

PATTERNS OF INEQUALITY IN THE U.S. CLASS STRUCTURE

By

Eric J. Jenkins

Advised by

Professor Harold R. Kerbo

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Social Sciences Department

College of Liberal Arts

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

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Research Proposal

The purpose of my Senior Project is to research patterns of ascription and achievement in the United States class structure. My research will primarily identify the historical patterns and development of these issues in order to focus on causes and a future outlook on the situation. Additionally, I will be focusing on patterns of equality, social inheritance and social mobility as these subjects relate to ascription and achievement in this context. I believe geographically refining my research solely to the United States will allow me to identify unique factors, exclusive to this region, that will contribute to my goals. My overall goal of this project is to identify what factors contribute to ascription and achievement of different classes in the United States by researching the historical progression of ascription and achievement between different classes. I will accomplish this by reviewing several key documents that are imperative to understanding this subject. These documents will include books and articles, additionally an extensive look in to articles to be found on online databases will be conducted, all of which will be through the Cal Poly Robert E. Kennedy Library. I believe I will find that there is less equality/ achievement now than there was in the past (50 years ago) in the United States. My hypothesis will further include that there will be less social mobility, and more social inheritance than there was in the past.

Annotated Bibliography

Mishel, Lawrence, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz. 2008. *The State of Working America, 2008/2009*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

The authors of this book present many tables, charts and information regarding the U.S. labor market and its affects on both the rich and the poor. I am also interested in the “International Comparisons” chapter; where the U.S. is compared to other countries- topics include growth, employment, and income. Additionally, parts of this book discuss income inheritance this will directly support my thesis that there is less equality now in the U.S. than there was in the past.

Upper Bound. April, 17 2010. *Economist*, 395 (8678), 29-30.

This article from the *Economist*, found in the *Academic Search Elite* database, discusses the income distribution specific to the United States. My thesis is supported as the article points out trends showing there has been a decline in social mobility. This has especially been prevalent in babies born in to poor families. Furthermore, this article also offers some broad solutions to prevent this inequality from dipping even lower than it historically ever has. This work also cites several key pieces of data further supporting the article’s thesis, which in turn will help me support my thesis, that inequality is getting worse in the U.S.

Beller, Emily & Michael Hout. 2006. *Intergenerational social mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective*. *The Future of Children*, 16(2), 19-36.

Beller and Hout investigate social mobility back to 1940. The authors point out different ways to measure mobility, citing that sociologists tend to look at occupation while economists tend to look at income; as they dissect this data they find different patterns over the last 70 years. Beller and Hout conclude that slower economic growth since 1975 has significantly slowed down social mobility in the US. Additionally, the authors compare the United States to other countries in terms of mobility. This work will be helpful because it supports my thesis that social mobility is slowing.

Legot, Cristina, Bruce London, and John Shandra. 2010. *Environmental ascription: High-volume polluters, schools, and human capital*. *Organization & Environment*, 23(3), 271-290.

This work provides a new look at ascription focusing on environmental factors as a determinant of a child's future. The authors describe these inequalities, for example where a child goes to school, being combined with other socially constructed factors such as social class and race. Reduced educational outcome is the result of this study, the authors further relate this inequality to schools that are located in close proximity to top industrial polluters, which they argue are disproportionately closer to poor and minority residents. This work will be helpful to my project because it suggests environmental

factors plays a role in the stratification process. Furthermore, this will be helpful in supporting my thesis that there is more inequality than in the past.

Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1991. *Status Homogamy in the United States*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(2), 496-523.

Using data from surveys taken in 1962 & 1973 (Occupational Change in a Generation), Kalmijn argues that education is a more important constraint in marriage than social class. The importance of spousal choice is important to my research because it suggest important mobility patterns among women. We can see from this research that marriage is more dependent on educational achievement rather than similar class backgrounds. This will be important to my thesis as it may suggest the mixing of different class backgrounds, which may prove helpful in predicting future outcomes of ascription and achievement.

Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement*. *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Kerbo discusses the topic of social mobility; based on an array of extensive references Kerbo summarizes social mobility to be very widespread when the bottom and top classes are excluded from study. He points out that the top and bottom classes in the U.S. show evidence of occupational inheritance. Due to the overall US economy and the reduction of many middle class jobs in the U.S. since the 1980s, social mobility has been

slowing. Kerbo also shows trends of different races and genders dealing with social mobility as well. Comparatively speaking, the US does not rank any better than other industrial countries on the topic of social mobility, where citizens are born in this country. This work will be helpful to my project because it is the most comprehensive work on my subject I have found. Furthermore, this work has an extensive reference list that is very helpful in finding related works that dig deeper in to specific related topics.

