

A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW OF
SOCIAL CLASS IN AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

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For Sebastian and Tristan, in hopes you will inherit a better world...

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Abstract

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A theoretical understanding of stratification and inequality is necessary to understand social phenomena in general. Unfortunately, professional sociology in the United States has historically promoted a limited theoretical understanding of stratification that tends to ignore economic realities, social structures, institutional mechanisms, power relations, and other important factors such as racial discrimination in reproducing social class. In fact, mainstream sociology has replaced class-based theories altogether with the concept of socio-economic status (SES) and, at the same time, all too often embraces problematic theories that justify inequality. This critical literature review of social class in American sociology attempts to: 1) provide a more comprehensive history of sociological theory in the United States regarding stratification and social class, 2) expose the sociological factors affecting these social theories and concepts, and 3) deconstruct and critique mainstream social theories that offer weak explanations of stratification.

Peter J. Seybold, PhD, Chair

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INTRODUCTION

Class matters. Stratification, or structured inequality and the resulting categories of social class, is a central feature of American society; it lies at the heart of our culture, economy, and everyday life (Schwalbe 2008: 4). Depending on one's perspective, it is either a divine blessing or a hellish curse. It can grant us freedom or take it away, increase our chances or reduce them to nil. It even defines our neighborhoods and shapes our cities. A refined understanding of class is therefore necessary to understand social phenomena in general.

Class also hurts. Inequality is without a doubt the primary cause of many—if not most—of our contemporary social problems: poverty, hunger, crime, disease, psychological maladies, political dysfunction, and human misery in general. Put simply, the 'lower classes' throughout the world are left to face these social problems and lead a lower quality of life, while the 'upper classes' typically remain insulated and lead a much higher quality of life. Thanks to unequal distributions of wealth, income, and power, a disproportionate amount of resources are being devoted to a small minority of people at the expense of the majority. This makes inequality both an *analytic* and a *moral* problem (Schwalbe 2008: 9).

Current research has indicated that there is a growing gap between the upper and lower classes, especially in the United States: "The United States may see itself as the City on a Hill, but many of its citizens labor in dismal swamps" (Greenhouse 2008: xv). There has been a significant decline in the status and treatment of American workers over the past thirty years (Greenhouse 2008: 4). Since 1979, for 80 percent of workers real wages have only risen by one percent, despite the fact that worker productivity has

increased nearly 60 percent (Greenhouse 2008: 5). At the same time, the number of foreclosures and bankruptcies has tripled (Greenhouse 2008: 5). One-quarter of workers in the United States—over 33 million—now live below poverty line, earning less than ten dollars per hour (Greenhouse 2008: 7). Three-quarters lack health benefits or paid sick leave (Greenhouse 2008: 7-8). In 2005, for the first time since the Great Depression, the nation's personal savings rate fell below zero (Greenhouse 2008: 6).

One would be quite naïve to conclude that this has nothing to do with social class. The decline of American labor is certainly not a product of struggling business. Corporate profits actually increased 13 percent between 2001 and 2007 (Greenhouse 2008: 9). While income for the middle and lower classes has steadily deteriorated, income for the upper class increased 80 percent, with the top one-fifth now receiving well over half of all after-tax income (Greenhouse 2008: 40). Income for the top one-percent increased nearly 228 percent (Greenhouse 2008: 40). The average CEO today earns more than 369 times as much as the average worker (Greenhouse 2008: 41).

In the words of Warren Buffet: “There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning” (Greenhouse 2008: 41). The degradation of the lower classes has been caused by a deliberate dismantling of the social contract which was maintained between capital and labor throughout the mid-Twentieth Century (Greenhouse 2008: 38). Rampant inequality is rooted in capitalism’s ever-increasing power over politics in the United States, which has reduced the need for mass support, resulting in a ‘disconnect’ between profits and wages and an effort by companies to shift costs and risks onto their workers (Greenhouse 2008: 37-38).

METHOD

The primary goal of this paper is to provide a critical literature review of the theoretical definitions and concepts of social class in American sociology. In doing so, I will not only provide the reader with an insightful history of sociology, but also a sociology of knowledge that analyzes the development of sociological theory in the United States. Sociology of knowledge is “the analysis of the sources and meanings of forms of knowledge in relation to the experience, institutions, traditions, practices, and positions of social groups and the individuals within those groups” (Goldman 1994: 266). In other words, it is a perspective that performs a sociological analysis of intellectuals—in this case, it is a sociological analysis of sociologists. The reason such an analysis is important is because sociologists themselves are embedded in a social context, often unknowingly succumbing to the same social forces that other people do (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 5-7). Like any human being, the sociologist is unconsciously prone to be misled by his or her own socio-psychological nature.

Throughout history, American sociologists have been influenced by an American ideology, cultivated in an environment of capitalism and frontier expansion, not to mention evangelical Christendom, and this ideology has, more often than not, fundamentally skewed our understanding of stratification and social class. After all, early American sociologists were *Americans*, and therefore shaped and guided by a particular historical context, culture, and set of experiences. Consequently, in hindsight, we can discover the previous biases and errors of social theorists in hopes of avoiding them ourselves. In summary, besides providing the reader with an insightful history of social theory, this paper seeks to: 1) expose the effects ideology and various cultural biases have

had on social theory, 2) show that professional sociologists are often biased by their own particular social locations, and 3) understand how institutional mechanisms have affected sociological research in the United States. In doing so, again, I hope to provide a comprehensive history of American sociology and deconstruct mainstream theories.

A PROBLEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

The history of American sociology is complex and full of difficulties.

Sociological texts had appeared in the United States as early as 1854, but these were largely motivated by, and interdependent with, evangelical Christendom (Hofstadter 1992; Ritzer 2008: 52; Saint-Arnaud 2009: 15). In its infancy, American sociology usually took the form of a conservative, fundamentalist reaction to the social problems caused by industrialization, and mainly sought to ‘cure’ the moral deficiencies of everyday modern life and restore the importance of tradition, community, and religious faith. Through Christendom, Protestant Calvinism significantly influenced our early theories of social class, because it proposed “wealth was a measure of divine grace” and this meant that class itself became “the measure of perseverance in the service of God amongst the English Puritans and in the Puritan sects in America” (Ossowski 1963: 50).

Because the academic system was well-established in the United States around the turn of the century, sociology, at least when compared to Europe, was easily established as a scientific discipline here (Ritzer 2008: 53). However, in the early stages of the discipline European theorists such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber were excluded (Ritzer 2008: 53). As it turned away from evangelical Christianity and became a legitimate scientific discipline, American sociology was shaped more by the Social Darwinism of Spencer and Sumner (Hofstadter 1992; Ritzer 2008: 53). These men became extremely popular in the United States because they wrote in English (and were therefore more accessible to American readers), but also because Social Darwinism was favored by bourgeois Americans because it justified their laissez-faire economics, private

wealth, and property rights (Hofstadter 1992). So, instead of seeking to *cure* social problems, American sociologists instead began to *apologize* for them.

During this time American sociology also turned away from historical analysis in favor of quantitative methods and a positivistic focus on short-term changes (Ritzer 2008: 53). With the historical realities of African American slavery, American Indian genocide, and class-conflicts so near, most mainstream scholars were probably reluctant to study American history in much detail. Of course, quantitative methods are also more ‘scientific’ and adaptable to the needs of commerce.

EFFECTS OF AMERICAN IDEOLOGY

One must keep in mind that the United States has always been a class-system, one intentionally dominated by wealthy elites. The Constitution was “drafted by fifty-five men who were mostly wealthy slave-owners, lawyers, merchants, bondholders, and men of property” in order to give the “rich and well-born” a “distinct and permanent share in the government” (Zinn 1990: 152). Conservatives like Madison and Hamilton deliberately sought to dominate the masses, thwart rebellion, and protect the wealthy against reforms, such as an abolition of debts, an equal distribution of property, or “any other improper or wicked project” (Zinn 1990: 152-153). The post-Revolutionary government immediately adopted Hamilton’s economic program and began giving aid to the rich, a practice which has continued into today (Zinn 1990: 153). Not surprisingly, these details are usually excluded from the history lessons we receive throughout our primary and secondary education.

Political domination requires cultural domination, so the wealthy have actively sought to impose a pro-capitalist culture of consumerism and conformity onto American citizens (Ewen [1976] 2001). This “American ideology” of beliefs, values, and attitudes is maintained by “those in charge of our society” who dominate our ideas so that they will be secure in their power; “certain orthodox ideas are encouraged, financed, and pushed forward by the most powerful mechanisms of our culture” (Zinn 1990: 1-3). This cultural domination establishes what Gramsci refers to as “hegemony” (Joseph 2003: 44-48).

In Declarations of Independence, the historian Howard Zinn provides us with a detailed portrait of this imposed American ideology. First, it includes a core belief in

individualism and laissez-faire economics. We are systematically taught that individuals only have themselves to blame for their problems, that government dependency is bad for us, and that the best course of action is simply to “let things take their natural course without government interference” (Zinn 1990: 151). We consequently “leave the poor on their own” (Zinn 1990: 1). This also causes most Americans perceive the United States as being an unfettered meritocracy (Zinn 1990: 159).

Second, American ideology causes us to see economic growth as an absolute good. Contrary to our insistence on a laissez-faire economy, government intervention has never been considered bad for the rich (Zinn 1990: 151). Most Americans don't mind if the State attempts to “help the rich” by subsidizing corporations, cutting taxes, etc. (Zinn 1990: 1). Of course, it is not very difficult to figure out where these ideas probably originated—the rich—nevertheless, sociologists in the United States tend to favor the wealthy, and usually avoid going too far in their criticisms.

Third, American ideology is strictly opposed to communism, generating a “a hysterical fear that has led the United States to spy on its own citizens, to invade other countries, to tax the hard-earned salaries of Americans to pay for trillions of dollars of monstrous weapons” (Zinn 1990: 260). This is because communism and socialism are equated with ruthless policies and perceived as a threat to 'national security' (Zinn 1990: 1). This paranoia has led American sociologists throughout history to routinely misinterpret Marx, or else outright reject Marxian theories altogether.

Fourth, American ideology also promotes military realism, or the “glorification of war as heroic and ennobling” (Zinn 1990: 67-68). We see this in American foreign policy and the rise of a nationalistic patriotism (Bacevich 2010). Tumin (1965: 383) notes that

professional sociologists in the United States are mostly ambivalent to war, and that many even have a reputation for being pro-war.

Fifth, American ideology has historically been influenced by racism. Zinn points out that a significant component of American culture, interdependent with a belief in American exceptionalism, is the belief that certain races of people are ‘naturally’ inferior, including African Americans, Jews, Arabs, and Orientals (Zinn 1990: 1). Early American sociologists were living in a society that systematically eradicated American Indian tribes, institutionalized slavery and segregation, and exploited foreign countries. We should remember that this was perceived to be perfectly ‘normal’ for many Americans during this time—and we shall see that, while all this was happening, many sociologists still perceived the United States to be a society of freedom and justice, and, at the same time that robber barons were gobbling up the economy, sociologists somehow still proclaimed that ‘class’ did not matter.

Finally, in the United States, despite the fact that we were founded by revolutionaries, we have been led to value obedience to the law and the State. This is important because “the dominant ideology leaves no room for making intelligent and humane distinctions about the obligation to obey the law” (Zinn 1990: 107-108, 114-115). For the sake of conformity, many citizens—including most intellectuals—are likely to put the status quo before reason, or at least be significantly influenced by formal institutions and norms.

Zinn also notes several effects this ideology has had on our society, and on American intellectualism in general. First, intellectuals in the United States face “the problem of selection in history” in which “a certain set of values has dictated the ignoring

of an important historical event” (Zinn 1990: 56-58). Second, this ideology ensures a limited choice in public policy debates, which ultimately conserves the status quo because certain alternatives cannot even be discussed or considered (Zinn 1990: 2-3). Next, we frequently permit terrible working conditions and routinely cut government budgets for family care, often while, at the same time, channeling funds into corporate interests (Zinn 1990: 1). Finally, there exists “a great dependence on experts” because “we are expected to believe that great thinkers—experts—are objective, that they have no axes to grind and no biases, and that they make pure intellectual judgments” (Zinn 1990: 5). As we shall see, American ideology has had such an effect on American sociologists, who, naïve to their own limitations, 1) have embraced selective understandings of history, 2) been hesitant to consider alternative theories, 3) promoted a laissez-faire economy, and 4) taken their own values and judgments for granted.

This is especially true when it comes to research focused on stratification and social class. The American ruling class has deliberately opposed “sharp divisions in the mode of perception of the social structure” in an attempt to suppress class conflict (Ossowski 1963: 36; 89). “The view that social class is alien to American society is based on the conviction that the social attitudes of the average American are formed by a traditional ideology—the so-called American Creed” (Ossowski 1963: 105). Against all evidence to the contrary, American ideology perpetuates the idea that “there are no distinct social classes in America” based on the following myths: 1) socio-economic status is not determined by birth and the road to the highest positions is open to all; 2) socio-economic status is not divided or broken by any distinct barriers; 3) no definite privileges are attached to the various segments of the scale, nor does a permanent conflict

of interests exist between the higher and lower levels; 4) there is no separation or restriction in social interactions between strata (Ossowski 1963: 105-107).

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL LOCATION

One's position in the "classification struggle" ultimately depends on one's social location (Bourdieu 1984: 483). People of different "collectivities" perceive the structure of their society differently, i.e. a particular social context produces a "certain milieu" of "concepts, images, beliefs, and evaluations that are more or less common to people of a certain social environment and which are reinforced in the consciousness of particular individuals by mutual suggestion and by the conviction that they are shared by other people in the same group" (Ossowski 1963: 6). Because academia is itself a social context—with bourgeois tendencies—scholars often overlook obvious phenomena which are easily observed within their scope of experience. Said phenomena are "screened by facts and relationships which were more characteristic of the [cultural] epoch" (Ossowski 1963: 4). Furthermore, the social background of individual sociologists affects how they interpret stratification:

Hidden behind the statistical relationships between educational capital or social origin and this or that type of knowledge or way of applying it, there are relationships between groups maintaining different, and even antagonistic, relations to culture, depending on the conditions in which they acquired their cultural capital and the markets in which they can derive the most profit from it... (Bourdieu 1984: 12)

For example, it was Talcott Parsons who first introduced most American sociologists to Durkheim and Weber (Ritzer 2008: 70). Formerly an economics professor, Parsons dominated mainstream American sociology throughout much of the Twentieth Century through his position in the Harvard sociology department (Ritzer 2008: 70). He had a major influence on graduate students (e.g., Kingsley Davis) who would go on to

become notable sociologists (Ritzer 2008: 70). More than anything, he shows how research can be affected by social location. Parsons' own social location produced a bias for certain theories and an aversion to others. He was prone to erroneous interpretations that reflected his own theoretical orientations, which has had negative consequences for American sociology (Ritzer 2008: 71). Parsons also devoted little attention to Marx, which resulted in Marxian theories being left out of the mainstream for decades (Ritzer 2008: 70-71). His functionalism basically ignored the plight of the lower classes in American society and instead over-valued social harmony and order.

Today, while we seldom practice such 'grand' theorizing, professional sociologists are still affected by social location. This is especially true of intellectuals who identify more with the upper and middle classes, remain mostly detached from the lower classes, and treat the poor as a 'sample' to be studied. American sociologists often practice what Nels Anderson refers to as 'descend into the pit' sociology, i.e. the type of research in which the researcher seeks to "descend into the pit, assume a role there, and later ascend to brush off the dust" (Anderson 1961: 26). Many have become what Mills ([1944] 2008: 15) calls a "detached spectator," who, lacking an adequate philosophy, does not realize their own institutional helplessness because, trapped in a complacent culture, he or she never even tries to overcome it. On the contrary, an adequate philosophy is one in which personal responsibility is central to ethics and politics, emphasizing an objective consideration of events, a realistic estimation of personal position in relation to objective power distribution, and constant self-evaluation (Mills [1944] 2008: 18).

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Institutional norms are also influencing theoretical understandings of stratification and social class in the United States. Professional sociology is arguably failing the public because it typically promotes a limited understanding of social stratification and inequality. This is because 1) social theory has been devalued within the academic-industrial complex, 2) the profession overvalues methodology, and 3) mainstream sociologists are prone to pursuing narrow hypotheses and trivial topics.

In his 1975 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, Lewis Coser argued that sociology is facing a disciplinary crisis (Coser 1975: 691). The profession has been designed in such a way that theory is not being rewarded (Coser 1975: 693). Recent developments are therefore limited to “narrow, routine activities” and “sect-like, esoteric ruminations” which are based on weak theories and typically lack substance (Coser 1975: 691; Burawoy 2004: 15). One result is that there is often an “exclusive insistence on one particular dimension of reality and one particular mode of analysis” (Coser 1975: 695).

Theory has been replaced by methodology (Coser 1975: 693). Methodological fetishism and an obsession with trivial topics has become the professional norm (Burawoy 2004: 15). The profession now rewards precise measurements—e.g., path analysis and regression—more so than theory or substance (Coser 1975: 692). We have forgotten that measurements are a means to an end and that “if concepts and theoretical notions are weak, no measurement, however precise, will advance and explanatory science” (Coser 1975: 692). Coser called this the “fallacy of misplaced precision,” or the

belief that one can compensate for theoretical weakness with methodological strength (Coser 1975: 692-693).

Methodology is also more efficient in the context of ‘publish or perish,’ which values quantity over quality (Coser 1975: 693). Our passion for social justice has been channeled into the pursuit of academic credentials and disciplinary techniques (Burawoy 2004: 5). Worse still, we assume that theories and findings will just “seep back into society through osmosis” (Burawoy 2005: 76).

One of the more unfortunate trends of contemporary social science has been a growing ‘cult of irrelevance,’ a set of implicit standards that encourages smart young scholars to write more and more about less and less for fewer and fewer readers. The principle of academic freedom and the granting of lifetime tenure are supposed to free academics to tackle controversial subjects or ambitious research projects, but all-too-many social scientists choose to devote their efforts to meaningless displays of methodological firepower and to attack questions that are only of interest to a small group of like-minded scholars...they will present their results in a manner designed to make it incomprehensible to even a well-educated educated lay-person. (Walt 2009)

Burawoy (2005: 77) asserts that the dispute between theory and methodology is a result of professional sociology experiencing cultural lag, i.e. the profession is stuck in the early mindset of sociologists who were trying to make a place for the discipline. However, since Coser’s address, professional sociology has become more conservative and shifted even more to the Right (Burawoy 2004: 5; Burawoy 2005: 71). This means that, beyond a simple cultural lag, many sociologists have a vested interest in the status quo. They are prone to what Coser (1975: 698) refers to as a “massive cop-out,” failing to undertake research that would indicate the full effects of the objective, socio-economic context.

