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## Gloom, Doom, and Inequality

There is a growing consensus among academics, policy makers, and even politicians that poverty and inequality should no longer be treated as soft “social issues” that can safely be subordinated to more fundamental interests in maximizing total economic output. The most important sources of this newfound concern with poverty and inequality are (1) the spectacular increase in economic inequality and other forms of disadvantage in many late-industrial countries (the *takeoff account*); (2) the striking persistence of other forms of inequality (e.g., racially segregated neighborhoods, occupational sex segregation) despite decades of quite aggressive egalitarian reform (the *persistence account*); (3) an emerging concern that poverty and inequality may have negative macro-level effects on terrorism, total economic production, and ethnic unrest (the *macro-level externalities account*); (4) a growing awareness of the negative individual-level effects of poverty on health, political participation, and a host of other life conditions (the *micro-level externalities account*); (5) the rise of a “global village” in which spatial disparities in the standard of living have become more widely visible and hence increasingly difficult to ignore (the *visibility account*); (6) the ongoing tendency to expose and delegitimize new types of inequalities (based on sexual orientation, disability, or cit-

izenship) that, not so long ago, were taken for granted, rarely discussed, and barely seen (the *new inequalities account*); and (7) a growing commitment to a broader conception of human entitlements that encompasses rights to basic social amenities (e.g., housing) as well as rights to basic forms of social participation, such as employment (the *social inclusion account*).

This list is remarkable in two ways. First, only two of the seven reasons for our newfound interest in poverty and inequality are about brute empirics (i.e., the growth or intransigence of inequality), while all others are about changes in how we have come to view, study, and evaluate those empirics. When scholars now argue, for example, that inequality has multifarious unintended effects (i.e., an *externalities account*), they presumably don’t mean to suggest that such effects suddenly multiplied in the contemporary period (although perhaps they have). Rather, we are to understand that inequality was always rife with externalities, however inadequately we may have appreciated them in the past. While changes in empirics hardly exhaust, then, the sources of our growing concern with inequality, this is not to gainsay the equally important point that such changes, especially the recent takeoff in income inequality, are likely a core reason why inequal-

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This is a commissioned chapter that draws heavily on material in previous publications (David B. Grusky and Szonja Szelényi, “The Rise and Fall of Benign Narratives About Inequality,” David B. Grusky and Szonja Szelényi, eds., *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender*, 2007 by Westview Press; David B. Grusky, “The Past, Present, and Future of Social Inequality,” David B. Grusky, ed., *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition by Westview Press).

ity has come to be understood as a fundamental social problem of our time.

The above list is no less remarkable for the relatively minor role that normative concerns play. To be sure, there appears to be a growing sentiment that, at minimum, contemporary social systems should guarantee an opportunity to all citizens to participate in economic life and hence avoid the most extreme forms of social and economic exclusion (i.e., the *social inclusion account*). It would nonetheless be a mistake to understand the rising interest in poverty and inequality as principally fueled by some sudden realization that social inclusion is a fundamental social good. Indeed, far from treating inequality as exclusively a moral problem, there is a growing tendency to emphasize its profound consequences and threats for the world community as a whole (i.e., the *macro-level externalities account*). The rhetoric of “sustainability,” although more frequently featured in discussions of environmental problems, is increasingly taken as relevant to discussions of inequality as well (see Mullahy, Robert, and Wolfe, Ch. 95; Stiglitz, Ch. 109; Krueger and MaleOková, Ch. 111). In adopting this rhetoric, the claim is that extreme inequality is counterproductive not just because it reduces total economic output, but also because other very legitimate objectives, such as reducing mortality rates or the threat of terrorism, might be compromised if inequality remains so extreme. By this logic, social policy must simultaneously be oriented to increasing economic output *and* restraining the rise of debilitating and counterproductive forms of inequality, a rather more complicated maximization problem than that conventionally taken on (Fischer et al., Ch. 5; Krueger, Ch. 6).

### **Core Fields of Inquiry**

The foregoing is to suggest that the main task of stratification scholarship, that of describing the contours of inequality and ex-

plaining its causes, has come to be viewed as an increasingly important and central endeavor, and not just within the narrow world of academia. The purpose of this introductory essay is to lay out how the field of stratification has developed, where it currently stands, and how this volume represents and conveys that field.

It may be useful to begin such a task by specifying the main questions around which the field has to this point developed. For each of the eight subfields listed below, we provide some examples of the types of questions that have been featured, our intent being to convey the prevailing style of inquiry rather than some more exhaustive listing.

### **Forms and Sources of Stratification**

What have been the major forms of inequality in human history? Can the ubiquity of inequality be attributed to individual differences in talent or ability (e.g., Fischer et al., Ch. 5)? Is some amount of inequality an inevitable feature of human life (e.g., Davis and Moore, Ch. 2; Tumin, Ch. 4)? Why is income inequality increasing in so many late-industrial countries (e.g., Morris and Western, Ch. 7; Piketty and Saez, Ch. 8)?

### **Structure of Contemporary Inequality**

Is inequality organized into a small number of social classes or occupational groups (e.g., Grusky and Sørensen, Ch. 17)? Or does it take on a largely gradational form featuring wholly incremental differences of income or status (e.g., Blau and Duncan, Ch. 19; Hauser and Warren, Ch. 24; Sen, Ch. 26)? Which of these two forms became more prominent with the transition into modernity or late modernity (e.g., Weeden et al., Ch. 27)?

### **Inequality at the Extremes**

Do political, economic, and cultural elites come together to form a single “upper class” (e.g., Mosca, Ch. 28; Mills, Ch. 29; Giddens, Ch. 30)? Is there likewise a well-formed “underclass” of the poor and dispossessed (e.g.,

Wilson, Ch. 37)? Are elites principally drawn from long-standing elite families and the poor from long-standing poverty-stricken families (e.g., Domhoff, Ch. 31)?

### Generating Inequality

How frequently do individuals move into new classes, occupations, or income groups (e.g., Breen, Ch. 48)? Is the United States an especially mobile society (e.g., Erikson and Goldthorpe, Ch. 47)? To what extent are occupational outcomes determined by such forces as intelligence, effort, schooling, aspirations, social contacts, and individual luck (e.g., Jencks et al., Ch. 51; Harding et al., Ch. 52; Granovetter, Ch. 59; Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo, Ch. 62)?

### Race and Ethnicity

What accounts for racial and ethnic differences in grades, test scores, high school graduation, and college attendance (e.g., Steele, Ch. 71)? What accounts for racial and ethnic differences in hiring, promotion, and pay (e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan, Ch. 70)? Why are neighborhoods so deeply segregated by race and ethnicity (e.g., Massey and Denton, Ch. 38; Wilson, Ch. 76)? Why are interracial marriages becoming more common (e.g., Farley, Ch. 65)?

### Gender Inequality

Why has the gender gap in educational attainment disappeared altogether in some countries? Why has occupational sex segregation proven, by contrast, to be so durable (e.g., Reskin, Ch. 86; Grusky and Levanon, Ch. 87)? What accounts for the gender pay gap (e.g., Petersen and Morgan, Ch. 88; England, Ch. 89; Tam, Ch. 90)? Why has the historic decline in the pay gap stalled of late (e.g., Blau and Kahn, Ch. 91)?

### Consequences of Inequality

Does our class position determine our politics, attitudes, and behaviors (Bourdieu, Ch. 93; Chan and Goldthorpe, Ch. 96; Lareau,

Ch. 97; Hout and Moodie, Ch. 99)? Are such effects of class weakening (e.g., Hout and Moodie, Ch. 99)?

### Future of Inequality

Is a new “high-modern” form of stratification emerging (e.g., Giddens, Ch. 106; Beck and Lau, Ch. 108)? Will inequality continue to grow in many late-industrial countries (e.g., Firebaugh, Ch. 110)? Is the concept of social class still useful in describing contemporary forms of inequality (e.g., Pakulski and Waters, Ch. 107)? Are inequality regimes gradually shedding their distinctive features and converging towards some common regime (e.g., Esping-Andersen, Ch. 102)?