Biblarz, Timothy, Adrian Raftery, and Alexander Bucur. (1997). *Family Structure and Social Mobility*. *Social Forces*, 75(4), 1319-1341.

The authors in this work make the argument that the type of family a male child has when they are growing up will have varying effects on their type of socioeconomic attainment and social mobility. Men with a mother-headed family structure will do just as well as a two parent family structure. This work also explains that while there is a positive effect with some types of family structures there is also a negative effect with some other family structures. This work will help me in my project because it may help to explain different factors that lead to different kinds of social mobility in lower class families. These factors may help to support my thesis that there is less equality now than there was in the past.

Beeghley, Leonard. (1970). "Sociology and Stratification." *The Structure of Social Stratification in the United States* (pp. 12-18). Pearson.

Beeghley first chapter in his book discusses the historical structure of social stratification, specifically pertaining to technology and its relation to inequality. Among the author's many arguments, he says 'the greater the level of technology, the greater the productivity and inequality'. Although this data originated in 1970, I believe it will be tremendously beneficial to my project as it serves as an accurate prediction that supports my thesis that inequality has gotten worse as time has progressed. I believe this work will be of further value as it cites Davis and Moore, two other leading sociologists on this issue.

Hauser, Robert, John Koffel, Harry Travis and Peter Dickinson. 1975. "Temporal Change in Occupational Mobility: Evidence for Men in the United States." *American Sociological Review*, 40:279-297.

In this work the authors suggest that the changing occupational distribution is what changes intergenerational occupation mobility. I found this to relate to my project as it conveys a pattern of social mobility among occupations. This pattern would suggest that whatever jobs are available predicts where you will end up, not necessarily what your father's occupation was. Furthermore, this work will be helpful in finding historical information on ascription and achievement.

Sorensen, Annemette. 2006. "Welfare States, Family Inequality, and Equality of Opportunity." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 24, 4:367-375.

Sorensen's work questions why Scandinavian countries are better than others at creating conditions of encouraging equality of opportunity. The author argues that there are two characteristics of these types of states that have helped; the first is lower social and economic inequality, while the second is family policies. Both of these characteristics are said to equalize conditions for children. This relates to my project as it shows a more current (1996) study that identifies two characteristics that encourage equality. If these characteristics are shown to exist less in the US, this will further prove my thesis that there is more inequality in the US now than there has been in the past.

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Purpose
- B. Type of Research
 - 1. Describe what kind of research.
- C. Significance
 - 1. Importance and personal reasoning.
- D. Hypothesis/ Thesis
 - 1. There is less achievement/ equality now, than there was 50 years ago.

II. Background

- A. Definitions
 - 1. Ascription
 - 2. Achievement
 - 3. Explanation of other important terms. (social Mobility, occupational inheritance, etc.)
- B. Historical Trends
 - 1. Summary of historical patterns
 - 2. Set-up paper in historical chronological sequence

III. Social Mobility

- A. Historical Trends and Patterns
 - 1. Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement*. *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.
 - 2. Various pieces from Grusky
- B. Economics and Social Mobility
 - 1. Beller, Emily & Michael Hout. 2006. *Intergenerational social mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective*.
- C. Grusky, David B. (2008). *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Westview Press.
 - 1. Many articles on social mobility
- D. Explanation of how Social Mobility influences Ascription and Achievement

IV. Income Distribution (as it relates to Ascription and Achievement)

- A. US Perspective
 - 1. Upper Bound. April, 17 2010. *Economist*, 395 (8678), 29-30.
 - 2. *The State of Working America*
- B. Income Inheritance
 - 1. Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement*. *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.