These institutional problems have had serious consequences in terms of how we study stratification. On one hand, American social classes are presented as “statistical categories which can have only a heuristic significance” (Ossowski 1963: 104). Or, social classes are merely conceived to be “social groups based on a psychological bond” (Ossowski 1963: 104). This means that class is either measured via cross-sectional statistics or, more often than not, understood in a narrow context of anecdotal experiences. Because sociological theory has been devalued, American sociology has a limited understanding of stratification and social class.

This can be seen in the various terms and concepts mainstream sociologists use to study stratification. When discussing misunderstandings and divergences in sociological terminology, we may be concerned with either *terminological* differences or *conceptual* differences. Terminological differences occur when two researchers are employing the same concept but using different terms to refer to this concept (Ossowski 1963: 162). For example, the terms ‘class,’ ‘stratum’ or ‘order’ can refer to the same concept. On the other hand, conceptual differences occur whenever the same term is used to refer to different concepts (Ossowski 1963: 163). Such distinctions are important to consider because, as we are about to see, American sociology tends to replace ‘class’ with more convenient terms and concepts. While this might very well be an unconscious maneuver, it is no coincidence, and has serious consequences for theoretical understanding of stratification:

The choice of a particular term [...] may be the expression of certain views about reality...for the purpose of theory construction as well as for propaganda considerations, it is not immaterial whether we agree on a convention to refer to the different *strata* of the peasant class, or to speak of the different *classes* of the peasant stratum. Long-established associations have given the term 'class' a different value for us in theory construction than the term 'stratum'...for this reason it is not only in the choice of concepts but in the choice of terms that we are confronted with the problem of concealed assumptions and views... (Ossowski 1963: 169-171)

Lacking an adequate philosophy and corrupted by the American ideology described by Zinn and Ossowski, many mainstream sociologists have also been reluctant to challenge the status quo or explicitly blame the rich. Social class has become what sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls 'the elephant in the room.' Zerubavel's fundamental premise is that cognition is affected by social forces. Denial is therefore a social phenomenon; it is necessarily a collective endeavor that presupposes a mutual avoidance (Zerubavel 2006: 47). It takes place within a social context, relying on a collective "conspiracy of silence," which Zerubavel defines as "a social phenomenon whereby a group of people tacitly agree to outwardly ignore something of which they are personally aware" (Zerubavel 2006: 2). The fact that class exists but is seldom discussed in the mainstream is therefore no accident: "Separating the relevant from the irrelevant is a *sociomental* act performed by members of particular social communities" (Zerubavel 2006: 25). Our 'conspiracies' are maintained throughout everyday life via norms of communication, which often have an institutional basis: agenda-setting, intentional distraction, censorship, etc. Mills ([1944] 2008: 17-18) likewise pointed to a "universal deception" among intellectuals caused by both "habitual intimidations" and an increasing dependence on corporate funding.

In order to conduct an effective sociology of knowledge that reveals this conspiracy of silence, it becomes necessary to return to primary sources and contrast them with mainstream interpretations.

CLASSICAL THEORIES

While we often think of social class as a byproduct of modern society, and Americans like to pretend that the middle class is a product of American exceptionalism, the concept of class actually dates back to antiquity. For instance, we find the Greek philosophers discussing social class. Plato's Republic discussed how masters depend on a middle class to insulate them from their servants:

'Now, imagine that a man who owns fifty or more slaves is plucked by some god from his community—wife, children, and all—and deposited in some isolated spot along with his property, especially his slaves. There are no other free men around to help him. Would he be afraid of his slaves killing him and his family? And if so, how frightened do you think he'd be?'

'He'd be absolutely terrified, I expect,' [Glaucon] replied.

'What he'd have to do, then, despite their being his slaves, is immediately get on the right side of some of them, make them extravagant promises, and give them their freedom, whatever misgivings he may have. In fact, he'd end up being dependent on the goodwill of his servants, wouldn't he?' (Pojman 1998: 218-219)

In his Politics, Aristotle wrote that "the middle class is least likely to shrink from rule, or to be overambitious for it; both of which are injuries to the state" because "in that condition of life men are most ready to follow rational principle" and "they do not, like the poor, covet their neighbors' goods; nor do others covet theirs, as the poor covet the goods of the rich; and as they neither plot against others, nor are themselves plotted against, they pass through life safely" (nd). He concluded that a large middle class, allowing for stability and rationality, was therefore necessary for a democracy to function.

KARL MARX

In our modern epoch, capitalism would come to embrace the idea of a middle class to perform the functions described by Plato and Aristotle: *insulation* and *stability*. In Part III of the Communist Manifesto, which has been sadly ignored or undervalued by academics, Karl Marx predicts this phenomenon. Marx calls this *conservative socialism* (Marx & Engels 1848: 181). “A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances,” writes Marx, “in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society” (Marx & Engels 1848: 181). Conservative socialism is worked out into a “complete system” whose goal it is to eliminate any “revolutionary and disintegrating elements,” maintain the “relations between capital and labour,” and convince the masses that the bourgeoisie exists “for the benefit of the working class” (Marx & Engels 1848: 182). Echoing Plato and Aristotle, Marx recognizes that a middle class of social engineers could prolong the exploitation of the working classes.

Marx is one of the most influential thinkers of the modern period, and he has arguably had a greater impact on more people than anyone else in history (Simon 1944: ix). A testament to the predictive power of Marx’s sociological theories, the Communist Manifesto could just as well have been written last week. This is because it contains a wealth of theoretical concepts that are still very much relevant today: stratification, globalization, urbanization, economic crisis, structural mobility, etc., etc. (Eagleton 2000: 8-9). Using these concepts—in one poetic pamphlet—Marx was able to construct a powerful theoretical framework that helps us to better analyze and understand capitalism: “the writings of Marx form some sort of immense lens which concentrates the rays

coming from different directions, and is sensitive both to the heritage of past generations and to the creative resources of modern science” (Ossowski 1963: 70).

When reading Marx, it is important to remember (but all too often forgotten) that he was primarily a humanist, a materialist, and a social philosopher. It is impossible to comprehend Marx’s social theory without first taking these meta-theoretical tendencies into consideration. Marx’s early notes and writings, namely On the Jewish Question and the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, are very important because they provide us with the very foundations of Marxist thought.

Through his materialism, Marx recognized that humans are like other animals and live in and through inorganic nature; in practice, this interaction with material objects is a direct means of life (Marx 1844: 63). However, this material “productive life” of individuals, i.e. nourishment and reproduction, is also by default “species-life,” because it is social activity that maintains the existence of the species (Marx 1844: 63). Marx writes that “activity and satisfaction, both in their content and mode of existence, are social, social activity and social satisfaction” (Marx 1844: 72). Even as hunter-gatherers, humans were never solitary creatures, but naturally worked together in communities.

A “species-being” (*Gattungswesen*) is here defined by Marx as a higher animal that is related to nature *as a whole*, and that recognizes an ecological *interdependence* and sees itself *related* to the universe of material objects (Marx 1844: 63-64). In humanist fashion, Marx concludes that humans fall into this category: “Man is a species-being not only in that he practically and theoretically makes his own species as well as that of other things his object, but also [...] in that as a present and living species he considers himself to be a universal and consequently free being” (Marx 1844: 62). While the animal

kingdom is full of other social animals that work together to subsist, humans are social in a much deeper sense because our collective interaction occurs within a context of subjective choices and universal possibilities. Marx should therefore be seen as a humanist *par excellence*.

The Manifesto is consequently meant to be political propaganda, not a “total philosophy,” (Eagleton 2011: 34). It is best understood in the context of Marx’s other writings, which are often more difficult for the average reader (or even intellectual) to understand. This fact alone has led to countless misinterpretations and abuses. However, I would also blame weaknesses in Marx’s writing style for being prone to misinterpretation. Vacillating between poetry, philosophy, and social theory, the Manifesto often lacks organization and clarity. In many ways, Marx failed to provide a clear and concise presentation of his concepts.

This is especially true for his concept of class: “The role of the class concept in Marxian doctrine is so immense that it is astonishing not to find a definition of this concept, which they use so constantly, anywhere in the works of either Marx or Engels” (Ossowski 1963: 71). Marx actually spends a lot of time discussing the various classes in the Manifesto and other writings, but said discussion is so spread out and piecemeal that most scholars fail to even detect it. The manuscript of the third volume of his magnum opus, Das Kapital, breaks off dramatically at the moment Marx was about to answer the question “What constitutes a class?” and we do not know for sure he would have written because he died before the manuscript was finished (Ossowski 1963: 72). Consequently, in trying to understand Marx’s concept of class: 1) “one might regard it as an undefined concept of which the meaning is explained contextually” or 2) “compare the various

passages in which the concept of social class is used” or simply conclude that 3) “Marx left the problem of producing a definition of the concept of class until much later” (Ossowski 1963: 71). Since the first option leads us in the direction of post-modernism and the third option seemingly offers little reward, I will focus on the comparative method of understanding Marx’s concept of class.

Marx explicitly defines the bourgeoisie in the first two pages, describing how they emerged victorious from the class struggle with the feudal aristocracy, have come to dominate the proletariat, and manage contemporary economic affairs (Marx & Engels 1848: 14-15). Next, he spends several pages linking the bourgeoisie to various structural problems. Then, in the second section the bourgeoisie is further defined by its social status in production, i.e. capital is a social power (Marx & Engels 1848: 23). In “bourgeois society” the labor of others is a means to accumulation of independent wealth, so the bourgeoisie are implicitly defined as the owners and managers of the economic system (Marx & Engels 1848: 23). This includes “other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc” that essentially exploit the proletariat (Marx & Engels 1848: 18). In other words, Marx recognized that capitalism was not limited to industry and manufacturing, and that exploitation was also taking place in the financial and service sectors.

It is common mistake to conclude that Marx only proposed two or three social classes. On the contrary, he actually devotes a lot of attention to the middle class. For Marx, the middle class can be divided into three categories: 1) an upper middle class employed by the bourgeoisie for practical purposes; 2) the petit bourgeoisie, which is a category of composed of entrepreneurs, unionized craftsman, independent artisans, and

farmers; and 3) the lower middle class, which is composed of the downgraded small businesses falling from the latter category, which are essentially on the brink of failure.

The upper middle class is discussed in chapter three, which is the less appreciated and least read section of the Manifesto. The purpose of the upper middle class is to “secure the continued existence of bourgeois society” by “redressing social grievances” through social reforms and systematically ensuring that the lower classes remain “within the bounds of existing society” (Marx & Engels 1848: 31-32). Marx explicitly includes economists, philanthropists, various activists, and social workers in this category (Marx & Engels 1848: 31). In a previous section, he also mentions the role ministers, professors, and local officials play in serving as “a welcome scarecrow” for the state (Marx & Engels 1848: 30). The function of the middle class is therefore to maintain hegemony through the ideological state apparatus (Althusser 1970). While Marx somehow does not discuss the role of the military, police, and penal systems in maintaining capitalist relations in the Manifesto, it seems evident that the repressive state apparatus also functions to maintain capitalism through violence, and should therefore logically fall into this class (Althusser 1970; Marx 1869: 196-198, 204).

The petit bourgeoisie is a “supplementary” class that tentatively remains “an independent section of modern society” (Marx & Engels 1848: 29). Again, it is composed of unionized craftsman, artisans, entrepreneurs, and independent farmers. The people located in this class tend to be conservative because of their desire to simply “save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class” and “roll back the wheel of history” by rejecting any social progress that threatens their independence (Marx & Engels 1848: 20). Rather than revolution, the petit bourgeoisie—properly translated as

the “little” bourgeoisie, not “petty”—merely seek to maintain “corporate guilds for manufacture” or “patriarchal relations for agriculture” and generally react only when these are threatened (Marx & Engels 1848: 29). Labor unions consequently fall into this class because Marx predicted that the development of industrial capitalism would increasingly lead to conflicts between “individual bourgeoisie” and their workers, resulting in the formation of trade unions who “club together in order to keep up the rate of wages” (Marx & Engels 1848: 19). So, the petit bourgeoisie ultimately helps to maintain the status quo by serving as a cushion for capitalism.

In the context of capitalism, the petit bourgeoisie is always in flux, and Marx accurately predicted that it would decline as capital accumulated. He hints at what Waldinger & Lichter (2003) refer to as the “dynamic of skills polarization,” or the tendency for capitalism to arrange jobs into a hierarchy that is constantly being modified by economic forces, raising the status of high-skilled jobs while downgrading others. Highly-skilled jobs that serve a functional purpose are frequently being absorbed into the upper middle class. At the same time, relatively less-skilled jobs—those that can be Taylorized, or those with a surplus of workers—are downgraded in terms of status, prestige, wages, benefits, rights, and job security. Marx was therefore under no illusions about the fate of labor unions, asserting that they would be successful “only for a time” and acknowledged that they are “continually upset again by competition between the workers themselves” (Marx & Engels 1848: 19). The rest of the petit bourgeoisie will either accumulate enough capital to become the bourgeoisie proper, or else lose their independence because their enterprise cannot compete with big business (Marx & Engels 1848: 18). So, what few artisans, entrepreneurs, and farmers still remain in capitalism are

either on their way up or down. To paraphrase Nietzsche, what doesn't kill them only makes them stronger—and the only thing that doesn't kill them is profits!

Consequently, the lower middle class is really a category of failing businesses. The lower strata of the middle class—“the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesman” and “the handicraftsmen and peasants”—are constantly hurled down into the proletariat through competition (Marx & Engels 1848: 18). This lower middle class is mostly populated by busted unions, starving artists, sole proprietors, dwindling family farms, and downgraded laborers that struggle to keep afloat, are susceptible to economic crisis, and could be swept away by big business at any moment.

Next, the “proletariat” is composed of the working classes, or the “slaves of the bourgeois class,” who are “daily and hourly enslaved by the machine” and by the “overlooker” (Marx & Engels 1848: 18). This class is also in perpetual development because of accumulation and innovation; new methods of labor are applied, new technologies are developed, new populations of cheap labor are exploited, new resources are discovered, and new jobs are created, often in relation to those downgraded from the lower middle class. This is the really revolutionary class because 1) it is the largest of all the classes, 2) it is the most exploited and alienated, and 3) it is the most vital (in a practical sense) because it produces human goods.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Marx also includes an underclass, which he describes as the “dangerous class” or “lumpenproletariat” (Marx & Engels 1848: 20). He satirically describes this class as the “social scum” that has been “thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society” and is essentially “passively rotting” under capitalism

(Marx & Engels 1848: 20). Rather than promoting exclusion, Marx hoped to unite the underclasses with the proletariat into a single struggle.

There are several important themes which emerge from these passages. First, Marx and his followers associated the concept of class with exploitation (Ossowski 1963: 127).

Marxism is not fundamentally a theory of class structure. It is above all a theory of class struggle and social change. The analysis of class structure is intended not as the end point of the investigation, but as a starting point. The premise is that the structure of class relations establishes the basic parameters within which social struggle and change will take place. The purpose of studying class structure is to be able to understand the constraints on and possibilities of transformation. Ultimately, for Marxists, this means understanding the conditions for the formation of a working class capable of generating revolutionary socialist change. (Wright 1978: 52-53)

Second, contradicting Weber's polemic versus Marx, which we shall explore in detail later, it is clear that Marx uses both economic *and* psychological criteria to define social classes (Ossowski 1963: 72). However, what makes Marx's conceptualizations of class most powerful is that they are essentially structural:

By 'structure' in its literal meaning we understand a spatial arrangement of elements, in which we regard spatial relations as being correlated with some system of relationships between these elements or between particular parts and the whole...one does not however usually apply the term 'social structure' to the structure of society in this literal, spatial sense...in a metaphorical sense, structure is a system of figuratively interpreted distances and relations of one sort or another...I therefore conceive of social structure as a system of human relationships, distances and hierarchies in both an organized and an unorganized form. (Ossowski 1963: 9-11)

Keep in mind, however, that, in his Theses on Feuerbach, Marx (1845: 99) explicitly seeks to theoretically reunite the social with the material through human practice. This means that, while class certainly has a psychological component, it is essentially objective, or fundamentally grounded in a material reality. Another way to put this is that class structures—and the practices associated with these structures—generally *determine* the psychological components, because “*man* is not an abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of men*, the state, society” (Marx 1844: 28). Consciousness is *not* detached from matter and space.

In summary, Marxists define class as “groups determined *by their place in the social process of production*” and “at the same time as elements in a system of opposites” (Ossowski 1963: 54; Perrucci & Wysong 2008: 7). Wright (1978: 2-3) contends that the three basic elements of Marxian class analysis are: 1) classes are defined in *relational* terms rather than gradational terms; 2) these relations are analyzed in terms of the *social organization of the economy* rather than forms of technology; 3) class relations are primarily defined according to economic *production* rather than economic exchange. Marx did *not* define class in terms of “style, status, income, accent, occupation, or whether you have ducks or Degas on the wall...it is a question of where you stand within a particular mode of production” (Eagleton 2011: 160-161). Rather, Marxian classes are generically defined as “common positions within the [structured] social relations of [economic] production” (Wright 1978: 3).

Marx’s greatest blunder was his assumption that capitalism would continue to simplify class antagonisms (Marx & Engels 1848: 15). This is most likely due to the fact that, writing at the peak of the Enlightenment, he could not have predicted the second

technical revolution, the rise of nationalism, or modern techniques of central planning and programming (Ossowski 1963: 2-3). Nationalism has since caused the formation of massive societies with heterogeneous populations that are centrally-controlled through powerful military forces and bureaucracies. The scale and diversity of these societies have made it more difficult to unite the working classes (Brodkin 2000, Brown 1998; Bonacich 1972; Waldinger & Lichter 2003; Zeitlin & Weyher 2001). It is no wonder that, in his reinterpretation of Marx, Gramsci asserted that social classes are not to be conceived of as “homogenous blocs,” but determined by a range of social factors, often leading to various fractions and strata within a particular class (Joseph 2003: 51). Imperialism, patterns of migration, ethnic antagonism, and even structural mobility have undoubtedly slowed the formation of a unified, class conscious proletariat.

However, it is a grave error to interpret Marx as a simple determinist and, besides acknowledging the regressive influence of conservative socialism, he asserts that the structural development of a society can also retard the development of a revolutionary, class-conscious proletariat:

The republic signifies in general only the political form of the revolutionizing of bourgeois society and not its conservative form of life, as, for example, in the United States of North America, where, though classes already exist, they have not yet become fixed, but continually change and interchange their component elements in constant flux, where the modern means of production, instead of coinciding with a stagnant surplus population, rather compensate for the relative deficiency of heads and hands, and where, finally, the feverish, youthful movement of material production, which has to make a new world of its own, has left neither time nor opportunity for abolishing the old spirit world. (Marx 1869: 195)

Furthermore, Marx also explicitly recognizes that politics and culture can serve to maintain the status quo by distorting class-consciousness:

“Property, family, religion, order.” Society [as-is] is saved just as often as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most shallow democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an “attempt on society” and stigmatised as “socialism.” (Marx 1869: 195)

The inherent problem with capitalism is in fact what makes it so powerful: for the sake of a few wealthy individuals who wish to maintain the feudal relations between capital and labor, it deliberately denies the fact of species-being and instead promotes an ideology of hyper-individualism (McKibben 2008). This allows those few wealthy individuals to effectively exploit the species-being of humanity, but it ultimately degrades the human species in many ways. This is indicated by the ailing health of the system itself (McKibben 2008) and the numerous social problems sociologists are obliged to detect.

