



by James Davis

Up and Down Opportunity's Ladder

Mobility" is one of the few social science terms that means exactly what it says—movement of some kind. Geographic mobility is the clearest example (see Frank Bryan's "Rural Renaissance: Is America on the Move Again?" p. 16). If you are born in Mobile, Alabama and move away you are "mobile," but if you are born in Mobile and stay there until you die you are "immobile." Social mobility is a bit less obvious since it entails so many dimensions. Generally, sociologists define it as how far one has moved up or down life's ladder, and you don't have to be a sociologist to be aware of people who are "rising in the world," "on the skids," "going places," "drop outs," and so forth.

Defining that initial rung on the social mobility ladder is a bit tricky, because at birth we all are unemployed, illiterate, and broke. Such deprivation is universal, but if the baby's parents are "up there" we don't feel quite so sad, while if the baby's parents are clinging to a bottom rung, things don't look as promising. Thus, the convention has developed of assigning *parental* scores as starting values. If your dad was a bootblack and you are now a physician, sociology says you have experienced "upward intergenerational occupational mobility"—73 points worth, as we shall see.

Of the ladders available for objective research, occupation has received most scrutiny. When sociologists talk about "social mobility" they usually mean intergenerational occupational mobility. And they are, ahem, usually talking about males. We don't have good beginning rungs for women because so few *mothers* had jobs. In the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Surveys, a series of national samplings during the 1970s, just half (50.4 percent) of the respondents said "yes" to "Did your mother ever work for pay for as long as a year, after she was married?" Needless to say, current scholars are redressing this imbalance. The early results suggest the main themes of mobility research are androgynous, but in the first half of this report I will stick to the classic data and thus talk mostly about males.

Mobility research is not new. (Nor is mobility. See
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Oscar Handlin's "The Idea of Opportunity," p. 2.) Pitirim Sorokin's 1927 volume, *Social Mobility*, is still worth reading, but the quantity and quality of mobility data changed enormously after World War II, when nationwide studies began. The landmark here is Peter Blau and Otis D. Duncan's 1967 book, *The American Occupational Structure*, a sophisticated and encyclopedic analysis of CPS (the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey) data from a probability sample of some twenty thousand U.S. men. The Blau-Duncan study is known as OCG-I for "Occupational Change in a Generation." A decade later in 1973, David Featherman and Robert Hauser gave us OCG-II, a thirty thousand case replication. Whether, like *Rocky* or *Superman*, we have further OCG treats in store is unknown, but a third data base has emerged on its own. Beginning in 1972, NORC began a series of samplings of American adults known as the General Social Survey (GSS). Most of the GSS questions are repeated word for word, year after year—not for lack of imagination but to catch social trends. One can pool GSSs to obtain a large sample—some 12,000 cases if one pools the eight surveys from 1972 through 1980. GSS 1982 is just completed, but we haven't seen any results yet.

After this brief introduction, let me turn to the daunting assignment of summarizing the findings of dozens of books and articles and analyzing the data. Necessarily painting with rather broad brush strokes, I say it looks like this:

1. Americans are frequent border-crossers
2. There is a lot more downward mobility than one might expect

3. But more of us move into the top levels than move out

4. Points 1, 2, and 3 shouldn't lead one to ignore the high amount of class continuity

5. Which is both promoted and mitigated by the "educational two-step."

Americans Are Frequent Border-Crossers

Comparing current situations with earlier ones, the General Social Survey and the Michigan election studies tell us:

- No more than 10 to 15 percent of those surveyed shift out of their original religion
- A bit less than 15 percent shift regions
- About 30 percent shift political party
- About a third have shifted from one state to another
- About a third cross the white collar v. blue collar/farm line, going one way or the other.

Occupational mobility is not rare. It is about as common as inter-state or inter-party mobility, and a lot more common than movement across the subcultural fault lines of religion and region.

Downward Mobility

Table 1 gives several examples of the classic way to examine mobility data, a nine-celled percentage table with fathers and sons each sorted into white collar, farm, and blue collar. For example, the fifth line of data says that in OCG-II, of 5,855 sons of farm fathers, 25.7 percent now have white collar jobs, 15 percent are still farming, and 59.3 percent have blue collar jobs.