V. Environmental Ascription

- A. Where you grow up matters

1. Legot, Cristina, Bruce London, and John Shandra. 2010. *Environmental ascription: High-volume polluters, schools, and human capital*. *Organization & Environment*, 23(3), 271-290.
- B. Type of parents a child has as a determinant of future/life
 1. Biblarz, Timothy, Adrian Raftery, and Alexander Bucur. (1997). *Family Structure and Social Mobility*. *Social Forces*, 75(4), 1319-1341.
- C. Explanation of how external factors affect ascription

VI. Status Attainment

- A. Occupational Mobility
 1. Hauser, Robert, John Koffel, Harry Travis and Peter Dickinson. 1975. "Temporal Change in Occupational Mobility: Evidence for Men in the United States." *American Sociological Review*, 40:279-297.
- B. Status and Income Attainment
 1. pgs. 486-505
Grusky, David B. (2008). *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Westview Press.
 2. Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.
- C. Inheritance
 1. Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement*. *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.
- D. Relate both Income distribution and Status Attainment to Ascription and Achievement

VII. Current Situation

- A. In-depth look at Ascription and Achievement currently
- B. Supporting Evidence
 1. Social Stratification
 - a. Beeghley, Leonard. (1970). "Sociology and Stratification." *The Structure of Social Stratification in the United States* (pp. 12-18). Pearson.
 - b. Kerbo, Harold. (2008). (pp. 385-433). *Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement*. *Social Stratification and Inequality* McGraw-Hill Humanities.
- C. Comparison of 50 years ago and now (Hypothesis)

VIII. International Situation

- A. Other Countries
 1. Mishel, Lawrence, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz. 2008. *The State of Working America, 2008/2009*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
 2. Kerbo – Part 5: Social Stratification Beyond the US.
- B. Equality of Opportunity in Scandinavian Countries

1. Sorensen, Annemette. 2006. "Welfare States, Family Inequality, and Equality of Opportunity." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 24, 4:367-375.

IX. Future of Ascription and Achievement

A. The Future of Inequality

1. Grusky, David B. (2008). *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Westview Press.

B. Patterns

1. Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1991. *Status Homogamy in the United States*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(2), 496-523.

C. Where are we headed?

X. Bringing Everything Together

1. Proving Thesis/ Hypothesis
2. Recall patterns over history and how they are now nationally and internationally
3. Explanation of how Ascription and Achievement have changed

XI. Conclusion

1. Synthesis of points made in paper
2. Relation to thesis
3. Closing remarks
4. Recommendations for Future Research

Introduction

Patterns of ascription and achievement have considerably changed from today to what they were fifty to sixty years ago. My project will attempt to prove that equality may not be what it used to be in the mid 19th century. The mid 1900's will be the time period where a comparison will be conducted, from past to present, to identify patterns – in order to understand if equality has changed in the United States of America. Research for this paper will primarily identify the historical patterns and development of these issues in order to focus on causes and suggest future patterns that may develop.

This paper will be structured in a way that guides readers through historical evidence that suggests ascription and achievement have changed from the mid 1900's to today. Topics will include; in depth looks at social mobility and status attainment, income distribution and inheritance as it relates to the US class structure, and occupational inheritance. From this point, I will discuss the current situation of inequality in the US and compare it to the previous sections. From there, a brief look at the comparative situation will be presented followed by how these patterns may change in the future. I will conclude the paper by proving my thesis based on the evidence I present.

My research will be geographically limited to the United States; this will ensure all studies deal with the same information such as historical events, cultural factors, etc. To sum up my intent or purpose, I will identify what factors contribute to ascription and achievement of different classes in the United States. This will be accomplished by researching the historical progression of ascription and achievement between different classes by reviewing and analyzing key documents within the last fifty to sixty years. In addition, documents that will be examined for this study consist of peer-reviewed and

recommended texts and articles from related reading on this subject. Primarily much of this project's information will come from accredited online databases subscribed by the Robert E. Kennedy Library at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (SLO), however some of the information will come from printed books and articles as well.

My interest for this subject stems from life events and knowledge I have learned in college. Since beginning my college career at California Polytechnic State University, SLO, I have had a particular interest in Sociology, more specifically social stratification. It has always fascinated me to see how, and why, people get to where they are in society. As our world continues to grow, and the future unfolds, it is important to understand societal patterns throughout history. This knowledge will be a valuable asset in predicting and explaining certain societal trends and phenomenon. I believe the information and data I will find will prove my thesis statement; there is less equality/ achievement now than there was in the past (50 years ago) in the United States. My hypothesis will further include that there will be less social mobility, and more social inheritance than there has been in the past.