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 (e.g., 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. In its most radical form, this egalitarianism led to Marxist interpretations of human history, and it ultimately provided the intellectual underpinnings for socialist stratification systems. While much of stratification theory has been formulated in reaction and opposition to these early forms of Marxist scholarship,<sup>1</sup> the field nonetheless shares with Marxism the distinctively Enlightenment premise that individuals are to be equally valued and respected regardless of differences in their economic or social standing (see Meyer, Ch. 105; also Tawney 1931).

### Basic Concepts

The eight lines of questioning described above are elaborated in the remainder of this

essay. Before turning to such elaboration, it will be helpful to introduce some of the basic concepts used to describe the amount and structure of inequality, the genesis and persistence of inequality, and the effects of inequality on social behavior of all kinds.

The key components of stratification 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 jobs or occupations in the division of labor (e.g., doctor, farmer, “housewife”), and (3) the mobility mechanisms that link individuals to jobs 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.<sup>2</sup> 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) puts it, the occupational structure can be seen as “a hotel . . . which is always occupied, but always by different persons” (p. 171).

What types of rewards are distributed via these two matching processes? It is increasingly fashionable to recognize that inequality is “multidimensional,” that income is accordingly only one of many important resources, and that income redistribution in and of itself would not eliminate inequality (e.g., Sen, Ch. 26). When a multidimensionalist approach is accordingly taken, one might usefully distinguish among the eight types of assets listed in Table 1, each understood as valuable in its own right rather than a mere investment item.<sup>3</sup> The assets of Table 1 may of course serve investment as well as consumption functions. For example, most economists regard schooling as an invest-

ment that generates future streams of income, while some sociologists likewise regard social networks as forms of capital that can be parlayed into educational credentials, income, and other valued goods.<sup>4</sup> While 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 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.<sup>5</sup>

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. The stratification field has developed a vocabulary that describes how these raw materials are distributed across members of the population. The main parameters of interest pertain to (1) the overall amount of inequality, (2) the extent to which individuals are locked permanently into certain positions (i.e., rigidity), (3) the extent to which ascription (e.g., racial discrimination) is used for purposes of allocation, and (4) the degree to which the various dimensions of inequality cohere (or are “crystallized”). These four classes of parameters are reviewed below.

The overall *amount of inequality* in any given resource (e.g., income) may be defined as its dispersion or concentration among 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 contemporary inequality regimes. The recent diffusion of “citizenship rights,” for example, implies that civil goods have come to be widely dispersed across all citizens, whereas economic and political goods continue to be

Table 1. Types of Assets and Examples of Advantaged and Disadvantaged Groups

Assets		Examples	
<i>Asset group</i>	<i>Examples of types</i>	<i>Advantaged</i>	<i>Disadvantaged</i>
1. Economic	Wealth Income Ownership	Billionaire Professional Capitalist	Bankrupt worker Laborer Worker (i.e., employed)
2. Power	Political power Workplace authority Household authority	Prime minister Manager Head of household	Disenfranchised person Subordinate worker Child
3. Cultural	Knowledge Digital culture “Good” manners	Intelligentsia Silicon Valley resident Aristocracy	Uneducated Residents of other places Commoner
4. Social	Social clubs Workplace associations Informal networks	Country club member Union member Washington A-list	Nonmember Nonmember Social unknown
5. Honorific	Occupational Religious Merit-based	Judge Saint Nobel Prize winner	Garbage collector Excommunicate Nonwinner
6. Civil	Right to work Due process Franchise	Citizen Citizen Citizen	Illegal immigrant Suspected terrorist Felon
7. Human	On-the-job General schooling Vocational training	Experienced worker College graduate Law school graduate	Inexperienced worker High school dropout Unskilled worker
8. Physical (i.e., health)	Mortality Physical disease Mental health	Person with long life Healthy person Healthy person	A “premature” death Person with AIDS, asthma Depressed, alienated

disproportionately controlled by a relatively small elite.

The *rigidity* of a stratification system is indexed by the continuity (over time) in the social standing of its members. The stratification system is 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 such rigidity (or “social closure”) will typically vary in degree across the different types of assets listed in Table 1.

The stratification system rests on *ascriptive processes* to the extent that conditions present at birth (e.g., parental wealth, sex, race) 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 contemporary societies, ascription of all kinds is usually seen as undesirable or discriminatory, and much governmental policy (e.g., antidiscrimination legislation) is therefore directed toward fashioning a stratification system in which individuals acquire resources solely by virtue of their achievements.<sup>6</sup>

The degree of *crystallization* is indexed by the correlations among the various resources (e.g., income, wealth, education) that are socially valued. If these correlations are strong, then the same individuals (i.e., the “upper class”) will consistently appear at the top of all 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 inconsisten-

cies (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.

### Measuring Inequality

Given the complexity of contemporary inequality, one might expect most scholars to adopt a multidimensional approach to characterizing it, an approach that might begin by specifying the multivariate “inequality space” of valued goods listed in Table 1. It nonetheless remains conventional among sociologists to describe stratification systems in terms of discrete classes or strata whose members are presumed to have similar levels or types of assets. In the most extreme versions of this approach, the resulting classes are assumed to be real entities that preexist the distribution of assets, and many scholars therefore refer to the “effects” of class location on the assets that their incumbents control. We present here a stylized history of such class models as well as competing approaches to characterizing the structure of inequality.

The claim that inequality takes on a “class form” is one of the few distinctively sociological contributions to inequality measurement and stands as the main alternative to approaches that either focus exclusively on income inequality or analyze the many dimensions of inequality independently and separately. The main advantage of class-based measurement, as argued by sociologists, is that conventional class categories (e.g., professional, manager, clerk, craft worker, laborer, farmer) are institutionalized within the labor market and are accordingly more than purely nominal or statistical constructions. The labor market, far from being a seamless and continuous distribution of incomes, is instead understood as a deeply lumpy entity, with such lumpiness mainly taking the form

of institutionalized groups (i.e., “classes”) that constitute prepackaged combinations of the valued goods listed in Table 1.

Within sociology, the implicit critique, then, of income-based approaches rests not so much on the argument that the income distribution is just one of many distributions of interest (i.e., multidimensionalism), but rather on the argument that measurement strategies based on the income distribution alone impose an excessively abstract, analytic, and statistical lens on a social world that has much institutionalized structure to it. This structure takes the tripartite form of a set of social classes that are privileged under capitalist labor markets (e.g., capitalists, professionals, managers), a set of social classes that are less privileged under advanced capitalism (e.g., routine nonmanuals, craft workers, operatives), and an “underclass” that stands largely outside the labor market and is accordingly deeply disadvantaged in market systems. The rise of class models should therefore be understood as a distinctively sociological reaction to the individualism of the income paradigm and other unidimensional approaches to measuring inequality.

The foregoing account, which is a largely consensual rendition of the rationale for social class measurement, nonetheless conceals much internal debate within the field on how best to identify and characterize the boundaries dividing the population into classes. We review below the three main phases in which these debates have played out.

#### Structuralist Phase (ca. 1945–1985)

The class models of the postwar period rested implicitly or explicitly on the assumption that classes are bundles of endowments (e.g., education levels), working conditions (e.g., amount of autonomy), and reward packages (e.g., income) that tend to cohere together (esp. Giddens, Ch. 14; Parkin, Ch. 15). The middle class of “craft workers,” for example, comprises individuals with moderate educational investments (i.e., secondary school cre-

dentials), considerable occupation-specific investments in human capital (i.e., on-the-job training), average income coupled with substantial job security (at least until deindustrialization), middling social honor and prestige, quite limited authority and autonomy on the job, and comparatively good health outcomes (by virtue of union-sponsored health benefits and regulation of working conditions). By contrast, the underclass may be understood as comprising a rather different package of conditions, a package that combines minimal educational investments (i.e., secondary school dropouts), limited opportunities for on-the-job training, resulting in intermittent labor force participation and low income, virtually no opportunities for authority or autonomy on the job (during those brief bouts of employment), relatively poor health (by virtue of lifestyle choices and inadequate health care), and much social denigration and exclusion. The other classes appearing in conventional class schemes (e.g., professional, managerial, routine nonmanual) may likewise be understood as particular combinations of scores on the dimensions of Table 1.