Table 1
THE STANDARD BRAND, CONTEMPORARY U.S., FATHER-SON MOBILITY TABLE

| Father's Job | Son's Job | | | Total | N | Origins |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------|-------------|-------|--------|---------|
| | White Collar | Farm | Blue Collar | | | |
| (A) OCG-I (1962) | | | | | | |
| White Collar | 69.8% | 1.4% | 28.8% | 100% | 4,290 | 24.4% |
| Farm | 22.9 | 22.3 | 54.9 | 100 | 5,141 | 29.2 |
| Blue Collar | 36.5 | 1.7 | 61.9 | 100 | 8,180 | 46.4 |
| | | | | | 17,611 | 100.0 |
| (B) OCG-II (1973) | | | | | | |
| White Collar | 66.1 | .1 | 32.9 | 99 | 7,232 | 27.6 |
| Farm | 25.7 | 15.0 | 59.3 | 100 | 5,855 | 22.3 |
| Blue Collar | 38.1 | 1.1 | 60.9 | 100 | 13,148 | 50.1 |
| | | | | | 26,235 | 100.0 |
| (C) GSS (1972-1976)* | | | | | | |
| White Collar | 66.5 | .5 | 32.9 | 100 | 762 | 25.6 |
| Farm | 24.4 | 19.9 | 55.7 | 100 | 734 | 24.6 |
| Blue Collar | 35.4 | .8 | 63.8 | 100 | 1,483 | 49.8 |
| | | | | | 2,974 | 100.0 |
| (D) GSS (adjusted for education) | | | | | | |
| White Collar | 54.0 | 1.2 | 44.7 | 100 | 762 | 25.6 |
| Farm | 34.2 | 17.6 | 48.3 | 100 | 734 | 24.6 |
| Blue Collar | 37.7 | .8 | 61.5 | 100 | 1,483 | 49.8 |
| | | | | | 2,979 | 100.0 |

*Calculated from tables in John W. Meyer, Nancy Brandon Tuma, and Krzysztof Zagorski, "Educational and Occupational Mobility: A Comparison of Polish and American Men," *American Journal of Sociology* (1979), 84:978-986.

Sticking with nonfarm jobs for the moment and squinting just a bit, I say each study is consistent with this proposition: "About a third of the white collar sons move down to blue, and about a third of blue collar sons move up to white collar." The ascent of the blues is, of course, "The American Dream," but the descent of the white collars is seldom lauded in Labor Day speeches on our open society. Yet the probabilities are similar in either direction. Not all descents are sickening plummet, I grant you. Indeed, as we will see, the top of the blue collar group (Craftsmen) have occupational prestige scores on a par with the bottom of the white collar (Clerical and Sales). True enough, but most white collar fathers are among the more prestigious "Professional and Managerial" group and most blue collar fathers are within the less prestigious "Operatives, Service Workers, Laborers" group rather than Craftsmen. Taking the *top* of the whites and the *bottom* of the blues and combining OCG-I and OCG-II, 16 percent of the Professional and Managerial sons ended up in Operative-Service-Labor, while 22 percent of the Operative-Service-Labor sons ended up in Professional and Managerial. For nonfarm workers, the chances of downward mobility are about the same as the chances for upward mobility.

Moving into the Top Levels

If the white collars have about the same chance of moving down as the blue collars have of moving up, why do we hear only about upward mobility? Perhaps part of our sense of progress comes from the astounding increase in real incomes in this century. Contemporary blue collar workers live a lot better than pre-World War II white collar workers. But another part comes from a profound mathematical principle: if you apply the same percentage to a larger number you will get more cases than if you apply it to a smaller number. Look again at table 1. About half of us come from blue collar homes and only about a quarter from white collar homes. Most of this difference can be accounted for by occupational structure, but some of it is due to fertility. Blue collar families generate more sons for the tables than the same number of white collar families. Consequently, there are roughly twice as many sons who moved from blue to white as moved from white to blue.

And then there are the farm sons. If asked to nominate one single social trend to characterize America in the last century, I would opt for "Land Rush"—a rush of farmers and farm sons to get off the land. GSS data, for example, suggest that among Americans born around 1890, half had farmer fathers while among those in the birth cohort of 1955 (in their early twenties during the GSS years 1972-1980) the figure is down to 6 percent. Rural southern blacks, Yankee adolescents on stony hillsides, and Scandinavian lads from the endless prairies: all had this in common—as adults the vast majority were working in cities, most (about 55 percent in table 1) as blue collar workers, but a sizable minority

(about 25 percent) as white collar. Farm sons were more likely to end up as white collar workers than as farmers! Since nobody (one percent or less) from nonfarm origins ends up working in agriculture, the land rush added considerably to the number of people crossing into white collar jobs. Averaging over the three studies and fudging a weensy bit to make things tidy:

- 50 percent stayed in their father's group (immobile)
- 25 percent moved from farm or blue collar into white (up)
- 10 percent moved from white collar to blue (down)
- 15 percent moved from farm to blue (down)

These four numbers can be combined and rearranged into several pretty patterns:

- (25% + 10% = 35%) i.e. the one-third crossing the white collar line one way or the other
- (25% + 10% + 15% = 50%) Half the sons are mobile if you use a three-way split
- (25% ÷ 10% = 2.5%) More than twice as many move into white collar as move out
- (15% - 10% = 5%) Most entrants into the blue collar stratum came from farm
- (15% + 10% = 25%) If you consider movement from farm to blue collar as downward mobility (more on this later), upward mobility (25% moving from farm or blue collar into white) and downward mobility are about equally common.