Background

It is important to define a variety of terms before we discuss stratification in depth. Since some of these articles use different terms in different context, it will be helpful to solidify the meanings so they are applied equally to every circumstance this paper comes across. Furthermore, the definitions will help us gain a more specific understanding of the term in respect to social stratification.

The first term we will discuss is ascription. Ascription, in the most basic form, refers to social placement beyond one's control. For our purposes, the definition will strictly apply in a hereditary sense, meaning a person is born in to a certain social placement. Ascribed features are out of one's control; sex, age, family background, race and ethnicity are all examples of these features. Ascription is one form of social placement that sociologists use to explain stratification processes, achievement is the other and will be our next term. Achievement refers to how hard you work to get some where in society. Instead of being born in to a certain social structure, you move up through society by means of skill or motivation.

Social mobility is also an important concept for this paper. Social mobility refers to the ease of which an individual can move throughout the social hierarchy. In the United States, social mobility would be concerned with the class system and how a person can move up or down based on ascription and achievement. For the purpose of comparison and understanding, social mobility in the country of India would be centered on a caste stratification system, which of course is different from what persists in the United States. Important within social mobility are the concepts of horizontal and vertical mobility. Horizontal social mobility, "is movement from one position to another of equal rank in the occupational structure," while vertical social mobility, "may be defined as the movement from one occupational position to another of higher or lower rank" (Kerbo 2011). According to studies of occupational prestige (see Kerbo 2011), certain occupations have different levels of prestige and by this we can definitively study and analyze different types social mobility. There is much more to the concept of social mobility, a further explanation and historical analysis can be found in the *Social Mobility*

and Status Attainment section of this paper. While there are several more important terms, they will be presented in their respective sections. The concepts and definitions of ascription, achievement and social mobility are critical for the discourse of this paper.

Social Mobility and Status Attainment

To guide us back to the discussion of social mobility, we will take a look at several articles and texts that attempt to explain the patterns of social mobility in context of the United States. By way of background, it is important to mention two revolutionary studies concerning the introduction of social mobility. Blau and Duncan's, *The American Occupational Structure* published in 1967, has a comprehensive collection of data, most of which is collected from the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1962. The next study, *Opportunity and Change*, published in 1978 by scholars Featherman and Hauser was more or less a follow up study to Blau and Duncan. The Blau and Duncan piece is noted for being the landmark study of social mobility in the United States (Kerbo 2011). These two studies will serve as a reference to much of the data that is presented in a more current context.

Social mobility is predominantly studied through occupational change, especially within the United States. Additionally, status attainment has to do with where someone is in society and how he or she got to that place. Kerbo summarizes status attainment quite well with the simple question, "who gets ahead and why?" (2011). We will move to a study by Beller and Hout that takes a look at this occupational change but will return to the 'landmark studies' later on.

Occupational Mobility

The occupational mobility section discusses the patterns of this type of mobility based off of the birth year of males. This data begins in the ten-year period from 1930-1939, and concludes in the ten-year period beginning in 1970. I chose to present this information first because it presents data from a birth year perspective rather than when the individual began to see changes in the mobility structure. This is important because we can infer and analyze events that led up to changes in mobility. The article states that a man enters the workforce twenty years after he is born and reaches his ‘top earnings potential’, fifty years after his birth. For example, “the earliest cohort (born in the 1930s) first entered the labor force in the 1950s and reached its top earning potential around 1980” (Beller 2006). Additionally, this reinforces why the information is valid because those born in the fifth cohort, 1970-1979, will reach their ‘top earnings potential’ in the year 2030.

Figure 1: Changes in types of Mobility by Year of Birth
“Amount and Direction of Men’s Occupational Mobility, by Year of Birth”

Percent

Year of birth	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	Downwardly mobile	Total
1930–39	26	49	25	100
1940–49	28	45	27	100
1950–59	31	39	30	100
1960–69	31	35	33	100
1970–79	33	35	32	100

Source: General Social Surveys, 1988–2004.

SOURCE: Beller (2006:29)

According to Figure 1, we can see that upward mobility shows signs of decreasing, while downward mobility shows signs of increasing and those who are immobile show signs of

increasing as well. In other words, as people were born more recently it was more difficult to move up and became easier to either stay in the same socioeconomic situation or move down. Another important point in this article is, “growing inequality does not necessarily increase or decrease the prevalence of social mobility, but it does increase the difference between the upwardly mobile and downwardly mobile” (Beller 2006). The authors go on to say that this essentially means a person has further to rise or fall in a society where inequality is more prevalent. Note that the authors are quick to point out, “data sets for women are available only from the 1970s,” and after they are adjusted due to different occupational distributions, the data did not differ for men and women (Beller 2006).