For the purposes of illustration, consider a simplified case in which the multidimensional “inequality space” comprises only three individual-level variables (e.g., education, autonomy, income), thus allowing the class hypothesis to be readily graphed. Additionally, assume that the class structure can be represented by six classes (e.g., professional, managerial, sales and clerical, craft, laborer, farm), signified in Figure 1 by six different symbols (dark squares, light squares, dark circles, etc.). As shown in this figure, the two main claims underlying the class hypothesis are that (1) the structural conditions of interest tend to cluster together into characteristic packages, and (2) these packages of conditions correspond to occupational or employment groupings. For structuralists, the inequality space is presumed to have a relatively low dimensionality, indeed a di-

mensionality neither more nor less than the number of postulated classes. The individuals falling within the classes constituting this scheme will accordingly have endowments, working conditions, and reward packages that are close to the averages prevailing for their classes. Moreover, even when individual scores deviate from class averages, the conventional class-analytic assumption (albeit wholly untested) is that the contextual effect of the class is dominant and overcomes any such individual-level deviations. For example, a full professor who lacks a Ph.D. is presumably just as marketable as a fully credentialed (but otherwise comparable) full professor, precisely because membership in the professorial class is a master status that tends to dominate all others.

The postwar period also was notable for a flourishing of gradational measurement approaches that again treated occupations as the fundamental units of analysis but assumed that such occupations may be ordered into a unidimensional socioeconomic or prestige scale (e.g., Treiman, Ch. 20; Goldthorpe and Hope, Ch. 21). In Figure 1, we assumed that the class structure cannot be understood in simple gradational terms, meaning that at least some classes were formed by combining high values on one dimension with low values on another. It is possible, however, that the structural conditions of interest tend to co-

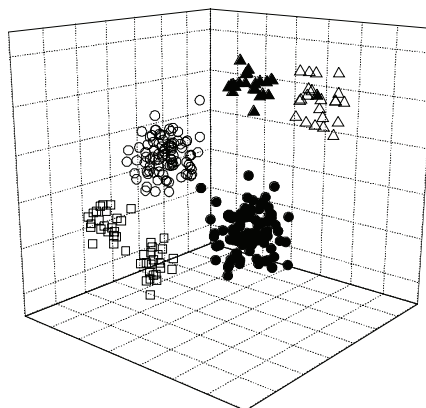


Figure 1. Class Regime

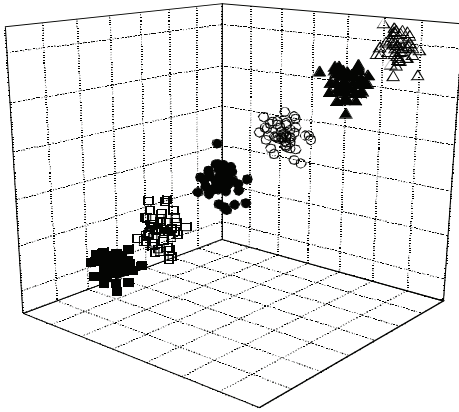


Figure 2. Gradational Regime

vary linearly, thus generating a class structure of the very simple type represented in Figure 2. In a regime of this sort, inequality becomes rather stark (i.e., crystallized), as privilege on one dimension implies very reliably privilege on another. There should accordingly be much interest in determining whether inequality indeed takes this form. Unfortunately, inequality scholars of the postwar period didn't typically test the crystallization assumption, but rather simply assumed that it held and proceeded to develop socioeconomic scales that treated education and income as the main dimensions of interest (and ranked occupations by averaging scores on these two dimensions).

It may be noted that many neo-Marxian scholars during this period also deviated from a strict multidimensional stance by nominating particular dimensions within Table 1 as being theoretically crucial and hence the appropriate basis upon which social classes might be defined. There are nearly as many claims of this sort as there are dimensions in Table 1. To be sure, Marx is most commonly criticized for placing "almost exclusive emphasis on economic factors as determinants of social class" (Lipset 1968, p. 300), but in fact much of what passed for stratification theorizing during this period amounted to reductionism of some kind, albeit often an expanded version of reduction-

ism in which two or three dimensions were nominated as especially crucial. When a reductionist position is adopted, the rationale for a class model is not typically that classes are coherent packages of conditions (as represented in Figure 1), but rather that the nominated dimension or dimensions are crucial in defining interests and will accordingly come to be the main sources of social action. The classic Marxian model, for example, has workers ultimately appreciating that their status as workers (i.e., nonowners) defines their interests.

### Culturalist Phase (ca. 1985–1995)

In the mid-1980s, Bourdieu (Ch. 93) and other sociologists (esp. Wilson, Ch. 36) sought to develop a culturalist rationale for class models, a rationale that rested on the claim that classes are not merely constellations of structural conditions (e.g., working conditions, rewards) but are also socially closed groupings in which distinctive cultures emerge and come to influence attitudes, behaviors, or even preferences of class members. Throughout this period, many sociologists continued to work with more narrowly structuralist definitions of class (e.g., Wright, Ch. 11; Erikson and Goldthorpe, Ch. 47), but Bourdieu (Ch. 93) and Wilson (Ch. 37) were instrumental in pressing the claim that class-specific cultures are a defining feature of inequality systems (also, Lareau, Ch. 97).

The two main forms of closure that serve to generate class-specific cultures are residential segregation (e.g., urban ghettos) and workplace segregation (e.g., occupational associations). As Wilson notes, members of the underclass live in urban ghettos that are spatially isolated from mainstream culture, thus allowing a distinctively oppositional culture to emerge and reproduce itself. The effects of residential segregation operate, by contrast, in more attenuated form for other social classes; after all, residential communities map only imperfectly onto class categories



(i.e., the demise of the “company town”), and social interaction within contemporary residential communities is in any event quite superficial and cannot be counted upon to generate much in the way of meaningful culture. If distinctive cultures emerge outside the underclass, they do so principally through the tendency for members of the same occupation to interact disproportionately with one another in the workplace and in leisure activities. In accounting, for example, for the humanist, antimaterialist, and otherwise left-leaning culture and lifestyle of sociologists, class analysts would stress the forces of social closure within the workplace, especially the liberalizing effects of (1) lengthy professional training and socialization into the “sociological worldview,” and (2) subsequent interaction in the workplace with predominantly liberal colleagues.

When occupations or classes are allowed to have cultures in this fashion, one naturally wishes to better understand the content of those cultures and, in particular, the relationship between such content and the structural conditions (i.e., endowments, outcomes, institutional setting) that a class or occupational situation implies. At one extreme, class cultures may be understood as nothing more than “rules of thumb” that encode optimizing behavioral responses to prevailing institutional conditions, rules that allow class members to forego optimizing calculations themselves and rely instead on cultural prescriptions that provide reliable and economical shortcuts to the right decision. For example, Breen and Goldthorpe (Ch. 64) argue that working-class culture is disparaging of educational investments not because of some maladaptive oppositional culture, but because such investments expose the working class (more so than other classes) to a real risk of downward mobility. In most cases, working-class children lack insurance in the form of substantial family income or wealth, meaning that they cannot easily recover from an educational investment gone awry (i.e.,

dropping out); and those who nonetheless undertake such an investment therefore face the real possibility of substantial downward mobility. The emergence, then, of a working-class culture that regards educational investments as frivolous may be understood as encoding that conclusion and thus allowing working-class children to undertake optimizing behaviors without explicitly engaging in decision tree calculations. The behaviors that a “rule of thumb” culture encourages are, then, deeply adaptive because they take into account the endowments and institutional realities that class situations encompass (also see Morgan, Ch. 55).

