RECENT AMERICAN RESEARCH ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION*)

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The literature on social stratification has grown so rapidly in the United States that a comprehensive review would fill a small book.¹) The studies referred to in the present article are a representative but incomplete list of analyses of stratification in America by American sociologists published during the last five years.²) Several sectors of the field are not discussed: sociometric studies of interpersonal relationships, studies of bureaucracies, demographic studies (e.g., differential fertility), and intelligence testing. The status of Negroes is mentioned only incidentally. The focus of attention is upon social class stratification and mobility in the community and the nation.

For the orientation of the reader, certain points of view of the writer are stated categorically. It seems proper to speak of "social classes" only where the status system of a society has certain features. (There are many status hierarchies that are not class systems; e.g., local, state or provincial, and national officers of a veterans' organization). If any of the first six of the following conditions are absent, one should speak of status categories or groups but not of social classes:

1. Criteria of status must be related to social roles; beauty or intelligence is not the basis of a social class.
2. If there are social classes, their criteria will be definite, readily identified, and agreed upon by a large proportion of the population.
3. The different criteria or components of status will be congruent; i.e., knowledge of a family's standing on one attribute will correlate closely with its position on other attributes.
4. The criteria of class position will manifest stability over considerable

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periods of time in their relationships with the ideologies of the society.

5. There will be stability likewise in the association of the criteria with particular sets of families. If mobility along the scale of status is rapid (other than for exceptional families) we would have a set of status categories resembling military ranks, not a class system.

6. Social classes, if they exist, are functional in the society or the community. Cliques of leisure-time friends are not a class; neither are single occupational groups. Hence classes must be identifiable by more meaningful labels than "upper" or "lower".

Some writers would favor adding two other stipulations:

7. Class consciousness must correspond to "objective relationships". But this condition would limit us to studying societies where we can use opinion polls. For other reasons also it seems preferable to view this relationship as a question of fact to be determined, not a prerequisite.

8. Social classes must be organized corporate entities. This criterion seems unusable in practice and extremely esoteric.

Individual writers concern themselves mainly, though rarely exclusively, with one of the four usual components of status: occupation, economic standing, power and personal prestige or esteem. Any given writer tends also to emphasize one of the following aspects of status: achievement, opportunity, or snobbery. Mobility studies deal usually with achievement. The influence of parental occupation upon children's education reflects opportunity. A study of cliques concerns snobbery.

It is undeniable that interest in phenomena of social stratification on the part of American sociologists was greatly stimulated by the depression, though the rapid maturing of the profession would have led to the same result in a few years. Parallel to the development of "stagnation theories" by economists, sociologists apparently accepted the view that American society had at last congealed into fixed status groups. The ambitious studies by the Warner group supported this belief. Recent economic events, the gathering of more data, and a growing scepticism about Warner's methods have led to more adequate and less simple interpretations. Research on many aspects of the topic is proceeding vigorously. Much labor might have been saved had the data and conclusions of Sorokin's "Social Mobility" been studied more carefully and had his early criticisms of the Yankee City reports been heeded.

The concept of social class

The most ambitious effort to codify the numerous theories is Parsons' recent extension of an earlier essay. But this statement is so involved
that Kornhauser's interpretation of the debate over the work of the Warner school will probably provide a more suitable basis for further research.\(^5\) Equally provocative are essays by Pfautz, Mayer, and Foote et al.\(^6\) Loomis, Simon, and Tumin relate the theory of stratification to that of social systems in general, while Kluckhohn focuses upon cultural systems and Bierstedt upon power.\(^7\)

Discussion continues as to whether the term social class can be applied equally to prestige hierarchies in local communities and to national hierarchies based on occupational or economic criteria.\(^8\)

As in most other fields of investigation, ideological differences among scholars lead to confusion in both theoretical and field study. Hatt and Ktsanes\(^9\) demonstrated this confusion by applying factor analysis to representative American writings. They found the authors agreed that stratification was basically economic and that the height of the American social pyramid was great. But authors could be subdivided according as they thought there was a great deal or very little mobility between classes. Accumulation of more facts will provide a more accurate estimate of the extent of mobility, though whether this is "much" or "little" will remain in dispute. A new division between optimists and pessimists may be expected.