Another relevant finding in Beller and Hout’s study is intergenerational occupational patterns. In reference to Figure 2, “the bold diagonal entries show the percentage of men from each class background who stay where they began” (Beller 2006).

Figure 2: “Intergenerational Occupational Mobility of Men Born between 1950 and 1979”

Percent

Origin: father's occupation	Destination: son's occupation						Total
	Upper professional	Lower professional and clerical	Self-employed	Technical and skilled	Farm sector	Unskilled and service	
Upper professional	42	24	7	12	0	15	100
Lower professional and clerical	29	27	7	17	0	20	100
Self-employed	29	18	16	19	0	18	100
Technical and skilled	17	19	6	30	1	26	100
Farm sector	14	11	8	17	13	37	100
Unskilled and service	16	17	6	22	1	38	100

Source: General Social Surveys, 1988-2004.

SOURCE: Beller (2006:24)

Additionally, the numbers depicted on figure 2 Beller and Hout calculated and found, “32 percent were immobile, 37 percent were upwardly mobile, and 32 percent were downwardly mobile.” The authors attributed 15% of this mobility was due to economic conditions, specifically the economy called for an increase in professional jobs and a decrease in farming jobs (Beller 2006). Beller and Hout’s work provides some suggestions of an emerging pattern of social mobility in the United States, we now turn to some of the first studies on this subject.

Landmark Studies

As mentioned earlier, Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, published a study in 1967 on social mobility followed by David L. Featherman and Robert M. Hauser study eleven years later in 1978. These two studies have been cited as, “the most detailed studies on social mobility in the United States following the old functionalist categories,” these two studies have yet to be matched by the same comprehensiveness, hence they will be used as a respectable baseline and understanding of developing patterns (Kerbo 2011).

While there is much to say about these two early studies, Kerbo offers a brief summary and explanation of the studies. Both showed that nearly 60 percent of occupational inheritance was concentrated at the top of the occupational structure, the next highest rate of occupational inheritance that was found to be in the low occupational levels at about 40 percent. There was also evidence that social mobility was very high, “between the upper-middle class and low-skilled occupations... Only about 20 percent of sons from fathers with occupations in the middle stayed at that level.” More often than not, sons moved up the occupational structure than they moved down (Kerbo 2011).

The roots of Beller and Hout's study (seen above) confirms that economic conditions led to more upward mobility and can be traced back to Featherman and Hauser's study in 1978. Here, Featherman and Hauser, attribute the conclusions from their study in combination with Blau and Duncan's study to two main explanations. The first is the changing occupational structure; simply put more jobs were being created toward the top of the occupational structure because of emerging technological advances. The second explanation is families lower on the occupational structure tend to have more children, this and the combination of less lower occupational jobs, leads to more opportunity at the top of this structure (Kerbo 2011).

An article that appeared in the American Sociological Review in 1975 by Hauser *et al.* (different from the 1978 Featherman and Hauser piece), "observed that the pattern of association between father's occupation and son's occupation is largely invariant with respect to time" (Hauser 1975). During this earlier time period it can be seen that levels of occupational inheritance were not changing beyond the levels they were at.

It is quite evident that the occupational structure has changed since the studies conducted in 1967 and 1978, and the information seen in the 1975 study; Hout provides some updated numbers to the previous studies where we can see this change. "Hout (1988) found that the overall rate of social mobility was slowing for the first time in the years we have data on the subject. He also found that, while there was still more upward than downward mobility, the upward social mobility has slowed" (Kerbo 2011). Based on these numbers, we can begin to see an emerging trend of changing mobility patterns in the United States. In regards to ascription and achievement, these studies offer a baseline of their respective status, or level, some time ago. These studies showed that there was

more upward intergenerational mobility than there was downward mobility, from this we can draw a rough conclusion that being born in to a lower-class family did not necessarily mean you would be immovable in terms of mobility. In other words, economic and social structures allowed upward movement.