Capitalism makes the productive life, the species-being, loathsome for the majority. “Under the presupposition of private property,” writes Marx, “my individuality is externalized to the point where I *hate* this *activity* and where it is a *torment* for me...a *forced* activity, imposed upon me only by *external* and accidental necessity and *not* by an *internal* and *determined* necessity” (Marx 1844: 53). Capitalism alienates the individual worker from his labor by externalizing it, and, in doing, so alienates him (or her) from free conscious activity, will, and nature as a whole (Marx 1844: 63). Work is no longer a

free and spontaneous activity, but a socially-controlled, oppressive *exploitation* of the individual.

Finally, there is a contradiction inherent in capitalism—this is why Marx used dialectics to describe it—in that there are two opposing truths within the system (Ollman 2003). First, capitalism is fundamentally pro-social because it causes centralization, interdependence, and organic solidarity, making work more collective. This means that capitalism actually enhances species-being in many ways. However, capitalism is, at the same time, anti-social because it degrades society. It denies species-being while, at the same time, relying on it: alienating workers, promoting competition and hyper-individualism, and making destructive decisions based on that individual greed. In other words, it causes the very pre-conditions of socialism, while actively seeking to suppress socialism through political economy.

The sociological concepts of Western Europe and the United States clash with the Marxist method of interpreting phenomena (Ossowski 1963: viii). Marx has also been misinterpreted by many scholars because of his connection to Hegel (Ollman 2003). Scholars like Karl Popper (1957) have even argued that Marx was not a ‘scientist.’ Then there are those who argue that Marx’s prediction simply ‘failed,’ that capitalism won the battle because it is somehow superior to communism (Fukuyama 1989). Early American sociologists, tending to be politically moderate to conservative, regarded Marxist thought as an attack on their society (Ritzer 2008: 36). Marxist thought therefore presented an immediate dilemma for bourgeois academicians, and much of classical social theory can be seen as an attempt to reinterpret or refute Marx’s theories in order to conserve the status quo.

EMILE DURKHEIM

As the history of sociology developed in the United States, Parsons' conservative interpretation led most American sociologists to believe that Durkheim's sociology represents a clean-cut, histrionic break with Marxist thought, and that structural-functionalism is the antithesis of conflict theory. Unfortunately, Durkheim did not intend for this to happen. While his sociology indicates a divergence from Marx, and Durkheim himself could be characterized as a moderate, his thought does *not* point to such a break with Marxist theory. A deeper investigation into both Durkheim the man and Durkheim's proposed solutions to social problems makes this mainstream interpretation very problematic. Durkheim was not a Right-wing conservative: for him, the State, family, and religious organizations cannot provide the necessary connective tissue in modern society (Gouldner 1962: 18).

According to Gouldner (1962: 20, 29), Durkheim was instead seeking to combine the Comteian focus on regulating moral norms with the Marxist focus on economic institutions, a synthesis of Marx and Comte which lead him back to Saint-Simone. Durkheim actually had a great respect for Marx. He proclaimed that Marx's Das Kapital remains socialism's "strongest work—the most systematic, the richest in ideas—that this school has produced" (Durkheim [1896] 1962: 41). In fact, many of Durkheim's students were converted to Marxism (Mauss [1928] 1962: 34). He was friends with many Marxists and even wrote a book entitled Le Socialisme, which was a thorough study of socialist thought. While there is a turn away from many of Marx's ideas in Durkheim, it is clear that there is definitely not an absolute break here, and that introductory textbooks are wrong to juxtapose Marx and Durkheim as intellectual opposites.

That said, Durkheim's divergence from Marx is worth exploring, and it is really necessary to understand his disagreements with Marxism when trying to understand Durkheim's theory. First, in a philosophical sense, Durkheim was strictly a rationalist who embraced the Western tradition of *a priori* reasoning, scholastic logic, and dualistic metaphysics. It is clear that Durkheim consequently disputed the central logic of Marx, i.e. dialectics, materialism, and the Hegelian view of history (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 16-17; Stedman Jones 2001: 120). Second, he felt that Marxism, as he understood it, focused too much on externals and failed to examine subjective motivations (Stedman Jones 2001: 122). Third, one needs to realize that he was an idealist who didn't think sociological empiricism could be reduced to an objective, material monism. In this sense, Durkheim is somewhat pluralistic and could be viewed as a precursor to later post-modern thought. Fourth, one might say that he is best characterized as the passive villain in Marx's Theses on Feuerbach. His notion of science is an aristocratic contemplation: a "consciousness raised to the acme of clarity" that transcends the "vulgar level" and is accessible only to the elite (Durkheim [1893] 1984:14). This elitism made Durkheim uncomfortable with the lower classes. Unlike Marx, Durkheim wants to make room for the aristocracy and did not think the working classes are capable of existing on their own. He opposes the reduction of socialism to a "workers' question" (Stedman Jones 2001: 122-123).

Finally, Durkheim was opposed to all wars of class or nation, and was uncommitted and reluctant to adhere to socialism because of its violent nature, working class themes, and political tone (Mauss [1928] 1962: 34). In fact, his major disagreement with Marxism was that he did not see class conflict or violence as a route to social

transformation (Stedman Jones 2001: 122-123). For Durkheim, “conflict is not the essence of the social system; rather, it exists as a problem for social cohesion that must be resolved through greater social and moral regulation” (Joseph 2004: 78). Contrary to Marxism, class conflict is simply an indication of a dysfunction within the social organism: “Durkheim sees as pathological some of the central aspects of modern society...feelings of alienation, and even social conflict” (Joseph 2004: 69). Violence can never be a solution to inequality for Durkheim because it is merely a symptom of the disease.

He believed that industrialization—in an objective sense—is neutral and benign. Civilization, and the services provided by the division of labor, completely lacks a “moral character” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 12). Consequently, the crisis of capitalism is not *economic* for Durkheim (Joseph 2004: 78). Conflict is not caused by the division of labor, as Marxists might claim, but because dramatic economic expansion has outpaced moral regulation (Joseph 2004: 78). The working classes are not opposed to capitalism because of inequality or injustice; on the contrary, Durkheim posits that they are opposed to capitalism because capitalist society is simply experiencing cultural lag: “Whereas Marx saw the conflict of the industrial order as due to the inherent evil of capitalism, and Weber saw it arising from the excess of modernity’s rational order, Durkheim understood conflict as a failure of the social to hold the moral bond in place” (Lemert 2007: 79). The division of labor has increased dramatically, making us more dependent on one another, but we lack the necessary moral regulation to handle such progress.

This trend towards a complex division of labor is, for Durkheim, the new source of social solidarity in the modern era (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 17). He writes that “great

political societies also cannot sustain their equilibrium save by the specialization of tasks; and that the division of labor is the source—if not the sole, at least the main one—of social solidarity” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 23). The development of large-scale societies requires that human beings be increasingly dependent on society—a form of helplessness akin to that described in Engels’ The Condition of the Working Class in England—so that society becomes cohesive and integrated. Mutual dependence is therefore actually praised by Durkheim for maintaining peace, order, and solidarity.

Durkheim also sought to justify and defend private property. 'Real rights,' i.e. the right to private property, is not the right to material possessions according to his theory, but instead it is reinterpreted as the rights that define social relationships. Property rights form a definite system whose function is not to link together the different parts of society, but to detach them from one another and clearly mark the barriers separating them, comparable to “a huge constellation in which each star moves in its orbit without disturbing the motion of neighboring stars” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 72-75). However, while property rights are expressions of negative solidarity, they also presume a social harmony because they rely on order—they define how people integrate society with ‘things.’ Durkheim essentially ignores the fact that property rights promote inequality and instead, much like an economist, argues that they are necessary rules that keep the machine well-oiled.

Therefore, when class conflict does occur, for Durkheim it is always pathological. Class conflict occurs because “at certain points of the organism certain social functions are not adjusted to one another” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 292). It is never because the system *as a whole* is dysfunctional; rather, it is because *parts* of the system are

dysfunctional. He asserts that the division of labor produces conflict whenever and wherever there is anomie, or when the division of labor takes on an “abnormal form” that deviates from the “natural course” (Durkheim [1893] 1984:291). He discusses three types of abnormal forms: 1) anomic, 2) forced, and 3) overspecialized.

Durkheim’s anomic division of labor often occurs because of hyper-individualism. The division of labor itself can exert a “dissolving influence” because “the individual, bent low over his task, will isolate himself and his own special activity” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 294). On the contrary, Durkheim’s ideal division of labor involves a collective consciousness, so that: “the worker, far from being bent over his task, does not lose sight of those cooperating with him, but acts upon them and is acted upon by them” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 303-304). In theory, this allows the worker to recognize that his labor is “tending in a certain direction, towards a goal that he can conceive of more or less distinctly” and “he feels that he is of some use...he knows his activity has a meaning” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 303-304). When this ‘feeling’ of integration, meaningfulness, and usefulness disappear—remember that, for Durkheim, this void is not so much because of actual working conditions, but because an imposed ‘morality’ is lacking—the individual laborer experiences anomie. Thus, the division of labor itself tends to cause anti-social behavior.

Next, a forced division of labor occurs when a society is organized into castes of classes (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 310). Durkheim argues that the division of labor only produces solidarity to the degree that it is spontaneous (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 312). Only a perfect meritocracy can avoid class conflict (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 311). This is because there is a “larger gap between hereditary tendencies of the individual and the

social function he will fulfill” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 310). Furthermore, “the field is open to trial and error and discussion, as well as being open to the free play of a host of causes that may make the individual nature deviate from its normal path, thus creating a pathological state” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 310). Thus, Durkheim is comparable to Giddens or Bourdieu in the sense that he recognizes that real behaviors are under-determined by social forces; however, what is more important here is that he is promoting a utopian laissez-faire economy, free from corruption from the top or bottom. Meritocracy is necessary because individuals will inevitably conflict with class boundaries.

Finally, Durkheim provides a third abnormal form that occurs when “functions are distributed in such a way that they fail to afford sufficient scope for individual activity” (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 323). Durkheim indeed recognizes the negative consequences of Taylorization, arguing that each occupation should grant the individual an adequate degree of autonomy, responsibility, etc. Of course, the problem with this notion, like much of his theory, is that Durkheim again and again fails to comprehend the nature of lower class labor—in his utopian fantasy, capitalism is going to bend over backwards to provide individuals with human rights and aesthetic considerations.

While it is wrong to assume that Durkheim attempted some historical or ideological disconnect with Marx, it would be correct to conclude that Durkheim’s sociology was an attempt to avoid the “workers’ question” (Stedman Jones 2001:122-123). His turn from politics to morality reflects this. There is little connection between theory and practice in Durkheim, and, above else all, he desired a life of passive, armchair scholarship. He was inclined to think that societies could resolve the debilitating

effects of social conflict (Lemert 2007: 78). He was confident that sociology could help society discover a social ethic suitable to the needs of society (Lemert 2007: 79). His sociology is therefore best characterized as extremely optimistic—an optimism that has since been exposed as naïve—and he was idealistic in hypothesizing that social classes would ‘naturally’ give way to a functional harmony. Durkheim’s sociological theory was ultimately an attempt to strip sociology of its revolutionary tendencies, and while he did not reject Marx completely, his work certainly helped to transform the discipline into a more bourgeois, aristocratic profession.

MAX WEBER

While Durkheim was the French antidote to Marx, Max Weber was the German solution. Lemert (2007: 61) characterizes Weber as “the personification of the German scientific scholar in a day when Germany set the standard for scientific work” (Lemert 2007: 61). When he was writing, the German university was regarded as an ‘elite’ institution by scholars throughout the world. German academics had a major influence on the American university throughout the late 19th and early Twentieth Century (Damrosch 1995; Mitchell 1997; Ortega y Gasset 1944). Furthermore, whereas Marx would not have a positive effect on American sociology until the 1960’s, Weber was introduced to a large American audience by Parsons, becoming highly influential by the late 1930’s (Ritzer 2008: 36). Weber’s theories were likely accepted by the mainstream because he was politically moderate and did not propose radical solutions to social problems (Ritzer 2008: 35-36). He also wrote in a more academic tone, which made him more attractive to academic audiences because he sounded more ‘scientific’ (Ritzer 2008: 36). Together, these factors led to Weber having a significant sway over sociology in the United States.

Soon after becoming a lawyer, Weber began teaching at the University of Berlin, and his interests shifted more to economics, history, and sociology (Ritzer 2008: 32-33). Putting his father’s alcoholism and indulgent lifestyle behind him, as a scholar Weber came to imitate the Calvinism his mother, becoming a strict, compulsive worker (Ritzer 2008: 33). This compulsion inevitably led to a nervous breakdown, with Weber spending about seven years in near-total collapse (Ritzer 2008: 33). It is worth noting that he wrote and published all his sociological works *after* recovering from mental illness in 1904

(Ritzer 2008: 33). However, he continued to be plagued by psychological problems until his death in 1920 (Ritzer 2008: 33).

Owing to his father's power and prestige, his intellect developed within the context of the German power elite, and he had little to no direct experience with the working classes. Consequently, Weber strongly identified himself with the German bourgeoisie (Joseph 2004: 98). Much like Durkheim, he was not concerned with the vices of the factory system and appreciated the benefits of the new industrial order (Lemert 2007: 63-64). On the contrary, he was more concerned with discrediting revolutionary socialism. Marx's theories were well known by the time Weber published his doctoral thesis (Lemert 2007: 61). Early German sociologists like Weber can be seen as developing in opposition to Marx (Ritzer 2008: 30). However, it is also worth noting that much of Marx's work was not published until after Weber's death (Ritzer 2008: 31). This means that Weber was not intimately familiar with Marx's work in its entirety (as we know it today) and was instead reacting to the work of early Marxists, who preached an overly simplistic economic determinism (Ritzer 2008: 31). Weber believed he was intimately familiar with Marx, though. His goal was to 'turn Marx on his head' in the same way that Marx had inverted the Hegelian dialectic (Ritzer 2008: 31). This was supposedly achieved by placing emphasis on culture and ideas in determining social phenomenon and de-emphasizing the objective material world; which, in many ways, is a *return* to Hegelian idealism.

For Weber, it was culture that determines social structures and material conditions, not vice versa. Whereas Marx argued that ideas, attitudes, and values are shaped by social conditions, Weber asserts that social conditions can be effected by ideas

and attitudes, e.g. religious ethics (Joseph 2004: 104). He claimed that Marx failed to account for capitalists as “individuals looking for meaning” (Lemert 2007: 69). He believed that capitalism was born from, and maintained by, an “ascetic attitude towards disciplined work in this world...the practical and subjective ethic of this-worldly rationality that drove the structure’s entrepreneurs” (Lemert 2007: 67).

While Weber did not reject materialism completely, he was an idealist (Lemert 2007: 65). We see this in his obsession with rationalism. He saw ‘reason’ everywhere he looked; the world for him, both social and material, operated on the basis of rationality. “Rationalization,” defined as a general process in which instrumental means-ends calculations are embedded into bureaucracies, is the main historical driving force in Weber’s theory (Joseph 2004: 103). In theory, this is due to the fact that, through the imposition of hierarchical structure, bureaucracy leads to greater stability, efficiency, and technical superiority (Joseph 2004: 109-110). Ironically, it was rationality that Weber despised—comparable to Heidegger, Weber concluded that rationalization was slowly enframing the entire world. In a Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, rationalization is cast as a negative force because bureaucracy eliminates personal, irrational, and emotional elements (Joseph 2004: 110). Therefore, Weber believed that modernity threatened the human spirit, a fatalistic departure from a previous age of “beautiful humanity” (Lemert 2007: 64, 66). He was opposed to social democracy precisely because it requires bureaucracies to function (Joseph 2004: 111).

Joseph (2004: 94) summarizes Weber’s concept of politics as “independent leadership in action.” Social cohesion and consent rests on the exercise of power, or the carrying out of one’s will against all resistance, and is maintained through the coercive

threat of violence (Joseph 2004: 99). Consequently, leadership is a major theme in his sociological theories (Joseph 2004: 94). He devoted much attention to analyzing power, not so much to critique power relations, but to understand the causes of heroism. The solution to social problems is to cultivate dynamic and charismatic aristocrats who could dominate the masses (Joseph 2004: 99). Weber concluded that charismatic leadership is the only force that can stop bureaucratization, and that democratic institutions ought to be seen as a testing ground for selecting charismatic leaders, who could passionately oppose legal-rational society (Joseph 2004: 98). Charismatic leadership is based on the extraordinary qualities and powers of the elite individual, which produces psychological reactions from followers—i.e., hero worship, loyalty, and devotion—unbounded by rules, so that charismatic authority is not founded on tradition, formal codes, or democratic participation, but on emotional interactions, reputation, and creative acts (Joseph 2004: 94-95). This is one way Weber justified the bourgeoisie. He argues that capitalism is driven by entrepreneurial agents who are rational, charismatic individuals that tend to oppose bureaucratic oppression (Joseph 2004: 102).

While Weber agrees that the economic order is important, he detaches the social from the economic. For Weber, a society is divided up into distinct arenas of social action, or ‘orders.’ The social order is defined as the “mode of distribution” of status among groups within a society (Weber [1917] 2004: 182). This is differentiated from the legal order and the economic order, which refer to different “modes” (Weber [1917] 2004: 182). While he acknowledges that all three are interdependent, his theory is built around the idea that social phenomena are a world apart from economics and politics. It is actually a gross misinterpretation to suggest that Weber’s concept of “class” is multi-

dimensional and incorporates economics, politics, and culture. On the contrary, “class” refers to the economic dimension, “status” refers to the social dimension, and “party” refers to the political dimension (Weber [1917] 2004: 193).

A Weberian “class” refers to a population of people who are in the same “class situation,” or a “typical probability” for gaining a social position and finding inner satisfactions (Weber [1917] 2004: 176). This probability is derived from the individuals’ skills and control of resources, i.e. individuals within the same class all theoretically have the same range of skills and powers (Weber [1917] 2004: 176). According to Weber, this commonality also means that individuals within a class situation all have similar interests (Weber [1917] 2004: 176). Today, we refer to this as an individual’s ‘life chances.’

