are highly sensitized to inequalities and have a special interest in uncovering those “deep structures” of social differentiation (e.g., Baron 1994, 390) that are presumably concealed from ordinary view. This sensitivity to all things unequal bodes well for the future of the field even in the (unlikely) event of a long-term secular movement toward diminishing inequality.

Notes

1. In some stratification systems, the distribution of rewards can be described with a single matching algorithm, because individuals receive rewards directly rather than by virtue of the social positions that they occupy. The limiting case here would be the tribal economies of Melanesia in which "Big Men" (Oliver 1955) secured prestige and power through personal influence rather than through incumbency of any well-defined roles (see also Granovetter 1981, 12–14).

2. It goes without saying that the assets listed in Table 1 are institutionalized in quite diverse ways. For example, some assets are legally recognized by the state or by professional associations (e.g., civil rights, property ownership, educational credentials), others are reserved for incumbents of specified work roles (e.g., workplace authority), and yet others have no formal legal or institutional standing and are revealed probabilistically through patterns of behavior and action (e.g., high-status consumption practices, deference, derogation).

3. It is sometimes claimed that educational credentials are *entirely* investment goods and should therefore be excluded from any listing of the primitive dimensions underlying stratification systems (e.g., Runciman 1968, 33). In evaluating this claim, it is worth noting that an investment rhetoric for schooling became fashionable only quite recently (e.g., Becker 1975), whereas intellectuals and humanists have long viewed education as a simple consumption good.

4. This is not to gainsay the equally important point that parents often encourage their children to acquire such goods because of their putative benefits.

5. The term *stratification* has itself been seen as anti-Marxist by some commentators (e.g., Duncan 1968), because it places emphasis on the vertical ranking of classes rather than the exploitative relations between them. The geological metaphor implied by this term does indeed call attention to issues of hierarchy; nonetheless, whenever it is used in the present essay, the intention is to refer generically to inequality of all forms (including those involving exploitation).

6. Although native ability is by definition established at birth, it is often seen as a legitimate basis for allocating rewards (because it is presumed to be relevant to judgments of merit).

7. The scholars listed in the right-hand column of Table 1 are not necessarily reductionists of this sort.

8. The viability of a synthesizing approach clearly depends on the extent to which the stratification system is crystallized. If the degree of crystallization is low, then one cannot construct a uni-

dimensional scale that is strongly correlated with its constituent parts.

9. There is, of course, an ongoing tradition of research in which the class structure is represented in gradational terms (see, e.g., Blau and Duncan 1967). However, no attempt has been made to construct an exhaustive rank-ordering of individuals based on their control over the resources listed in Table 1, nor is there any available rank-ordering of the thousands of detailed occupational titles that can be found in modern industrial societies (cf. Cain and Treiman 1981; Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988). The approach taken by most gradationalists has been (1) to map individuals into a relatively small number (i.e., approximately 500) of broad occupational categories and (2) to subsequently map these categories into an even smaller number of prestige or socioeconomic scores.

10. According to Dahrendorf (1959, 171–73), the classes so formed are always specific to particular organizational settings, and the social standing of any given individual may therefore differ across the various associations in which he or she participates (e.g., workplace, church, polity). This line of reasoning leads Dahrendorf (1959, 171) to conclude that "if individuals in a given society are ranked according to the sum of their authority positions in all associations, the resulting pattern will not be a dichotomy but rather like scales of stratification according to income or prestige."

11. The class structure can also operate in less obtrusive ways; for example, one might imagine a social system in which classes have demonstrable macro-level consequences (and are therefore "real"), yet their members are not fully aware of these consequences nor of their membership in any particular class.

12. The assumptions embedded in columns 4–6 of Table 2 are clearly far-reaching. Unless a stratification system is perfectly crystallized, its parameters for inequality and rigidity cannot be represented as scalar quantities, nor can the intercorrelations between the multiple stratification dimensions be easily summarized in a single parameter. Moreover, even in stratification systems that are perfectly crystallized, there is no reason to believe that persistence over the lifecourse (i.e., intragenerational persistence) will always vary in tandem with persistence between generations (i.e., intergenerational inheritance). We have nonetheless assumed that each of our ideal-typical stratification systems can be characterized in terms of a single "rigidity parameter" (see column 5).

13. This claim does not hold with respect to gender; that is, men and women were typically assigned to different roles, which led to consequent differences in the distribution of rewards (e.g., see Pfeiffer 1977; Leakey and Lewin 1977).

14. It should again be stressed that our typology by no means exhausts the variability of agrarian stratification forms (see Kerbo 2000 for an extended review).

15. The state elite was charged with constructing and maintaining the massive irrigation systems that made agriculture possible in regions such as China, India, and the Middle East (cf. Anderson 1974, 490–92).

16. This is not to suggest that feudalism could only be found in the West or that the so-called Asiatic mode was limited to the East. Indeed, the social structure of Japan was essentially feudalistic until the mid-nineteenth century (with the rise of the Meiji State), and the Asiatic mode has been discovered in areas as diverse as Africa, pre-Columbian America, and even Mediterranean Europe (see Godelier 1978). The latter “discoveries” were of course predicated on a broad and ahistorical definition of the underlying ideal type. As always, there is a tension between scholars who seek to construct ideal types that are closely tied to historical social systems and those who seek to construct ones that are broader and more encompassing in their coverage.

17. This economic interpretation of feudalism is clearly not favored by all scholars. For example, Bloch (1961, 288–89) argues that the defining feature of feudalism is the monopolization of *authority* by a small group of nobles, with the economic concomitants of this authority (e.g., land ownership) thus being reduced to a position of secondary importance. The “authority classes” that emerge under his specification might be seen as feudal analogues to the social classes that Dahrendorf (1959) posits for the capitalist case.

18. In the so-called secondary stage of feudalism (Bloch 1961), the obligations of serfs and free men became somewhat more formalized and standardized, yet regional variations of various sorts still persisted.

19. It was not until the early fourteenth century that states of the modern sort appeared in Europe (see Hechter and Brustein 1980).

20. In describing this period of classical feudalism, Bloch (1961, 325) noted that “access to the circle of knights . . . was not absolutely closed, [yet] the door was nevertheless only very slightly ajar.”

21. The Indian caste system flourished during the agrarian period, yet it persists in attenuated form within modern industrialized India (see Jalali 1992).

22. This is by no means an exhaustive listing of the various approaches that have been taken (see pp. 15–22 for a more detailed review).

23. Although educational institutions clearly play a certifying role, it does not follow that they emerge merely to fill a “functional need” for highly trained workers (see Collins 1979).

24. This issue is addressed in greater detail in Part IV (“Generating Inequality”).

25. Although Pakulski and Waters (1996) use the label *postmodern* in their analyses, other scholars have invented such alternative terms as *late modernity*, *high modernity*, or *reflexive modernization* (Beck 1999; Lash 1999; Giddens 1991), and yet others continue to use *modernity* on the grounds that the changes at issue are mere extensions of those long underway (e.g., Maryanski and Turner 1992). We use the conventional term *postmodern* without intending to disadvantage the analyses of those who prefer other labels.

26. The rise of synthetic approaches makes it increasingly difficult to label scholars in meaningful ways. Although we have avoided standard “litmus test” definitions of what constitutes a true neo-Marxist or neo-Weberian, we have nonetheless found it possible (and useful) to classify scholars broadly in terms of the types of intellectual problems, debates, and literatures they address.

27. This position contrasts directly with the conventional wisdom that “social mobility as such is irrelevant to the problem of the existence of classes” (Dahrendorf 1959, 109; see also Poulantzas 1974, 37; Schumpeter 1951).

28. It should be stressed that Giddens departs from usual neo-Weberian formulations on issues such as “the social and political significance of the new middle class, the importance of bureaucracy as a form of domination, and the character of the state as a focus of political and military power” (Giddens 1980, 297). As indicated in the contents, we have nonetheless reluctantly imposed the neo-Weberian label on Giddens, if only because he follows the lead of Weber in treating the foregoing issues as central to understanding modern industrialism and capitalism (see note 26).

29. There is a close affinity between models of closure and those of exploitation. In comparing these approaches, the principal point of distinction is that neo-Marxians focus on the economic returns and interests that exclusionary practices generate, whereas closure theorists emphasize the common culture, sociocultural cohesiveness, and shared market and life experiences that such practices may produce (see Grusky and Sørensen 1998, 1211).

30. However, insofar as “every new class achieves its hegemony on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously” (Marx and Engels [1947] 1970, 66), the presocialist revolutions can be interpreted as partial steps toward a classless society.

31. It is frequently argued that Americans have an elective affinity for gradational models of class. In accounting for this affinity, Ossowski (1963) and others (e.g., Lipset and Bendix 1959) have cited the absence of a feudal or aristocratic past in American history and the consequent reluctance of

Americans to recognize differences in status or power with overt forms of deference or derogation.

32. Although some of the research completed by Warner was gradational in character (e.g., Warner 1949, ch. 2), his preferred mapping of the American class structure is based on purely discrete categories.