Methodological dilemmas in field study identification of status groups

Trials of various methods for identifying status groups have sharpened our tools and stimulated reformulation of theories. For the nation as a whole North and Hatt\(^10\) demonstrated that the public has a general and stable conception of the relative standing of occupations. Equally unambiguous results have not been obtained when efforts have been made to obtain prestige rankings of individuals in local communities. Warner's procedures for this purpose were judged to be adequate by Brown in Kentucky and by Hill and McCall in Georgia.\(^11\) But the sharp logical criticism by Duncan and Fautz, Caplow, and Rose\(^12\) has been supported by other writers. Neither Steiner nor Gough found a close agreement of objective with subjective criteria of status, and Gross questions the validity of the self-classification technique used by Centers.\(^13\) It would seem that no unequivocal procedures for obtaining personal prestige scales have been developed.\(^14\)

Studies of specific occupations

Mills' study of the white collar groups is the most comprehensive
of this type yet published. Caplow's comparative analysis of occupations
is also going to prove exceedingly stimulating.\(^{15}\)

A number of occupations have been discussed in briefer reports: teachers,\(^{16}\) the clergy,\(^{17}\) physicians and nurses,\(^{18}\) musicians and
janitors.\(^{19}\) (Since elites and business leaders were reported on
separately at the Amsterdam committee meeting, they are not discussed
here).

**Vertical mobility**

The amount of vertical mobility is a fundamental feature of any
status system. The location in the status hierarchy at which mobility
occurs, or fails to occur, reveals the lines of strain and restructuring of
the system.

As indicated above, one of the most disputed questions has been
the comparative mobility in American society. And one of the earliest
and most persistent discussions has centered on mobility within agri­
culture: the farm tenure ladder. Agricultural economists have conducted
most of the research on this topic, but in a forthcoming monograph\(^{20}\)
tenure mobility has been compared in two regions of the nation, Negro
farmers compared with whites in the South, and changes in mobility
since 1930 are surveyed.

Urban studies of mobility are more numerous. The classic studies
by Sorokin, Anderson and Davidson, and Taussig and Joslyn were
followed by two national studies by Centers and by North and Hatt.
Unfortunately, none of the valuable field studies by the Warner group
contain mobility data. Recently Rogoff completed an intensive study
of one community\(^{21}\) in which mobility trends since 1910 were plotted.
Centers had concluded that there was little mobility, but a re-analysis
of his data led to the opposite conclusion.\(^{22}\) Fresh reviews of the whole
problem have been supplied by Caplow and by Lipset and Bendix.\(^{23}\)
Three recent discussions by economists deserve mention\(^{24}\); though
dealing mainly with short-term labor mobility they throw much light
on vertical mobility.

The dangers of an *a priori* speculations about the long-term trends in
mobility in the absence of empirical data has been demonstrated by the
three studies of Adams on physicians, lawyers, and business leaders.\(^{25}\)
Adams found that mobility into these groups has grown over the past
generation.

New light is being thrown also upon factors influencing mobility.
We have two studies presenting evidence that vertical mobility is facilitated by geographic migration.\textsuperscript{26} The subjective factor of aspiration levels is beginning to be explored.\textsuperscript{27} As a byproduct of the rapidly growing field of industrial relations, the effects of employment in large corporations upon mobility aspirations and opportunities is receiving attention.\textsuperscript{28} It is difficult, however, to coordinate these data with others relating to more general samples of the nation.

\textit{Educational opportunity}

Sociologists share the American belief that the public school system is a major agent in vertical mobility, though the growing evidence for selectivity of school attendance has weakened that belief. The complex relationships between education and mobility have, however, received too little theoretical attention.

A regional study by White and a national study by Havemann and West have uncovered many of the factors influencing recruitment to the universities.\textsuperscript{29} Mulligan and Deasy and Anderson, studying individual universities, have shown the effect of war veterans' educational programs.\textsuperscript{30} Marshal and Davie have completed local studies of secondary students.\textsuperscript{31} Centers demonstrated that among men of the same social origin, those with more education were considerably more mobile.\textsuperscript{32} Comparisons of the degree of inequality in schooling with that in other areas of life have been attempted by the writer. It has been shown also that advanced schooling brings more added income in some regions of the nation than in others.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Assimilation of ethnic minorities}

Though ethnic groups, apart from Negroes, are becoming less prominent in American society than a generation ago, research studies on minority groups continue to appear. Without taking space for all these reports, a few citations on Negroes\textsuperscript{34} and on other ethnic groups\textsuperscript{35} are listed because they contain suggestions for more general studies.