Assuming the rates stay the same, the *rate by origin* principle allows us to speculate about the future of mobility. Three predictions: (1) As white collar jobs increase vis-à-vis blue collar, downward mobility will increase and upward mobility decrease in absolute terms; (2) the evaporation of farm origins will reduce downward mobility more than it reduces upward; and (3) these two trends either will or won't cancel each other out and the rates may or may not stay the same.

While "just" half the sons remain in their paternal stratum, they are considerably more likely to end up there than sons from other strata. At the top, two-thirds of the white collar sons stay put, but that is a lot more than the one-third or less of blue collar or farm sons who scale those heights. And, of course, the opposite occurs for blue collar jobs, where blue collar sons end up with more than their fair share. In less technical language, "them as has, gets." The consequence is a perpetuation of family privilege and of family underprivilege.

Statistically, we are talking about a positive correlation between the prestige of father's and son's occupations. These correlations may well be the most studied statistic in sociology. I have seen dozens of them. The numbers vary with the sample and the particular statistics used, but they are always positive: in any community, region, ethnic group, or whatever in the United

States, it is safe to bet that the higher the prestige of the father, the higher the prestige of the son or daughter.

Whether this goes on more than two generations has not been well studied. My guess (drawing on unpublished research by Christopher Jencks and NORC) is that there is very little correlation between the prestige of grandfathers and grandsons, and what there is is explained by father's occupation. As the old American aphorism goes, "shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations." The American pattern seems to be one of moderate continuity but not of dynasties or a permanent underclass.

The "Educational Two-Step"

How do fathers pass on the occupational baton (or short end of the stick)? We know it isn't direct inheritance of jobs. If you remove the minority of cases where fathers and sons have exactly the same job titles, the patterns in table 1 change little. Instead, the key variable turns out to be schooling—the number of years of formal education.

When a third variable strongly influences a correlation, statistical rules say it must have an important association with both. Thus, the contribution of schooling to father-son occupational inheritance consists of two separate steps, a relation between father's occupation and education and a second relation between son's occupation and education.

Step one can be called the liberals' step, since it makes the United States look bad and would cost a lot of money to change. Table 2a uses GSS data to illustrate the strong differences in schooling still present in America:

- More than 60 percent of white collar sons have a year or more of college, in contrast to 32 percent of blue collar and 18 percent of farm sons.

- Almost 60 percent of farm sons failed to finish high school in contrast to 36 percent of blue collar and 15 percent of white collar.
- Most white collar sons have a year or more of college, most farm sons never finished high school, and blue collar sons are evenly split between college, high school, and less than high school.

Americans don't feel comfortable about discussing it, but we still have sharp class differences in schooling. As best we can tell, these differences are not going away. (Race differences in schooling are going away, but that's another matter.) Younger birth cohorts do have strikingly higher levels of education. For the birth cohorts of 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1940 the portions with 12 or more years of schooling are estimated as 23 percent, 36 percent, 50 percent, 58 percent, and 72 percent.

Step two of the educational two-step runs from education to occupation and it should please the conservatives since it suggests the system is working fairly and wonderfully and it would be a shame to monkey with it. More exactly, table 2b shows that when one looks at the occupational effects of education and father's stratum simultaneously, education is very important and class origins not very important:

- In each origin stratum, the proportion of white collar sons rises dramatically with education.
- In each educational level, the effects of father's stratum are moderate at best.
- A blue collar or farm son with a college degree has a better chance at a white collar job than a white collar son without a degree.

Liberals (rightly) decry the gross class differences in schooling, and conservatives (rightly) point with pride to the palpable meritocratic effects of schooling in

Table 2
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY (GSS)
(a) *Father's Occupation and Son's Education*

| Father's Occupation | Son's Education | | | | | Total | 0-11 | 13+ | N |
|---------------------|-----------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 0-8 | 9-11 | 12 | 13-15 | 16+ | | | | |
| White Collar | 5.0% | 9.7% | 22.6% | 28.3% | 34.4% | 100% | 14.7% | 62.7% | 762 |
| Blue Collar | 15.7 | 20.3 | 32.0 | 18.3 | 13.8 | 100 | 36.0 | 32.1 | 1,483 |
| Farm | 41.0 | 17.8 | 23.0 | 8.6 | 9.5 | 100 | 58.8 | 18.1 | 734 |