Weber distinguishes between several ideal types of classes. First, “property classes” vary according to the amount of accumulated *wealth* (Weber [1917] 2004: 176-177). Weber, taking a stab at Marx, asserts that this form of stratification is not “dynamic” and that inequality does not necessitate conflict, oppression, or struggle (Weber [1917] 2004: 177). “Rentiers” can theoretically coexist with “peasants,” and—taking another stab at Marx—when conflict does occur it can seek wealth redistribution within an economic order instead of changing the economic order itself (Weber [1917] 2004: 177). Second, “commercial classes” vary according to economic *influence*, i.e. individual levels of “qualifications,” “entrepreneurial management” abilities, and “influence on the economic policy” of various political organizations (Weber [1917] 2004: 178). Third, “social classes” vary according to *identity*, i.e. “class-conscious organization” (Weber [1917] 2004: 179). This form of stratification occurs whenever there is an “immediate economic opponent,” large numbers of people find themselves in

the same class situation, work is concentrated into a “community,” or when workers become influenced by “intelligentsia” who impose “readily understood goals” upon them (Weber [1917] 2004: 179). It is worth mentioning here that Weber’s presentation of “social class” is a near-perfect distillation of Marx’s concepts that were presented in the Communist Manifesto, so it is probably safe to assume that this type of class is where Weber and Marx converge. In general, “classes” are “bases of communal action” that occur whenever a population has a specific causal factor influencing their economic life (Weber [1917] 2004: 183). They are the product of economic “interests” that are imposed onto the “market,” or economic structure (Weber [1917] 2004: 184). A “uniform class situation” occurs when work becomes automated and “completely unskilled and propertyless persons are dependent on regular employment” (Weber [1917] 2004: 176, 179). Intellectuals like Marx can then seize this opportunity to program the uniform class with ideas, thereby inducing class conflict.

Weber then makes it clear that “status” is something supposedly independent of class situation; while it is possible for class situation to determine status, and status can determine class situation, Weber asserts that they are mutually exclusive (Weber [1917] 2004: 180-181). The concept of status is actually itself uni-dimensional in that it only refers to the social order. It is something independent of economic location and not reducible to social class; rather, it is based more on estimations of honor, prestige, ethnicity, and social background (Joseph 2004: 107). In theory, two individuals could be in the same social class but have different statuses. These privileges are manifested—in practice—through marriage, commensality, modes of acquisition, and other traditions (Weber [1917] 2004: 180). To his credit, Weber did see a relationship between social

status and economic class, admitting that “the possibility of maintaining the lifestyle of a status group is usually conditional on economics” and “in practice, status differentiation goes together with monopolization of cultural and material goods and opportunities” (Weber [1917] 2004: 190). However, the theoretical detachment of status and class categories allowed Weber to further separate culture from economics, promote an under-socialized portrait of human agency, and adapt his theory to a Germany that remained somewhere in between feudalism and capitalism.

Finally, a “party” is an organized association within a “group body” designed to secure power for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members (Weber [1917] 2004: 195). Weber saw the political party as something seriously flawed because they succumb to rationalization; however, he recognized that, except for charismatic leaders, politics commonly operated at the group-level.

Weber studied stratification through “ideal types,” which are essentially analytic concepts, or abstract mental constructs geared toward clarity, designed to represent one side of a causal chain (Joseph 2004: 94). This allowed Weber to *generalize* social phenomena. For example, he could transform Protestantism from a complex, historical phenomenon into a simpler, abstract concept to be analyzed. This is probably Weber’s most significant contribution to contemporary American sociology. To be fair, there is something to be said for clarity; however, for someone who promoted scientific sociology, Weber mostly studied social phenomenon mainly via historical analysis, philosophical interpretations, and *a priori* reasoning. This speculative armchair scholarship fundamentally weakens his theories. For example, contemporary research has falsified his theory that the Protestant ethic is related to the proliferation of capitalism

(Sanderson et al. 2011). While the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism somehow remains popular in mainstream sociology, it has been reduced to a “beloved myth” (Sanderson et al. 2011). Many contemporary theorists have found his theories of bureaucracy and rationalization to be flawed (Handel 2003). The truth is that Weber was not that great of a researcher. In the midst of promoting his shallow and biased interpretations of history, he lacked a strong scientific method, and what data he did collect was not reliable. We should therefore be skeptical of his theories of stratification.

Still, moreso than Marx or Durkheim, Weberian theories have ironically had a tremendous impact on American sociology, especially in regards to our understanding of social stratification. If anything, Weber helped to transform sociology into an instrument of capitalism. First, he advocated for strict academic specialization (Weber [1917] 2004: 271-273). For him, analysis is devoid of personal feelings, and theory is detached from practice. This is because facts and values are separate projects for Weber. Second, Weber asserts that science should conform to the demands of the status quo (Weber [1917] 2004: 287). Scholarship should be apolitical: the professor should be a teacher, not a leader (Weber [1917] 2004: 279, 282-283). He even claims that ‘science’ is unrelated to ‘happiness’ because it does not answer how we ought to live (Weber [1917] 2004: 277). The goals of science are limited to: 1) techniques to control life through calculation, 2) establishing methods of thought, 3) clarity, and 4) deductive logic (Weber [1917] 2004: 283-284). Anything else is unscientific and unprofessional for Weber, who was probably reluctant to critique *German* politics in a *German* university, anyhow. This is undoubtedly why sociologists today attempt to appear ‘value-free.’ In summary, here we

see the seeds of professional sociology being sown: apolitical corporatization that often lacks any hint of revolutionary thought or critical theory.

Next, rejecting structuralism, Weberian theories tend to be less abstract, middle-range models that place more emphasis on social action and human agency (Burriss 1987: 70). Weber's idealism led him to adopt a new sociological method. He is characterized as an "interpretive sociologist" (Joseph 2004: 100). More so than objective facts, he believed that social relations must be analyzed in terms of actors' subjective intentions and meanings (Joseph 2004: 100). In many ways this was another convenient turn away from Marx, who argued that theory should move from the particular to the general, and that social phenomena are best understood through an empirical study of objective reality. Weber, on the other hand, focuses on the subjective aspects of social phenomenon, and believes that the world is effectively understood through Verstehen.

"Verstehen," which translates as "understanding," is a sociological method first proposed in 19th Century Germany (Lemert 2007: 69). It distinguishes "social things" from "natural or physical things" on the grounds that subjective meaning cannot be studied by objective methods; on the contrary, the sociologist must be able to subjectively understand the meanings of the subject through empathy (Lemert 2007: 69). This dualism ultimately allowed sociology to be divorced from the natural sciences, and places a greater emphasis on beliefs, values, and attitudes. By asserting that culture determines economics, Weber essentially took the empirical ground out from under the social sciences.

Our preference for Weber has consequently limited our understanding of social class because it keeps us from thinking too big or theoretically connecting social

phenomena to social structure. Weber re-conceptualizes stratification according to occupational *prestige* and the ownership of *material goods and skills* instead of ownership of the means of production (Joseph 2004: 106-107; Perrucci & Wysong 2008: 8). This likely inspired our current fascination with the concepts of human capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Schwalbe 2008: 10). Again, this is quite different from Marxist theories, which tend to place greater emphasis on the functioning of objective structures that limit and determine human behavior (Burriss 1987: 69). Also, neo-Weberian theories frequently omit any reference to ‘class’ in favor of ‘status,’ i.e. layered rankings or descriptive categories (Perrucci & Wysong 2008: 8).

Throughout most of the Twentieth Century, the culture of academic institutions in the United States favored theories that justified or misconstrued inequality; i.e., theories that ignore social structure, explain stratification according to a meritocratic ‘status,’ or remain at the micro-level. American sociologists were quite happy to explain stratification in Weberian fashion: each ‘class’ came to be defined by a particular culture, or a way of life that includes both material and non-material indicators. Since, according to Weber’s theory, culture is the primary cause of social reality, bourgeois culture is viewed as morally superior and the lower classes are perceived as being culturally deficient.

Cultural theories of poverty portray the lower classes as a “self-perpetuating sub-society with a defective, unhealthy subculture” (Valentine 1968: 141). Of course, this suggests that individual lifestyle, personal values and attitudes, and patterns of consumption are better indicators of social class. One result is that the *products* of American capitalism have become “absolute indicators” of middle-class success

(Mooney 2008: 1-2; 20). Even progressive heroes like Barbara Ehrenreich are prone to defining the middle class in terms of individuals being able to have “enough for home ownership in a neighborhood inhabited by other members of their class; college educations for the children; and such enriching experiences as vacation trips, psychotherapy, fitness training, summer camp and the consumption of ‘culture’ in various forms” (Mooney 2008: 1). Unfortunately, this emphasis on individualistic lifestyle and culture often leads to what Mooney (2008: 143) describes as the “irresponsible-and-immature theory,” which, ignoring social structure and context, reduces the probability for individual success or failure to personal choices, self-discipline, and delayed gratification.

W.E.B. DU BOIS

Leading a direct assault against the bourgeois Social Darwinism that permeated early American sociology, Du Bois promoted an empiricist positivism, arguing that “the Negro problems are problems of human beings...they cannot be explained away by fantastic theories, ungrounded assumptions or metaphysical subtleties” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 140-141). Du Bois understood race to be a cultural, “sociohistorical construct” rather than a “natural, fixed, or innate category” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 143). He consequently wanted sociology to focus on understanding the “spatiotemporal plurality of races” and “multiple *cultural* differences sometimes leading to racial conflict” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 143). Racial conflict is redefined as “a function of physical differences as well as the broader social environment in which they are inscribed; that is, the composite of demographic, economic, political, ideological, and symbolic features typical of a historical era” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 143).

Next, Du Bois asserted that, if sociologists are to understand the social problems of a particular ethnic minority, they must look beyond the group and understand both “the physical environment of the city” and “the far mightier social environment” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 134). This includes a detailed analysis of the social class structure (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 135). The Philadelphia Negro was therefore a “theoretical and analytical breakthrough” in its concept of class as being “the hierarchical organizing principle of the community” (2009: 138). Du Bois understood the concept of class to be an analytical tool, but also “a part of a strategy for inducing Anglo-Americans to see blacks as something other than a homogenous and irresponsible human mass without a respectable

elite to guide them” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 142). The concept of class would hopefully eradicate poverty for blacks and whites.

Du Bois defined four classes, which he called 'grades,' calculated using the following variables: 1) income, 2) occupation, 3) property ownership, 4) literacy, and 5) lifestyle (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 135). The first 'grade' was an aristocratic class, representing about ten percent of the black community in Philadelphia at the time (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 135). The second was a “respectable working class” consisting of economically and socially ambitious individuals who were primarily concerned with accessing “good careers” for themselves and their children (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 135). This accounted for about half the black population. Third, the “poor” class consisted of struggling workers who, while they could not always secure “regular employment,” at the same time resisted “gross immorality or crime” in favor of charity and thrift (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 135-136). This third 'grade' represented about thirty percent of the black population, consisting of immigrants, widows and “abandoned women,” orphans, and the disabled (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 136). Finally, the bottom 'grade' is referred to by Du Bois as the “submerged tenth,” defined as “the lowest class of criminals, prostitutes, and loafers” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 136). However, like many other American sociologists during this time, Du Bois makes no explicit reference to Marx, and makes every attempt “not to accuse or blame anyone directly” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 138).

Despite the fact that he was a co-founder of American sociology, and employed research methods that were decades ahead of his time, Du Bois has since been marginalized through “the dictates of a physical system of academic control and segregation just as discriminatory as the society in which it evolved...the product of the

deeply racist ethos that pervaded scientific thinking about race...integral to the normative core of Anglo-American sociology” (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 3-4). Facing systematic discrimination, black American sociologists have spent the entire Twentieth Century in a struggle to assert their academic equality and forge a positive identity for themselves (Saint-Arnaud 2009: 5). Fortunately, Du Bois was able to inspire entire generations of American sociologists to continue moving forward and acknowledge the relationship between stratification and racial discrimination.

THORSTEIN VEBLEN

Another exceptional outlier in the history of American sociology, Veblen's critique of the leisure class was a direct challenge to not only Social Darwinism, but also functional and cultural theories of stratification. Scholars have tried to distance Veblen from Marx, primarily because they mistakenly interpret The Theory of the Leisure Class as an analysis of consumption rather than production (Ritzer 2008: 57). His focus on culture and 'conspicuous consumption' likewise invokes Weberian theories in the hearts and minds of most American sociologists; however, a careful reading of Veblen reveals that he was actually more in line with Marxian theories.

Veblen argues that the difference between peaceful, classless societies (i.e., primitive) and "the predatory phase of culture" (i.e., medieval and modern) is a "spiritual [or cultural] difference, not a mechanical one," but that this cultural difference is essentially "an outgrowth of a change in material facts of the life of the group...the growth of technical knowledge and the use of tools" (Veblen [1899] 1967: 20). In other words, Veblen appears to be more of a Marxian materialist, stressing that the ideas are ultimately grounded in objective, economic reality. For him, social forces are "no doubt ultimately reducible to terms of living tissue and material environment" (Veblen [1899] 1967: 189). Furthermore, similar to Marx's concept of surplus-value, Veblen argues that "predation cannot become the habitual, conventional resource of any group or class until industrial methods have been developed to such a degree of efficiency as to leave a margin worth fighting for, above the subsistence of those engaged in getting a living" (Veblen [1899] 1967: 20-21).

He likewise takes a more structural approach that goes unnoticed in introductory textbooks. “It is as elements of social structure,” writes Veblen, “that leisure and ownership are matters of interest” ([1899] 1967: 22). Veblen’s first project was to trace the evolutionary development of social stratification. The rise of the leisure-class coincides with the beginning of ownership (Veblen [1899] 1967: 22). Wherever the institution of private property exists, there shall also exist a struggle between men for the possession of goods, which ultimately results in acquisition and accumulation of wealth (Veblen [1899] 1967: 24-25).

In turn, the acquisition and accumulation of wealth “confers honour” to various individuals, resulting in a “distinction” and frequent “emulation” or “cultural advance” which give rise to social institutions (Veblen [1899] 1967: 26-28). Veblen argues that the “the distinction between exploit and drudgery is an invidious distinction between employments [is] habitually made [via] conditions of emulation,” which demand aggressive pursuits of honor and prestige (Veblen [1899] 1967: 15-16). The resulting upper classes increasingly employ leisure-time as a symbol of their superiority: “the rule holds with but slight exceptions that, whether warriors or priests, the upper classes are exempt from industrial employments, and this exemption is the economic expression of superior rank” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 1). Other symbols include “immaterial goods” that indicate leisure: “quasi-scholarly” and “quasi-artistic accomplishments,” or “a knowledge of processes and incidents which do not conduce directly to the furtherance of human life,” including distinct “branches” of sports and activities and “refined tastes, manners, and habits of life” such as décor, fashion, etc. (Veblen [1899] 1967: 45-48).

This is what leads to patterns of “conspicuous consumption,” i.e. the upper classes ritually consume products like “food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture” as symbols of social status (Veblen [1899] 1967: 68). Eventually, the possession of various amounts of wealth becomes a social necessity, i.e. “it becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one’s good name,” because once “wealth presently assumes the character of an independent and definitive basis of esteem” acquisition becomes a “meritorious act” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 29). Except for a few rare exceptions, “those members of the community who fall short” will “suffer in the esteem of their fellow men” and “also in their own esteem since the usual basis of self-respect is the respect accorded by one’s neighbors” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 30).

Social classes emerge from a system of ideas and practices that arrange human labors into a structured hierarchy: “The institution of a leisure class is the outgrowth of an early discrimination between employments, according to which some employments are worthy and others unworthy...worthy employments are those which may be classed as exploit; unworthy are those necessary everyday employments into which no appreciable element of exploit enters” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 8). “As wealth accumulates” and “differentiation is furthered by wealth” the “leisure class develops further in function and structure, and there arises a differentiation within the class” marked by an “elaborate system of rank and grades” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 76). The upper classes soon require an insular middle-class of “henchmen and retainers” and so “uniforms, badges, and liveries come into vogue” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 78).

An early conflict theorist, Veblen was attempting to show that the upper classes were in fact dysfunctional and culturally inferior. The leisure-class is the “conservative

class” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 198). It is the “least responsive” because it is not “in the full sense an organic part of the industrial community” and remains “sheltered from the stress of those economic exigencies” (Veblen [1899] 1967: 198). “The leisure class lives by the industrial community rather than in it,” writes Veblen ([1899] 1967: 246). In terms of social evolution, its social function is simply to “retard the movement and to conserve what is obsolescent” because it has a “vested interest, of an unworthy sort, in maintaining the present conditions” that ensure its existence (Veblen [1899] 1967: 198). In conclusion, Veblen promotes a revolutionary idea that again makes him appear to be more of a Marxist, arguing that the upper classes should be dismantled altogether. “As fast as pecuniary actions are reduced to routine,” writes Veblen, “the captains of industry can be dispensed with” ([1899] 1967: 211).

PITIRIM SOROKIN

Moving away from Du Bois and Veblen, the 'quantitative turn' sociology took in the United States is embodied in Pitirim Sorokin's Social Mobility (1927: x-xi). This text was “the first thoroughgoing attempt to describe social mobility in terms of social stratification and social distance” and to assemble “in accessible form a vast amount of factual evidence and quantitative data” on stratification in American sociology (Chapin 1927). To his credit, Sorokin acknowledged that it is impossible to understand social phenomena without an adequate understanding of social mobility (Sorokin 1927: x). “The biography of a man,” writes Sorokin, “in its essence is largely a description of the groups to which the man has had a relation, and the man's place within them” (Sorokin 1927: 6). Stratification expresses “something that really exists in the social universe,” including domination and subordination, authority and obedience, promotion and degradation (Sorokin 1927: 8).

Sorokin presents us with the concepts of “vertical mobility,” or movement up and down the structural hierarchy between groups, and “horizontal mobility,” which is movement within a particular group (Sorokin 1927: 8). Stratification is the product of “social selection and distribution” via various institutions and mechanisms (Sorokin 1927: 207). Vertical mobility consequently occurs through “holes,” “staircases,” “elevators,” and “channels” in what he described as the “membranes” between social layers, including institutions such as the military, church, school, political organizations, professional and wealth-making organizations, and the family (Sorokin 1927: 165-181). Notice how these correlate with Althusser's state apparatus and his overall project: “this

means that any social reformer must pay the most serious attention to the problem of a proper reorganization of these institutions” (Sorokin 1927: 208).

Sorokin promoted a sociological methodology in which quantitative analysis should be used to examine the “exterior architecture” of the social structure, i.e. to measure and describe how society is stratified, and then qualitative analysis should be used to understand the “inner structure” and mechanical organization of the “social pyramid” (Sorokin 1927: 17). So, in terms of his overall theory, in many ways Sorokin could be seen as an early structuralist—however, the quantitative aspects of his methodology have had much more influence on professional sociology.

Despite its many virtues, Social Mobility inherited a number of vices, betraying the influence Weberian theories have had on professional sociology in the United States. The irony in all of this is that Sorokin was especially opposed to Weber's interpretive methodology and favored a more empirical approach. For example, he rejected various forms of “speculative psychologizing and philosophizing,” which he referred to as the “plague of sociology” (Sorokin 1927: x-xi). “Speculative sociology is passing over,” writes Sorokin, “an objective, factual, behavioristic, and quantitative sociology is successfully superseding it” (Sorokin 1927: x).