The foregoing example may be understood as one in which a class-specific culture instructs recipients about appropriate (i.e., optimizing) means for achieving ends that are widely pursued by *all* classes. Indeed, the prior “rule-of-thumb” account assumes that members of the working class share the conventional interest in maximizing labor market outcomes, with their class-specific culture merely instructing them about the approach that is best pursued in achieving that conventional objective. At the other extreme, one finds class-analytic formulations that represent class cultures as more overarching worldviews, ones that instruct not merely about the proper means to achieve ends but additionally about the proper valuation of the ends themselves. For example, some class cultures (e.g., aristocratic ones) place an especially high valuation on leisure, with market work disparaged as “common” or “polluting” (Veblen, Ch. 92). This orientation presumably translates into a high reservation wage within the aristocratic class. Similarly, “oppositional cultures” within the underclass may be understood as worldviews that place an especially high valuation on preserving respect and dignity for class members, with of course the further prescription that these ends are best achieved by (1) withdrawing from and opposing conventional mainstream pursuits, (2) representing conventional mo-

bility mechanisms (e.g., higher education) as tailor-made for the middle class and, by contrast, unworkable for the underclass, and (3) pursuing dignity and respect through other means, most notably total withdrawal from and disparagement of mainstream pursuits. This is a culture, then, that advocates that respect and dignity deserve an especially prominent place in the utility function and that further specifies how those ends might be achieved.

It should by now be clear that sociologists operating within the class-analytic tradition have adopted very strong assumptions about how inequality and poverty are structured. As noted, intrinsic to the class concept are such claims as (1) the space of outcomes and capabilities has a (low) dimensionality equaling the number of social classes, (2) the class locations of individuals become master statuses that dominate (or at least supplement) the effects of individual-level endowments, and (3) such class locations are socially closed and come to be associated with adaptive or maladaptive cultures. The prior claims have been unstated articles of faith among class analysts in particular and sociologists more generally. In this sense, class analysts have behaved rather like stereotypical economists, the latter frequently being parodied for their willingness to assume most anything provided that it leads to an elegant model.

### Postmodernist Phase (ca. 1995–Present Day)

The third phase of conceptual work within sociology has been marked, however, by an increased willingness to challenge the assumptions underlying the class-analytic status quo. In recent years, such criticisms of the class-analytic enterprise have escalated, with many postmodernist scholars now feeling sufficiently emboldened to argue that the concept of class should be abandoned altogether. Although the postmodern literature is notoriously fragmented, the variant of postmodernism that is most relevant here pro-

ceeds from the assumption that the labor movement is rooted in the old and increasingly irrelevant conflicts of industrial capitalism, that political parties have abandoned class-based platforms in favor of those oriented toward values and lifestyles, and that class-based identities accordingly become ever weaker and more attenuated (see Hout and Moodie, Ch. 99, for a relevant discussion). The resulting “individualization of inequality” (e.g., Pakulski and Waters, Ch. 107; Beck and Lau, Ch. 108) implies that lifestyles and consumption practices are becoming decoupled from work identities as well as other status group memberships. The stratification system may be regarded, then, as a “status bizarre” (Pakulski and Waters, Ch. 107) in which identities are actively constructed as individuals select and are shaped by their multiple statuses.<sup>7</sup>

This hypothesis, which is represented in extreme form by Figure 3, has not yet been subjected to convincing empirical test and may well prove to be premature. Moreover, even if lifestyles and life chances are truly decoupling from economic class, this ought not be misunderstood as a more general decline in inequality per se. The brute facts of inequality will still be with us even if social classes of the conventional form are weakening. Most obviously, income inequality is clearly on the rise (e.g., Piketty and Saez, Ch.

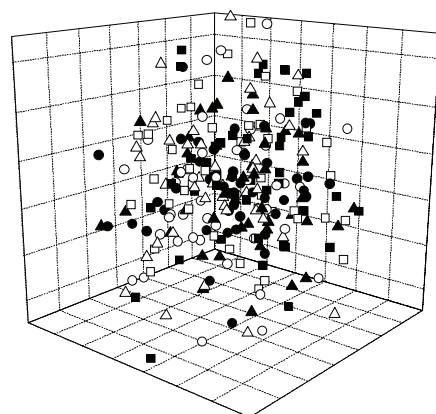


Figure 3. Disorganized Inequality

8-; Morris and Western, Ch. 7), while other forms of inequality show no signs of withering away. The postmodernist hypothesis speaks, then, to the way in which inequality is organized, not to the overall amount of such inequality.

### Analyzing Allocation

Although inequality scholars have long sought to understand how different “reward packages” are attached to different social positions, an equally important task within the field is that of understanding the rules by which individuals are allocated to the social positions so defined and rewarded. 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 securing these rewards. As sociologists have frequently noted, 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. If the competition has been fairly run, we are quite willing to reward the winners and punish the losers.

The study of opportunities (or “capabilities”) is no less fashionable among economists. The main motivation, however, among economists for studying opportunities is not some intrinsic interest in mobility processes themselves, but rather a concern that standard outcome-based measures of inequality are tainted by the confounding effect of differential tastes. For example, an employee with a well-developed taste for leisure will presumably opt to work for relatively few hours, leading to low earnings but nonetheless optimal utility (by virtue of the high valuation placed on leisure). Whenever income inequality is generated through the operation of differential tastes, most econo-

mists would argue that it should be regarded as quite unproblematic, given that low-income workers are simply choosing, by virtue of their particular tastes, to trade off income for some other valuable good (e.g., leisure). This line of reasoning implies that inequality scholars should measure the distribution of opportunities that prevails before differential tastes can express themselves. The main task of an inequality scholar under this formulation is to determine whether “capabilities” (i.e., opportunities to secure rewards) are equally distributed, not whether rewards themselves, which reflect the operation of tastes, are equally distributed.

It follows that sociologists and economists have become quite interested, albeit for different reasons, in the study of opportunity and how it is unequally distributed. In most of the resulting research, the liberal ideal of an open and discrimination-free 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 objective underlies analyses of the gross effects of class origins on class destinations (e.g., Featherman and Hauser, Ch. 46; Solon, Ch. 49; Conley, Ch. 63) as well as analyses of the net effects of gender, race, and class background after controlling education and related measures of achievement or merit (e.g., Blau and Duncan, Ch. 50; Sewell, Haller, and Portes, Ch. 53). We have presented a wide range of such analyses in this volume. Additionally, experimental approaches to measuring discrimination have recently become popular, most notably “audit studies” that proceed by (1) sending employers resumes that are identical save for the applicant’s gender, race, or class, and (2) then examining whether call back rates (for interviews) are nonetheless different across such groups. Although the available statistical and experimental studies all indicate that opportunities are far from equal (e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan, Ch. 70; Pager, Ch. 72; also see Goldin and

Table 2. Parameters of Stratification for Eight Ideal-Typical Systems

<i>Regime (1)</i>	<i>Principal Assets (2)</i>	<i>Major Strata or Classes (3)</i>	<i>Inequality (4)</i>	<i>Rigidity (5)</i>	<i>Crystallization (6)</i>	<i>Justifying Ideology (7)</i>
<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" life-styles)	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	Marcxism and Leninism
8. Advanced industrial	Human (i.e., education, expertise)	Skill-based occupational groupings	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Medium	Classical liberalism

Rouse, Ch. 80), there remains some debate about whether or to what extent such inequalities are declining or will continue to decline. We turn to such debates next.

### A Compressed History of Inequality

The task of identifying the essential dynamics underlying social change has long been fundamental to sociology, but nowhere is this interest better developed or more fundamental than within the field of inequality analysis. The remainder of our essay is devoted, then, to laying out some of the most compelling narratives about how inequality has evolved. We begin this task by developing a quite conventional typology of inequality forms over the long span of human history and then turn to the question of how the narrative-building enterprise has changed in recent times (i.e., the last half-century).