2,979

(b) *Father's Occupation, Son's Education, and Son's Occupation*
(Proportion of Sons in White Collar Jobs)

| Father's Occupation | Son's Education | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 0-8 | 9-11 | 12 | 13-15 | 16+ |
| White Collar | 28.9% | 33.8% | 51.2% | 67.1% | 90.8% |
| Blue Collar | (38)* | (74) | (172) | (216) | (262) |
| Farm | 12.1 | 18.3 | 25.9 | 53.7 | 84.8 |
| | (232) | (301) | (474) | (272) | (204) |
| | 11.6 | 12.2 | 25.4 | 46.0 | 80.0 |
| | (301) | (131) | (169) | (63) | (70) |

*Numbers in parentheses represent the total cases for the proportions above.

every origin stratum, but the sociologist is interested in how these two steps combine to influence father-son inheritance. Table 1d shows what happens to the data in table 1c after a little experiment. Let us give the sons in each paternal stratum of table 1c the same educational attainments—through a statistical procedure called “direct standardization,” not, I hasten to say, through federal handouts. Then let’s see what this does to inheritance. Comparing tables 1c and 1d we see the adjustment eliminates about half the inheritance. For example, in table 2c white collar sons have a 31.1% advantage in white collar jobs compared with sons of blue collar workers ($66.5 - 35.4 = 31.1$) but when class differences in education are eliminated statistically their advantage drops to 16.3% ($54.0 - 37.7 = 16.3$). Other statistics, other data sets, and other occupational measures give slightly different numbers, but one can routinely explain half or more of the father-son occupational prestige correlation by son’s schooling.

The American system of education acts powerfully and simultaneously to:

- preserve class differences across generations because the well-born go much farther in school and schooling is crucial for good jobs;
- cancel out class differences across generations because not all well-born go far in school (a third of white collar sons have no college), a number of lower status sons get a lot of schooling (a third of blue collar sons have some college) and schooling is more important than class origins in getting good jobs.

These then are the main themes in mobility research: an impressive amount of intergenerational mobility in all directions, rates of downward mobility almost as large as rates of upward mobility, more movement into the very top than out of it because of origin distributions and the secular decline in farming, a persistent positive correlation between father’s and son’s occupational prestige, and the powerful effect of schooling both in transmitting status across generations and in promoting mobility.

Ethnic Group Mobility

When you jam thousands of people into nine little boxes like the mobility tables in table 1, their idiosyncrasies don’t get much chance to shine through. Nevertheless, the data so far have been strictly about individual Americans, as have the vast number of sociological mobility studies. But sociologists are interested in groups too—in particular, ethnic groups such as southern blacks, Irish Catholics, or French-Canadians. Like feminine mobility, ethnic group mobility has not been thoroughly studied because of a shortage of data. The U.S. Census does not ask about religion—partly because Jews, among others, have found that having their religious preference on government lists is not always advantageous—so Census Bureau studies such as the OCGs do not include religion. GSS, however, includes

detailed data on religion and nationality and its 12,000 cases enable us to study relatively small groups.

Ethnicity is like pornography in that, as Mr. Justice Stewart remarked, you can’t define it but you know it when you see it. To see it you have to look at combinations of at least four variables: race, religion, region, and national origin. These variables are so intricately interwoven that many possible combinations sound facetious, for example, “Black, Southern, Swedish Catholics.” Therefore I have used four variables to point out selected combinations that make sociological and statistical sense. Ethnic classification is not standard and other (well-meaning but misguided) sociologists might do it differently. Figure 1 shows my version.

Starting at the top of figure 1, we first divide the cases by race. For the 288 self-defined American Indians, that is that. They appear with their case count and abbreviation (AMERIN) in the upper left corner. Blacks are not sorted on religion because 83 percent were raised as Protestants, but they are divided on region. Blacks have experienced an epochal trek from the rural South to the urban North. Therefore, I divided them into three groups: those who grew up in and stayed in the South (642 cases), those born in the South and now living in the North (288) and those born in and living in the North (335). Northern born blacks returning to the South make excellent feature copy but are too few in number (1.7% of GSS blacks) to include. Whites (there were too few Orientals to consider) are divided first on religion (“In what religion were you raised?”). The 249 Jews are not further subdivided.

Roman Catholics are sorted by national origin (“From what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?”). In order of size: Italy (450), Ireland (387), Germany (341), Poland (227), Mexico (166), Czechoslovakia (96), France (88), England (80), Puerto Rico (58), and French Canada (53). The Catholic groups are not subdivided on region because they are heavily northern (strictly speaking, non-southern). While about a third of the GSS population lives in the Census region South, for seven of ten Catholic groups the percentage is under 15, for Czechs and French the figure is a bit under the norm (24% and 31%) and only Mexicans (40%), with their southwestern concentration, are relatively southern.