At the same time, however, Sorokin did adopt the Weberian notion that sociologists ought to be 'value-free.' Another “plague” for him was the frequency of “preaching or evaluative judgments' of what is good and what is bad, what is 'useful' and what is 'harmful,“ which Sorokin believed compromised science (Sorokin 1927: xi). Sociologists studying stratification should not favor one class over another: “the task of evaluation is entirely out of the field of such a study” (Sorokin 1927: xi). Unfortunately,

like many professional sociologists, while Sorokin might have honestly believed that he was being 'value-free,' his analyses were in fact extremely biased.

Sorokin was a Russian immigrant who regarded the United States as a 'City on a Hill.' He ends his preface expressing his gratitude to “the people of the United States of America” and his colleagues at Minnesota, adding “where I found the most hospitable shelter, the possibility of work, and the most instructive social school” (Sorokin 1927: xii). Like most of his contemporaries, Sorokin mistakenly believed that the Soviet Union accurately represented Marx's thought. In Social Mobility, socialists are caricatured as clever opportunists who use political activity as an avenue for social mobility: “to be a socialist now means to take the quickest, most comfortable, and surest way of climbing and getting the desired power and other worldly things” (Sorokin 1927: 489). He also refers to socialists and communists as “groups of levelers” who, without exception (at least, in his interpretation), throughout history have hypocritically become tyrants and oligarchs with contempt for the masses (Sorokin 1927: 16). He is clearly still debating with the ghost of Marx, and much of his quantitative data attempts to refute him.

First, Sorokin (1927: 14) attacks Marx by attempting to dispel the belief that primitive communism was more egalitarian, which was one of the inspirations for Marx's overall project. He claims that “unstratified society, with a real equality of its members, is a myth which has never been realized in the history of mankind,” and even occurs in the plant and animal kingdoms (Sorokin 1927: 12-13). Taking a stab at Marx's more Hegelian view of history, he also asserts that “history shows only goalless fluctuations,” or that no group exhibits a perpetual trend towards prosperity or impoverishment (Sorokin 1927: 25). Next, Sorokin understood that Marx's essential point was that

economic differentiation would increase as European societies evolved; however, he refuted the theory on the grounds that “the 75 years which have elapsed since the Communist Manifesto did not corroborate Marx's expectation and prophecy” and consequently “this part of the theory was disproved by history” (1927: 38-39). Amidst tycoons like Rockefeller and Morgan, Sorokin was convinced that there was no statistical evidence to suggest that “the rich as a class were getting rapidly richer” or indicate “the existence of any marked tendency of concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands” (Sorokin 1927: 41). To be fair, when he was writing, the economic conditions of European and American laborers had been improving since World War I, with real wages and purchasing power steadily rising up into the 1920's, and the middle class appeared to be growing (Sorokin 1927: 39-40). Amidst the naive optimism of Roaring Twenties, he therefore (somewhat hastily) concluded that Marx's theories had been falsified. “So much for the theories of Marx,” writes Sorokin, “the above data are enough to show that practically all his predictions have failed” (Sorokin 1927: 45). Of course, within a few years of said publication, not to mention the past few decades, Marx's theories are much harder to dismiss.

Again, Sorokin sees the world through the lens of an adopted American ideology, which is undoubtedly why the book was so successful in academic circles. It is made clear throughout that he is wholeheartedly supportive of American capitalism. The book begins (literally) with the less-than-value-free assertion that “Our society is a mobile society *par excellence*” (Sorokin 1927: x). Of course, the obvious problem with this statement is that it only applied to European Americans with white skin—Sorokin was not considering the oppression African Americans, Latinos, Chinese immigrants, or

American Indians were facing during this time period. It should also be mentioned here that Sorokin replaced the term “class” with “social layers” (Sorokin 1927: 11). This further provides evidence that, from its early years, professional sociology has been prone to avoid the issue of social class and depict the United States as a meritocracy devoid of class interests.

Another vice inherited from Weber is a Verstehen-inspired, metatheoretical dualism. Sorokin's analysis detaches social location from the physical world, i.e. “social space” is detached from “geometrical space” (Sorokin 1927: 3-4). Social location is therefore removed from economic context and instead depends more on cultural status, i.e. “relations to other men” or groups in the social universe (Sorokin 1927: 4-5). While he doesn't explicitly reject materialism—much like Weber—this dualism skews his analysis. His project begins by further dividing stratification into three dimensions: economic stratification is rooted in unequal wealth, political stratification on authority and prestige, and occupational stratification based on occupational-group authority and prestige (Sorokin 1927: 11-12). Towards the beginning of the book, Sorokin claimed that his social status is calculated based on the following concepts: family status, nationality, religious group, occupational group, political party, economic status, race, and finally the relative position of the individual within each of these groups (Sorokin 1927: 5). Social location is ultimately defined as the *totality* of these variables (Sorokin 1927: 6). However, throughout the text I could find no such grand calculation; instead, he seems to treat each “dimension” separately whenever he provides statistics, e.g. correlations between wealth and health, or between occupation and health. Much of the text is instead devoted to correlating social location with individual attributes, such as “general

intelligence, health, and social character” or more specific qualities, such as artistic talents (Sorokin 1927: 183).

The aspect of Sorokin's theory that arguably had the greatest impact on professional sociology was his discussion occupational stratification. Sorokin asserts that occupational stratification occurs in two forms: “interoccupational stratification” and “intraoccupational stratification.” The first refers to relations between occupational classes when a particular occupational group is superimposed upon another, while the second occurs within each occupational class when members of an occupational group are stratified into ranks and layers (Sorokin 1927: 99). Likely the inspiration for Davis & Moore's mainstream essay, Sorokin (1927: 100) then argues that interoccupational stratification is based on two conditions: 1) the functional importance of an occupation for the continued existence of the group as a whole, and 2) the relative degree of intelligence (i.e., skills) necessary for a successful performance of a particular occupation (Sorokin 1927: 100-101). In terms of intraoccupational stratification, we discover Sorokin providing a prototype of Erik Olin Wright's new model, dividing each occupational group into various quantitative categories, such as “employers and independents,” “higher employees,” and “wage earners” (1927:117-121). However, more importantly, the generic concept of “occupational group” with leanings towards status-based measurements ultimately paved the way for SES to replace class-based theories.

That said, Social Mobility does intentionally challenge American ideology in fundamental ways. This is especially true in terms of Sorokin's conclusions related to political stratification. Sorokin believed that history does not show a trend towards greater political equality, or a more equal distribution of power, but instead concluded

that advanced societies typically generate complex hierarchies of political authority, and that history is trendless in terms of politics (Sorokin 1927: 72). He also claims that there is no perpetual trend from monarchy to republic, from a government of the minority to that of the majority, or that political stratification has decreased from previous epochs (Sorokin 1927: 78-84). One can only wonder what idealistic Americans were thinking when reading this chapter in the 1920's! Instead, political stratification increases along with 1) the size of the political state, 2) the heterogeneity of its population, or 3) when one or both of these factors increase or decrease through violent means (Sorokin 1927: 84-85). Furthermore, despite his crusade versus Marxism, he did recognize the tension between accumulation and equalizing forces, and argued that "if economic inequality becomes too great and reaches the point of overstrain the top of society is doomed to crumble and fall" because "the economic cone of an advanced society fluctuates within definite limits" (Sorokin 1927: 63). Consequently, many of Sorokin's theories could still be relevant today—especially since the economic cone of ours has recently grown so top-heavy.

KINGSLEY DAVIS, WILBERT MOORE, & MELVIN TUMIN

Davis & Moore's Some Principles of Stratification (1945) argues that stratification and inequality are a "universal necessity" (Davis & Moore 1945: 242). Drawing off the Parsonsian misinterpretation of Durkheim, social class is recast as an organic function, i.e. according to this view, inequality is not the result of human agency, domination, or conflict, but manifests 'naturally' by way of society's 'invisible hand.' The central argument of Davis & Moore is that: 1) certain positions in society are functionally more important than others and require special skills, 2) only a limited number of individuals within any society possess the necessary talent to acquire these skills, 3) the conversion of these talents into skills requires sacrifices on the part of these individuals due to training, 4) in order to induce talented individuals to make these sacrifices and receive said training, their future positions must offer more rewards than they would have otherwise received, 5) these rewards consist of sustenance, comfort, diversions, and prestige, 6) stratification is the natural manifestation of these principles, and, finally, 7) social inequality is therefore positively functional and inevitable in any society (Tumin 1953: 388). It is consequently *society itself*, not the bourgeoisie, which must "give sufficient reward to them...to insure that they will be filled competently" (Davis & Moore 1945: 243). Power and interest were simply removed from the equation.

Tumin (1953: 387) criticized Davis & Moore for being biased in their judgment of what is 'functional.' For example, the labor of factory workers is just as *necessary* as the labor of an engineer; furthermore, our *ideas* of what types of labor are perceived to be more valuable are shaped by culture, and are therefore not 'natural' or absolute. Stratification itself is dysfunctional because it often limits the discovery and recognition

of talented individuals (Tumin 1953: 389). The reward-structure often fails to reward equal amounts of income, power, and prestige (Tumin 1953: 392). Nor are those in power necessarily the most talented individuals, or the ones that have experienced the most training or sacrifice (Tumin 1953: 389-390).

Finally, the only items which society must distribute unequally are the power and property necessary for the performance of the different tasks (resources) but there is no evidence that rewards must differ (Tumin 1953: 392-393). There are also other motivations (besides money) that induce men to choose a career path (Tumin 1953: 391). To assume that inequality is an absolute good and that rewards based on money and labor-time are inevitable is therefore a serious error: “Every known society, past and present, distributes its scarce and demanded goods and service unequally...The ubiquity and the antiquity of such inequality has given rise to the assumption that there must be something inevitable and positively functional about such social arrangements” (Tumin 1953: 387).

Tumin goes on to argue that Parsonsian functionalism is itself dysfunctional because it lacks a moral compass:

The functionalist approach permits the investigator to take certain ends or interests or system-states as given, and to analyze the consequences—supportive and destructive—of any given set of practices for those ends, interests, or system-states. In the process, one may, without apparent penalty, narrow one’s focus of attention so that only certain lines of consequence for certain actors are highlighted while others are ignored. (Tumin 1965: 380)

Furthermore, functionalism claims to be ‘value-free’ but in fact it is biased by the institutional context, assumptions, values, and attitudes of the researcher (Tumin 1965).

The functionalist approach therefore skews our understanding of stratification and social class because it is prone to a naïve delusion: functionalists claim to be objective and might even believe they are, but in fact they employ a vast array of metatheoretical assumptions. These assumptions are often conservative products of an unchecked ideology, social location, and institutional factors.

Of course, in his reply Kingsley Davis is less-than-value-free, and not exactly excited about Tumin's constructive criticism. "He himself offers no explanation for the universality of stratified inequality," snaps Davis (1953: 394). Davis first accuses Tumin of being biased, asserting that their "causal explanation" is not a "justification" (Davis 1953: 394). Fleeing into idealism, the next counterpoint is to claim that their article "represented a high degree of abstraction" and that "Tumin confuses abstract, or theoretical, reasoning on one hand with raw empirical generalizations on the other" (Davis 1953: 394). Davis also hides inside of a multi-dimensional, Weberian approach, thereby accusing Tumin of being inconsistent and conflating concepts in his critique (Davis 1953: 394). Tumin has also apparently misrepresented their theory (Davis 1953: 394). Though, after reading both articles, one would be hard pressed to conclude that Tumin misrepresented anything.

W. LLOYD WARNER

Perhaps one of the most influential works in the history of American sociology, at least in terms of how we understand social stratification, was Social Class in America, written and published in 1949 by Warner and his colleagues at Science Research Associates, Inc. Put simply, this book carried on where Sorokin had left off, providing professional sociologists with a methodological model for studying stratification and conflating social class with quantitative measurements.

Warner actually acknowledges that the United States perpetuates a social class-system, and that stratification is an important social phenomenon. “In the bright glow and warm presence of the American Dream all men are born free and equal,” he writes, though “we all know such perfect equality of position and opportunity does not exist” simply because “all Americans are not born into families of equal position” and “if all men are equal there can be no top level to aim for” (Warner et al. 1949: 3). He recognizes that “social class enters into almost every aspect of our lives” and is “an important determinant of personality,” “skills, abilities, and intelligence,” and patterns of consumption (Warner et al. 1949: v-vi). Warner also admits that class often has negative consequences; there are “hard facts of our social-class system” and “we only learn by hard experience, often damaging us, that some things we learned in early life [in school] exist only in our political ideals and are rarely found in the real world” (Warner et al. 1949: v). However, despite this admission, Warner is ultimately apologetic for American society, and does not seek fundamental changes to the system—if anything, he seems to revere social class in the United States.

Likely influenced by Davis & Moore, Warner takes a hardcore functionalist perspective. He argues that social stratification is not only 'natural,' but an organic necessity. "Some form of rank is always present and a necessity for our kind of society" and "when societies are complex and service large populations, they always possess some kind of status system which...places people in higher and lower positions" (Warner et al. 1949: 8). Warner then hints at a Parsonsian systems theory, adding that organized specialization, coordination, and integration is essentially what maintains society and "enables the larger group to survive and develop" (Warner et al. 1949: 8). He compares society to a "large industrial enterprise," which necessarily requires a hierarchical structure of authority to function (Warner et al. 1949: 8-9). The result is that social class is cast as a brute fact—an absolute reality than modern man must simply cope with:

Social status in America is somewhat like man's alimentary canal [i.e., digestive tract]; he may not like the way it works and he may want to forget that certain parts of it are part of him, but he knows that it is necessary for his very existence. So the status system, often an object of our disapproval, is present and necessary in our complex social world. (Warner et al. 1949: 10)

Warner therefore denounces those who reject the "American Dream" because of stratification and social class: "Fortunately, most of us are wiser and better adjusted to social reality; we recognize that, though it is a Dream and though some of it is false, by virtue of our firm belief in it we have made some of it true" (Warner et al. 1949: 4-5). Our meritocracy is 'justified by faith.' Warner boldly asserts that, in the United States, "the principles of democracy do operate," precisely because our society maintains *themes* of meritocracy, i.e. "democratic faith," "equal rights as citizens," and the "Christian

dogma that all men are equal in the sight of God because He is our Father and we are His spiritual children” (Warner et al. 1949: 4).

In Durkheimian fashion, his main concern is ensuring that this hierarchical structure arises ‘naturally,’ asserting that “we must work to keep it as democratic and equalitarian as possible” and “see to it that each American is given his chance to move in the social scale” (Warner et al. 1949: 10-11). This is not to be achieved through structural changes—e.g., political or economic reforms—but through a utopian moral order. It is this morality which transforms the American class-system into an exceptional way of life that demands our respect. Warner also claims that there are countless examples of Americans advancing from the bottom to the top which provide us “convincing evidence” that the United States is a true meritocracy (Warner et al. 1949: 4). Though, to be honest, he doesn’t provide us with this evidence.

Warner was also heavily influenced by Weberian theories. For example, he embraced an old-fashioned metaphysical dualism that, like so many of his contemporaries, skewed his analysis because it disconnected the socio-mental from the physical. For example, much like Weber, Warner admits that economic and technological factors are important determinants of stratification; however, he consistently argues that “class is a multi-factored phenomenon” (Warner et al. 1949: 129). For Warner, seemingly reading Weber through Christian dogma, human survival “universally depends” on “three environments” (Warner et al. 1949: 266). These are 1) the “natural environment,” manipulated through technology, 2) the “human species environment,” or “system of social organization,” which is controlled through moral order and results in “real power,” and 3) the “supernatural environment,” or “a system of sacred symbols,” which is

controlled through “rituals of religion and magic” which not only determine man’s “ultimate fate” but “govern those activities and outcomes over which the other two have insufficient power” (Warner et al. 1949: 266-267). Warner consequently asserts that “beliefs, values, and rules” are the primary determinants of both 1) economic and technological factors and 2) social complexity, the latter of which he argues is “the basic factor determining the presence or absence of class” (Warner et al. 1949: 9). Warner likewise takes a more Weberian view of power and authority, i.e. power is not reducible to material reality (Warner et al. 1949: 265).

It should come as no surprise that Warner was theoretically opposed to Marx. He mistakenly associated Marxism with the Soviet Union (Warner et al. 1949: 9-10). He explicitly rejects a Marxian analysis of stratification because 1) “the presence of class order does not necessarily mean class conflict—the relations of the classes can be and often are amiable and peaceful” and 2) “classless societies (without differential status systems) are impossible where there is a complexity” (Warner et al. 1949: 9-10).

To summarize, Warner was obviously not ‘value-free.’ He was corrupted by an American ideology that leaned him in the direction of those classical theorists who were debating with the ghost of Marx. His metatheoretical perspective was a cocktail of Durkheimian utopianism, Parsonsian Functionalism, and Weberian underpinnings. The first caused him to overvalue moral regulation and see it as enough to cure the negative effects of social class. The second caused him to regard the United States’ class-system (and inequality as we know it) to be an inevitable, harmonious, organic necessity. The third factor, Weber, de-emphasized the economic dimension and, among other things, caused Warner to focus exclusively on individual action. Class was recast as an

individualistic dilemma, i.e. “the lives of many are destroyed because they do not understand the workings of social class” (Warner et al. 1949: 5). Conformity to the status quo, and a Weberian ‘independent politics in action,’ were Warner’s prescribed solutions: “To live successfully and adaptively in America,” writes Warner, “every one of us must adjust his life to each of these contradictions, not just one of them, and we must make the most of each” (Warner et al. 1949: 5).

Social Class in America was more concerned with *measuring* stratification and less concerned with *understanding* it: “This book on social status is a scientific tool with a detailed set of directions for understanding and measuring social class and making such knowledge useful to all social scientists, to class analysts, and, where necessary, to those who deal with more practical matters” (Warner et al. 1949: vii). According to Warner himself, the primary purpose of the book is to provide a method for “how to identify any class level,” “how to study and measure it,” and “how to find the class level of an individual” (Warner et al. 1949: v). So, it is another historical indicator of the ‘quantitative turn’ away from social theory and towards what Coser refers to as methodological fetishism and routine activities. Warner claims that “social scientists have been more concerned with their theories and with quarreling among themselves about what social class is than with studying its realities in the daily lives of people...they have lagged behind novelists in investigating what our classes are, how they operate in our social life, and what effect they have on our individual lives” (Warner et al. 1949: 6). Warner compares the social scientist to a geographer; in studying the status structure of a community “he must identify, describe, locate, interrelate, and measure the facts about the structure of social interaction” and then report it in the form of a “map” (Warner et al.

1949: 34). Of course, when profits are at stake, critical inquiry and academic debate gets devalued.

Next, Warner was hoping to aid capitalism, mainly because businesses are “forever at the mercy of the status evaluations of their customers” who desire “powerful symbols of status and social class,” so the book will hopefully “greatly aid them in measuring and understanding the human beings who make up their markets” (Warner et al. 1949: vii). Understanding status can help corporations to better understand consumers and market their products.