Although stratification systems can of course be defined by a great many param-

eters, we proceed here by building a typology of inequality regimes in terms of the parameters of inequality that were introduced at the beginning of this essay (i.e., amount of inequality, rigidity, crystallization). For each of the eight regimes listed in Table 2, a particular class of assets (e.g., economic) has been assumed to be especially crucial in defining the structure of inequality, thus making it possible to specify the dominant social classes in terms of those assets. The rigidity of stratification systems can then be indexed by the amount of class persistence (see column 5), and crystallization can be indexed by the presumed correlation between class membership and each of the assets listed in Table 1 (see column 6).<sup>8</sup> The final column in Table 2 rests on the further assumption that inequality regimes 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. If, for example, the facts of labor market processes are inconsistent with the prevailing ideology (e.g., racial discrimination in advanced industrialism), then various sorts of ameliorative action might be anticipated (e.g., affirmative action programs).

The staple of modern classification efforts has been the tripartite distinction among class, caste, and estate, 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 (e.g., Wright, Ch. 11). As shown in Table 2, these conventional approaches are largely complementary, and it is therefore possible to fashion a hybrid classification that incorporates most of the standard distinctions. This hybrid typology should be understood as a highly stylized and compressed history of inequality forms over the premodern, modern, and late modern periods.

The stratification forms represented in Table 2 should thus be taken as ideal types. 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.

The first panel in this table pertains to the 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 in the structure of these systems: It is “merely in the night of our ignorance [that]

all alien shapes take on the same hue” (Anderson, 1974, p. 549). While such variable features of tribal societies are clearly of interest, 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 overall level of economic inequality (but not necessarily on other forms of inequality). It is also noteworthy 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,” as 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 obviously not to suggest that a perfect equality prevailed. The more powerful medicine men (i.e., shamans) within tribal societies often secured a disproportionate share of resources, and the tribal chief could exert considerable influence on the political decisions of the day. In most cases, these residual forms of power and privilege were not directly inherited, nor were they typically allocated in accord with well-defined ascriptive traits (e.g., racial traits).<sup>9</sup> It was only by demonstrating superior skills in hunting, magic, or leadership that tribal members could secure political office or acquire status and prestige. While 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, the “Asiatic mode” was often treated as an intermediate formation in the transition to advanced agrarian society (e.g., feudalism), and we have therefore led off our typol-

ogy with the Asiatic case (see line B2).<sup>10</sup> 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 category in the development of class society (e.g., Hobsbawm, 1965). The main features of this formation are (1) a large peasant class residing in agricultural villages that are “almost autarkic” (O’Leary 1989, p. 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, p. 127),<sup>11</sup> 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, p. 18).

Beyond this skeletal outline, all else is open to dispute. There are long-standing debates, for example, about how widespread the Asiatic mode was and about the appropriateness of reducing all forms of Asian development to a “uniform residual category” (Anderson 1974, pp. 548–49). These issues are clearly worth pursuing, but for our purposes it suffices 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, pp. 327–28). Under 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, pp. 324–52).

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.<sup>12</sup> 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).<sup>13</sup> 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 (see Wright, Ch. 11). With this interpretation, the statuses of serf and slave differ only in degree, and slavery thereby constitutes a 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, p. 256) that confuse and blur the conventional dividing lines between slavery, serfdom, and freedom. The slavery of Roman society provides the best example of complete subordination, 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, pp. 255–74).<sup>14</sup> The social classes that emerged under European agrarianism were thus structured in quite complicated 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, since the means of production (i.e., land, labor) were controlled by a proprietary class that emerged quite independently of the state.<sup>15</sup>

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, since it suggests that stratification systems often become more rigid as the underlying institutional forms mature and take shape. 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, p. 325),<sup>16</sup> 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, pp. 320–31). 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 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, p. 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) notes, slavery in the antebellum South was “hereditary, endogamous, and permanent” (p. 303), with the annual manumission rate apparently as low as 0.04 percent by 1850 (see Patterson 1982, p. 273). The slave societies of Jamaica, South Africa, and rural Iraq were likewise based on largely permanent slave populations.

The most extreme examples of hereditary closure are of course found in caste societies (see line B5). In some respects, American slavery might be seen as having “caste-like features” (see Berreman 1981), but Hindu India clearly provides the defining case of caste organization.<sup>17</sup> 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 intercaste 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 that induces the population to regard such extreme forms of inequality as legitimate and appropriate (Smaje 2000; Dumont 1970; Srinivas 1962). 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.

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 stratification 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, p. 23), so much so that Marx (Ch. 9) 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 (as discussed above). For example, a simple Marxian model focuses on the cleavage between capitalists and workers, while more elaborate Marxian and neo-Marxian models identify additional intervening or “contradictory” classes (e.g., Wright, Ch. 11), and yet other (non-Marxian) approaches represent the class structure as a continuous gradation of wealth or income.

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, Ch. 3). In the immediate postrevolutionary period, factories and farms were indeed collectivized or socialized, and various fiscal and economic reforms were instituted for the express purpose of reducing income inequality and wage differentials among manual and nonmanual workers. 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, Ch. 3). 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, Szelenyi, and Townsley, Chs. 34, 104). This class has been variously identified with intellectuals or intelligentsia, bureaucrats or managers, and party officials or appointees (Gouldner, Ch. 32). 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. In the end, the propertied class may nonetheless 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-Anderson, Ch. 102; Giddens, Ch. 106), (2) the increasing centrality of theoretical knowledge in the transition to a new “information age” (Bell, Ch. 101), and (3) the consequent emergence of technical expertise, educational degrees, and training certificates as “new forms of property” (Berg 1973, p. 183; Gouldner, Ch. 32; Brooks, Ch. 33). 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.

### **The Role of Benign Narratives in Past Scholarship**

The foregoing classification embodies a complicated amalgam of “benign narratives” about how inequality has developed within the industrial period, narratives that are benign in the sense that history is understood as operating in the main to reduce inequality, if only gradually and fitfully. Under such narratives, the problem of inequality becomes a tractable moral problem, an unfortunate side-circumstance of capitalism (and even socialism) that becomes yet more manageable with the transition into the increasingly affluent forms of advanced industrialism. This orientation to inequality is expressed in standard postwar narratives about three types of outcomes: (1) the distribution of income, power, and other valued resources; (2) the distribution of opportunities for securing income, power, and other valued resources; and (3) the formation of social classes and other institutionalized groups (e.g., racial groups, gender groups). We have hinted at these narratives in the preceding section and throughout this essay but turn in this section to laying them out more formally.

#### **Trend in Inequality**

The dominant inequality narrative of the postwar period featured the emergence of egalitarian ideologies and the consequent delegitimation of extreme forms of inequality (e.g., Kerr et al., Ch. 100; Bell, Ch. 101). The Enlightenment is understood in this context as unleashing one of the most profound revolutions in human history. The resulting decline in inequality can be seen, for example, in (1) the European revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the privileges of rank (honorific equality); (2) the gradual elimination of inequalities in the right to vote, own

property, and speak and assemble (civil equality); (3) the abolition of slavery and the establishment of the radically egalitarian principle of self-ownership (equality of human assets); and (4) the equalization of economic assets via the rise of socialism, welfare capitalism, and their many institutions (economic equality).

As is well known, the latter commitment to equalizing economic assets was rather weaker than the commitment to other forms of equalization (at least in the capitalist context), with the result that economic inequalities remained extreme in all market economies. There was nonetheless a gradual decline in economic inequality throughout the postwar period in the United States and other industrial countries. According to the classic Kuznets curve (Kuznets 1955), the initial stages of capitalist development bring about an increase in income inequality as capital is increasingly concentrated among a small number of investors, whereas more advanced forms of capitalism entail a growth in the size of the middle class and a consequent reversal of the upward trend. The causal dynamics behind the resulting inverted-U pattern remain unclear (see Piketty and Saez, Ch. 8), but most sociologists attribute the late-industrial decline in inequality to the increasingly crucial role that the skilled working class played in production, the associated growth in working-class productivity, and the leverage that this growth in skills and productivity conferred on skilled workers.