33. This recommendation holds only for studies of attainment processes. In fact, given that other weightings may be optimal in other research contexts, Hauser and Warren (1997, 251) argue that "the global concept of occupational status is scientifically obsolete."

34. In this context, a "job" is a collection of activities that a worker is expected to perform in exchange for remuneration, whereas an "occupation" refers to an aggregation of jobs that are similar in terms of the activities performed.

35. This is not to suggest that the "subjects" themselves always fully appreciate the class-based sources of their tastes and preferences. As argued by Bourdieu (1977), the conditioning process is typically so seamless and unobtrusive that the sources of individual dispositions are concealed from view, and the "superior" tastes and privileged outcomes of socioeconomic elites are therefore misperceived (and legitimated) as the product of individual merit or worthiness.

36. The defining feature of ethnic groups is that their members "entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration" (Weber [1922] 1968, 389). This definition implies that "races" are particular types of ethnic groups in which putative physical similarities provide the basis for a subjective belief in common descent (see Alba 1992, 575–76 for competing definitions).

37. There is, of course, a large popular literature that represents gender conflict in wholly individualistic terms. This tendency to personalize gender conflicts reflects the simple fact that men and women interact frequently and intimately in family settings.

38. The position that Zeitlin (1982) takes here is directed against the conventional argument that corporate ownership in Western industrialized societies is so diffused across multiple stockholders that effective corporate power has now defaulted to managers.

39. The recent work of Wright (1985) is similarly zero-sum in character. Although Wright emphasizes that multiple forms of capital tend to co-exist in any given historical system, he nonetheless defines the march of history in terms of transitions from one dominant form of capital to another.

40. The importance of distinguishing between the early and mature Parsons on matters of stratification should therefore be stressed. This distinc-

tion has not been sufficiently appreciated in recent debates about the appropriateness of treating families as the primitive units of modern stratification analysis (see Szelenyi 2001).

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Part II

Forms and Sources of Stratification

The Functions of Stratification

The Dysfunctions of Stratification



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The Functions of Stratification

KINGSLEY DAVIS AND WILBERT E. MOORE

Some Principles of Stratification

In a previous paper some concepts for handling the phenomena of social inequality were presented.¹ In the present paper a further step in stratification theory is undertaken—an attempt to show the relationship between stratification and the rest of the social order.² Starting from the proposition that no society is “classless,” or unstratified, an effort is made to explain, in functional terms, the universal necessity which calls forth stratification in any social system. Next, an attempt is made to explain the roughly uniform distribution of prestige as between the major types of positions in every society. Since, however, there occur between one society and another great differences in the degree and kind of stratification, some attention is also given to the varieties of social inequality and the variable factors that give rise to them.

Clearly, the present task requires two different lines of analysis—one to understand the universal, the other to understand the variable features of stratification. Naturally each line of inquiry aids the other and is indispensable, and in the treatment that follows the two will be interwoven, although, because of space limitations, the emphasis will be on the universals.

Throughout, it will be necessary to keep in mind one thing—namely, that the discussion

relates to the system of positions, not to the individuals occupying those positions. It is one thing to ask why different positions carry different degrees of prestige, and quite another to ask how certain individuals get into those positions. Although, as the argument will try to show, both questions are related, it is essential to keep them separate in our thinking. Most of the literature on stratification has tried to answer the second question (particularly with regard to the ease or difficulty of mobility between strata) without tackling the first. The first question, however, is logically prior and, in the case of any particular individual or group, factually prior.

The Functional Necessity of Stratification

Curiously the main functional necessity explaining the universal presence of stratification is precisely the requirement faced by any society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. As a functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions. It must thus concern itself with motivation at two different levels: to instill in the proper individuals the desire to fill certain positions, and, once in these positions, the desire to perform the duties attached to them. Even

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though the social order may be relatively static in form, there is a continuous process of metabolism as new individuals are born into it, shift with age, and die off. Their absorption into the positional system must somehow be arranged and motivated. This is true whether the system is competitive or non-competitive. A competitive system gives greater importance to the motivation to achieve positions, whereas a non-competitive system gives perhaps greater importance to the motivation to perform the duties of the positions; but in any system both types of motivation are required.

If the duties associated with the various positions were all equally pleasant to the human organism, all equally important to societal survival, and all equally in need of the same ability or talent, it would make no difference who got into which positions, and the problem of social placement would be greatly reduced. But actually it does make a great deal of difference who gets into which positions, not only because some positions are inherently more agreeable than others, but also because some require special talents or training and some are functionally more important than others. Also, it is essential that the duties of the positions be performed with the diligence that their importance requires. Inevitably, then, a society must have, first, some kind of rewards that it can use as inducements, and, second, some way of distributing these rewards differentially according to positions. The rewards and their distribution become a part of the social order, and thus give rise to stratification.

One may ask what kind of rewards a society has at its disposal in distributing its personnel and securing essential services. It has, first of all, the things that contribute to sustenance and comfort. It has, second, the things that contribute to humor and diversion. And it has, finally, the things that contribute to self respect and ego expansion. The last, because of the peculiarly social character of the self, is largely a function of the opinion of others, but it nonetheless ranks in importance with the first two. In any social system all three

kinds of rewards must be dispensed differentially according to positions.

In a sense the rewards are "built into" the position. They consist in the "rights" associated with the position, plus what may be called its accompaniments or perquisites. Often the rights, and sometimes the accompaniments, are functionally related to the duties of the position. (Rights as viewed by the incumbent are usually duties as viewed by other members of the community.) However, there may be a host of subsidiary rights and perquisites that are not essential to the function of the position and have only an indirect and symbolic connection with its duties, but which still may be of considerable importance in inducing people to seek the positions and fulfil the essential duties.

If the rights and perquisites of different positions in a society must be unequal, then the society must be stratified, because that is precisely what stratification means. Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. Hence every society, no matter how simple or complex, must differentiate persons in terms of both prestige and esteem, and must therefore possess a certain amount of institutionalized inequality.

It does not follow that the amount or type of inequality need be the same in all societies. This is largely a function of factors that will be discussed presently.

The Two Determinants of Positional Rank

Granting the general function that inequality subserves, one can specify the two factors that determine the relative rank of different positions. In general those positions convey the best reward, and hence have the highest rank, which (a) have the greatest importance for the society and (b) require the greatest training or talent. The first factor concerns function and is a matter of relative significance; the second concerns means and is a matter of scarcity.

Differential Functional Importance. Actually a society does not need to reward positions in proportion to their functional importance. It merely needs to give sufficient reward to them to insure that they will be filled competently. In other words, it must see that less essential positions do not compete successfully with more essential ones. If a position is easily filled, it need not be heavily rewarded, even though important. On the other hand, if it is important but hard to fill, the reward must be high enough to get it filled anyway. Functional importance is therefore a necessary but not a sufficient cause of high rank being assigned to a position.³

Differential Scarcity of Personnel. Practically all positions, no matter how acquired, require some form of skill or capacity for performance. This is implicit in the very notion of position, which implies that the incumbent must, by virtue of his incumbency, accomplish certain things.

There are, ultimately, only two ways in which a person's qualifications come about: through inherent capacity or through training. Obviously, in concrete activities both are always necessary, but from a practical standpoint the scarcity may lie primarily in one or the other, as well as in both. Some positions require innate talents of such high degree that the persons who fill them are bound to be rare. In many cases, however, talent is fairly abundant in the population but the training process is so long, costly, and elaborate that relatively few can qualify. Modern medicine, for example, is within the mental capacity of most individuals, but a medical education is so burdensome and expensive that virtually none would undertake it if the position of the M.D. did not carry a reward commensurate with the sacrifice.

If the talents required for a position are abundant and the training easy, the method of acquiring the position may have little to do with its duties. There may be, in fact, a virtually accidental relationship. But if the skills required are scarce by reason of the rarity of talent or the costliness of training, the posi-

tion, if functionally important, must have an attractive power that will draw the necessary skills in competition with other positions. This means, in effect, that the position must be high in the social scale—must command great prestige, high salary, ample leisure, and the like.

How Variations Are to Be Understood. In so far as there is a difference between one system of stratification and another, it is attributable to whatever factors affect the two determinants of differential reward—namely, functional importance and scarcity of personnel. Positions important in one society may not be important in another, because the conditions faced by the societies, or their degree of internal development, may be different. The same conditions, in turn, may affect the question of scarcity; for in some societies the stage of development, or the external situation, may wholly obviate the necessity of certain kinds of skill or talent. Any particular system of stratification, then, can be understood as a product of the special conditions affecting the two aforementioned grounds of differential reward.

Major Societal Functions and Stratification

Religion

The reason why religion is necessary is apparently to be found in the fact that human society achieves its unity primarily through the possession by its members of certain ultimate values and ends in common. Although these values and ends are subjective, they influence behavior, and their integration enables the society to operate as a system. Derived neither from inherited nor from external nature, they have evolved as a part of culture by communication and moral pressure. They must, however, appear to the members of the society to have some reality, and it is the role of religious belief and ritual to supply and reinforce this appearance of reality. Through belief and

ritual the common ends and values are connected with an imaginary world symbolized by concrete sacred objects, which world in turn is related in a meaningful way to the facts and trials of the individual's life. Through the worship of the sacred objects and the beings they symbolize, and the acceptance of supernatural prescriptions that are at the same time codes of behavior, a powerful control over human conduct is exercised, guiding it along lines sustaining the institutional structure and conforming to the ultimate ends and values.