It must be noted the ‘landmark studies’ conducted in 1967 and 1978 have not been matched in their rigor by today’s standards. Kerbo mentions that, “smaller studies using the old occupational categories to measure mobility have refined our understanding of the subject” (Kerbo 2011). However a basic flaw in these studies is their use of, “old occupational measures of class,” subsequently the study of social mobility in regards to the ‘landmark studies’ discussed earlier, “has turned to ‘income mobility’ from one generation to the next (Kerbo 2011).

Income Distribution

Income inequality and distribution is a very important measure of social conditions and mobility. The *Economic Policy Institute*, has extensive data that will allow us to endeavor in to this subject with a solid base of data. The following will present information pertaining to income inequality and how it has been distributed throughout the United States. We will use this data in order to gain an insight on current and past economic conditions. Furthermore this information will be presented in a chronological fashion in an effort to see emerging trends and patterns that may be developing.

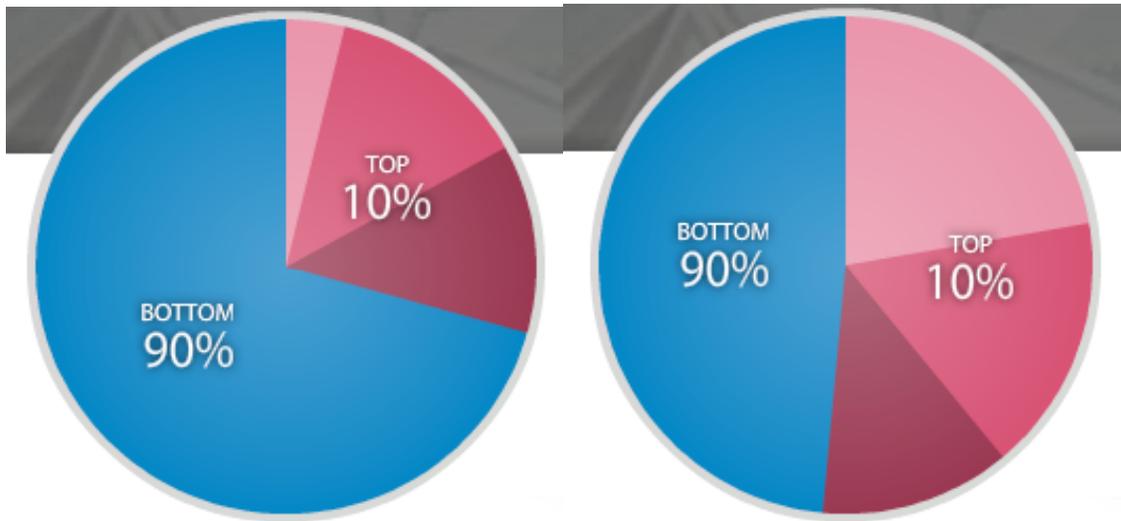
Historical Progression of Income Inequality

According to *The State of Working America* in conjunction with the *Economic Policy Institute*, “between 1947 and 1973, economic growth was both rapid and distributed equally across income classes.” Furthermore, based on computations by

Emmanuel Saez of University of California, Berkeley and presented by the Economic Policy Institute, we can see this according to Figure 3.

Figure 3: US Income Distribution 1917-1978

Figure 4: US Income Distribution 1917-2008



SOURCE (both Figures 3 and 4): Economic Policy Institute (2011)

To relate the section on social mobility to the current section on income distribution, the time period of 1978 was selected due to Featherman and Hauser's study that was discussed earlier.

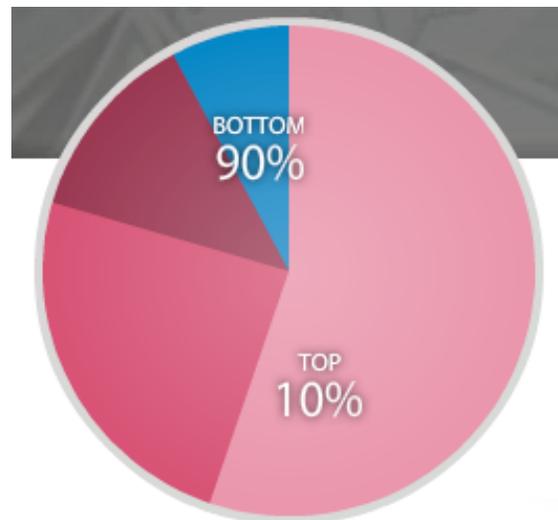
Figure 3 shows us that the bottom 90% of all income received from 1917 to 1978, 71% of income growth went to the bottom 90% of the US, while the top 10% received 29% of the income growth. In 1967, when the earlier study by Blau and Duncan was conducted, the richest 10% received 31% of the income growth from 1917 to 1967, which is not significantly different from the time period of Featherman and Hauser.