It is worth inquiring as to the less proximate mechanisms by which egalitarianism of this sort may diffuse and take hold. The conventional view in this regard is that a series of crucial historical events after the Enlightenment (e.g., the defeat of Nazism, the civil rights movement) served to define equality as one of our core cultural commitments. Absent some revolutionary event that changes this cultural trajectory, the course of human history then becomes the “working out” of this commitment, a task that in-

volves shedding subsidiary values that sometimes come into conflict with our deeper commitment to egalitarianism. The core mechanism that drives this cultural diffusion may therefore be understood as the gradual reconciling of competing values to a new value, that of equality, that has been elevated by one or more historical events to a position of prominence.

This is obviously not to suggest that *all* postwar sociologists and social scientists emphasized forces making for a decline in inequality. However, even when a benign narrative was not explicitly adopted, there was usually some effort to engage with it and to explain or defend the decision not to take it up. This defensiveness was especially apparent in neo-Marxian analyses of the postwar era. Although such analyses were based on deeply pessimistic subnarratives about the trajectory of capitalism, these subnarratives were typically attached to larger and more benign narratives about the postcapitalist trajectory (e.g., Marx, Ch. 9; also see Wright, Ch. 11; Wallerstein, Ch. 12).

### Trend in Inequality of Opportunity

The second benign narrative of interest rests on the conventional distinction between the distribution of social rewards (e.g., income) and the distribution of opportunities for securing these rewards. In liberal welfare regimes, extreme inequalities in rewards may be tolerated, but only insofar as opportunities for attaining these rewards are understood to be equally distributed. It is inequalities of opportunity that are regarded, then, as especially illegitimate in the context of liberal welfare regimes.

The dominant narratives of the postwar period have these inequalities of opportunity gradually weakening. The narratives of this period may be understood as benign because they describe the withering away of precisely those types of inequalities (i.e., inequalities of opportunity) that are regarded as problematic or illegitimate. The trademark of the

benign narrative is this simple correspondence between what we want and what we think will likely happen. We describe below four benign subnarratives that characterize some of the processes by which inequalities of opportunity may come to be weakened.

The most famous such subnarrative pertains to the discrimination-reducing effects of competitive market economies. In his original formulation of the “taste for discrimination” model, Becker (1957) argued that discrimination would be eroded by competitive market forces because it requires employers to pay a premium to hire members of the preferred class of labor, whether these be males, whites, or any other ascriptively defined classes. This taste is “discriminatory” because it rests on exogenous preferences for a certain category of labor that cannot be understood as arising from some larger concern for maximizing profitability or market share. When managers make hiring decisions in accord with such tastes, their firms will not be competitive with nondiscriminating firms because they must pay extra to secure labor from the preferred class (without any compensating increase in productivity). In standard renditions of this account, it is presumed that discriminating firms will gradually be selected out by the market, although it is also possible that some discriminating firms will change their hiring practices to remain competitive.

This economic subnarrative works in tandem with a second, “organizational” one that emphasizes the diffusion of modern personnel practices in the form of universalistic hiring practices (e.g., open hiring, credentialism) and bureaucratized pay scales and promotion procedures (Weber, Ch. 13; Grusky and Levanon, Ch. 87). The essence of such bureaucratic personnel practices is a formal commitment to universalism (i.e., treating all workers equally) and to meritocratic hiring and promotion (i.e., hiring and promoting on the basis of credentials). In its ideal-typical form, the spread of bureaucracy

becomes an organizational process with its own dynamic, a process of diffusion that rests not on actual efficiencies, as with the economic subnarrative, but simply on the *presumption* that bureaucratic practices are efficient and that “modern firms” must therefore adopt them. This subnarrative, like the economic one, implies that firms will gradually come to embrace organizational procedures that reduce inequalities of opportunity.

The third subnarrative of interest is the political one. Whereas the economic and organizational subnarratives treat change in inequality as an unintended by-product of macro-level forces (i.e., competition and bureaucratization), the political subnarrative is about instrumental action explicitly oriented towards effecting a decline in inequality. In theory, such political action could be oriented toward reducing either inequalities of opportunity or outcome, but historically a main emphasis within liberal welfare regimes has been legislation aimed at reducing inequality of opportunity (e.g., antidiscrimination legislation, early education programs, educational loans). The distinctive assumption of the political subnarrative is that straightforward “social engineering” is an important source of change and that the unintended or unanticipated consequences of such engineering are too often overemphasized.

The final subnarrative, a simple cultural one, rests on the argument that Western ideals of justice and equality continue to be endogenously worked out through a logic that diffuses independently of the economic efficiency of such ideals. The cultural subnarrative can be straightforwardly distinguished from the economic one because the growing “taste” for equality is presumed to be an exogenous shift rather than some accommodation to the economic cost of exercising discriminatory tastes. Likewise, the cultural subnarrative is distinct from the organizational subnarrative by virtue of focusing on the spread of tastes for equality and equality-

enhancing practices, not the spread of organizational forms (e.g., bureaucratization) that are deemed efficient, normatively desirable, or both. Similarly, the cultural and political subnarratives are closely related because political commitments to equal opportunity, antidiscrimination legislation, and school reform may be partly or even largely motivated by these newfound tastes for equal opportunity. At the same time, the cultural commitment to equal opportunity is not expressed exclusively in such political terms but is additionally expressed in the attitudes, behaviors, and personnel practices of employers. Most obviously, employers may gradually shed their preferences for certain categories of labor and instead develop positive tastes for equality in hiring, firing, and promotion, tastes that might at the limit be exercised in the labor market even with some loss in profits or efficiency.

The spread of such tastes for equal opportunity may again be viewed as part of our Enlightenment legacy, albeit a particular “liberal” variant of that legacy that emphasizes equalizing opportunities, not outcomes. This commitment is expressed not only at the individual level (e.g., changes in attitudes) but also at the collective level through various types of political reform (e.g., antidiscrimination legislation) as well as the diffusion of bureaucratic personnel policies (e.g., open hiring).

### Trend in Class Formation

The final benign narrative of interest describes the gradual transition from “lumpy” class-based labor markets to more purely gradational ones (see Weeden et al., Ch. 27). Within this narrative, the early-industrial economy is represented as deeply balkanized into partly independent labor markets defined by detailed occupations (e.g., economist, carpenter), big social classes (e.g., manager, farmer), or yet more aggregated factors of production (e.g., worker, capitalist). For our purposes, what is principally of

interest is our collective fascination with arguments describing how these classes, however they may be defined, tend to gradually dissipate and leave us with gradational labor markets that increasingly approximate the seamless neoclassical ideal. The first step in this transition, as described most famously by Dahrendorf (Ch. 10), is the gradual “institutionalization” of class conflict, a regularization of labor-capital relations achieved through the establishment of unions, collective bargaining agreements, and other laws defining how labor and capital should negotiate. The second step in this transition involves the dismantling of unions and other institutionalized residues of classes as the liberal welfare ideals of “deregulation” and flexibility are increasingly pursued (Sørensen, Ch. 25). Although the mechanisms differ, there are of course analogous narratives on offer pertaining to the gradual decline of status groupings based on race, ethnicity, or gender (e.g., Wilson, Ch. 73; also see Petersen, Ch. 83).