If this conception of the role of religion is true, one can understand why in every known society the religious activities tend to be under the charge of particular persons, who tend thereby to enjoy greater rewards than the ordinary societal member. Certain of the rewards and special privileges may attach to only the highest religious functionaries, but others usually apply, if such exists, to the entire sacerdotal class.

Moreover, there is a peculiar relation between the duties of the religious official and the special privileges he enjoys. If the supernatural world governs the destinies of men more ultimately than does the real world, its earthly representative, the person through whom one may communicate with the supernatural, must be a powerful individual. He is a keeper of sacred tradition, a skilled performer of the ritual, and an interpreter of lore and myth. He is in such close contact with the gods that he is viewed as possessing some of their characteristics. He is, in short, a bit sacred, and hence free from some of the more vulgar necessities and controls.

It is no accident, therefore, that religious functionaries have been associated with the very highest positions of power, as in theocratic regimes. Indeed, looking at it from this point of view, one may wonder why it is that they do not get *entire* control over their societies. The factors that prevent this are worthy of note.

In the first place, the amount of technical competence necessary for the performance of religious duties is small. Scientific or artistic

capacity is not required. Anyone can set himself up as enjoying an intimate relation with deities, and nobody can successfully dispute him. Therefore, the factor of scarcity of personnel does not operate in the technical sense.

One may assert, on the other hand, that religious ritual is often elaborate and religious lore abstruse, and that priestly ministrations require tact, if not intelligence. This is true, but the technical requirements of the profession are for the most part adventitious, not related to the end in the same way that science is related to air travel. The priest can never be free from competition, since the criteria of whether or not one has genuine contact with the supernatural are never strictly clear. It is this competition that debases the priestly position below what might be expected at first glance. That is why priestly prestige is highest in those societies where membership in the profession is rigidly controlled by the priestly guild itself. That is why, in part at least, elaborate devices are utilized to stress the identification of the person with his office—spectacular costume, abnormal conduct, special diet, segregated residence, celibacy, conspicuous leisure, and the like. In fact, the priest is always in danger of becoming somewhat discredited—as happens in a secularized society—because in a world of stubborn fact, ritual and sacred knowledge alone will not grow crops or build houses. Furthermore, unless he is protected by a professional guild, the priest's identification with the supernatural tends to preclude his acquisition of abundant worldly goods.

As between one society and another it seems that the highest general position awarded the priest occurs in the medieval type of social order. Here there is enough economic production to afford a surplus, which can be used to support a numerous and highly organized priesthood; and yet the populace is unlettered and therefore credulous to a high degree. Perhaps the most extreme example is to be found in the Buddhism of Tibet, but others are encountered in the Catholicism of feudal Europe, the Inca regime of Peru, the Brahminism of India, and the Mayan priest-

hood of Yucatan. On the other hand, if the society is so crude as to have no surplus and little differentiation, so that every priest must be also a cultivator or hunter, the separation of the priestly status from the others has hardly gone far enough for priestly prestige to mean much. When the priest actually has high prestige under these circumstances, it is because he also performs other important functions (usually political and medical).

In an extremely advanced society built on scientific technology, the priesthood tends to lose status, because sacred tradition and supernaturalism drop into the background. The ultimate values and common ends of the society tend to be expressed in less anthropomorphic ways, by officials who occupy fundamentally political, economic, or educational rather than religious positions. Nevertheless, it is easily possible for intellectuals to exaggerate the degree to which the priesthood in a presumably secular milieu has lost prestige. When the matter is closely examined the urban proletariat, as well as the rural citizenry, proves to be surprisingly god-fearing and priest-ridden. No society has become so completely secularized as to liquidate entirely the belief in transcendental ends and supernatural entities. Even in a secularized society some system must exist for the integration of ultimate values, for their ritualistic expression, and for the emotional adjustments required by disappointment, death, and disaster.

Government

Like religion, government plays a unique and indispensable part in society. But in contrast to religion, which provides integration in terms of sentiments, beliefs, and rituals, it organizes the society in terms of law and authority. Furthermore, it orients the society to the actual rather than the unseen world.

The main functions of government are, internally, the ultimate enforcement of norms, the final arbitration of conflicting interests, and the overall planning and direction of society; and externally, the handling of war and diplomacy. To carry out these functions it acts

as the agent of the entire people, enjoys a monopoly of force, and controls all individuals within its territory.

Political action, by definition, implies authority. An official can command because he has authority, and the citizen must obey because he is subject to that authority. For this reason stratification is inherent in the nature of political relationships.

So clear is the power embodied in political position that political inequality is sometimes thought to comprise all inequality. But it can be shown that there are other bases of stratification, that the following controls operate in practice to keep political power from becoming complete: (a) The fact that the actual holders of political office, and especially those determining top policy must necessarily be few in number compared to the total population. (b) The fact that the rulers represent the interest of the group rather than of themselves, and are therefore restricted in their behavior by rules and mores designed to enforce this limitation of interest. (c) The fact that the holder of political office has his authority by virtue of his office and nothing else, and therefore any special knowledge, talent, or capacity he may claim is purely incidental, so that he often has to depend upon others for technical assistance.

In view of these limiting factors, it is not strange that the rulers often have less power and prestige than a literal enumeration of their formal rights would lead one to expect.

Wealth, Property, and Labor

Every position that secures for its incumbent a livelihood is, by definition, economically rewarded. For this reason there is an economic aspect to those positions (e.g. political and religious) the main function of which is not economic. It therefore becomes convenient for the society to use unequal economic returns as a principal means of controlling the entrance of persons into positions and stimulating the performance of their duties. The amount of the economic return therefore becomes one of the main indices of social status.

It should be stressed, however, that a position does not bring power and prestige *because* it draws a high income. Rather, it draws a high income because it is functionally important and the available personnel is for one reason or another scarce. It is therefore superficial and erroneous to regard high income as the cause of a man's power and prestige, just as it is erroneous to think that a man's fever is the cause of his disease.⁴

The economic source of power and prestige is not income primarily, but the ownership of capital goods (including patents, good will, and professional reputation). Such ownership should be distinguished from the possession of consumers' goods, which is an index rather than a cause of social standing. In other words, the ownership of producers' goods is properly speaking, a source of income like other positions, the income itself remaining an index. Even in situations where social values are widely commercialized and earnings are the readiest method of judging social position, income does not confer prestige on a position so much as it induces people to compete for the position. It is true that a man who has a high income as a result of one position may find this money helpful in climbing into another position as well, but this again reflects the effect of his initial, economically advantageous status, which exercises its influence through the medium of money.

In a system of private property in productive enterprise, an income above what an individual spends can give rise to possession of capital wealth. Presumably such possession is a reward for the proper management of one's finances originally and of the productive enterprise later. But as social differentiation becomes highly advanced and yet the institution of inheritance persists, the phenomenon of pure ownership, and reward for pure ownership, emerges. In such a case it is difficult to prove that the position is functionally important or that the scarcity involved is anything other than extrinsic and accidental. It is for this reason, doubtless, that the institution of private property in productive goods becomes more subject to criticism as social develop-

ment proceeds toward industrialization. It is only this pure, that is, strictly legal and functionless ownership, however, that is open to attack; for some form of active ownership, whether private or public, is indispensable.

One kind of ownership of production goods consists in rights over the labor of others. The most extremely concentrated and exclusive of such rights are found in slavery, but the essential principle remains in serfdom, peonage, *encomienda*, and indenture. Naturally this kind of ownership has the greatest significance for stratification, because it necessarily entails an unequal relationship.

But property in capital goods inevitably introduces a compulsive element even into the nominally free contractual relationship. Indeed, in some respects the authority of the contractual employer is greater than that of the feudal landlord, inasmuch as the latter is more limited by traditional reciprocities. Even the classical economics recognized that competitors would fare unequally, but it did not pursue this fact to its necessary conclusion that, however it might be acquired, unequal control of goods and services must give unequal advantage to the parties to a contract.

Technical Knowledge

The function of finding means to single goals, without any concern with the choice between goals, is the exclusively technical sphere. The explanation of why positions requiring great technical skill receive fairly high rewards is easy to see, for it is the simplest case of the rewards being so distributed as to draw talent and motivate training. Why they seldom if ever receive the highest rewards is also clear: the importance of technical knowledge from a societal point of view is never so great as the integration of goals, which takes place on the religious, political, and economic levels. Since the technological level is concerned solely with means, a purely technical position must ultimately be subordinate to other positions that are religious, political, or economic in character.