\textit{Differential social participation}

Knupfer's "Portrait of the Underdog"\textsuperscript{36} vividly describes the isolation of lower status individuals from community organizations and from the more informative channels of mass communication. But, as many
of the studies summarized by Klapper indicate, in this area of life status should not be interpreted in a tooo narrowly economic sense since educational factors often outweigh economic ones.

The interconnections of the varied religious structure of the United States with the general social organization is a topic of long-standing interest though little research appeared until recent years.  

Social participation among farm families has been studied intensively for many years; three recent studies illustrate the methods and findings. More recently similar work has been undertaken in urban communities. Ortmeyer has restated the view, which is debatable, that social status may be defined in terms of participation.

The federal and state governments jointly operate the Agricultural Extension Service whose program is the supplying of technical information to farmers who might otherwise fail to become familiar with newer farm practices. Recent studies like earlier ones make it clear that lower status farmers are not reached as effectively as more prosperous farmers by such programs.

Ecological segregation, community solidarity, and the status structure

The scope of the distinctively American specialty, ecology, is being widened to embrace the newer interest in stratification. The Warner group's use of "area of residence" as one element in a status scale has stimulated efforts to test the validity of such a procedure. While rural and suburban areas have not been neglected, most of the studies deal with cities. Shevky and Williams introduced some new techniques of analysis of ecological patterns, while new tools for measuring segregation in particular are being developed.

Other studies manifest a more dynamic approach to community life. The processes by which in-migrants are assimilated into the local status system are considered by Myers. Both the uneven distribution among status groups of knowledge about the community and their different degrees of "community solidarity" suggest new topics for research. Field studies of the role of different classes in actual decision-making processes in the community are beginning to appear.

Levels of living

On this aspect of social status the bulk of American research is the work of economists. Development of standardized scales is perhaps
the distinctive sociological contribution, though many correlates of level of living are explored.48) Non-pecuniary aspects of living patterns are not neglected; e.g., the recent studies of funeral customs, fashion, and the names of luxury shops.49) In another study the caste and the class elements in the use of servants have been distinguished.50)

Social class, family patterns, and intermarriage

The variations in family life at different social levels are just beginning to receive attention in research; Cavan's discussion indicates some of the possibilities and new techniques have been tried by Bosard and Boll.51) More specific traits of family relationships as they are affected by social class have had some attention. Thomas' study of religious training within the family suggests a number of ways in which the inculcation of class norms could be observed.52)

Though there have been numerous reports on intermarriage among ethnic groups, specific studies of class intermarriage are few. Class endogamy appears to be less marked than the descriptive community studies would lead one to expect.53)

Social class and personality

It is easy to demonstrate that different social classes have definite impressions about each others' typical personalities.54) But to prove that typical personality structures actually differ from one class to another is more difficult.55)

It is not possible to review here the research in social pathology and criminology,56) much of which throws light on class differences. But one should mention the specific topic of "white collar crime", about which a vigorous controversy is occurring.57)

Sorokin's recent interest in "altruistic behavior" has been received sceptically by the profession; nevertheless, one may predict that from this work will come important new perspectives on social status.

Class conflict

The shock of the great depression produced a receptiveness in the United States to theories of class struggle that hitherto had not been favored. But in this intellectual reorientation ideological preconceptions were perhaps more influential than facts. Centers' "Psychology of Social
Classes" and Mills' "White Collar" stated the class struggle position effectively and in doing so contributed many fresh data even though critics do not interpret these data similarly. More recently, critical analysis of data has produced scepticism about such theories. Rosenberg and DeGre58 have identified American conditions limiting class consciousness, while other writers have tried to fit class struggle into a broader theory of conflict.59) Charters60) has ably attacked the assumption that class position is a major factor in individual's behavior in conflicts.

The accumulated collections of public opinion poll data have been skillfully analyzed around this question. Centers' book had set the problem, though Hyman61) has reformulated it more subtly. The 1952 presidential election received a masterful analysis by Campbell,62) and the particular case of the farmers has been reviewed by Beers.63) Cross-currents in class opinions are emphasized by Kornhauser, Anderson, and Lenski, while Robinson formulates the problem in terms of motives.64)

The labor union, as a new major element in American society, is beginning to receive its share of attention both with respect to its role in class struggles and also to other aspects of status.65)

Summary comments

Numerous evaluations of particular studies have been made incidentally in the preceding pages. A few general criticisms are now offered. It should be emphasized, however, that merits considerably outweigh defects. Previous accomplishments, and even errors, form a foundation for further progress. Certainly advance in quality as well as quantity of research has been noteworthy. Foreign readers should remember that research is handicapped by the enormous heterogeneity of America. An additional obstacle is the absence of archival and register data of the kind so familiar to European scholars.