Protestants are sorted into ten nationalities and in some cases by original region also. The regional pattern of Protestant (and Catholic) groups gives us an almost instant course in American history and geography, since even today their homes reflect time of immigration and historical patterns of agriculture and transportation. Scandinavian groups are emphatically non-southern (less than 15 percent for Danes, Finns, Norwegians, and Swedes, half or more of whom grew up in the Midwest); the Dutch and Germans are a bit “dis-southern” at 25 percent each, but the four old migration, large, Protestant groups (English, French,

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Irish, and Scotch) have 40 to 50 percent born in the South. They are subdivided by region. All of which gives us a total of fourteen white Protestant groups, four subdivided by region and six intact but relatively "Northern."

The twenty-nine ethnic groups in figure 1 comprise 62 percent of all GSS respondents. Of the remainder some are members of small nationality groups (17 Belgians, 12 Chinese, 18 Romanians, etc.), a handful were raised as "Other" or "None" in religion, but the largest chunk, about a fifth of all the cases, were ineligible because they could not pick a single national origin. Of these, about half simply didn't know and half reported multiple origins with none dominant. We are all, as Franklin D. Roosevelt told the DAR, descendants of immigrants, but about a fifth of us have become ethnically pureed in the Cuisinart of American history.

While Americans seem inhibited about discussing social class, quite the opposite seems true for ethnicity. I suspect we all hold the following beliefs about our own group: (1) We started at the very bottom; (2) We are especially hard working and self-sacrificing; (3) We have come a long way but not as far as we deserve; and (4) Among us, unlike other groups, Mamma really runs the family. Similarly in the intellectual world much more is published than known about ethnicity and we do not have the classic data bases comparable to those in table 1. However, Andrew Greeley of NORC pioneered in studying ethnicity by pooling national surveys and unpublished results from the GSS, allowing us to follow his lead with more recent samples. Table 3 lays out the key facts.

Since the results here are in terms of "occupational prestige scales" rather than white-blue-farm, we must detour briefly to consider measurement. Tables like table 1 treat large occupational categories (collars) but one may also study mobility in terms of specific occupations (e.g. physicians or bootblacks). To do so, the jobs must be placed on a single scale of prestige or "social standing." This turns out to be much easier than one might think. One of the remarkable conclusions of modern sociological research is the high agreement on the prestige of occupations. When one asks the man or woman in the street to judge the social standing of specific jobs, one finds striking consensus across time (1925 to today), occupational strata, educational levels, regions, sexes, even nations of the world. Consequently, sociologists have developed prestige scales for occupations. The GSS uses the Hodge-Segal-Rossi scale, which runs from a low of 9 points (bootblacks) to a high of 82 (physicians).

The left-hand column of table 3 gives the average (mean) prestige score for fathers of the twenty-nine groups, that is, how they lined up at the starting gate. Since the mean age of the respondents is about forty-five and fathers average thirty years older than their children, the typical father in these data was born

Table 3
OCCUPATIONAL AND EDUCATION SCORES
OF ETHNIC GROUPS

| Group | Occupational Prestige | | Change in Rank | Schooling |
|-------------|-----------------------|------|----------------|-----------|
| | Father's | Own | | |
| (1) Jewish | 45.3 | 46.6 | 0 | 48.8 |
| (2) ScotPN | 45.1 | 46.1 | 0 | 35.0 |
| (3) FrncPN | 45.1 | 43.1 | -4 | 32.2 |
| (4) EnglPS | 42.9 | 43.3 | -2 | 21.0 |
| (5) EnglPN | 42.0 | 42.3 | -5 | 23.3 |
| (6) SwedeP | 41.8 | 40.2 | -6 | 8.6 |
| (7) DanesP | 41.8 | 42.7 | -1 | 18.9 |
| (8) FrncPS | 41.3 | 45.1 | +4 | 11.4 |
| (9) IrishC | 41.2 | 41.9 | -2 | 22.8 |
| (10) ScotPS | 41.0 | 44.6 | +5 | 19.2 |
| (11) EngliC | 40.8 | 46.0 | +8 | 33.7 |
| (12) NorwyP | 40.3 | 42.6 | +3 | 15.0 |
| (13) GermnC | 40.1 | 39.6 | -2 | 0.9 |
| (14) GermnP | 40.1 | 39.8 | +1 | -1.6 |
| (15) FrncC | 40.0 | 39.6 | -1 | 17.3 |
| (16) IrshPN | 39.8 | 39.1 | -1 | 0.4 |
| (17) IrshPS | 39.4 | 39.1 | -1 | -21.1 |
| (18) FrncC | 37.9 | 36.0 | -5 | -15.1 |
| (19) DutchP | 37.9 | 37.3 | -2 | -28.8 |
| (20) CzechC | 36.7 | 39.7 | +6 | -2.1 |
| (21) ItalyC | 36.3 | 38.2 | +2 | -7.1 |
| (22) Amerin | 35.8 | 34.2 | -3 | -23.3 |
| (23) BlckSN | 34.9 | 29.9 | -5 | -35.2 |
| (24) PolesC | 34.3 | 38.0 | +4 | -10.5 |
| (25) PrrcoC | 34.0 | 30.7 | -2 | -57.9 |
| (26) BlckNN | 32.9 | 35.4 | +2 | 1.2 |
| (27) FinnsP | 32.6 | 36.2 | +5 | -19.5 |
| (28) BlckSS | 32.1 | 28.6 | -1 | -46.3 |
| (29) MexcoC | 30.5 | 32.1 | +3 | -31.9 |

Note: N = North, S = South, C = Catholic, P = Protestant.