Nevertheless, the distinction between expert and layman in any social order is fundamental, and cannot be entirely reduced to other terms. Methods of recruitment, as well as of reward, sometimes lead to the erroneous interpretation that technical positions are economically determined. Actually, however, the acquisition of knowledge and skill cannot be accomplished by purchase, although the opportunity to learn may be. The control of the avenues of training may inhere as a sort of property right in certain families or classes, giving them power and prestige in consequence. Such a situation adds an artificial scarcity to the natural scarcity of skills and talents. On the other hand, it is possible for an opposite situation to arise. The rewards of technical position may be so great that a condition of excess supply is created, leading to at least temporary devaluation of the rewards. Thus "unemployment in the learned professions" may result in a debasement of the prestige of those positions. Such adjustments and readjustments are constantly occurring in changing societies; and it is always well to bear in mind that the efficiency of a stratified structure may be affected by the modes of recruitment for positions. The social order itself, however, sets limits to the inflation or deflation of the prestige of experts: an over-supply tends to debase the rewards and discourage recruitment or produce revolution, whereas an under-supply tends to increase the rewards or weaken the society in competition with other societies.

Particular systems of stratification show a wide range with respect to the exact position of technically competent persons. This range is perhaps most evident in the degree of specialization. Extreme division of labor tends to create many specialists without high prestige since the training is short and the required native capacity relatively small. On the other hand it also tends to accentuate the high position of the true experts—scientists, engineers, and administrators—by increasing their authority relative to other functionally important positions. But the idea of a technocratic social order or a government or priesthood of

engineers or social scientists neglects the limitations of knowledge and skills as a basis for performing social functions. To the extent that the social structure is truly specialized the prestige of the technical person must also be circumscribed.

Variation in Stratified Systems

The generalized principles of stratification here suggested form a necessary preliminary to a consideration of types of stratified systems, because it is in terms of these principles that the types must be described. This can be seen by trying to delineate types according to certain modes of variation. For instance, some of the most important modes (together with the polar types in terms of them) seem to be as follows:

(a) **The Degree of Specialization.** The degree of specialization affects the fineness and multiplicity of the gradations in power and prestige. It also influences the extent to which particular functions may be emphasized in the invidious system, since a given function cannot receive much emphasis in the hierarchy until it has achieved structural separation from the other functions. Finally, the amount of specialization influences the bases of selection. Polar types: *Specialized*, *Unspecialized*.

(b) **The Nature of the Functional Emphasis.** In general when emphasis is put on sacred matters, a rigidity is introduced that tends to limit specialization and hence the development of technology. In addition, a brake is placed on social mobility, and on the development of bureaucracy. When the preoccupation with the sacred is withdrawn, leaving greater scope for purely secular preoccupations, a great development, and rise in status, of economic and technological positions seemingly takes place. Curiously, a concomitant rise in political position is not likely, because it has usually been allied with the religious and stands to gain little by the decline of the latter. It is also possible for a society to emphasize

family functions—as in relatively undifferentiated societies where high mortality requires high fertility and kinship forms the main basis of social organization. Main types: *Familistic*, *Authoritarian* (*Theocratic* or sacred, and *Totalitarian* or secular), *Capitalistic*.

(c) **The Magnitude of Invidious Differences.** What may be called the amount of social distance between positions, taking into account the entire scale, is something that should lend itself to quantitative measurement. Considerable differences apparently exist between different societies in this regard, and also between parts of the same society. Polar types: *Equalitarian*, *Inequalitarian*.

(d) **The Degree of Opportunity.** The familiar question of the amount of mobility is different from the question of the comparative equality or inequality of rewards posed above, because the two criteria may vary independently up to a point. For instance, the tremendous divergences in monetary income in the United States are far greater than those found in primitive societies, yet the equality of opportunity to move from one rung to the other in the social scale may also be greater in the United States than in a hereditary tribal kingdom. Polar types: *Mobile* (open), *Immobile* (closed).

(e) **The Degree of Stratum Solidarity.** Again, the degree of “class solidarity” (or the presence of specific organizations to promote class interests) may vary to some extent independently of the other criteria, and hence is an important principle in classifying systems of stratification. Polar types: *Class organized*, *Class unorganized*.

External Conditions

What state any particular system of stratification is in with reference to each of these modes of variation depends on two things: (1) its state with reference to the other ranges of variation, and (2) the conditions outside the

system of stratification which nevertheless influence that system. Among the latter are the following:

(a) **The Stage of Cultural Development.** As the cultural heritage grows, increased specialization becomes necessary, which in turn contributes to the enhancement of mobility, a decline of stratum solidarity, and a change of functional emphasis.

(b) **Situation with Respect to Other Societies.** The presence or absence of open conflict with other societies, of free trade relations or cultural diffusion, all influence the class structure to some extent. A chronic state of warfare tends to place emphasis upon the military functions, especially when the opponents are more or less equal. Free trade, on the other hand, strengthens the hand of the trader at the expense of the warrior and priest. Free movement of ideas generally has an equalitarian effect. Migration and conquest create special circumstances.

(c) **Size of the Society.** A small society limits the degree to which functional specialization can go, the degree of segregation of different strata, and the magnitude of inequality.

Composite Types

Much of the literature on stratification has attempted to classify concrete systems into a certain number of types. This task is deceptively simple, however, and should come at the end of an analysis of elements and principles, rather than at the beginning. If the preceding discussion has any validity, it indicates that there are a number of modes of variation between different systems, and that any one system is a composite of the society's status with reference to all these modes of variation. The danger of trying to classify whole societies under such rubrics as *caste*, *feudal*, or *open class* is that one or two criteria are selected and others ignored, the result being an unsatisfactory solution to the problem posed.

The present discussion has been offered as a possible approach to the more systematic classification of composite types.

Notes

1. Kingsley Davis, "A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification," *American Sociological Review*. 7:309-321, June, 1942.

2. The writers regret (and beg indulgence) that the present essay, a condensation of a longer study, covers so much in such short space that adequate evidence and qualification cannot be given and that as a result what is actually very tentative is presented in an unfortunately dogmatic manner.

3. Unfortunately, functional importance is difficult to establish. To use the position's prestige to establish it, as is often unconsciously done, constitutes circular reasoning from our point of view. There are, however, two independent clues: (a) the degree to which a position is functionally unique, there being no other positions that can perform the same function satisfactorily; (b) the degree to

which other positions are dependent on the one in question. Both clues are best exemplified in organized systems of positions built around one major function. Thus, in most complex societies the religious, political, economic, and educational functions are handled by distinct structures not easily interchangeable. In addition, each structure possesses many different positions, some clearly dependent on, if not subordinate to, others. In sum, when an institutional nucleus becomes differentiated around one main function, and at the same time organizes a large portion of the population into its relationships, the *key* positions in it are of the highest functional importance. The absence of such specialization does not prove functional unimportance, for the whole society may be relatively unspecialized; but it is safe to assume that the more important functions receive the first and clearest structural differentiation.

4. The symbolic rather than intrinsic role of income in social stratification has been succinctly summarized by Talcott Parsons, "An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," *American Journal of Sociology*. 45:841-862, May, 1940.



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The Dysfunctions of Stratification

MELVIN M. TUMIN

Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis

The fact of social inequality in human society is marked by its ubiquity and its antiquity. Every known society, past and present, distributes its scarce and demanded goods and services unequally. And there are attached to the positions which command unequal amounts of such goods and services certain highly morally-toned evaluations of their importance for the society.

The ubiquity and the antiquity of such inequality has given rise to the assumption that there must be something both inevitable and positively functional about such social arrangements.

Clearly, the truth or falsity of such an assumption is a strategic question for any general theory of social organization. It is therefore most curious that the basic premises and implications of the assumption have only been most casually explored by American sociologists.

The most systematic treatment is to be found in the well-known article by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, entitled "Some Principles of Stratification."¹ More than twelve years have passed since its publication,

and though it is one of the very few treatments of stratification on a high level of generalization, it is difficult to locate a single systematic analysis of its reasoning. It will be the principal concern of this paper to present the beginnings of such an analysis.

The central argument advanced by Davis and Moore can be stated in a number of sequential propositions, as follows:

1. Certain positions in any society are functionally more important than others, and require special skills for their performance.
2. Only a limited number of individuals in any society have the talents which can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions.
3. The conversion of talents into skills involves a training period during which sacrifices of one kind or another are made by those undergoing the training.
4. In order to induce the talented persons to undergo these sacrifices and acquire the training, their future positions must carry an inducement value in the form of differential, i.e., privileged and disproportionate access to the scarce and desired rewards which the society has to offer.²
5. These scarce and desired goods consist of the rights and perquisites attached to,

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or built into, the positions, and can be classified into those things which contribute to (a) sustenance and comfort, (b) humor and diversion, (c) self-respect and ego expansion.

6. This differential access to the basic rewards of the society has as a consequence the differentiation of the prestige and esteem which various strata acquire. This may be said, along with the rights and perquisites, to constitute institutionalized social inequality, i.e., stratification.
7. Therefore, social inequality among different strata in the amounts of scarce and desired goods, and the amounts of prestige and esteem which they receive, is both positively functional and inevitable in any society.