1. Defining Away the Problem. There is a risk that the search for refined techniques may lead to our unconsciously overlooking the original problems. For example, use of multiple correlation techniques for combining scores on different status scales may yield a valid "status" score. Social class, however, has traditionally implied membership in distinct groups or quasi-groups.

The absence of validating criteria handicaps most of the studies in this field. The use of personal prestige ratings is limited by their
inherent unreliability, as well as by their unfeasibility in large communities. It is a questionable procedure also to identify status groups or classes by the extent of informal personal association or intermarriage. One of the basic questions that is always asked about a class system is whether families from different classes intermarry or associate intimately. But if we delineate classes initially by these criteria we have defined this basic problem away.

A similar dilemma appears in the attack on the validity of intelligence tests. Certainly the tests in use handicap some lower class children. Nevertheless, on the present tests some upper class children score very low and some culturally handicapped children score very high. If the tests were made "culture free" in the manner proposed, lower class children would be as "intelligent" on the average as upper class children. Only in a society with extreme rigidity of class lines over several generations could such equality be even approximated.

2. Defining Status Non-Functionally And Statically. American sociologists have shown little interest in studying the function of classes. The "pecking order" conception of social class receives disproportionate emphasis. It is a fashion to call studies "structural-functional", but this is nearly always a misnomer. There has been no study of the actual functions performed by a social class in any American community up to this time — though evidence about dysfunctional features is plentiful.66)

Moreover, most of the studies have taken a quite static view of the American class system. But processes of mobility are inherent in and at the heart of a class system; we so define classes in contrast to estates or castes. A snap-shot of a status system at one date, and in a single community, gives an incomplete and often misleading picture.

3. Excessive Emphasis on Scaling. Defining the problem away is not the only distortion associated with zeal for refined measurement techniques. Valuable as such studies are for many purposes, one may suggest that the search for status indexes has been premature, if not a misconception of our problem. We do not have a sufficiently varied sampling of data nor an adequate theory to guide us in selecting factors or to suggest the most appropriate way of combining them.

Linear scaling procedures tend to reify a linear conception of status. Status may be multidimensional; class membership must be based upon several attributes in a complex society where roles are diverse and multiple. Since the existence of classes implies congruence among the attributes of membership, we must fall back upon professional consensus
as to how far above chance levels this congruence must be if we are to speak of "class". By the same logic, variance between classes must exceed that within classes, but such a comparison has yet to be made. If social class is a matter of membership and not of position on a scale, we must face the possibility that a large portion of the population are marginal to classes or have no definite class position. Perhaps future work will bring a distinction between "status" and "class" and develop quite different procedures for studying each.

There are other, minor disadvantages to the use of scales which can be illustrated by Adams' otherwise excellent studies. He reports his results in "Hatt scale" values. His findings cannot be compared with earlier periods of time for which we lack a corresponding occupational prestige scale. If one is to compare another set of data with Adam's findings, those data must be converted into Hatt units. Comparisons with other countries with different or no similar scales are impossible. If Adams reported his results also in more conventional rubrics, as "professional" — even though these categories are not perfectly homogeneous — comparability among different bodies of data would be facilitated.

Technical skill has other applications in the study of stratification, particularly in the development of probability or expectation models. The recent "Social Mobility in Britain", the Rogoff study, and the writer's "Intelligence And Occupational Mobility" all made profitable use of formal expectation schemes in calculating mobility rates. Such models can be useful also in personal prestige rating studies. To measure mobility in terms of opportunities for mobility, or to measure prestige ratings in terms of maximum possible differences between raters, is more informative than to compute correlation coefficients. The former procedure also permits analysis of discrete sections of the prestige structure.

More attention is needed also to the formal properties of hierarchies as a basis for developing indexes of occupational inheritance or mobility. For example, in computing mobility opportunities one must take account of the relative size of various classes. The fact that very few workers can become executives is not an attribute of "monopoly capitalism" but of hierarchy.

4. Lack of a Comparative And Historical Viewpoint. This defect is more serious in studies of stratification than, for example, in criminology. Comparisons of status systems among a large number of societies, even if the study be superficial, will improve our conceptual
framework. Comparative studies have the additional advantage of eliminating the tendency to compare a particular society with a utopian picture of status relationships.\textsuperscript{68}) It is relatively easy to work out tentative combinations of fluid and rigid status systems together with their associated structural characteristics.\textsuperscript{69})

Over and over again one reads that opportunities for mobility in America today are few, and the author immediately goes on to say that these opportunities were greater fifty years ago — without giving any definite data about that earlier period. Since historical trends cannot be established at one point in time, use of historical materials is urgently needed. Even though the documents lack the detail of contemporary surveys, a historical study of the changing status relationships in one single section of the nation would be invaluable.