See figure 1 for key to national origin abbreviations (e.g. Prrco = Puerto Rican).

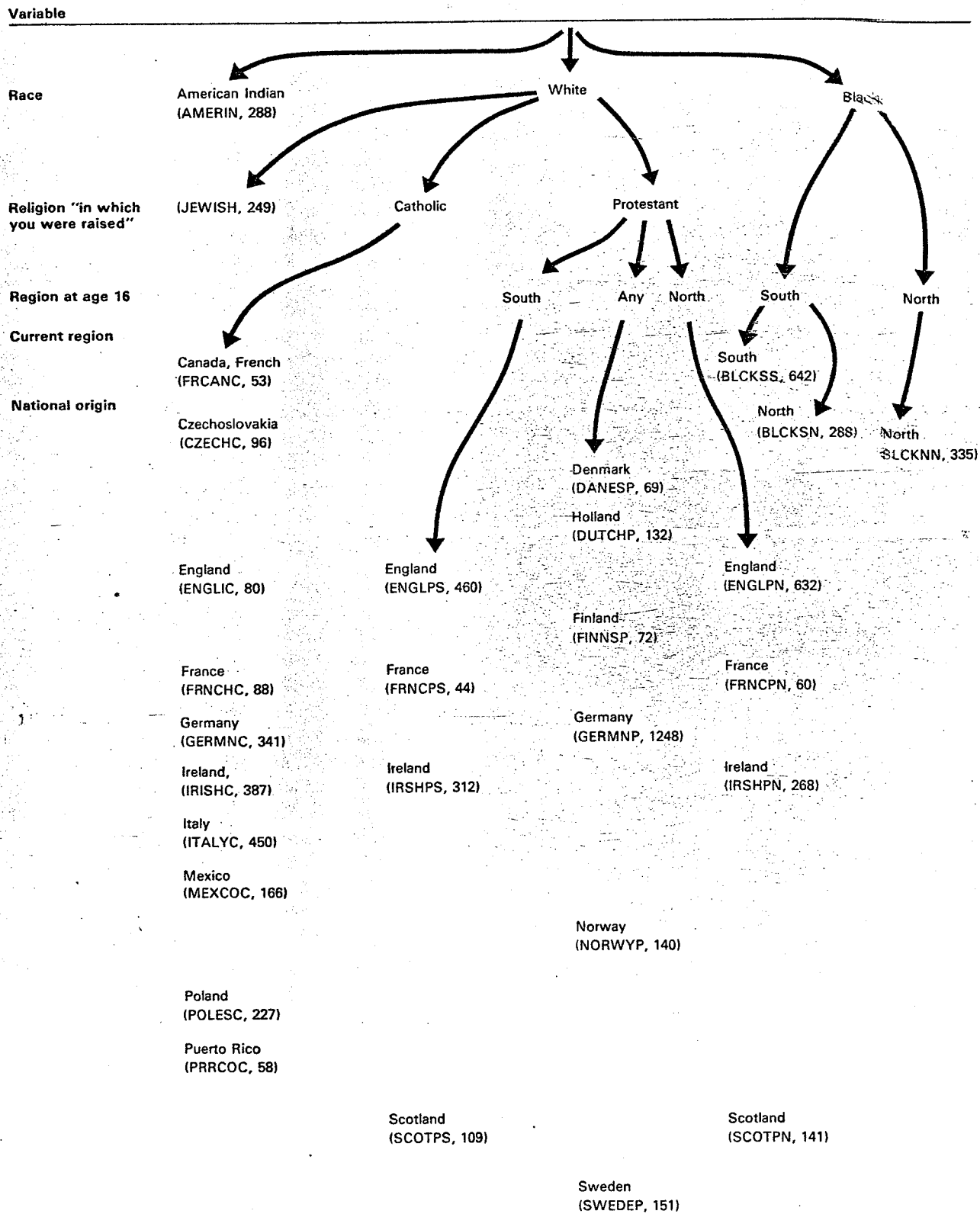
around the turn of the century and the typical respondent (we are dealing with both men and women in this section) was born just at the beginning of the Great Depression. The figures can thus be seen as a rough estimate of how the twenty-nine groups stood in occupational prestige in the first third of the 20th century. Top position went to the Jews with a mean of 45.3. The Poles' position, 34.3, is distinctly lower, and the anchor spot went to Mexican Catholics with a score of 30.5. The rankings, by and large, confirm our social stereotypes:

- Of the bottom eight positions all but two went to nonwhites (the three black groups and Indians) or Latins (Mexicans and Puerto Ricans.)
- While the Catholic group spans a larger range than the stereotype (from nine to thirty) none of the Catholic groups was in the top quarter.
- Of the top eight positions, five went to the older Protestant groups (Scotch, French, English), both northern and southern.