Let us take these propositions and examine them *seriatim*.³

(1) *Certain positions in any society are more functionally important than others and require special skills for their performance.*

The key term here is "functionally important." The functionalist theory of social organization is by no means clear and explicit about this term. The minimum common referent is to something known as the "survival value" of a social structure.⁴ This concept immediately involves a number of perplexing questions. Among these are: (a) the issue of minimum vs. maximum survival, and the possible empirical referents which can be given to those terms; (b) whether such a proposition is a useless tautology since any *status quo* at any given moment is nothing more and nothing less than everything present in the *status quo*. In these terms, all acts and structures must be judged positively functional in that they constitute essential portions of the *status quo*; (c) what kind of calculus of functionality exists which will enable us, at this point in our development, to add and subtract long and short range consequences, with their mixed qualities, and arrive at some summative judgment regarding the rating an act or structure should receive on a scale of greater or lesser

functionality? At best, we tend to make primarily intuitive judgments. Often enough, these judgments involve the use of value-laden criteria, or, at least, criteria which are chosen in preference to others not for any sociologically systematic reasons but by reason of certain implicit value preferences.

Thus, to judge that the engineers in a factory are functionally more important to the factory than the unskilled workmen involves a notion regarding the dispensability of the unskilled workmen, or their replaceability, relative to that of the engineers. But this is not a process of choice with infinite time dimensions. For at some point along the line one must face the problem of adequate motivation for *all* workers at all levels of skill in the factory. In the long run, *some* labor force of unskilled workmen is as important and as indispensable to the factory as *some* labor force of engineers. Often enough, the labor force situation is such that this fact is brought home sharply to the entrepreneur in the short run rather than in the long run.

Moreover, the judgment as to the relative indispensability and replaceability of a particular segment of skills in the population involves a prior judgment about the bargaining-power of that segment. But this power is itself a culturally shaped *consequence* of the existing system of rating, rather than something inevitable in the nature of social organization. At least the contrary of this has never been demonstrated, but only assumed.

A generalized theory of social stratification must recognize that the prevailing system of inducements and rewards is only one of many variants in the whole range of possible systems of motivation which, at least theoretically, are capable of working in human society. It is quite conceivable, of course, that a system of norms could be institutionalized in which the idea of threatened withdrawal of services, except under the most extreme circumstances, would be considered as absolute moral anathema. In such a case, the whole notion of relative functionality, as advanced by Davis and Moore, would have to be radically revised.

(2) *Only a limited number of individuals in any society have the talents which can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions (i.e., the more functionally important positions).*

The truth of this proposition depends at least in part on the truth of proposition 1 above. It is, therefore, subject to all the limitations indicated above. But for the moment, let us assume the validity of the first proposition and concentrate on the question of the rarity of appropriate talent.

If all that is meant is that in every society there is a *range* of talent, and that some members of any society are by nature more talented than others, no sensible contradiction can be offered, but a question must be raised here regarding the amount of sound knowledge present in any society concerning the presence of talent in the population.

For, in every society there is some demonstrable ignorance regarding the amount of talent present in the population. *And the more rigidly stratified a society is, the less chance does that society have of discovering any new facts about the talents of its members.* Smoothly working and stable systems of stratification, wherever found, tend to build-in obstacles to the further exploration of the range of available talent. This is especially true in those societies where the opportunity to discover talent in any one generation varies with the differential resources of the parent generation. Where, for instance, access to education depends upon the wealth of one's parents, and where wealth is differentially distributed, large segments of the population are likely to be deprived of the chance even to *discover* what are their talents.

Whether or not differential rewards and opportunities are functional in any one generation, it is clear that if those differentials are allowed to be socially inherited by the next generation, then, the stratification system is specifically dysfunctional for the discovery of talents in the next generation. In this fashion, systems of social stratification tend to limit the chances available to maximize the efficiency of discovery, recruitment and training of "functionally important talent."⁵

Additionally, the unequal distribution of rewards in one generation tends to result in the unequal distribution of motivation in the succeeding generation. Since motivation to succeed is clearly an important element in the entire process of education, the unequal distribution of motivation tends to set limits on the possible extensions of the educational system, and hence, upon the efficient recruitment and training of the widest body of skills available in the population.⁶

Lastly, in this context, it may be asserted that there is some noticeable tendency for elites to restrict further access to their privileged positions, once they have sufficient power to enforce such restrictions. This is especially true in a culture where it is possible for an elite to contrive a high demand and a proportionately higher reward for its work by restricting the numbers of the elite available to do the work. The recruitment and training of doctors in modern United States is at least partly a case in point.

Here, then, are three ways, among others which could be cited, in which stratification systems, once operative, tend to reduce the survival value of a society by limiting the search, recruitment and training of functionally important personnel far more sharply than the facts of available talent would appear to justify. It is only when there is genuinely equal access to recruitment and training for all potentially talented persons that differential rewards can conceivably be justified as functional. And stratification systems are apparently *inherently antagonistic* to the development of such full equality of opportunity.

(3) *The conversion of talents into skills involves a training period during which sacrifices of one kind or another are made by those undergoing the training.*

Davis and Moore introduce here a concept, "sacrifice" which comes closer than any of the rest of their vocabulary of analysis to being a direct reflection of the rationalizations, offered by the more fortunate members of a society, of the rightness of their occupancy of privileged positions. It is the least critically thought-out concept in the repertoire, and can

also be shown to be least supported by the actual facts.

In our present society, for example, what are the sacrifices which talented persons undergo in the training period? The possibly serious losses involve the surrender of earning power and the cost of the training. The latter is generally borne by the parents of the talented youth undergoing training, and not by the trainees themselves. But this cost tends to be paid out of income which the parents were able to earn generally by virtue of *their* privileged positions in the hierarchy of stratification. That is to say, the parents' ability to pay for the training of their children is part of the differential *reward* they, the parents, received for their privileged positions in the society. And to charge this sum up against sacrifices made by the youth is falsely to perpetrate a bill or a debt already paid by the society to the parents.

So far as the sacrifice of earning power by the trainees themselves is concerned, the loss may be measured relative to what they might have earned had they gone into the labor market instead of into advanced training for the "important" skills. There are several ways to judge this. One way is to take all the average earnings of age peers who did go into the labor market for a period equal to the average length of the training period. The total income, so calculated, roughly equals an amount which the elite can, on the average, earn back in the first decade of professional work, over and above the earnings of his age peers who are not trained. Ten years is probably the maximum amount needed to equalize the differential.⁷ There remains, on the average, twenty years of work during each of which the skilled person then goes on to earn far more than his unskilled age peers. And, what is often forgotten, there is then still another ten or fifteen year period during which the skilled person continues to work and earn when his unskilled age peer is either totally or partially out of the labor market by virtue of the attrition of his strength and capabilities.

One might say that the first ten years of differential pay is perhaps justified, in order to

regain for the trained person what he lost during his training period. But it is difficult to imagine what would justify continuing such differential rewards beyond that period.

Another and probably sounder way to measure how much is lost during the training period is to compare the per capita income available to the trainee with the per capita income of the age peer on the untrained labor market during the so-called sacrificial period. If one takes into account the earlier marriage of untrained persons, and the earlier acquisition of family dependents, it is highly dubious that the per capita income of the wage worker is significantly larger than that of the trainee. Even assuming, for the moment, that there is a difference, the amount is by no means sufficient to justify a lifetime of continuing differentials.

What tends to be completely overlooked, in addition, are the psychic and spiritual rewards which are available to the elite trainees by comparison with their age peers in the labor force. There is, first, the much higher prestige enjoyed by the college student and the professional-school student as compared with persons in shops and offices. There is, second, the extremely highly valued privilege of having greater opportunity for self-development. There is, third, all the psychic gain involved in being allowed to delay the assumption of adult responsibilities such as earning a living and supporting a family. There is, fourth, the access to leisure and freedom of a kind not likely to be experienced by the persons already at work.

If these are never taken into account as rewards of the training period it is not because they are not concretely present, but because the emphasis in American concepts of reward is almost exclusively placed on the material returns of positions. The emphases on enjoyment, entertainment, ego enhancement, prestige and esteem are introduced only when the differentials in these which accrue to the skilled positions need to be justified. If these other rewards were taken into account, it would be much more difficult to demonstrate that the training period, as presently operative, is really sacrificial. Indeed, it might turn

out to be the case that even at this point in their careers, the elite trainees were being differentially rewarded relative to their age peers in the labor force.

All of the foregoing concerns the quality of the training period under our present system of motivation and rewards. Whatever may turn out to be the factual case about the present system—and the factual case is moot—the more important theoretical question concerns the assumption that the training period under *any* system must be sacrificial.

There seem to be no good theoretical grounds for insisting on this assumption. For, while under any system certain costs will be involved in training persons for skilled positions, these costs could easily be assumed by the society-at-large. Under these circumstances, there would be no need to compensate anyone in terms of differential rewards once the skilled positions were staffed. In short, there would be no need or justification for stratifying social positions on *these* grounds.

(4) In order to induce the talented persons to undergo these sacrifices and acquire the training, their future positions must carry an inducement value in the form of differential, i.e., privileged and disproportionate access to the scarce and desired rewards which the society has to offer.