This line of argumentation is additionally expressed in postmodernist narratives that assume that class identities, ideologies, and organization are attenuating and that “new theories, perhaps more cultural than structural, [are] in order” (Davis 1982, p. 585). The core claim here is that politics, lifestyles, and consumption practices are no longer class-determined and increasingly become a “function of individual taste, choice, and commitment” (Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992, p. 222; Pakulski and Waters, Ch. 107). In more ambitious variants of postmodernism, the focus shifts away from simply claiming that attitudes and practices are less class-determined, 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., environmentalism) as the vanguard force behind future stratificatory change. As

argued by Eyerman (1992) and others (e.g., Pakulski and Waters, Ch. 107), 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 and far more benign force “shaping the future of modern societies” (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992, p. 17).

### **New Approaches to Studying Inequality**

The foregoing narratives, all of which were fixtures of the postwar intellectual landscape, describe the emergence of a world in which inequalities are less profound, opportunities are more equally distributed, and class conflicts and interclass differences become attenuated. These narratives are benign in the sense that they push us toward equilibria that most commentators, even neo-Marxian ones, might well regard as appealing. The benign narrative is accordingly built on the happy correspondence between what should be and what will be.

If there is any theme to contemporary analyses of inequality, it is that the benign narrative has fallen largely out of fashion. We have nonetheless laid out these standard narratives in some detail because they provide an important backdrop to current theorizing and are often used as foils by contemporary scholars seeking to motivate their own analyses. The benign narrative is in this sense lurking in the background of contemporary discussions of inequality. We turn now to a closer discussion of how contemporary analyses of inequality have developed partly in reaction to the benign narratives of the postwar period.

### Multidimensionalism and New Inequalities

As a natural starting point for this discussion, we note that contemporary inequality scholarship is increasingly concerned with new forms of inequality, forms that were either ignored in the past or have been spawned by new technologies or institutions. This growing emphasis on new inequalities is consistent with the now fashionable view that inequality is multidimensional and that conventional studies of economic, socioeconomic, or cultural inequality hardly exhaust its many forms.

This approach may be understood as simply reemphasizing the importance of studying all eight forms of inequality listed in Table 1. If the resulting multidimensional space is taken seriously, we can then ask how individuals are distributed among the less conventionally studied dimensions of the inequality space. Are “new” assets as unequally distributed as old ones? Is inequality becoming more of an “all or nothing” affair in which upper-class workers are advantaged on all dimensions of interest and lower-class workers are disadvantaged on all dimensions of interest? Are new assets sometimes distributed in ways that compensate for shortfalls in older ones? In the present volume, multidimensionalist questions of this kind are posed for such “new” outcomes as health (Mullahy, Robert, and Wolfe, Ch. 95), computer literacy (Hargittai, Ch. 98), imprisonment or capital punishment (Western, Ch. 41), and networks and social capital (Granovetter, Ch. 59; Lin, Ch. 60; Burt, Ch. 61). These new types of inequality may be understood in some cases as truly new divides generated by new technologies (e.g., the digital divide) or new social institutions (e.g., modern mass prisons). More typically, the “new” outcomes are just increasingly popular topics of study among academics, not truly new forms (e.g., health inequalities).

### The Intransigence of Poverty and Inequality

The foregoing line of research typically takes the form of an exposé of the extent to which seemingly basic human entitlements, such as living outside of prison, freely participating in digital culture, or living a long and healthy life, are unequally distributed in ways that sometimes amplify well-known differentials of income or education. The continuing attraction of such exposés (at least among academics) may be attributed to our collective discomfort with an economic system that generates rather more inequality than is palatable under contemporary cultural standards. Although the equalizing reforms of social democracy have historically been a main solution to this tension, the declining legitimacy of such reform (especially in Europe and the United States) leaves the tension an increasingly unresolved one.

Whereas the old narratives focused, then, on the forces making for decline in inequality, a more pessimistic assessment of the trajectory of late industrialism has now taken hold, and much scholarship accordingly focuses on documenting that inequality has persisted at higher levels than had been anticipated. This sensibility underlies, for example, contemporary research showing that residential segregation in the United States is so extreme as to constitute a modern form of “apartheid” (Massey and Denton, Ch. 38), that racial discrimination in labor markets likewise remains extreme (Bertrand and Mullainathan, Ch. 70; Pager, Ch. 72), that the occupational structure is “hypersegregated” by gender (Reskin, Ch. 86), that income inequality has increased markedly in many countries over the last thirty-five years (Piketty and Saez, Ch. 8), that poverty rates in the United States remain strikingly high (Smeeding, Ch. 36), that African Americans are routinely harassed, slighted, and insulted in public places (Feagin, Ch. 74), that working-class and middle-class children tend to

be raised in profoundly different ways (Lareau, Ch. 97), that political behavior continues to be strongly shaped by class-based politics (Hout and Moodie, Ch. 99), and that massive class disparities in access to health services persist (Mullahy, Robert, and Wolfe, Ch. 95).

The cynic might ask whether this new muckraking tradition is really all that necessary. Is there truly a large public that doesn't already appreciate the persistence of many of these inequalities? We live, after all, in a market society in which virtually everything is commodified, meaning that almost all goods and services (e.g., health care, housing) are allocated on the basis of our ability to pay for them. Because we are so deeply and (seemingly) irrevocably marketized, the real intellectual challenge would be to find a good, service, or outcome that is somehow untouched by class, one that is perfectly and equally distributed to all. The role of class is in this sense so obvious as to preclude any need for academic muckraking.

We suspect that our contributors would react to such (hypothetical) criticism by emphasizing that only some inequalities may be understood as the inevitable outcome of our collective decision to allocate resources on the basis of a market. It is at least possible to imagine markets that do not entail racial discrimination, that do not entail gender discrimination, and that encompass institutions that have a substantial inequality-moderating effect. It is likewise possible to imagine that class differences in politics, culture, and child rearing practices would have by now abated. The benign narratives of the postwar period in fact laid out precisely such imaginings. If it is now clear that these imagined futures have not been realized, surely we need to document that conclusion with all the rigor that can possibly be mustered. To be sure, many of us well know that the world is a massively unequal one, but even so the force of the known can

be readily lost when we live with profound inequality on a day-to-day basis. This commitment to remind us of what comes to be taken for granted is the cornerstone, we suspect, of the renewed interest in the inequality-documenting function.

### The Rise of Less Benign Narratives

The rise of this muckraking exposé of inequality has been coupled, moreover, with increasing interest in developing narratives that explain why inequality has persisted or grown more extreme. These narratives are typically less grand than the quite encompassing narratives of the postwar period; that is, rather specialized narratives have recently developed around many of the various unit trends of interest (e.g., the expansion of income inequality, the stalling decline in the gender wage gap), and rather little attention has been paid to developing some grand meta-narrative that links these specialized narratives together. The signature, then, of the contemporary narrative is this highly delimited focus, a commitment to developing a rigorously empirical foundation, and a special interest in identifying those more insidious social forces that undermine the benign narratives of the past.

By way of example, consider the historic rise in income inequality, a development that has spawned one of the most sustained efforts at narrative-building of our time (see Morris and Western, Ch. 7). As noted above, the classic Kuznets curve aligns nicely with the facts of inequality up to the early 1970s, but then a dramatic, unprecedented upswing in inequality in the post-1970 period made it clear that inequality history had not ended. We have since witnessed one of the most massive research efforts in the history of social science as scholars sought to identify the "smoking gun" that accounted for this dramatic increase in inequality.

Initially, the dominant hypothesis was that deindustrialization (i.e., the relocation of

manufacturing jobs to offshore labor markets) brought about a decline in demand for less-educated manufacturing workers, a decline that generated increases in inequality by hollowing out the middle class and sending manufacturing workers into unemployment or into the ranks of poorly paid service work. Although this line of argumentation still has its advocates, it cannot easily be reconciled with evidence suggesting that the computerization of the workplace and related technological change has been at least one force behind a heightened demand for highly educated workers. Because of this result (and other supporting evidence), the deindustrialization story has now been largely supplanted by the converse hypothesis that “skill-biased technological change” has increased the demand for high-skill workers beyond the increase in supply, thus inducing a short-term disequilibrium and a correspondingly increased payoff for high-skill labor. At the same time, most scholars acknowledge that this story is at best an incomplete one and that other accounts, especially more narrowly political ones, must additionally be entertained (e.g., Card and DiNardo 2002). Most notably, some of the rise in income inequality in the United States was clearly attributable to the declining minimum wage (in real dollars), a decline that in turn has to be understood as the outcome of political processes that increasingly favor pro-inequality forces (Morris and Western, Ch. 7). The same conclusion applies yet more obviously to the recent round of tax cuts in the United States.