There are some surprises:

- Even a generation ago Jews had the highest prestige of any ethnic group.
- The Scandinavians showed a wide range in prestige origins from rank six (Swedes) to rank twenty-seven (Finns).
- The Protestant Irish, both northern and southern,

Figure 1
ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE GSS



were distinctly farther down the ladder (ranks sixteen and eighteen) than the other old Protestant groups, these being the famous "Scotch-Irish" or less affectionately, "Hill Billies." They started—and remained—below the rank of the later arriving Irish Catholics.

While table 3 shows that Jews and Mexican Catholics started out 14.8 points apart, it is hard to say whether 14.8 is big or small. I think it is small—or at least smaller than most of us would expect.

One yardstick is the distribution of individuals. In the cumulative GSS, 25 percent of the individuals report father scores above 45 and 22 percent report father scores below 30.5. Thus, while Jews were the highest prestige group in the parental generation, their average score was at the "bottom of the top quarter" for all Americans. Comfortable, maybe, but hardly aristocratic. Similarly, almost a quarter of all Americans had paternal prestige scores lower than those of Mexican Catholics, whose position was uncomfortable, maybe, but hardly down and out. While the twenty-nine ethnic groups were spread out in their original scores, they were all spread through the middle of the U.S. distribution. None of them could be termed patricians and none pariahs.

If the first striking feature of the group data is the small range of the original status differences, the second is the large size of the inheritance or stability.

If one calculates a scale known in the sociology business as a "Pearson product moment correlation

(r)" for father's and own jobs, one obtains an r of $+ .870$, which is in two words, a whopper. Since a high correlation between origins and destinations means low mobility, the theme here is one of relative immobility. For example, if we simply subtract father's score from own job using the data in table 3 (e.g., for Jews $46.6 - 45.3 = + 1.3$), the median change is ± 1.6 . Thus, the typical movement of an ethnic group is up or down less than two points on another scale, the Hodge-Segal-Rossi scale. Only two groups shifted five or more points: English Catholics moved up from 40.8 to 46.0, while blacks who moved from South to North dropped from 34.9 to 29.9.

When talking about individuals, the theme was "a lot of continuity and a lot of mobility" but when talking about ethnic groups the theme seems to be "a lot of continuity and some mobility."

Even a correlation of $.870$ is not perfect and the groups did not cross the finish line in perfect follow-the-leader form. The third column in table 3 shows the change in rank for each group. For example, Mexican Catholics started at rank twenty-nine, ended up in rank twenty-six, and got a rank change score of $+ 3$. Four groups increased their rank by five or more points (Finnish Protestants, Southern Scotch Protestants, Czech Catholics, and English Catholics), and four groups fell back five or more ranks (black migrants from South to North, French Canadian Catholics, English Northern Protestants, and Swedish Protestants).

How do you zoom past your competitors? Hard work? Tough mammas? Maybe, but again schooling has a definite impact. So we tune up for another two-step, this time at the group level.

Step one says the higher the paternal status of a group, the higher the education of its sons and daughters. The index I used is simply the percentage with a year or more of college minus the percentage with zero to eleven years of schooling. Thus, Jews have 62.3 percent with some college and 13.5 percent with zero to eleven giving an index of $+ 48.8$. Puerto Ricans, at the other extreme, have 8.8 percent with some college and 66.7 percent with zero to eleven years giving an index of $- 57.9$. The other twenty-seven groups lie between these scores. The product moment correlation between "Fathers" and "Schooling" in table 3 equals $+ .837$, which is substantial. You can reach the same conclusion without any calculations by inspecting the right hand column in table 3. With one exception, all the minus signs are lower than the positive scores—that is, except for German Protestants, children from the top sixteen groups were more likely to have some college than to be high school dropouts, while for the bottom thirteen groups "high school dropouts" outnumber those with a year or more of college.

The second half of the educational two-step (à la table 2b) requires us to demonstrate that the educational level of an ethnic group affects its occupational prestige, *controlling* for father's prestige.

Berry's World



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"IT'S ABOUT THE AMERICAN DREAM ..."