Let us assume, for the purposes of the discussion, that the training period is sacrificial and the talent is rare in every conceivable human society. There is still the basic problem as to whether the allocation of differential rewards in scarce and desired goods and services is the only or the most efficient way of recruiting the appropriate talent to these positions.

For there are a number of alternative motivational schemes whose efficiency and adequacy ought at least to be considered in this context. What can be said, for instance, on behalf of the motivation which De Man called “joy in work,” Veblen termed “instinct for workmanship” and which we latterly have come to identify as “intrinsic work satisfaction?” Or, to what extent could the motivation of “social duty” be institutionalized in

such a fashion that self interest and social interest come closely to coincide? Or, how much prospective confidence can be placed in the possibilities of institutionalizing “social service” as a widespread motivation for seeking one’s appropriate position and fulfilling it conscientiously?

Are not these types of motivations, we may ask, likely to prove most appropriate for precisely the “most functionally important positions?” Especially in a mass industrial society, where the vast majority of positions become standardized and routinized, it is the skilled jobs which are likely to retain most of the quality of “intrinsic job satisfaction” and be most readily identifiable as socially serviceable. Is it indeed impossible then to build these motivations into the socialization pattern to which we expose our talented youth?

To deny that such motivations could be institutionalized would be to overclaim our present knowledge. In part, also, such a claim would seem to derive from an assumption that what has not been institutionalized yet in human affairs is incapable of institutionalization. Admittedly, historical experience affords us evidence we cannot afford to ignore. But such evidence cannot legitimately be used to deny absolutely the possibility of heretofore untried alternatives. Social innovation is as important a feature of human societies as social stability.

On the basis of these observations, it seems that Davis and Moore have stated the case much too strongly when they insist that a “functionally important position” which requires skills that are scarce, “must command great prestige, high salary, ample leisure, and the like,” if the appropriate talents are to be attracted to the position. Here, clearly, the authors are postulating the unavailability of very specific types of rewards and, by implication, denying the possibility of others.

(5) These scarce and desired goods consist of rights and perquisites attached to, or built into, the positions and can be classified into those things which contribute to (a) sustenance and comfort; (b) humor and diversion; (c) self respect and ego expansion.

(6) *This differential access to the basic rewards of the society has as a consequence the differentiation of the prestige and esteem which various strata acquire. This may be said, along with the rights and perquisites, to constitute institutionalized social inequality, i.e., stratification.*

With the classification of the rewards offered by Davis and Moore there need be little argument. Some question must be raised, however, as to whether any reward system, built into a general stratification system, must allocate equal amounts of all three types of reward in order to function effectively, or whether one type of reward may be emphasized to the virtual neglect of others. This raises the further question regarding which type of emphasis is likely to prove most effective as a differential inducer. Nothing in the known facts about human motivation impels us to favor one type of reward over the other, or to insist that all three types of reward must be built into the positions in comparable amounts if the position is to have an inducement value.

It is well known, of course, that societies differ considerably in the kinds of rewards they emphasize in their efforts to maintain a reasonable balance between responsibility and reward. There are, for instance, numerous societies in which the conspicuous display of differential economic advantage is considered extremely bad taste. In short, our present knowledge commends to us the possibility of considerable plasticity in the way in which different types of rewards can be structured into a functioning society. This is to say, it cannot yet be demonstrated that it is *unavoidable* that differential prestige and esteem shall accrue to positions which command differential rewards in power and property.

What does seem to be unavoidable is that differential prestige shall be given to those in any society who conform to the normative order as against those who deviate from that order in a way judged immoral and detrimental. On the assumption that the continuity of a society depends on the continuity and stability of its normative order, some such distinction between conformists and deviants seems inescapable.

It also seems to be unavoidable that in any society, no matter how literate its tradition, the older, wiser and more experienced individuals who are charged with the enculturation and socialization of the young must have more power than the young, on the assumption that the task of effective socialization demands such differential power.

But this differentiation in prestige between the conformist and the deviant is by no means the same distinction as that between strata of individuals each of which operates *within* the normative order, and is composed of adults. The *latter* distinction, in the form of differentiated rewards and prestige between social strata is what Davis and Moore, and most sociologists, consider the structure of a stratification system. The *former* distinctions have nothing necessarily to do with the workings of such a system nor with the efficiency of motivation and recruitment of functionally important personnel.

Nor does the differentiation of power between young and old necessarily create differentially valued strata. For no society rates its young as less morally worthy than its older persons, no matter how much differential power the older ones may temporarily enjoy.

(7) *Therefore, social inequality among different strata in the amounts of scarce and desired goods, and the amounts of prestige and esteem which they receive, is both positively functional and inevitable in any society.*

If the objections which have heretofore been raised are taken as reasonable, then it may be stated that the only items which any society *must* distribute unequally are the power and property necessary for the performance of different tasks. If such differential power and property are viewed by all as commensurate with the differential responsibilities, and if they are culturally defined as *resources* and not as rewards, then, no differentials in prestige and esteem need follow.

Historically, the evidence seems to be that every time power and property are distributed unequally, no matter what the cultural definition, prestige and esteem differentiations have tended to result as well. Historically, however,

no systematic effort has ever been made, under propitious circumstances, to develop the tradition that each man is as socially worthy as all other men so long as he performs his appropriate tasks conscientiously. While such a tradition seems utterly utopian, no known facts in psychological or social science have yet demonstrated its impossibility or its dysfunctionality for the continuity of a society. The achievement of a full institutionalization of such a tradition seems far too remote to contemplate. Some successive approximations at such a tradition, however, are not out of the range of prospective social innovation.

What, then, of the "positive functionality" of social stratification? Are there other, negative, functions of institutionalized social inequality which can be identified, if only tentatively? Some such dysfunctions of stratification have already been suggested in the body of this paper. Along with others they may now be stated, in the form of provisional assertions, as follows:

1. Social stratification systems function to limit the possibility of discovery of the full range of talent available in a society. This results from the fact of unequal access to appropriate motivation, channels of recruitment and centers of training.
2. In foreshortening the range of available talent, social stratification systems function to set limits upon the possibility of expanding the productive resources of the society, at least relative to what might be the case under conditions of greater equality of opportunity.
3. Social stratification systems function to provide the elite with the political power necessary to procure acceptance and dominance of an ideology which rationalizes the *status quo*, whatever it may be, as "logical," "natural" and "morally right." In this manner, social stratification systems function as essentially conservative influences in the societies in which they are found.
4. Social stratification systems function to distribute favorable self-images unequally throughout a population. To the extent that such favorable self-images are requisite to the development of the creative potential inherent in men, to that extent stratification systems function to limit the development of this creative potential.
5. To the extent that inequalities in social rewards cannot be made fully acceptable to the less privileged in a society, social stratification systems function to encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of a society and thus to limit the possibilities of extensive social integration.
6. To the extent that the sense of significant membership in a society depends on one's place on the prestige ladder of the society, social stratification systems function to distribute unequally the sense of significant membership in the population.
7. To the extent that loyalty to a society depends on a sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification systems function to distribute loyalty unequally in the population.
8. To the extent that participation and apathy depend upon the sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification systems function to distribute the motivation to participate unequally in a population.

Each of the eight foregoing propositions contains implicit hypotheses regarding the consequences of unequal distribution of rewards in a society in accordance with some notion of the functional importance of various positions. These are empirical hypotheses, subject to test. They are offered here only as exemplary of the kinds of consequences of social stratification which are not often taken into account in dealing with the problem. They should also serve to reinforce the doubt that social inequality is a device which is uniformly functional for the role of guaranteeing that the most important tasks in a society will be performed conscientiously by the most competent persons.

The obviously mixed character of the functions of social inequality should come as no surprise to anyone. If sociology is sophisticated in any sense, it is certainly with regard to its awareness of the mixed nature of any social arrangement, when the observer takes into account long as well as short range consequences and latent as well as manifest dimensions.

Summary

In this paper, an effort has been made to raise questions regarding the inevitability and positive functionality of stratification, or institutionalized social inequality in rewards, allocated in accordance with some notion of the greater and lesser functional importance of various positions. The possible alternative meanings of the concept "functional importance" has been shown to be one difficulty. The question of the scarcity or abundance of available talent has been indicated as a principal source of possible variation. The extent to which the period of training for skilled positions may reasonably be viewed as sacrificial has been called into question. The possibility has been suggested that very different types of motivational schemes might conceivably be made to function. The separability of differentials in power and property considered as resources appropriate to a task from such differentials considered as rewards for the performance of a task has also been suggested. It has also been maintained that differentials in prestige and esteem do not necessarily follow upon differentials in power and property when the latter are considered as appropriate resources rather than rewards. Finally, some negative functions, or dysfunctions, of institutionalized social inequality have been tentatively identified, revealing the mixed character of the outcome of social stratification, and casting doubt on the contention that

Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most im-

portant positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons.⁸

Notes

The writer has had the benefit of a most helpful criticism of the main portions of this paper by Professor W. J. Goode of Columbia University. In addition, he has had the opportunity to expose this paper to criticism by the Staff Seminar of the Sociology Section at Princeton. In deference to a possible rejoinder by Professors Moore and Davis, the writer has not revised the paper to meet the criticisms which Moore has already offered personally.