According to Figure 4, we can see that the richest 10% of America holds 51% of the income, while the bottom 90% holds just 49%. Again these statistics measure average income over time, and Figure 4 represents the average from 1917 to 2008. It is evident from these figures we can see a significant change in income distribution from 1978 to

2008. Note that the lightest shade of red (pinkish) specifies the top 1%, then the next 4% (1-5%), and finally the next 5% (5-10%) respectively (Economic Policy Institute 2008).

We can see from both figures 3 and 4 that US income distribution is showing increasing signs of inequality. This fact, in conjunction with the hypothesis of this paper, suggests that patterns of inequality are still growing. If we take an even more historical look at these statistics at the time between 1930 and 1984, the richest 10% of Americans received less than 34% of the income. Although still very unequal, it was not until after 1984 where signs of even more inequality begin to emerge (Economic Policy Institute 2008).

Figure 5: US Income Distribution 1984-2008



SOURCE: Economic Policy Institute (2011)

According to Figure 5, we can see that the richest 10% of the United States held 92% of all income growth, the bottom 90% held just 8% of that growth between 1984 and 2008. It is important to restate that Figures 3 through 5 show us the percentage of *income growth*, between the indicated time periods, that was held by either the top 10% (shades of red) or bottom 90% (blue).

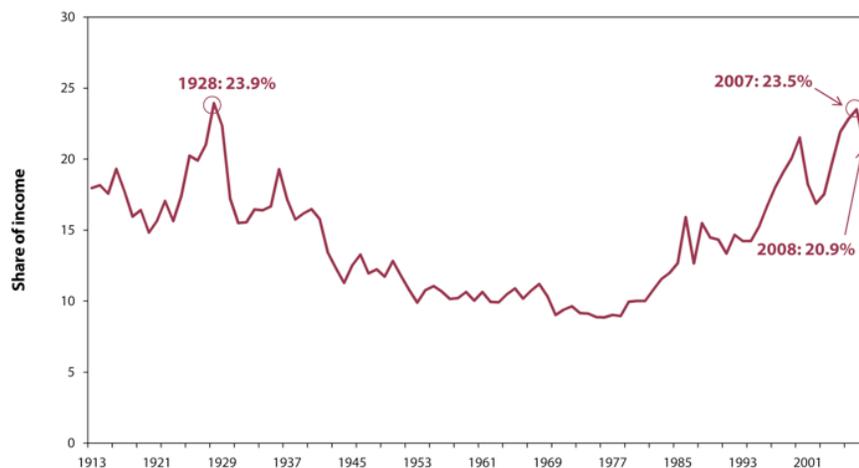
Productivity Growth

The *Economic Policy Institute* also studied productivity growth. This study analyzes the years between 1973 and 1995; here we see productivity growth decline to half of what it was during the previous period. Productivity growth can be defined as the amount of income that one can generate in a given hour of their total work. Family income, “once mirrored overall productivity growth,” but after the first period, 1947 to 1970s it fell, “far behind productivity growth” (Economic Policy Institute 2008). When comparing this to figures 3 and 4, we can see that income distribution changes as well, “the poorest families saw their real income actually shrink, while income growth increased notably higher up the income scale” (Economic Policy Institute 2008).

Public Opinion and Inequality Trends

As we see income inequality grow, it is becoming evident that the 1960s and 1970s are more equal in terms of income distribution than they are now. A study conducted by Atkinson, Piketty and Saez in 2010, drew the conclusion that, “2007 was the most unequal year barring one – 1928.”

Figure 6: “Share of income (including capital gains) held by top 1%, 1913-2008”



SOURCE: Atkinson, Piketty, and Saez (2008)

Figure 6 proves this last point, the top 1% held the most they have ever held in history in the years 1928 and 2007, respectively. The authors are careful to explain the sharp decline in income share by the top 1% in 2000 is due to the, “dot-com bubble bursting,” while the decline just after 2007 is due to the most recent economic recession (Atkinson *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, we can see other historical events and their impact on the top 1% of income distribution. For example, Figure 6 shows historic evidence of the Great Depression in 1929, just after the highest amount of income the richest 1% of Americans have shared in history, we can see this decline lasted through the 1930’s. We also see a relatively steady share of income from about the 1950s to the late 1970s, the point where our evidence suggests was one of the most ‘equal’ times in our history.