5. Lack of Coordination between Sociology And Political Science. Neither of these disciplines makes systematic use of the other's findings in discussions of stratification.\textsuperscript{70}) While sociology textbooks continued to quote localized field studies as typical, Key's "Southern Politics" mapped the diversity of racial and other status patterns in the American South. We in sociology have made little use of the vast literature on the electoral process, the party system, or pressure groups. The corrosive effect of free elections on status relationships has been little noticed.

6. Shortcomings of a Non-Economic Economic Theory of Stratification. Though sociologists are generally agreed that income and wealth are basic elements in the class system, they have ignored economic data in their studies — apart from occupational data. Four areas may be listed in which the use of economic data would enrich our research.

a) The most obvious example is the possibility of collaboration in developing more adequate occupational classifications and in conducting comparative studies of the occupational structures in different societies.

b) The rich stores of economic data on income offer innumerable opportunities. (1) It would be useful to study the relative income positions of representative occupations at different times and places. (2) What are the status correlates of shifts in the relative incomes of different vocations? (3) What are the stable and the changing features of income distributions and the changes in the degree of inequality of income distributions?\textsuperscript{71}) (4) Economists' analyses of income-consumption
functions would prove worthwhile reading. All of these topics would throw light on the necessary versus the chance factors in economic stratification.

c) There is another large area in which both political science and economics have built an elaborate structure of theory and data: the study of non-vertical groupings or pressure groups such as unions, cartels, farmers' organizations, trade associations. From this material we would learn much about the connections between classes and interest groups and about the relative importance of class struggles among all the power struggle of modern society.\(^2\)

d) Central to economic theory but also to any theory about a "pecuniary society" is study of market processes. Little attention has been given to the tendency of a private property and market system to undermine as well as to support established status relationships. We might pay more respect to the widespread judgment among economists that unions have not been a preponderant influence upon the trends of real incomes. Some attention to economic writing on monopoly would also be useful; there is a substantial group of economists who argue that competition has become more, not less, vigorous in recent decades.

In short, study of social stratification calls for more sophisticated conceptualization, more varied statistical analysis, a broader perspective in space and time, and closer collaboration with other social sciences.

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3) By "personal prestige" we refer to ratings of individuals by their acquaintances; "occupational prestige" refers to judgments of whole occupations.

4) P. A. Sorokin "Society, Culture, and Personality", New York 1947, p. 261-.


20) C. A. Anderson and M. J. Bowman "Tenure Changes And the Agricultural Ladder", forthcoming bulletin from Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station. See

21) N. Rogoff "Recent Trends in Urban Occupational Mobility", p. 442- in Bendix and Lipset "Class, Status and Power".

22) C. A. Anderson et al "Intelligence And Occupational Mobility", Journal of Political Economy, LX, 1952, p. 218-; See also P. C. Glick "Educational Attainment And Occupational Advancement", "Transactions, 2nd World Congress of Sociology", II, p. 183-.

23) T. Caplow Op. Cit., ch. 3; S. M. Lipset and R. Bendix "Ideological Equilibrium And Social Mobility in the United States", Ibid. p. 34-.


32) R. Centers "Education And Occupational Mobility", American Sociological Review, XIV, 1949, p. 143-.

33) C. A. Anderson "Inequalities in Schooling in the South", American Journal of Sociology, LX, 1955, p. 547-; "Regional And Racial Differences in Relations between Income And Education", School Review, 1955 (Jan.), p. 38-.
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F. Hunter’s “Community Power Structure”, (Chapel Hill 1953) identifies the supposed powerholders in a city but does not show that they actually wield power.


H. W. Beers "Rural-Urban Differences", Rural Sociology, XVIII, 1953, p. 1-


Scudder and Anderson Op. Cit., Social Forces, XXXII.


C. A. Anderson and M. J. Bowman "A Typology of Societies", Rural Sociology, XVI, 1951, p. 268-

A distinguished exception is R. Heberla "Social Movements", New York 1951.

S. Kuznets "Economic Growth And Income Inequality", American Economic Review, XLV, 1955, p. 1-