1. *American Sociological Review*, X (April, 1945), pp. 242-249. An earlier article by Kingsley Davis, entitled, "A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification," *American Sociological Review*, VII (June, 1942), pp. 309-321, is devoted primarily to setting forth a vocabulary for stratification analysis. A still earlier article by Talcott Parsons, "An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLV (November, 1940), pp. 849-862, approaches the problem in terms of why "differential ranking is considered a really fundamental phenomenon of social systems and what are the respects in which such ranking is important." The principal line of integration asserted by Parsons is with the fact of the normative orientation of any society. Certain crucial lines of connection are left unexplained, however, in this article, and in the Davis and Moore article of 1945 only some of these lines are made explicit.

2. The "scarcity and demand" qualities of goods and services are never explicitly mentioned by Davis and Moore. But it seems to the writer that the argument makes no sense unless the goods and services are so characterized. For if rewards are to function as differential inducements they must not only be differentially distributed but they must be both scarce and demanded as well. Neither the scarcity of an item by itself nor the fact of its being in demand is sufficient to allow it to function as a differential inducement in a system of unequal rewards. Leprosy is scarce and oxygen is highly demanded.

3. The arguments to be advanced here are condensed versions of a much longer analysis entitled, *An Essay on Social Stratification*. Perforce, all the reasoning necessary to support some of the contentions cannot be offered within the space limits of this article.

4. Davis and Moore are explicitly aware of the difficulties involved here and suggest two “independent clues” other than survival value. See footnote 3 on p. 244 of their article.

5. Davis and Moore state this point briefly on p. 248 but do not elaborate it.

6. In the United States, for instance, we are only now becoming aware of the amount of productivity we, as a society, lose by allocating inferior opportunities and rewards, and hence, inferior motivation, to our Negro population. The actual

amount of loss is difficult to specify precisely. Some rough estimate can be made, however, on the assumption that there is present in the Negro population about the same range of talent that is found in the White population.

7. These are only very rough estimates, of course, and it is certain that there is considerable income variation within the so-called elite group, so that the proposition holds only relatively more or less.

8. Davis and Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

CLAUDE S. FISCHER, MICHAEL HOUT, MARTÍN SÁNCHEZ JANKOWSKI, SAMUEL R. LUCAS, ANN SWIDLER, AND KIM VOSS

Inequality by Design

Why do some Americans have a lot more than others? Perhaps, inequality follows inevitably from human nature. Some people are born with more talent than others; the first succeed while the others fail in life's competition. Many people accept this explanation, but it will not suffice. Inequality is not fated by nature, nor even by the “invisible hand” of the market; it is a social construction, a result of our historical acts. *Americans have created the extent and type of inequality we have, and Americans maintain it.*

To answer the question of what explains inequality in America, we must divide it in two. First, who gets ahead and who falls behind in the competition for success? Second, what determines how much people get for being ahead or behind? To see more clearly that the two questions are different, think of a ladder that represents the ranking of affluence in a

society. Question one asks why this person rather than that person ended up on a higher or lower rung. Question two asks why some societies have tall and narrowing ladders—ladders that have huge distances between top and bottom rungs and that taper off at the top so that there is room for only a few people—while other societies have short and broad ladders—ladders with little distance between top and bottom and with lots of room for many people all the way to the top.

The answer to the question of who ends up where is that people's social environments largely influence what rung of the ladder they end up on.¹ The advantages and disadvantages that people inherit from their parents, the resources that their friends can share with them, the quantity and quality of their schooling, and even the historical era into which they are born boost some up and hold others down. The children of professors, our own children, have substantial head starts over children of, say, factory workers. Young men who graduated from high school in the booming 1950s had greater opportunities than the

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ones who graduated during the Depression. Context matters tremendously.

The answer to the question of why societies vary in their structure of rewards is more political. In significant measure, societies choose the height and breadth of their “ladders.” By loosening markets or regulating them, by providing services to all citizens or rationing them according to income, by subsidizing some groups more than others, societies, through their politics, build their ladders. To be sure, historical and external constraints deny full freedom of action, but a substantial freedom of action remains. In a democracy, this means that the inequality Americans have is, in significant measure, the historical result of policy choices Americans—or, at least, Americans’ representatives—have made. In the United States, the result is a society that is distinctively *unequal*. Our ladder is, by the standards of affluent democracies and even by the standards of recent American history, unusually extended and narrow—and becoming more so.

To see how policies shape the structure of rewards (i.e., the equality of outcomes), consider these examples: Laws provide the ground rules for the marketplace—rules covering incorporation, patents, wages, working conditions, unionization, security transactions, taxes, and so on. Some laws widen differences in income and earnings among people in the market; others narrow differences. Also, many government programs affect inequality more directly through, for example, tax deductions, food stamps, social security, Medicare, and corporate subsidies.

To see how policies also affect which particular individuals get to the top and which fall to the bottom of our ladder (i.e., the equality of opportunity), consider these examples: The amount of schooling young Americans receive heavily determines the jobs they get and the income they make. In turn, educational policies—what sorts of schools are provided, the way school resources are distributed (usually according to the community in which children live), teaching methods such as tracking, and so on—strongly affect how much schooling

children receive. Similarly, local employment opportunities constrain how well people can do economically. Whether and where governments promote jobs or fail to do so will, in turn, influence who is poised for well-paid employment and who is not.

Claiming that intentional policies have significantly constructed the inequalities we have and that other policies could change those inequalities may seem a novel idea in the current ideological climate. So many voices tell us that inequality is the result of individuals’ “natural” talents in a “natural” market. Nature defeats any sentimental efforts by society to reduce inequality, they say; such efforts should therefore be dropped as futile and wasteful. Appeals to nature are common and comforting. As Kenneth Bock wrote in his study of social philosophy, “We have been quick to seek explanations of our problems and failures in what we *are* instead of what we *do*. We seem wedded to the belief that our situation is a consequence of our nature rather than of our historical acts.”² In this case, appeals to nature are shortsighted.

Arguments from nature are useless for answering the question of what determines the structure of rewards because that question concerns differences in equality *among societies*. Theories of natural inequality cannot tell us why countries with such similar genetic stocks (and economic markets) as the United States, Canada, England, and Sweden can vary so much in the degree of economic inequality their citizens experience. The answer lies in deliberate policies.

Appeals to nature also cannot satisfactorily answer even the first question: Why do some *individuals* get ahead and some fall behind? Certainly, genetic endowment helps. Being tall, slender, good-looking, healthy, male, and white helps in the race for success, and these traits are totally or partly determined genetically. But these traits matter to the degree that society makes them matter—determining how much, for example, good looks or white skin are rewarded. More important yet than these traits are the social milieux in which people grow up and live.

Realizing that intentional policies account for much of our expanding inequality is not only more accurate than theories of natural inequality; it is also more optimistic. We are today more unequal than we have been in seventy years. We are more unequal than any other affluent Western nation. Intentional policies could change those conditions, could reduce and reverse our rush to a polarized society, could bring us closer to the average inequality in the West, could expand both equality of opportunity and equality of result.

Still, the “natural inequality” viewpoint is a popular one. Unequal outcomes, the best-selling *Bell Curve* argues, are the returns from a fair process that sorts people out according to how intelligent they are.³ But *The Bell Curve*’s explanation of inequality is inadequate. The authors err in assuming that human talents can be reduced to a single, fixed, and essentially innate skill they label intelligence. They err in asserting that this trait largely determines how people end up in life. And they err in imagining that individual competition explains the structure of inequality in society. . . .

Disparities in income and wealth, [other] analysts argue, encourage hard work and saving. The rich, in particular, can invest their capital in production and thus create jobs for all.⁴ This was the argument of “supply-side” economics in the 1980s, that rewarding the wealthy—for example, by reducing income taxes on returns from their investments—would stimulate growth to the benefit of all. The 1980s did not work out that way, but the theory is still influential. We *could* force more equal outcomes, these analysts say, but doing so would reduce living standards for all Americans.

Must we have so much inequality for overall growth? The latest economic research concludes *not*; it even suggests that inequality may *retard* economic growth. In a detailed statistical analysis, economists Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini reported finding that, historically, societies that had more inequality of earnings tended to have lower, not higher, subsequent economic growth. Replications by

other scholars substantiated the finding: More unequal nations grew less quickly than did more equal societies.⁵ . . .

This recent research has not demonstrated precisely how greater equality helps economic growth,⁶ but we can consider a few possibilities. Increasing resources for those of lower income might, by raising health, educational attainment, and hope, increase people’s abilities to be productive and entrepreneurial. Reducing the income of those at the top might reduce unproductive and speculative spending. Take, as a concrete example, the way American corporations are run compared with German and Japanese ones. The American companies are run by largely autonomous managers whose main responsibility is to return short-term profits and high stock prices to shareholders and—because they are often paid in stock options—to themselves as well. Japanese and German managers are more like top employees whose goals largely focus on keeping the company a thriving enterprise. The latter is more conducive to reinvesting profits and thus to long-term growth.⁷ Whatever the mechanisms may be, inequality appears to undermine growth. Americans certainly need not feel that they must accept the high levels of inequality we currently endure in order to have a robust economy.