The left hand column in table 4 rearranges the twenty-nine ethnic groups and the educational score

Table 4
EDUCATION AND MOBILITY

| Ethnic Group | Schooling Net of Father's Job | Change in Rank |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| (26) BlckNN | 32.73 | +2 |
| (11) EnglC | 22.35 | +8 |
| (27) FinnsP | 13.66 | +5 |
| (24) PolesC | 13.43 | +4 |
| (1) Jewish | 13.02 | 0 |
| (29) MexcoC | 12.66 | +3 |
| (15) FrnchC | 10.29 | -1 |
| (9) IrishC | 9.28 | -2 |
| (20) CzechC | 8.81 | +6 |
| (10) ScotPS | 6.77 | +5 |
| (12) NorwyP | 6.37 | +3 |
| (21) ItalyC | 5.98 | +2 |
| (5) EnglPN | 5.44 | -5 |
| (7) DanesP | 2.12 | -1 |
| (3) FrncPN | 1.31 | -1 |
| (2) ScotPN | 0.31 | 0 |
| (4) EnglPS | -1.75 | -2 |
| (8) FrncPS | -2.66 | +4 |
| (16) IrshPN | -5.52 | -1 |
| (13) GermnC | -6.65 | -2 |
| (22) Amerin | -7.51 | -3 |
| (6) SwedeP | -8.18 | -6 |
| (14) GermnP | -9.15 | +1 |
| (28) BlckSS | -10.42 | -1 |
| (18) FrncC | -10.71 | -5 |
| (23) BlckSN | -14.52 | -5 |
| (19) DutchP | -24.41 | -2 |
| (17) IrshPS | -24.85 | -1 |
| (25) PrrcoC | -32.34 | -2 |

Note: N = North, S = South, C = Catholic, P = Protestant.
See figure 1 for key to national origin abbreviations (e.g. Prrco = Puerto Rican).

predicted by using father's job in a regression equation. High scores mean the group went a lot farther in school than one would predict from their fathers' jobs; negative scores mean the group did not obtain as much schooling as one would predict. The highest "overachievers" are northern-born, northern-living blacks. Their educational score is not smashing (a value of 1.2 and rank fourteen), but they got an awful lot of schooling considering their parental starting point at rank twenty-six. Other overachievers by ten or more points are English Catholics, Finnish Protestants, Polish Catholics, Jews, Mexican Catholics, and French Catholics. At the opposite end, southern-born blacks (migrant or not), French Canadian Catholics, Dutch Protestants, Southern Irish Protestants, and Puerto Rican Catholics all fell ten or more points short of their predicted scores.

Is there a pattern here? I find it interesting that seven of ten Catholic groups are overachievers, as are seven of fourteen Protestant groups and the one out of four nonwhite groups who didn't attend southern schools.

Intriguing, but the question is whether schooling-net-of-father's-occupation affects prestige. Look at the right hand column in table 4 where the change in rank data are repeated. Again, the plus signs are up toward

the top and the minus signs toward the bottom. More exactly:

- Of the ten groups which moved up two or more ranks, nine are overachievers.
- Of the nine groups which moved zero, one, or two ranks, five are overachievers.
- Of the ten groups which moved down two or more ranks, two are overachievers.

As with individuals, schooling is simultaneously the key mobility mechanism (as shown by the strong association between "overachievement" and change in rank) and the key mechanism in maintaining the ethnic "peck order" (as shown by the reduction of the father-own correlation from + .870 to + .324 when education is controlled).

Education Begets Prestige

Some groups moved up, some groups moved down, some groups stayed put. How, overall, did the pattern change? If we think of the ranks in terms of a top quarter, a bottom quarter, and a large middle, I draw four conclusions:

- At the bottom, the four nonwhite and two Latin Catholic groups ended up about where they started, while the Poles and Finns moved up.
- At the top, Jews remained in the number one spot and the old Protestant groups, if anything, improved their standing as the southern Scotch and French moved into the top quarter while only the northern English moved down.
- Among the non-Latin Catholics, the English zoomed up into the top quarter, but the other groups mostly remained in the middle half.
- Among the Scandinavians and German Protestants, the trend was toward the middle half as the Swedes dropped from the top quarter and the Finns moved up toward the middle.

As in the case of individual mobility, the ethnic mobility results have something for every ideological taste. The highest prestige group is so far from the top and the lowest group so far from the bottom that ethnic differences in occupational prestige must be characterized as moderate. Schooling is the key to ethnic mobility: groups who get more schooling move up in the pack, groups who get less fall back—whatever their odd cooking habits and weird religions. Statistically, educational attainment is a much better predictor of a group's current prestige than is its original (father's) prestige.

All this is true and cheery, and yet, the amount of schooling a group gets is still powerfully influenced by the paternal occupational level. A generation of "rapid social change" still shows "old Protestants" (ScotPN, FrncPS, ScotPS, EnglPS, and FrncPN) in five of the seven top ranks and blacks, Latins, and American Indians in the bottom six positions. The issues and problems of "border crossing" for the contemporary United States are not limited to the Immigration Service. ☐