Finally, Warner mainly wanted to know the effect class has on the individual and how individuals can use said knowledge to better conform to the status quo (Warner et al. 1949: 7). Social Class in America is intended to be a sort of self-help manual for social climbing individuals, or an “easy means” to “know a situation and how to adjust to it,” so that it may serve as a “corrective instrument which will permit men and women to better evaluate their social situations and thereby better adapt themselves to social reality” (Warner et al. 1949: v-vii, 5). He was apparently oblivious to the moral problems inherent with such conformity.

Moving on, Warner provides professional sociology with two new methods for studying stratification: “Evaluated Participation” and “Index of Status Characteristics” (Warner et al. 1949: vi, 35).

The first, “Evaluated Participation,” is based on the “propositions that those who interact in the social system of a community evaluate the participation of those around them, that the place where an individual participates is evaluated, and that members of the community are explicitly or implicitly aware of the ranking and translate their

evaluations of such social participation into social class ratings that can be communicated to the investigator” (Warner et al. 1949: 35). It is a qualitative method in which the “field man” uses his “interviewing skill” (Warner et al. 1949: 35). Evaluative Participation employs six basic techniques. First, informants from diverse backgrounds provide the researcher with perceived “rank orders” which are later “matched” and “counted” to establish a “Social-Class Configuration” (Warner et al. 1949: 37). Second, individuals can then be “rated” by the analyst based on “superior or inferior symbols” identified in the interviews (Warner et al. 1949: 37). Third, individuals and families are assigned to classes by the analyst based on their “reputation” provided by informants (Warner et al. 1949: 37). The fourth technique allows the researcher to rate individuals and families based on comparisons to other informants (Warner et al. 1949: 37). Fifth, individuals and families can be assigned to a category based on “qualified informants” (Warner et al. 1949: 38). Sixth, individuals and families can be ranked based on “Institutional Membership,” or “Real Interconnectedness” to cliques, associations, churches, etc. (Warner et al. 1949: 38). Evaluated Participation is therefore defined as a qualitative method that uses interviews to establish rankings based on the following variables: inclusion/exclusion, relative status, identification with symbols, and individual traits (Warner et al. 1949: 38-39). Of course, the problem with this method is that it relies entirely on individuals’ *subjective perceptions* of status, i.e. does not consider *historical* or *objective* realities whatsoever, let alone *actual* behaviors. You could essentially have a thousand factory workers who were brainwashed into thinking they were the bourgeoisie and if you employed Warner’s “Evaluated Participation” you would never know the difference!

The second method, the “Index of Status Characteristics,” is based on the propositions that “economic and other prestige factors are highly important and closely correlated with social class” and that these “social and economic factors, such as talent, income, and money, if their potentialities for rank are to be realized, must be translated into social-class behavior acceptable to the members of any given social level of the community” (Warner et al. 1949: 39). This is a quantitative method that “measures the socioeconomic levels of the community” and, in combination with qualitative analysis, allows the social scientist to “say what is meant in socioeconomic terms by such class concepts as upper, middle, and lower class” or “higher or lower socioeconomic levels” (Warner et al. 1949: 35). It is sold to the reader as being a completely “objective method” (Warner et al. 1949: 39) that is less complex, easily learned, and easily applied (Warner et al. 1949: vi). It is an early prototype of contemporary SES.

The “Index of Status Characteristics” is essentially “an index of socioeconomic factors” that “can be used with a considerable degree of confidence as an index of social-class position as well” (Warner et al. 1949: 39). The four variables that Warner recommends for the index are 1) “Occupation,” 2) “Source of Income,” 3) “House Type,” and 4) “Dwelling Area.” He later reintroduces 5) “Amount of Income” and 6) “Education” as additional variables; however, these were ultimately removed to make the index more ‘accurate’ and statistically reliable (Warner et al. 1949: 163-164). Each variable is broken down further and Warner provides a lengthy, detailed discussion for each one.

Ratings of each variable are made on seven-point Likert scales, which are then weighted based on “importance” (Warner et al. 1949: 41). The weights are supposedly

“designed to secure the maximum degree of social-class prediction” (Warner et al. 1949: 123). “Occupation” is multiplied by four, “Source of Income” by three, “House Type” by three, and “Dwelling Area” by two before finally being added together into a summation scale (Warner et al. 1949: 41, 123). The results are then finally stratified into arbitrary categories, or “social-class equivalents,” that “can be done in any one of several different ways” (Warner et al. 1949: 41).

We cannot be sure if the “Index of Status Characteristics” merely *reflected* or in fact *inspired* the ‘white flight,’ suburban sprawl, and urban decay that occurred over the next few decades; however, one thing is certain, and this is that Warner’s scale is very problematic for several other reasons. The first is that, despite the claim that the index is “objective,” Warner immediately backslides into social constructivism, arguing that:

In order for it to be a reliable instrument and an accurate index of social class, each of the four characteristics and the points in their scales must reflect how Americans feel and think about the relative worth of each job, the sources of income which support them, and the evaluation of their houses and neighborhoods in which they live, for it is not the house, or job, or the income, or the neighborhood that is being measured so much as the evaluations that are in the backs of our heads—evaluations placed there by our cultural tradition and our society...[they] are no more than evaluated symbols... (Warner et al. 1949: 40)

In other words, Warner’s notion of “objective” is, again, actually quite subjective, and social class is limited to *ideas* in our heads. He is so concerned about disconnecting socioeconomic status from political economy and material reality that, in the end, his analysis of class never touches solid ground at any point. Both of his methods lead us to statistical measurements of arbitrary categories. For example, Warner admits that

“ethnicity has a definite effect—usually a limiting one—on social participation in the community” and can “pull down” individuals in particular ethnic groups (Warner et al. 1949: 186-187). But he isn’t willing to place this downward mobility into a holistic, structural context. Instead, he keeps his analysis relative, arguing that “the relationship between social class and socioeconomic status may vary from ethnic group to ethnic group” and “from community to community” (Warner et al. 1949: 128). His notion of class is something that we *construct*—in other words, Warner’s notion of “class” here becomes “socioeconomic status,” or something that is not real, which is very different from Marx’s original concept of class, which is something that is, more than anything, lived, and all too real.

PETER BLAU & OTIS DUNCAN

Influenced by Sorokin and Warner, a more descriptive, statistical treatment of stratification culminated in the work of Blau & Duncan in the 1960's (Burawoy 2004: 5). The American Occupational Structure not only provides us with the contemporary SES model, but also marks the point in which our attentions are directed *away* from social class and *towards* a 'value-free' snapshot of individual mobility within a supposedly 'meritocratic' occupational structure.

Blau & Duncan basically seek to "describe the patterns of social mobility in some detail, to estimate the influence of various factors on occupational life chances, and to ascertain a few consequences of socio-economic status and mobility" (1965: 4). In particular, they are interested in the effects of education, ethnic background, community size, migration, and parental family (Blau & Duncan 1965: 4). Understanding this is important because in their view the "occupational structure is the foundation of the stratification system of contemporary industrial society...class differences come to rest primarily on occupational positions and the economic advantages and powers associated with them" (Blau & Duncan 1967: vii). Therefore, they believe that "the understanding of social stratification in modern society is best promoted by the systematic investigation of occupational status and mobility" (Blau & Duncan 1967: 5). However, they are very quick to distinguish this project from grand theorizing:

Neither have we set ourselves the objective of formulating a theory of stratification on the basis of results of our empirical investigation. This does not mean that we have restricted our responsibility to reporting ‘the facts’ ...or that we favor an artificial separation of scientific research and theory. On the contrary, we seek to place our research findings into a theoretical framework and suggest theoretical implications for them. To bring theoretical considerations to bear upon our empirical data on occupational achievement and mobility, however, is a much more modest undertaking than to construct a theory of stratification. The latter is not the aim of this book... (Blau & Duncan 1967: 2)

Blau & Duncan claim that Marx believed that social theories should be justified by their “action implications” and not by “objective scientific merits” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 2). Of course, this is a gross misinterpretation. Next, we are reminded that Marx, Durkheim, or any other “broad theories of social class” have not really influenced American sociology, and that “most empirical studies of occupational mobility never refer to these theories” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 2-3). This is supposedly because “empirical studies of social status and mobility in one society cannot make the relevant comparisons...because each society constitutes merely a single case” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 3). On the contrary, in their opinion grand theories involve a more “comparative framework,” which transcends a single empirical study (Blau & Duncan 1967: 3). Furthermore, they recognize that empirical studies tend to ignore “other institutional conditions in a society that produce the characteristic class structure” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 3). So, Blau & Duncan assert that the general design of their “mobility research” is not suited for grand theorizing because “it centers attention not on the institutional differences between societies but on the differential conditions that affect occupational achievements and mobility...” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 3-4). So, here the measurement of

SES is portrayed as a ‘different project’ than class-based analyses, and that sociologists studying stratification sans social class are just doing something else entirely—that is equally important, of course.

Their primary goal is to illustrate the “analytic procedures” they used, which mainly rely on statistical regression (Blau & Duncan 1965: 4). They recommend said procedures because “it is a very efficient method of large-scale data reduction” and because “it permits, consequently, the simultaneous examination of the interrelations of fairly large numbers of variables, especially if computers are used” (Blau & Duncan 1965: 4). They used official data from the United States’ census, both from the regular “Current Population Survey” and from a supplementary questionnaire that they designed to sample over twenty-thousand American men from non-farming backgrounds (Blau & Duncan 1965: 4-5). They do not really explain why women were excluded.

They then used the data collected to calculate “SES,” or “socio-economic status” scores (Blau & Duncan 1965: 5). Here SES is essentially a scale which ranges from 0 to 96 (Blau & Duncan 1965: 5). It is calculated based on three variables, or “predictors,” which consist of 1) income, 2) education, and 3) the N.O.R.C. prestige rating (Blau & Duncan 1965: 5). The latter is cited as being derived from the National Opinion Research Center’s 1947 “Jobs and Occupations” report (Blau & Duncan 1965: 23). They note a strong correlation (.91) for the scale (Blau & Duncan 1965: 5). An average of the scores for each “conventional major groups of nonfarm occupations” is then presented, e.g. “professionals and technicians” average 75, “managers, proprietors, and officials” have a mean score of 57, while “unskilled workers” are at the bottom with 7 (Blau & Duncan 1965: 5).

Several conclusions emerge from these calculations. Because they calculate a weak to moderate correlation between father 's and son's occupational status, Blau & Duncan argue that "there is much occupational mobility in the United States," though they admit that it is not "excessive" compared to other Western countries (Blau & Duncan 1965: 6). More importantly, the relationship between father's and son's occupational status is "mediated in the United States by education" (Blau & Duncan 1965: 7).

To their credit, Blau & Duncan admit that "social origins also have a definite effect on occupational opportunities that has nothing to do with educational qualifications" (Blau & Duncan 1965: 8). They are obliged to discuss race and ethnicity; however, they explain away this inequality meritocratically through "differential access to educational facilities" and various groups having "lower social origins than whites" (Blau & Duncan 1965: 8-9). For example, "discrimination notwithstanding," they mainly blame racial inequality on "serious educational handicaps" (Blau & Duncan 1965: 8). They then hint at a problematic reality: "occupational advancement" depends on education, but there is a relationship between the education an individual receives and the SES of their parents (Blau & Duncan 1965: 7). Blau & Duncan want to avoid this issue, however, and instead focus more on the *effect* education has on social mobility in general (Blau & Duncan 1965: 7). Put simply, formal education becomes a hallowed solution to inequality.

Growing up in or near a large city is also an occupational advantage due to the labor market and educational opportunities (Blau & Duncan 1965: 17). However, Blau & Duncan also discover that individuals with the highest SES scores live in the "suburban

fringe,” and that larger cities tend to have higher scores than smaller cities (1965: 11). The lowest average is typically rural areas (Blau & Duncan 1965: 11). While there is no definite “pattern” presented, migrants tend to have significantly lower scores than non-migrants (Blau & Duncan 1965: 12-15).

They also discuss the family, asserting that smaller family-size produces higher SES (Blau & Duncan 1965: 17). They conclude that “a man’s chances of occupational success are impeded by many siblings” (Blau & Duncan 1965: 17). This seems to be a spurious correlation, however—betraying the danger of analyzing social class solely through abstract statistical calculations—because it confuses causation with effect, i.e. lower class families tend to bear more children because of cultural factors, lack of family planning, a need for more labor, etc. So, one could argue that Blau & Duncan are here ignoring class reproduction. They later even admit this, writing that “the superior occupational achievements of children from small families are largely accounted for by the better economic conditions in which they find themselves...” (Blau & Duncan 1965: 20).

Blau & Duncan conclude that patterns of mobility indicate just two “class boundaries,” essentially dividing up Americans into three broad classes: 1) middle class or white-collar, 2) working class or blue-collar, and 3) agricultural class or farm workers (Blau & Duncan 1967: 78). “No other possible division among occupations,” they claim, “sets such clear-cut limits on downward movements” but these divisions “permits upward mobility in excess of chance” (Blau & Duncan 1967: 78). The “lowest occupations” of each class function as “distinctive entry occupations” through which individuals move between classes (Blau & Duncan 1967: 79). Social class and inequality is here obscured

by economic 'sector', hiding the power relations and historical inequalities that produce stratification.

There are three interesting characteristics found in Blau & Duncan's research.

First, quite surprisingly, they were under no illusions that they were theoretically biased:

Confronted by the same set of qualitative data, two men do not necessarily arrive at the same conclusion regarding the empirical 'facts' of the case, let alone regarding the inferences to be drawn from them...Orders of significance and priority of emphasis may fail to coincide, and what looks like an interesting discovery from one point of view seems trivial from another. (Blau & Duncan 1967: viii-ix)

Second, Blau & Duncan believe that the major limitation of their study is that it fails to account for the "different dimensions of social stratification" prescribed by Weber (Blau & Duncan 1967: 5). This not only betrays the powerful effect Weber is still having on professional sociologists in the United States, but somewhat undermines the very reasons that professional sociology embraces their model, i.e. because it is supposedly the epitome of 'value-free' and 'multi-dimensional' analysis.

Third, they argue that using the sole criterion of economic location is no longer adequate for studying stratification, supposedly because the "men in control" are "themselves employees of corporations" and "the economy is dominated by corporations rather than individual proprietors" (Blau & Duncan 1967: 6). While economic location is most significant, "occupational position" is assumed to be more related to one's "prestige status" (Blau & Duncan 1967: 6). What this really does is detach occupation from social structure and economic location, and place it into an idealistic hierarchy of subjective perceptions, which are more often than not the product of ideology and social institutions.

“Prestige status” is therefore, more than anything, a convenient way of maintaining the status quo because it reproduces power relations and avoids putting occupations into a hierarchy of real power relations.

Consequently, wholeheartedly embracing Blau & Duncan, American sociologists have since *replaced* class-based theories with this conceptual model of “socio-economic status” or “SES” (Burawoy 2004: 5; Ferris & Stein 2010: 213; Macionis 2007: 269). Contemporary SES is essentially a multi-dimensional ranking based on four variables: income, wealth, education, and occupational prestige (Macionis 2007: 269, 280-282).

The problem is that, lacking a good theoretical foundation, SES simply measures *distributive* aspects of social class, i.e. individual characteristics of people within a class structure (Coser 1975: 694). It ignores *relational* aspects of social class: “There is no concern here with the ways in which differential class power and social advantage operate in predictable and routine ways, through specifiable social interactions between classes or interest groups, to give shape to determinate social structures and to create differential life chances” (Coser 1975: 694). SES limits our ability to provide a full accounting of major societal forces (Coser 1975: 695). According to Coser (1975: 695), SES consequently gives us a “bowdlerized” version of social stratification that oversimplifies and distorts our analysis.

Coser (1975: 694) also suggests that there is a historical relationship between methodological fetishism and SES. Exclusive concern for a precise measurement of the distributive aspects draws attention away from more important aspects of class, including the monopolization of socio-political mechanisms, the interdependence of wealth and poverty, institutional factors, differential location, etc. (Coser 1975: 694-695). In other

words, SES does not account for power or conflict, the historical aspects of class, or macro-level social structures. It ignores important factors, such as the role race, gender discrimination, and social networks play in reproducing social class (Waldinger & Lichter 2003).

The SES model is highly influenced in American ideology of individual achievement (Coser 1975: 695). It limits the study of stratification and inequality to “a study of mobility within a hierarchy of occupational prestige” (Burawoy 2004: 6). Much like Warner, this is much more compatible with capitalist ideology and the American myth of meritocracy than class-based theories. However, social class is not limited to individual characteristics (Coser 1975: 694; Schwalbe 2008: 13).

Contemporary SES now *assumes* a natural statistical correlation between education, occupation, and income; however, recent trends have revealed this correlation to be weakening. College prices are rising, incomes for college graduates are falling, and student loan debts are crippling (Mooney 2008: 43). More and more people are graduating from college and finding themselves unable to find work, or, if they are able to find a job, they are being paid less and less (Jones & McClusky 2011). The average income for a new college graduate is just \$36,000 (Mooney 2008: 52). Professional employment is also less secure, with contingent workers now comprising 33 percent of the workforce (Mooney 2008: 72). 75% of college students rely on student loans to fund their education and the average undergraduate carries close to \$20,000 in student debt, with most graduate students owing up to \$46,000 or more (Mooney 2008: 48). More importantly, SES ignores affiliation and falsely treats all degrees as if they are equal (Schwalbe 2008: 76-80). Lumping education into broad statistical categories ultimately

helps to skew the statistics and hide the relationship between social class, educational attainment, and income.

While Blau & Duncan were aware of the theoretical limitations of SES, they unfortunately produced a Frankenstein monster that has since made its way through the history of American sociology. The contemporary profession more often than not takes the concept of SES for granted as *the* way to study stratification, frequently oblivious to its theoretical limitations, and consequently ignores crucial aspects of stratification and social class in American society.

E.P. THOMPSON

In reaction to professional sociology, Thompson attempted to take the concept of class away from bourgeois academics and give it back to the proletariat. He wanted to show that class is not defined by social scientists or intellectuals; rather, it is defined by “men as they live their own history” and “in the end, this is its only definition” (Thompson 1966: 11). He attacks Marxists who define class “almost mathematically,” i.e. in terms of a theoretical structure or “so many men who stand in a certain relation to production” (Thompson 1966: 10). On the other hand, he is critical of sociologists who insist that class is merely a “pejorative theoretical construct, imposed upon the evidence” (Thompson 1966: 10). This is an implicit reference to functionalists who regard class as “a component of social structure,” and use this notion to assert that class-consciousness is a “bad thing” simply because it disturbs social harmony (Thompson 1966: 10). Thompson was especially critical of the “methodological preoccupations of certain sociologists” (Thompson 1966: 11). Consequently, drawing on Marx's assertion that people make history but not the conditions of their own choosing, he mainly focused on class as a *lived experience*, attempting to give the “explanatory power” back to those experiencing said conditions (Skeggs 2004: 41-42).