A related concern for Americans is whether “leveling” stifles the drive to get ahead. Americans prefer to encourage Horatio Alger striving and to provide opportunities for everyone. Lincoln once said “that some would be rich shows that others may become rich.”⁸ Many, if not most, Americans believe that inequality is needed to encourage people to work hard.⁹ But, if so, *how much* inequality is needed?

For decades, sociologists have been comparing the patterns of social mobility across societies, asking: In which countries are people most likely to overcome the disadvantages of birth and move up the ladder? In particular, does more or less equality encourage such an “open” society? The answer is that Western societies vary little in the degree to which children’s economic successes are constrained by their parents’ class positions. America, the

most unequal Western society, has somewhat more fluid intergenerational mobility than do other nations, but so does Sweden, the most equal Western society.¹⁰ There is no case for encouraging inequality in this evidence, either.

In sum, the assumption that considerable inequality is needed for, or even encourages, economic growth appears to be false. We do not need to make a morally wrenching choice between more affluence and more equality; we can have both. But even if such a choice were necessary, both sides of the debate, the "altruists" who favor intervention for equalizing and the supposed "realists" who resist it, agree that inequality can be shaped by policy decisions: wittingly or unwittingly, we choose our level of inequality.

Notes

1. We know that in statistical models of individual status attainment much, if not most, of the variance is unaccounted for. Of the explained variance, however, the bulk is due to social environment broadly construed. Also, we believe that much of the residual, unexplained variance is attributable to unmeasured social rather than personal factors.

2. Kenneth Bock, *Human Nature Mythology* (Urbana 1994), p. 9.

3. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York 1994).

4. See, for example, Rich Thomas, "Rising Tide Lifts the Yachts: The Gap Between Rich and Poor Has Widened, but There Are Some Comforting

Twists," *Newsweek*, May 1, 1995. See also George Will, "What's Behind Income Disparity," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 1995.

5. Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini, "Is Inequality Harmful for Growth?," *American Economic Review* 84, 1994; Roberto Chang, "Income Inequality and Economic Growth: Evidence and Recent Theories," *Economic Review* 79, 1994; George R.G. Clarke, "More Evidence on Income Distribution and Growth," *Journal of Development Economics* 47, 1995. See also Peter H. Lindert, "The Rise of Social Spending," *Explorations in Economic History* 31, 1994.

6. Persson and Tabellini's explanation ("Is Inequality Harmful?") for their results is that in societies with greater earnings inequality, there is less political pressure for government redistribution; such redistribution impairs growth. However, their evidence for the explanation is thin, and Clarke's results ("More Evidence") are inconsistent with that argument. Chang ("Income Inequality") suggests that with more equality, lower-income families could make longer-term investment decisions. In any event, the statistical results suggest that government intervention on behalf of equality in the market, rather than after the market, would be beneficial.

7. See, for example, Michael Porter, *Capital Choices: Changing the Way America Invests in Industry* (Washington 1992).

8. Quoted by Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York 1982), p. 75.

9. See, for example, Lee Rainwater, *What Money Buys: Inequality and the Social Meanings of Income* (New York 1974); James R. Kluegel and E.R. Smith, "Beliefs About Stratification," *Annual Review of Sociology* 7, 1981.

10. Harry B.G. Ganzeboom, Donald J. Treiman, and Wout C. Ultee, "Comparative Intergenerational Stratification Research," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17, 1991.

GERHARD LENSKI

New Light on Old Issues: The Relevance of “Really Existing Socialist Societies” for Stratification Theory

Scholars have long debated the causes, consequences, and legitimacy of systems of social inequality, with some defending them as natural, inevitable, or even divinely ordained, and others challenging them as unnatural, unnecessary, and immoral (Lenski 1966, ch. 1). In the twentieth century, the most important challenges have come from groups and individuals inspired, directly or indirectly, by the work of Marx and his followers.

One does not need to look far in sociology to see the impact of Marx's vision and the controversies it has created. As many have observed, the long-running debate between functionalists and their critics is, in many ways, a debate over the merits of Marxism: Functionalist maintain that economic inequality is both necessary for societies and beneficial for the vast majority of their members, whereas their critics argue that it is neither.

Unfortunately, from the standpoint of our understanding of the causes and consequences of systems of stratification and the merits of Marx's ideas, the debate among sociologists has focused almost entirely on the experience of Western “capitalist” societies.¹ Surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the experience of the former Soviet republics, Poland, East Germany before unification, the once-united Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Romania,

Bulgaria, Albania, China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and other societies that were or have been governed for extended periods by dedicated Marxists. Yet, as East European sociologists have often pointed out in recent years, these societies have provided a unique set of laboratories for observing the effects of “really existing socialism.”² They allow us to observe socialist societies functioning in the real world under real-life conditions. In these societies, we can see what actually happens when private ownership is abolished and the emphasis in a society's system of rewards is shifted from material incentives to moral incentives. Imperfect though these tests have been, they shed valuable new light on the causes and consequences of inequalities in power and privilege.³ The results have been much too consistent to be ignored or written off as simply a matter of chance, and the consistency is especially impressive when one considers the great cultural diversity of the societies involved.

For many years, Western sociologists could justify their inattention to “really existing socialist societies” because of the difficulties of obtaining reliable data. By the early 1970s, however, a sufficient body of evidence had accumulated, and political conditions in a number of Marxist societies had improved to the point that one could, with some confidence, begin to form a fairly accurate view of a number of important aspects of the new Marxist systems of stratification. On the basis of mate-

¹ This is an original article prepared for this book.

rials available at the time, I concluded in an earlier article (Lenski 1978) that these “experiments in destratification” had enjoyed their greatest successes in reducing *economic* inequality: Differentials in wealth and income appeared to be substantially less in societies governed by Marxist elites than in other societies. These successes were offset, however, by two major failures: (1) *Political* inequalities in these societies were enormous, far greater than in any of the Western industrial democracies, and (2) none of these societies had achieved anything remotely resembling the critical transformation in human nature that Marx had predicted would follow the abolition of private property and would lay the foundation for the subsequent evolution of societies from socialism to communism. These failures, I concluded, were due in large measure to a critical flaw in Marxian theory—its unrealistic assumptions about human nature.

Looking back, I believe these conclusions have stood the test of time fairly well. Of course, information that has since emerged and the wisdom of hindsight would lead me to modify and extend them. For example, recent revelations following the overthrow of the Marxist regimes in Eastern Europe indicate that the level of economic inequality in those societies was greater than I was then aware. To cite but three examples: (1) After the overthrow of Todor Zhikov, the Bulgarian public and the rest of the world learned that during his years in power he had acquired no fewer than thirty separate homes for his personal use and that he and other top Communist Party leaders had accumulated millions of dollars in secret foreign bank accounts (Laber 1990); (2) the longtime Communist leader of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, amassed forty villas and twenty palaces for himself and his family and accumulated millions in Swiss bank accounts at a time when the bulk of the population was often living without heat or light (*Washington Post* 1990); and (3) in East Germany, Erich Honecker accumulated millions of dollars in Swiss bank accounts by skimming profits from arms sales to Third World nations, while sharing with other top

Communist Party leaders exclusive private hunting preserves and other luxuries that were denied to, and hidden from, the rest of the population. Although it has long been clear that Communist Party elites enjoyed many privileges that were denied to others (Matthews 1978), the extent of these privileges has proved to be much greater than most had supposed. That these were not merely aberrations of East European Marxism is indicated by non-European examples: In Nicaragua, the villas and much of the other property once owned by Anastasio Somoza and his associates became the personal property of top Sandinista leaders and their families, while in China and Vietnam, Communist Party elites continue to live in closed compounds (similar to those in the former East Germany) where living conditions are carefully hidden from public scrutiny (Salisbury 1992).

At the other extreme, poverty in these societies was more widespread and more serious than Western observers generally realized. Reports by Soviet authorities in the late 1980s indicated that at least 20 percent of the population was living at or below the official poverty level (Fein 1989). Homelessness was also reported to be a problem in Moscow and other Soviet cities, while studies in Hungary at the end of the Communist era found that a quarter of the population was living in poverty (Kamm 1989).

Despite these revelations, it still appears that the level of economic inequality in Marxist societies never equaled the level found in Japan and most of the Western democracies. Wealthy and privileged though the Zhikovs, Ceaușescus, and Honeckers were by comparison with their fellow citizens, the magnitude of their wealth never compared with the great fortunes amassed by leading Western and Japanese businessmen and by oil-rich Middle Eastern leaders. Furthermore, passing wealth on to the next generation has always been much more difficult in Marxist societies than elsewhere, as the unhappy experiences of the Leonid Brezhnev family and others indicate.⁴