
The sixteen essays in this anthology examine the past and present fluidity of the American social structure. The selections are arranged by broad, chronological divisions: the colonial and Revolutionary periods, the “Era of the Common Man,” the “Early Industrial Era” (1860-1900), and the twentieth century. The essays were written during a twenty-four year span and the authors, scholars in different disciplines, employ a variety of sources and methodologies.

William Reavis and Russell Menard both examine social mobility in colonial Maryland. Reavis shows that an English commoner could achieve a significant improvement in his status simply by boarding a ship for the colony. “Shipboard mobility” offered an easier path than a slow climb “through the ranks.” Menard’s study indicates that until approximately 1660 indentured servants often became men of means and position shortly after their contract expired. After that year, however, there was a “general constriction of opportunity” (p. 31) as both population and competition increased.

Those familiar with the editor’s published works during the past decade will not be surprised that he characterizes the “Era of the Common Man” as one of “surprising immobility.” In passages reprinted from his recent article in the American Historical Review Pessen argues that “the ante-bellum decades were featured by an inequality that surpasses anything experienced by the United States in the twentieth century” (pp. 118-19). Stuart Blumin adds credence to this idea with his discovery that Philadelphia’s wealth distribution on the eve of the Civil War indicated “a society of extreme economic stratification” (p. 91).

Frances W. Gregory and Irene D. Neu demonstrate that the typical industrial leader of the 1870s did not rise from rags to riches solely on the strength of hard work and clean living. Indeed, he probably never wore rags at all. Chances were good that he had been “born and bred in an atmosphere in which business and a relatively high social standing were intimately associated with his family life” (p. 188). Examining the other end of the social scale, Stephan Thern-
strom shows that intergenerational mobility among laborers in late nineteenth century Newburyport, Massachusetts, was steady but modest. Upward movement within the working class constituted the most common form of social advance.

The essays in the final section, dealing with the twentieth century, are written by sociologists. Included are Gordon Lewis’ examination of “The Backgrounds and Careers of Small Businessmen in Lexington, Kentucky” and a summary of Otis D. Duncan and Peter M. Blau’s detailed analysis of occupational mobility in contemporary America.

It is unclear for what audience this book is intended. Undergraduate history majors are likely to find some of the sociologists too technical, while their peers in sociology will object to the relative lack of sophistication of the historians’ treatments. Graduate students and researchers in the field will find the volume’s utility severely limited as a result of the editor’s (or publisher’s) regrettable decision to delete the footnotes to all the essays. Still, the material collected here does provide a useful introduction to the questions which have been asked regarding American social structure. Interested students may find their way to the plethora of additional literature on the subject by consulting the editor’s bibliographical essay.

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From his acceptance of the teachings of Joseph Smith until his death, Charles C. Rich played a prominent role in the development of Mormonism. A biography of Rich was published in 1936, but it is now out of print. In addition, new material relating to the life of this important Mormon leader was uncovered by members of the Rich family. This prompted the author to undertake the task of writing a new biography. Professor Arrington has depicted a deeply religious man who was always willing to sacrifice his own welfare for the betterment of the whole Mormon flock.

Rich emerges as an example of a dedicated leader who rarely questioned the wisdom of the dictates of Brigham