In doing so, Thompson argues that class is a “structured *process*, made by those who lived structural divisions of labor,” i.e. class-consciousness is the defining feature of class itself (Skeggs 2004: 41). In his view, the working class is “present at its own making,” and, more importantly, this “making” is an active process that the working class plays a part in (Thompson 1966: 1). For Thompson, class can only be understood as a “social and cultural formation” that arises from “processes which can only be studied as

they work themselves out over a considerable historical period” (Thompson 1966: 11).

He even goes as far as saying that “if we stop history at any given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences” (Thompson 1966: 11). He thereby redefines the concept of class:

By class I understand an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is a *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a “structure,” nor even as a “category,” but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships...class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. (Thompson 1966: 1)

Our concept of class is nothing but a “descriptive term” that “loosely ties together a bundle of discrete phenomena” and ultimately “evades as much as it defines” (Thompson 1966: 1). Trying to “anatomize the structure” of class relations or produce a “pure specimen” is futile because class involves a fluid relationship that “evades analysis” (Thompson 1966: 1). Furthermore, there cannot be “distinct classes” with an “independent being” because class is relational (Thompson 1966: 1). Rather, the idea of class, what it *is* and what it *means*, is owned and managed by the people who actively create it.

Thompson's intentions were seemingly to show that ‘class’ is something that *really happens*, regardless of academic debate or methodology. Unfortunately, he used problematic language and perhaps went too far in his polemic against social theorists and

statisticians. First, the language used by Thompson portrays class as something entirely subjective: it has no objective foundations (in an epistemological sense) that can be studied; and, without class-consciousness, it seems to vanish altogether. Would laborers in a factory who *believed* they were upper class still be considered working class? Second, this also limits the sociological study of class to long-term subjective perceptions. Class cannot be understood cross-sectionally or in the short-term, and we have no bearings for what class is in the present, at least at the macro-level. Third, Thompson removes the objective structure from class-analysis, thereby making class relations limited to experiences and interests, and stripping away class as a political or socio-economic phenomenon. This makes Thompson attractive to post-modern theoreticians who want to portray class as a contextual social construction—without expressing any objective 'truth.' Worse still, denying that class can be seen as a category makes Thompson utterly useless to professional sociologists who want to study class empirically.

Of course, should we forgive Thompson for his rhetoric and appreciate him for his main point—that class is something that happens, and that it is an idea that belongs to working people, regardless of academic debate—then we see that he is in fact an important figure in the history of American sociology. Furthermore, Thompson was not against, say, showing how technology influences the idea of class, as he did in his well known essay Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism, which explores “How far, and in what ways, did this shift in time-sense affect labour discipline, and how far did it influence the inward apprehension of time of working people?” (Thompson [1967])

1982: 300). He just wanted to show that class is all too real, but perhaps not in the sense that professional sociologists prefer to perceive reality.

ANTHONY GIDDENS

Giddens produced a mixed-bag of complex ideas that must be considered because he had a major impact on American sociology. First, Giddens's most worthy contribution is in the realm of practice theory, and in particular the agency-structure debate (Ritzer 2008: 85). Second, while Giddens is not a Marxist, and incorporates a wide range of theories, Marxian theories had a major influence on his work (Ritzer 2008: 395). Because of this, Giddens is, ultimately, a leading figure in both the "critical responses to structural-functionalism" and "the contemporary revival of Marxist scholarship in the West" (Giddens 1973: 15-16). He presents a critical summary of Marxist and Weberian thought that has become highly influential. Finally, one of his central projects was to provide sociologists with a new analysis of stratification and social class.

Giddens's "structuration theory" is one of the most renowned efforts to integrate agency and structure (Ritzer 2008: 395). He argues that mainstream sociology has historically focused too much on structural constraints and not enough on human actors. Rejecting the over-determination of mainstream structural-functionalism, he proposes that structure and agency should be viewed as an interdependent "duality," i.e. that social structures are both constraining *and* enabling (Ritzer 2008: 85; 396). In the process of presenting this theory, Giddens articulates a new definition of "social structure" that is steeped in idealism; which has, in many ways, since become quite popular in American sociology.

Social structures, according to Giddens, are redefined as "the structuring properties [rules and resources]...the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend

them systematic form...structure is what gives form and shape to social life, but it is not *itself* that form and shape” (Ritzer 2008: 398). For Giddens, social structures are not comparable to “the girders of a building” or “the skeleton of a body” (Ritzer 2008: 398). Consequently, a social structure does not exist in time and space, but “only exists in and through the activities of human agents” (Ritzer 2008: 398). It is instead conceived to be a dialectical relationship between ideas and actions, or between institutions and individuals, that leads to social reproduction (Ritzer 2008: 398-399). This definition of course reminds us of a Verstehen-induced detachment from the material world that is all too common in sociological theory, and serves to ensure a clear-cut break from Marx.

When reading Giddens, we should keep in mind that his “new framework” is heavily influenced by his own political leanings, especially his relationship with the bourgeois London School of Economics and the Tony Blair administration. While the mainstream has since perceived him to be a vehicle of Marxist thought, he is far from being a Marxist in the traditional sense; in fact, he explicitly rejects the vast majority of Marx's ideas. Comparable to Durkheim, Giddens is more of a moderate who seems to embrace an idealistic capitalism that is perceived to be driven and maintained by a utopian social democracy (Giddens 1973: 285). Like Durkheim, he remains charitable to Marx, but goes off in a completely different direction:

I make no bones about declaring that new departures are needed in contemporary social theory...But I might stress that this book should not be regarded as the latest in a well-populated line of attempts to 'refute' Marx by showing how inappropriate his ideas are to the industrial order which has progressed far beyond nineteenth-century capitalism. I do believe however that, in a fundamental sense, in the industrialised third of the world, we live in a society which is both 'post-Marxist' and 'post-bourgeois,' although not in a society which is 'post-capitalist,' let alone 'post-industrial.' (Giddens 1973: 19)

Giddens's metatheoretical assumptions can be summarized as follows. First and foremost, he outright rejects Marx's materialism, arguing that "it is not legitimate to claim that, because men must eat to live, their mode of life is necessarily determined by the manner in which they produce what they eat...It is even less valid to hold that the structure characteristic of a given society is controlled by the type of technique employed in production" (Giddens 1973: 87). Of course, this is easier for an upper class scholar to say than a manual worker who spends half his day working on a machine.

That said, this belief has several notable effects: while Giddens does not *completely* reject historical analysis, he intends to leave us skeptical of historical analyses undertaken by classical theorists. He argues that class-based theories have been "obfuscated" by oversimplified comparisons between historical periods (Giddens 1973: 19).

Second, much like Weber, rejecting materialism allows him to detach the social from both technology and economic behavior. Giddens denounces the assertion that the characteristic nature of a society is governed by technological development, and rejects the conclusion that social evolution is consequently teleological, because it supposedly distorts our analysis of stratification (Giddens 1973: 19). In his opinion "technocratic

theories” and terms such as “post-industrial society” and “counter-culture” should be “severely censured” (Giddens 1973: 21-22). However, while he explicitly rejects materialism, he is also critical of Weberian theories. To his credit, Giddens does assert that “socio-economic infrastructure,” and not just “cultural values,” should be considered when trying to understand social development; however, he proposes the primary determinants of class structures are “political influences” (Giddens 1973: 20-21). In summary, he seems to walk a fine line between Marx and Weber that retreats into the safe and well-ordered haven of legitimate political institutions.

Several other challenges to Marxian theories are offered. Giddens also believes that the concept of “class structuration” should replace the notion of the “existence” or “non-existence” of social classes, i.e. because stratification is inevitable we should now discuss “types and levels” (Giddens 1973: 20). Next, the Marxian theory that capitalism is systematically superseded by state intervention in economic life is to be turned on its head: according to Giddens, capitalism actually becomes “fully developed” through state intervention (Giddens 1973: 22). Furthermore, state socialism is not the “transcendence” of capitalist society, but merely a different form of industrial society that is manifested from the “paradox of socialism,” which is defined as the conflict between 1) “freedom” and 2) “equality,” or between 1) the principle of economic regulation “according to human need” and 2) the rejection of “exploitative domination of man over man” (Giddens 1973: 22). Finally, “convergence theory,” which proposes that the differences between capitalist states and socialist states are naturally diminishing, should be rejected based on the latter propositions (Giddens 1973: 21).

That said, Giddens refers to the issue of social classes and class conflict as “*the problem*” in sociology (Giddens 1973: 19). He is critical of both Marxism *and* mainstream sociology for failing to come to grips with social class. “For some while, as it is presented in the works of non-Marxist sociologists at least,” writes Giddens, “the concept of class seems to have become enveloped with a sort of atmosphere of seedy decay” (Giddens 1973: 9). Giddens critiques the “complete sterility” of Twentieth Century, orthodox Marxism because social theorists in this school were frequently reluctant to challenge dogma, reinterpret theories, or consider alternatives (Giddens 1973: 17-18). On the other hand, professional sociologists perceive 'class' to be outdated and have prematurely rejected it based on false premises, or because unreasonable demands have been directed at the concept itself (Giddens 1973: 10). The concept is also harmed by “confusion and ambiguity” in the discipline, and because there have been few “distinctive and considered attempts to revise the *theory* of class upon a broad scale” (Giddens 1973: 10). The result is, of course, that many sociologists have grown “dissatisfied with it as an instrument of sociological analysis” (Giddens 1973: 10).

In reaction to this, The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies consequently begins where Ossowski left off: in attempting to better understand concepts drawn from the “European tradition of class theory” and thereby “work out a new framework” for sociological analysis (Giddens 1973: 9). In doing so, Giddens takes a grand, philosophical approach. He mainly discusses class at the level of what he calls “abstract models,” or theories which apply to all types of class systems, which is distinct from “concrete models,” or descriptions of the specific characteristics of social classes in particular societies (Giddens 1973: 27). He believed that this was Marx’s approach to

conceptualizing social class. Giddens also explicitly rejects the contemporary SES model, writing: “this is not the same as saying that class is a 'multi-dimensional' phenomenon which can be analyzed as an aggregate of several hierarchical 'dimensions,' as is sometimes claimed by certain of those (mis)interpreters of Weber” (Giddens 1973: 273). However, Giddens does not provide us with any new concepts to understand class, nor does he offer a clear framework of concepts. He simply asserts that “class structuration has most strongly developed at three levels, separating the upper, middle and working classes” (Giddens 1973: 273). These three levels could supposedly change at any time, however (Giddens 1973: 273). More importantly, his idealistic notion of social structure ultimately limits his theory of stratification because it keeps him from seeing the relationships between classes, or from connecting classes to economic reality. He argues that “class divisions cannot be drawn like lines on a map, and the extent to which class structuration occurs depends on the interaction of various sets of factors...” (Giddens 1973: 273). Here he ironically takes the Weberian route away from conflict—into a confused pluralism meant to avoid *real* economics and power interests.

Giddens was mainly concerned with understanding social class because he favored capitalism. He does recognize that capitalism necessarily implies a class society (Giddens 1973: 273). However, in his view, capitalism has not maintained feudal relations, as Marx believed, supposedly because 1) class-systems are by default “open” to social mobility, 2) the dominant class is not as “clearly distinct a grouping” as the feudal aristocracy, and 3) class itself is a “variable phenomenon” (Giddens 1973: 273). Giddens counters that “the basic structural trait of capitalist society is that of an institutional mediation of power involving the separation of the 'political' and the 'economic,' such that

the characteristic modes of participation in one sphere are not determined by those in another” (Giddens 1973: 286). He believes that capitalism operates through “pluralism,” which he defines as “a reliance on markets and plans and group-bargaining; towards several or even many centres of power rather than more or only one; towards infinitely complex mixtures of rationality and irrationality, morality and immorality, principle and pragmatism; towards many managers and even more who are managed; towards many conflicts over rules and rewards” (Giddens 1973: 274). Consequently, in Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics, Giddens attempts to reconstitute “radical politics” according to a “utopian realism,” seeking to strike a balance between utopian ideals and the realities of modern life, including the acceptance of many aspects of capitalism and the rejection of many aspects of socialism (Ritzer 2008: 428).

Of course, these assumptions are wrong: we know that the political and economic are *not* separate because the economically powerful have significantly more legitimate political influence than the lower classes, and that they actively influence political outcomes. More importantly, Piven (2006) has shown that positive political outcomes usually occur through *disruption* of the capitalist system, not through normal politics or institutional mediation—as Giddens would have us believe.

In summary, though far less influential in British and European circles, Giddens has been highly influential in the United States (Ritzer 2008: 425). While his theoretical perspective was ultimately skewed by his own ideology and social location, Giddens remains an important figure in the history of American sociology because, more than anything, he did help to revive the theoretical importance of Marx and inspire contemporary discussions of stratification and social class.

ERIK OLIN WRIGHT

Wright is considered by many to be *the* leading expert on Marxist class analysis in American sociology. He began his career attempting to “clarify the critical contours of the current debates within Marxist theory about the proper way to conceptualize the class structure of advanced capitalist societies” (Wright 1978: 2). He mainly wants to show non-Marxists that Marxian theories are compatible with professional sociology and can be useful in “pursuing systematic empirical research,” i.e. Wright hopes to demonstrate that “Marxist class analysis could be carried out with the same empirical rigor as non-Marxist stratification research and that it could generate sociologically interesting empirical results” (Wright 1997: 545).

At the same time, he seeks to show Marxists and other “Left-wing scholars” that “knowledge within class analysis could be pursued using conventional quantitative research methods” (Wright 1997: 545). Wright therefore seeks to “reconstruct Marxist thought” so that it accepts “systematic quantitative investigation” (Wright 1997: 546). He is frustrated that Marxists are generally skeptical of quantitative methodology and prefer qualitative approaches, e.g. historical analysis (Wright 1997: 545-546). “Traditional Marxist skepticism toward quantitative methods,” argues Wright, “goes beyond a simple judgment about the appropriate kinds of data needed...it has also reflected a general hostility by many (although not all) Marxists to anything that smacked of 'bourgeois social science'” (Wright 1997: 546). Consequently, Wright's overall project is to offer sociologists the “foundations of a neo-Marxist class analysis” (Wright 2005: 7). Said analysis seems to wholeheartedly embrace professional norms.

Wright is critical of concepts that portray class as a simple polarization. He argues that “the category of all wage-earners is far too heterogeneous in its basic interests to provide a structural basis for class formation. It is simply implausible to claim that top managerial positions are part of the proletariat, have class interests fundamentally identical to those of industrial workers and fundamentally opposed to capitalists” (Wright 1978: 19). At the same time, he is also critical of SES and various Weberian theories that focus on *exchange* as an indicator of class: “The claim that skills and credentials constitute a special form of property comes very close to Weber's and Giddens’ arguments that it is market capacity that defines class location...[On the contrary] many workers with considerable skills and credentials lose all control over their labor once they enter the employment relation, and thus should be considered fully proletarianized...skills constitute a qualitatively different kind of property” (Wright 1978: 21-22). Moving away from these cynical Marxists and neo-Weberian theorists, Wright basically wants to shift the emphasis to a quantitative analysis of “relations of domination/subordination” (Wright 1978: 50).

Wright is a “committed partisan” in the “elaboration and defense of the structural relations” of what he calls “contradictory functions” or “contradictory structural relations” (Wright 1978: 5). In this view, “not all positions within the production process fall unambiguously into a single class location” because some locations are “objectively torn between classes” (Wright 1978: 5). In a somewhat Weberian maneuver, class becomes multi-dimensional, not according to the dimensions of economic class, social status, and political party, but instead according to dimensions of social production. Wright explicitly divides production into “three interconnected dimensions” of

domination and subordination: 1) “real economic ownership” or “money capital,” or the flow of investments and accumulation; 2) “possessions” or “physical capital,” which are the actual means of production; and 3) “labor,” defined as “the laboring activity of the direct producers within production” (Wright 1978: 6-7). He next puts Marxist class struggles into this context, defining class relations as “a polarized, antagonistic relation along all three of these dimensions,” with capitalists dominating labor through control of the first and second dimensions (Wright 1978: 7). Classes are then defined according to their location within this maelstrom. For example, the working class is squarely situated within the dimension of labor, and mostly excluded from the other two dimensions.

“Other classes enter into the analysis” at lower levels of abstraction when sociologists study particular societies because “pre-capitalist relations of production exist side-by-side with capitalist relations” and because the three dimensions “need not necessarily coincide perfectly” and this “non-correspondence” generates “contradictory structural relations” (Wright 1978: 8). These contradictory classes include: 1) *managers and supervisors*, who are on one hand ultimately excluded from control or money capital (relative to the capitalist class) but who, at the same time, maintain a “certain real degree of control of the physical means of production and over the labor of workers within production” (Wright 1978: 8); 2) *small employers* who occupy a location between the petit bourgeoisie and the capitalist class and, like the capitalist class, are in a relation of exploitation with workers, but at the same time, unlike the capitalist class, are often directly engaged with production and do not accumulate large amounts of capital (Wright 1978: 9); and 3) *semi-autonomous employees*, who occupy a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class because they “do have some real

control of their immediate physical means of production” but are usually “excluded from any control over money capital and the labor of others” (Wright 1978: 9).

Keep in mind that Wright argues that these classes are not contradictory because they are “pigeonholed,” or located between other classes in some hierarchy; rather, in his view they are contradictory because they “simultaneously share the relational characteristics of two distinct classes” and consequently “share class interests with two different classes, but have interests identical to neither” (Wright 1978: 10).

Furthermore, positions located “outside immediate class production,” including state employees, housewives, pensioners, students, etc., are “outside the class structure” because they are “situated within class relations through social relations other than production relationships” (Wright 1978: 11). Wright admits that his overall schema is problematic, somewhat arbitrary, and likely to be modified, but the schema is still superior because it provides “a fairly comprehensive way of locating positions within the social relations of production” (Wright 1978: 10).

Next, Wright continues the ‘quantitative turn’ and attempts to reconcile Marx with the methods of Sorokin, Warner, etc. We are to fill in these categories based on a quantitative methodology—i.e., statistics derived from survey research—that “operationalizes” these concepts using formulas that calculate scales of “self-employment,” “decision-making participation,” “authority,” “position within the formal hierarchy,” “managerial location,” and “autonomy” (Wright et al. 1982). His paper entitled “American Class Structure” supposedly “presents the first systematic investigation of the American class structure based on data from an explicitly Marxian, relational perspective” (Wright et al. 1982). Instead of defining classes according to

“occupations,” Wright sets out to define class categories “in terms of social relations of control over investments, decision-making, other peoples' work, and one's own work” using quantitative data from a national survey (Wright et al. 1982). He later presents a more complex, quantitative “class matrix” intended to provide “a general framework for the analysis of class” that supposedly portrays “the basic outlines of the class structure” (Wright 1985).