The future of income inequality depends on which of these underlying mechanisms is principally at work. The silver lining of the deindustrialization story is that within-country increases in inequality should be offset by between-country declines (as poor countries profit from new manufacturing jobs), whereas the silver lining of skill-biased technological change is that the heightened demand for high-skill workers is presumably a

one-time, short-term disequilibrium that will, by virtue of the higher payoff to high-skill jobs, trigger a compensating growth in the supply of high-skill workers. There is, unfortunately, no shortage of competing stories that imply more disturbing futures, even futures consistent with a classical Marxian account in which low-skill workers are emiserated within some countries by virtue of a globalization-induced “race to the bottom.” Indeed, accounts that focus on the political sources of rising inequality often take on this more disturbing character, given that social democratic ideologies have fallen largely out of fashion and no longer provide capitalists with a viable high road of “enlightened self-interest” (e.g., support for labor unions, redistribution). As social democratic agendas come to be viewed with suspicion, political support for the minimum wage and other inequality-reducing institutions may increasingly falter, and market-generated inequality may no longer be much restrained by pre-market or after-market interventions.

We have focused on the rise of income inequality and the various narratives it has generated only because this literature is especially well known and central to the field. The larger point that we seek to make is that, no matter the subfield, there appears to be much interest in developing narratives that explain why long-standing declines in inequality have slowed down, stalled altogether, or even reversed themselves. We are referring, for example, to (1) narratives of “globalization” that describe how the liberalization of financial and capital markets has harmed poor countries (Stiglitz, Ch. 109); (2) narratives of “deindustrialization” that describe the loss of inner-city jobs and the associated rise of an urban underclass (Ehrenreich, Ch. 35; Wilson, Ch. 37); (3) narratives of “deunionization” that describe the loss of middle-class unionized jobs and the emergence of nonstandard forms of employment (e.g., Piore, Ch. 56; Kalleberg, Ch. 58); (4) narratives of “segmented assimilation” that

describe the relatively bleak prospects for at least some new immigrant groups (Portes and Zhou, Ch. 68; Waters, Ch. 69); (5) narratives of “opting out” that have highly trained women eschewing stressful careers in favor of recommitting to their children, spouses, and domestic responsibilities (Belkin, Ch. 78; cf. Boushey, Ch. 79); (6) narratives of “essentialist segregation” that describe how sex-typed occupational ghettos continue to be built around presumed differences in male and female aptitudes (Grusky and Levanon, Ch. 87), (7) narratives of “nonconscious discrimination” that refer to subtle internalized prejudices that are especially difficult to extirpate (e.g., Correll, Benard, and Paik, Ch. 81; Reskin, Ch. 82); and (8) narratives of “spatial segregation” that emphasize the deeply institutionalized forces generating racial enclaves (Massey and Denton, Ch. 38) and poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Pebly and Sastry, Ch. 39; Sampson and Morenoff, Ch. 40). The key question of our time, and one which remains largely unanswered by the evidence of the last half-century, is whether the forces for equality featured in the “liberal theory” are strong enough to overcome the above countervailing processes. Although counternarratives of the more optimistic sort are also being developed (e.g., Firebaugh, Ch. 110), these seem not to be as frequently generated or as readily embraced, and the proponents of such narratives tend now to find themselves beleaguered, outnumbered, and on the defensive.

## Conclusions

We have fashioned the latter part of our review around the subtle changes over the last half-century in the types of narratives that sociologists and other social scientists have applied to make sense of trends in inequality. The narratives of the postwar period took on a strikingly benign form in which the dominant logics of history were understood as operating in the main to reduce inequality. These

benign narratives, which now mainly seem naive and quaint, have been supplanted by a host of new narratives that give far greater weight to the forces making for inequality.

Has the pendulum swung too far? It is of course child’s play to posit any number of nonempirical sources of our fascination, some might say obsession, with the pessimistic narrative. The following are perhaps the most obvious of such accounts:

### The Newsworthiness Account

If the postwar era of the benign narrative was indeed one of across-the-board declines in inequality, then a special incentive presumably emerged to ferret out results that were inconsistent with the prevailing wisdom and hence would be regarded as newsworthy. It is surely difficult to market analyses and forge careers on the basis of business-as-usual evidence. We might ask, for example, whether the “digital divide” emerged as a newsworthy topic because of early evidence of a substantial divide. If instead access to computing was found to be equal, would we have quickly discarded the topic and set off to find some other more unequal outcome? This type of selection on the dependent variable (i.e., inequality) will create a research literature that exaggerates how unequal the world is.

### The “Moral Credentials” Account

It is well to bear in mind that the contemporary academic, far from taking a vow of poverty, is now firmly ensconced in the middle class, often the upper middle class. When relatively privileged scholars study poverty and disadvantage, they often feel a special obligation to demonstrate a strong commitment to amelioration and to display political sentiments that are liberal, progressive, or even radical. In some cases, this pressure may motivate them to downplay any evidence of decline in inequality or disadvantage, presumably out of concern that undue emphasis on the progress achieved so far will make it



appear that the remaining disadvantage is taken as acceptable or unproblematic.

### The “Obsession with Small Differences” Account

The continuing diffusion of egalitarian values renders any departures from equality, no matter how small, as problematic and newsworthy. By this logic, even increasingly small intergroup differences will attract much attention, especially because ever more powerful models and statistical methods now make it possible to tease them out.

If these nonempirical interpretations shouldn't be dismissed out of hand, nor should they be taken too seriously. It is relevant in this regard that many of the pessimistic narratives involve indisputably dramatic changes in outcomes (e.g., income) that were frequently studied well before any reversal in the trendline was detected. Although some of the pessimistic narratives featured in this volume are still in incipient form and are not yet well researched, it will of course be difficult to continue to maintain these narratives should strong disconfirming evidence turn up. The implication, then, is that our exaggerated taste for pessimism might conceivably lead us to cycle through a great many pessimistic stories (and fail to develop enough benign ones), but at least the usual rules of evidence will have us excise egregiously flawed narratives, no matter how benign or pessimistic they may be.

#### NOTES

1. In fact, the term *stratification* has itself been seen as anti-Marxist by some commentators (e.g., Duncan 1968), since 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.

2. In some stratification systems, the distribution of rewards can be described with a single matching algorithm, since 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 (also see Granovetter 1981, pp. 12–14).

3. 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).

4. 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, p. 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.

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

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. Although Pakulski and Waters (Ch. 107) use the label *postmodern* in their analyses, other scholars have invented such alternative terms as *late modernity*, *high modernity*, or *reflexive modernization* (see Giddens, Ch. 106; Beck and Lau, Ch. 108), and yet others continue to use *modernity* on the argument that the changes at issue are mere extensions of those long under way. We frequently use the term *post-modern* in this essay without intending to disadvantage the analyses of those who prefer other labels.

8. 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 life course (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).

9. This claim does not hold with respect to gender. That is, women and men were typically assigned to different roles, which led to consequent differences in the distribution of rewards.

10. 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).

11. 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, pp. 490–92).

12. This is not to suggest that feudalism can only be found in the West or that the so-called Asiatic mode is 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.

13. This economic interpretation of feudalism is clearly not favored by all scholars. For example, Bloch (1961, pp. 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 (Ch. 10) posits for the capitalist case.

14. 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.

15. It was not until the early fourteenth century that states of the modern sort appeared in Europe.

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

17. The Indian caste system flourished during the agrarian period, yet it persists in attenuated form within modern industrialized India.

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