Besides catering to methodological fetishism, Wright's model throws us into an overly-complex and confused predicament. Because he is committed to portraying classes as contradictory, he ultimately reaches the conclusion, based on his matrix, that: “The American class structure cannot therefore be represented by any simply scheme of class polarization” because “close to half of all locations within the class structure have a 'contradictory character’” (Wright et al. 1982). In other words, half the population is somewhere *between* social classes according to Wright, which makes his theory unattractive and problematic. More than anything, this seems to be a theoretical distortion of Marx that is driven by methodological fetishism and professional norms; for Marx, the only inherent contradiction in capitalism was bourgeois exploitation, and, rather than being a natural result of ‘contradictory’ social locations, conflict *within* the class structure is related to this deliberate, active domination.

PIERRE BOURDIEU

A European theorist, Bourdieu has recently had a tremendous influence in the United States. Going back to Marx, Bourdieu's social theory tries to reunite the subjective and the objective, i.e. recognize the connection between the social and the material by presenting a model of the social world as a physical space (Ritzer 2008: 330). Distilled for simplicity, Bourdieu's theoretical model of society revolves around four concepts: 1) "fields," or arenas of social life that generate complex networks of rules and relations, and support specific practices necessary to maintain themselves; 2) "habitus," or the system of dispositions to action produced out of past conditioning and the structuring of one's actions towards stimuli in the field; 3) "practice," or actions that manifest through the mechanism of habitus in order to navigate the field; and 4) "capital," or various resources the individual attempts to acquire, convert, and use in practice (Ritzer 2008: 329). The latter includes economic capital (wealth), social capital (relationships), cultural capital (knowledge of how to practice in a particular field), and symbolic capital (prestige). Working together, these four processes form what we usually refer to as 'everyday life': "One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus of the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world, in other words the harmonization of agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from [all forms of] expression..." (Bourdieu 1977: 80).

Bourdieu hopes that understanding the essential relationship between fields, habitus, and practice will catalyze liberation. "The theory of knowledge," writes Bourdieu, "is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to

impose the principles of the construction of reality—in particular, social reality—is a major dimension of political power” (Bourdieu 1977:165). He argues that “doing one’s duty as a man means conforming to the social order, and this is fundamentally a question of respecting rhythms, keeping pace, not falling out of line” (Bourdieu 1977:161). His critique of taste is explicitly intended to undermine such conformity.

His social theory attempts to show just how arbitrary, malleable, and prescribed everyday life really is, thereby exposing what he refers to here as “doxa,” or aspects of our habitus which are routinely taken for granted through an “absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness” (Bourdieu 1977: 165-166; 168). Next, Bourdieu wants to expose how individuals are programmed to adhere to a “sense of limits” or “the sense of reality,” defined as “the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established social order” (Bourdieu 1977:164). In other words, the most fundamental feature of social control is to determine what is seen as *possible* and *impossible*. This includes a bourgeois maintenance of the “universe of discourse” in academics and the media, “a range of ideas which is either expressed or understood as containing the whole matter of discussion” (Bourdieu 1977: 170). It also includes the avoidance of class, because “everything conspires to conceal the relationship between work and its product” (Bourdieu 1977: 176).

Distinction basically refers us back to Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption. “Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication,” writes Bourdieu, “that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or

explicit mastery of a cipher or code...one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of knowledge (*savoir*)...the implementation of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code” (Bourdieu 1984: 2-3). Consumption and taste are the product of fields, related to social location, and consequently “bound up” in a habitus that is a characteristic of different classes and class fractions (Bourdieu 1984: 6). This means that our “cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education” (Bourdieu 1984: 1). Tastes consequently function as markers of social class (Bourdieu 1984: 2). One’s taste is embedded in class relations:

Taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall—and therefore befit—an individual occupying a given position in social space...a ‘sense of one’s place’, guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. (Bourdieu 1984: 466-467)

Again, Bourdieu is pointing all this out in an effort to liberate the masses from cultural domination. He shows that class conflict is centered on the struggle to define “cultural nobility” (Bourdieu 1984: 2). Studying consumption and taste *scientifically* is meant to “abolish the sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe” and overturn the bourgeois “denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment,” which all too often “implies an affirmation of superiority” upon the lower classes (Bourdieu 1984: 6-7).

According to Bourdieu, given what it knows, sociology must reflexively “use its own instruments to find out what it is and what it is doing, to try to better know where it

stands,” so that it “continually turns back onto itself the scientific weapons it produces” (Ritzer 2008: A-5). This includes an enlightened recognition of the strategies, of both individual sociologists and the discipline itself, that are employed to achieve “distinction,” or “euphemized assertions of power” (Ritzer 2008: A-6). Such a project is crucial because sociologists need to “avoid being the toy of social forces in [their] practice of sociology...to try to cleanse [their] work of...social determinants” (Ritzer 2008: A-6). This includes 'freeing' sociologists from the “symbolic violence” committed against them by other, more powerful sociologists (Ritzer 2008: A-6). Therefore, a sociology of sociology, rather than seeking to undermine sociology, is meant to effectively “free it from those forces which determine it” (Ritzer 2008: A-6).

Metatheorists, engaging in a systematic study of the underlying structure of sociology in general, as well as its various components and theories, are consequently performing a crucial task (Ritzer 2008: A-1). Consequently, one of Bourdieu’s main projects was “relating intellectual products and producers to their social conditions of existence” (Bourdieu 1984: xiii).

Bourdieu wants sociologists to “refuse the dichotomy” between the subjective and objective, to move beyond the opposition between “social physics,” or using statistics to depict “quantified expressions” of objective distributions on one hand, and “social semiology,” or the qualitative methods of deciphering subjective meanings, on the other hand (Bourdieu 1984: 482). He also explicitly rejects the identification of social classes according to “discrete groups” or “simple countable populations separated by boundaries” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). He instead wants sociologists to focus on defining social class according to the “practical knowledge” of agent-subjects; however, far from

being a denial of the material, this is because Bourdieu is reuniting the ‘social’ with material space, and consequently regards practical knowledge itself as being composed of “divisions and classifications which are no less objective than those of the balance sheets of social physics” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). Schemes of habitus thereby serve to “engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world” and “directly express the division of labour (between the classes, the age groups and the sexes)” or, in other words, “the division of the work of domination” (Bourdieu 1984: 466). A holistic understanding of fields, habitus, practices, and the various forms of capital employed in social phenomena therefore provides a more powerful theoretical understanding of social class than constructing “simple countable populations” or “aggregating the individual classifications” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). This is because Bourdieu’s theory allows us to understand the actual *mechanisms* of class reproduction.

Much like E.P. Thompson, Bourdieu argues that “a class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). However, Bourdieu offers us a profound new theory that re-incorporates the material aspects of social class in the conceptual form of fields and practices. This allows us to understand and appreciate the relationship between subjective and objective social phenomena.

Doing so is meant to emphasize “the relative autonomy of the logic of symbolic representations with respect to the material determinants of socio-economic condition” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). This is a fancy way of saying that culture is arbitrary, and that we are deliberately being programmed to perceive concrete material reality in a particular way—i.e., the bourgeoisie and upper classes maintain hegemony through effective social institutions, which shape our perceptions. Within “the individual or collective

classification struggles aimed at transforming the categories of perception and appreciation of the social world” the social world itself becomes “a forgotten dimension of the class struggle” (Bourdieu 1984: 483). Merely recognizing this fact, however, exposes the arbitrary nature of social reality, and the power relations underlying the assumptions of everyday life, thereby essentially freeing our minds from cultural domination. Put simply, Bourdieu is hoping we will all notice the elephant in the room, and become liberated through a theoretical understanding of social phenomena; this is much more instrumental than simply providing society with quantitative models of social stratification.

Synthesizing Marx with contemporary theories, Bourdieu arguably presents professional sociology with a superior theoretical framework for researching stratification and social class. Bourdieu's fields allow us to re-incorporate geographic analyses—environmental sociology, material culture, effects of technology, etc.—back into our research. The concept of habitus allows us to study how class is reproduced through an embodied culture, i.e. culture that is not abstract or free-floating in some abstract ether, but a pre-programmed culture that is, at the same time, strategically adapted by the agent-subject. Studying practice allows sociology to recognize a particular class as *a category of actual economic behaviors that occur within and through social structures*, which I would argue ought to be the defining feature of a social class. Finally, Bourdieuan capital allows us to analyze the resources that 1) maintain and reproduce power relations, 2) promote domination, and 3) catalyze social mobility. In summary, we have a comprehensive theory of class as it is being produced and re-produced:

social causes of class (fields, habitus, capital)-->**practice** (class itself)-->**effects** (social location, individual attributes, characteristics, values, and attitudes, etc.)

effects (social location, individual attributes, characteristics, values, and attitudes, etc.)
-->**practice** (class itself)-->**social causes of class** (fields, habitus, capital)

More importantly, Bourdieu also falls in line with E.P. Thompson's overall project of recognizing the *existential reality* of social class relations. The main problem throughout the history of American sociology is that, owing to a lack of substance, theoretical deficiencies, and methodological fetishism, professional sociology has more often than not confused the *effects* of class with *class itself*; more importantly, driven by ideology, location, and institutional effects, I have demonstrated that professional sociologists are also prone to avoid the *causes* of class. Put simply, our quantitative treatments of class, focusing on merely discovering statistical correlations between concepts, tend to limit the study of stratification to the assumed relationships between social location, lifestyle or culture, and other individualistic attributes. This approach not only fails to understand what class *is*—real, lived, economic behavior in a material world that produces a collective experience—but also fails to understand (theoretically) the actual *causes* and *mechanisms* of class. Seen in this way, research that merely draws correlations between the effects of class (e.g., wealth and income, education, and prestige) is clearly redundant, since economic practices that share a similar social location or organic function, and employ the same set of strategic capital, are of course going to manifest similar statistical outcomes.

However, Bourdieu's greatest limitation is that he often borderlines on French idealism, limits himself to cultural anthropology and tends to avoid alternative methods

of analysis. Bourdieu hastily rejects structuralism and structural Marxism (Ritzer 2008: 403). The task of future researchers will be to use Bourdieu's theory to construct better 'maps' of society, using it to analyze class more categorically, to apply it to particular societies, and to adapt it to the various qualitative and quantitative methods—not so much as the way in which Wright attempts to adapt Marx into a bourgeois paradigm, but instead to expand on Bourdieu's theories in a similar spirit of resistance.

DISCUSSION

Employing a sociology of knowledge, a critical literature review of the theories and concepts used to study social class throughout the history of American sociology reveals that ideology, social location, and social institutions have had negative effects on those researchers attempting to understand and explain social stratification. These effects need to be *recognized* and *acknowledged* so that they might be dealt with in future research, thereby allowing researchers to overcome their own limitations and hopefully conduct research that is more objective and instrumental.

Sociologists are obviously not, nor have they ever been, 'value-free.' Those sociologists who claim to be 'value-free' are frankly delusional or worse—attempting to mislead their audiences by using the illusion of objectivity as a rhetorical strategy. It would seemingly be much better for the individual researcher, the reader, the discipline, and the population being studied if the researcher would simply adopt benevolent values that favor the population and make them explicit, e.g. what Mills refers to as an adequate philosophy.

Many scholars are quick to claim that 'class' is an outdated concept. Nearly two decades ago, Pakulski & Waters argued that there is a “declining commitment to Marxism” and a “waning appeal of socialist ideologies” in the Western world, so “both the left and right are abandoning their preoccupation with class issue” (1996: 1). They denounced class-based theories of stratification altogether and caricature the project of 'class-analysis' as irrelevant and outdated (Pakulski & Waters 1996: 3). They claimed that the *idea* of class itself was simply going to fade away into the dustbin of history. Of course, it has not. The issue of social class has not gone away; if anything, it has become

more relevant, *more* important. My project is a testament to the fact that, despite the many bourgeois sociologists proclaiming the death of class throughout American history, the experiences of social class, as an all-too-real-fact, keeps the idea discussion alive. As long as the lower classes are being exploited by a powerful upper class minority, the idea of class will persist, despite the apologetic claims of bourgeois academicians.

'Class' therefore needs to be re-introduced as a mainstream *term* and *concept* in our discussions of inequality. American sociology has deliberately avoided the issue of social class and attempted to replace it with other terms and concepts which are less threatening to the status quo. Unfortunately, these concepts fail to reflect important aspects of stratification, and ultimately leave sociology biased towards the upper classes. "Class" as a word arguably conveys important, instrumental *meanings*—inherent power relationships, historical context, common destiny, fraternity, agency, struggle, and, most importantly, hope. If sociology is to form an adequate philosophy, better understand stratification, and promote the interests of the public, it must stop avoiding the issue of social class. Furthermore, 'class' categories must not be framed in such a way that class relations are downplayed or distorted, e.g. using terms such as 'working class' to soften a lower class existence, presenting numerous categories to make society appear more stratified than it actually is, or hiding material and economic relations under a shroud of 'prestige.'

Next, studying stratification cannot be limited to quantitative analysis. Good social theory is required, not only to construct and present accurate descriptions of stratification, but to understand the causes and effects of stratification. Because professional sociology has grown theoretically deficient, all too often the causes of social

class are confused with the effects, and vice versa. While quantitative analysis is certainly important, triangular approaches that incorporate historical analysis, qualitative methods, and critical theories must not be marginalized by the profession. A synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge and methods is necessary to better understand the phenomenon of social stratification.

One cannot simply rely on common *perceptions* of class to describe stratification because hegemony ensures that common perceptions are skewed to maintain the status quo, e.g. the lower classes are often deceived to believe that they are middle class workers, just as the middle classes are frequently duped into adopting bourgeois aspirations and a belief in unfettered meritocracy, also known as the ‘American dream.’ Therefore, class-consciousness can often be a poor indicator of class realities. Stratification is ultimately *structural*, i.e. classes are primarily caused by objective economic factors, so that in order to truly understand social class one must transcend subjective indicators. Researchers studying stratification and social class should attempt to construct ‘maps’ of society in order to showcase the structural relationships between groups.

One limitation of this project is that I have mainly focused on mainstream sociological theories and concepts of class. There are other important aspects of stratification that I have reluctantly had to omit, including politics, race, gender, and immigration. Unfortunately, much like social class, these topics often become the elephant in the room, and have historically been avoided, marginalized, or distorted by professional sociologists.

Understanding race is crucial to class-based theories because the division of labor, including “the labor process, work spaces, intra-class power relations, communities and neighborhoods—indeed, the class struggle itself” have been “racialized” (Kelley 1994: 26). This phenomenon is not limited to black America or ethnic minorities, but also implies a highly-racialized “white working-class consciousness” (Kelley 1994: 30). Furthermore, throughout the history of the United States, the “struggles for dignity and autonomy often took on an *intra*class character” (Kelley 1994: 29-30). For example, black men and women, who technically inhabit the same class as white workers, have had to deal with racial discrimination and degradation offered by the white people who share their social location.

Racial relations often mirror the power relations between upper and lower classes. Royster (2003: 31) has shown that a “durable inequality” has persisted, despite the ideological claim that racism has disappeared and the American meritocracy prevails. “The earlier creation and contemporary maintenance of segregated networks and institutions,” writes Royster, “does the work of perpetuating racial inequality by making everyday exclusionary behaviors a path of least resistance for contemporary whites” (2003: 31). We may be through with the past, but the past is not through with us. Social networks produce a “structure inimical to outsiders, who fare poorly because job opportunities get withdrawn from the open market, and ethnic membership implicitly circumscribes eligibility for employment” (Waldinger & Lichter 2003: 98). Bonacich (1972: 548) refers to this phenomenon as an exclusion movement, based on ethnic antagonisms, aimed at maintaining the in-group’s social location.

The history of racial segregation in America has created conditions in which the easiest way to categorize people is by race and ethnicity. Contemporary research has indicated that “when employers are looking for the most 'appropriate' worker, suitability is largely determined *categorically*” (Waldinger & Lichter 2003: 8). Put simply, the way that a ‘type’ of worker is often identified by potential employers (e.g., stereotyped) is usually by race or ethnicity. In the context of capitalism, this establishes what is known as the “hiring queue,” defined as the ordering of job candidates by racial or ethnic groups (Waldinger & Lichter 2003: 8). Certain racial and ethnic categories are assumed by the bourgeoisie and their managers to have the ‘right’ skills and attitudes for various ‘bad jobs.’ Consequently, “stereotypes and prejudices are likely to matter, perhaps at the beginning of the hiring process in the small, family-run firm, perhaps at the end of the day in the large, professionally managed organization...the issue at hand involves the personal attributes that employers prefer” (Waldinger & Lichter 2003: 16). Immigrants especially are now seen as ideal candidates for these positions because of the relative poverty they are used to. The powerlessness of immigrants, and the possibility of using them for undesirable jobs and exercising considerable control over them, is exactly what makes those immigrants a distinct category—or “underclass”—within the overall labor supply (Sassen-Koob 1981: 77).

In sum, although race was initially invented to justify a brutal regime of slave labor that was profitable to Southern planters, race making has become a key process by which the United States continues to organize and understand labor and national belonging. Africans, Europeans, Mexicans, and Asians each came to be treated as less civilized, less moral, less self-restrained races only when they were recruited to the core of the U.S. capitalist labor force. Such race making depended and continues to rest upon occupational and residential segregation...Race making in turn facilitated the degradation of work itself, its organization as 'unskilled,' intensely driven, mass-production work. Race making is class making, just as class making is race making. (Brodkin 2000: 245)

Researchers therefore cannot ignore politics, race, gender, or immigration when trying to understand stratification and social class, especially in American society. Capitalism not only *induces* class-reproduction, but deliberately *maintains* ethnic inequalities through various state apparatuses, social networks, and a hiring queue to fill downgraded jobs with cheap labor. Consequently, one cannot hope to understand or explain stratification without acknowledging the complex relationships between capitalism, globalization, and social class.

The formation of race, class, and gender identities begins to develop in childhood, long before an individual enters into the wage-labor force; therefore, in order to better understand the social processes through which ideology and class-consciousness develop, we must also go beyond a "workplace-centered understanding of class" and understand class as "a learned position" that is rooted in childhood, the family, the community, and the difficulties an individual faces in everyday life (Kelley 1994: 37). We must connect social class to social institutions.

While some might be naïve enough to argue that professional sociology is just fine, polls show that around 90 percent of people in the United States, with salaries ranging as low as \$7,000 and as high as \$113,000, now identify themselves as "middle

class” (Mooney 2008: 20). This indicates that our society has an extremely limited *theoretical understanding* of stratification and social class.

In conclusion, professional sociology has been corrupted by a conservative American ideology. The perspective of social researchers is often limited by their own social location, which more often than not offers them an ‘upper class’ view of society. Academic institutions, likewise corrupted by capitalism, also tend to reward intellectual work that either promotes bourgeois interests or does not threaten the status quo. Professional sociology in the United States is therefore failing the public, promoting a limited understanding of stratification, and avoiding the issue of social class. Class-based theories have been replaced by a methodological fetishism that lacks substance. It would probably be safe to assume that the *workers* in our society have a better understanding of the *implications* of class than many professional sociologists, because, unlike those who sit in the ivory tower, working men and women experience the effects of social class on a daily basis.

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