In numerous polls, 71% of Americans believe that achievement, work and skill, is the primary motive of how one moves up in our society (Economist 2010). Based on the data presented, it is questionable if American’s assertion regarding social stratification is truly valid. Looking back at Figure 4, we can see that the richest 10% take in 51% of the income; this increase in the rich makes it increasingly harder for Americans to achieve more than they could before the 1970s. We can also see this from Figures 5 and 6. “Between 1947 and 1973, the typical American family’s income roughly doubled,” while subsequently until 2007, family income only grew by 22% (Economist 2010). According to the same article, much of the subsequent growth can be attributed to the introduction of two-worker households. What this means is that while it may seem as family income is slightly growing, one must take in to account two incomes as opposed to just one in the past. Furthermore, trends show that the middle-class is shrinking primarily because of increases in technology and therefore creating more inequality.

According to our figures and information on income distribution, it would have been easier for one to move up in society during periods where the rich hold less of the income, during the 1950s to 1970s. This period, roughly 50 years ago, experienced levels of less income inequality, which made it easier for one to move up. We can also see from our information of more current times that inequality, in terms of income distribution, is now at one of the highest levels it has ever been in history. Income distribution tells us that it is harder to move up or achieve a higher status than it was in the past, or about 50 years ago.

Comparative Perspective

We have previously discussed patterns of mobility within the United States from a historical perspective, with a particular emphasis on income distribution as a variable that allows us to see how income has been distributed. This has further allowed us to examine how and why people in the United States have either stayed, moved up, or down, in society over the past half-century. We will now look at a comparative perspective displaying the United State's position to other countries in the world.

The Modern World System

Simply put, the overall pattern that is being seen in the world is as follows; "the rich are getting richer while many of the poor are getting poorer, not just in the United States but even more so worldwide" (Kerbo 2011). Perhaps this statement can be best explained by Wallerstein's research concerning his modern world systems theory.

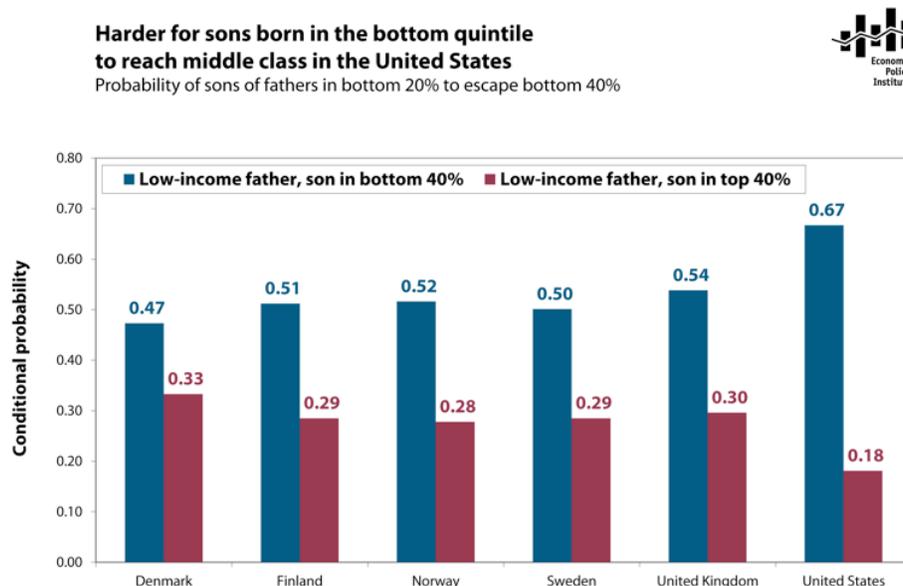
Although the theoretical model is a bit too exhaustive for this paper, we can still take away many useful explanations of how a world stratification system has emerged. Kerbo offers us a more simplified explanation of the modern world system, as it pertains to this

section, his explanation will be summarized in the remainder of this paragraph. The world is divided, as are most societies, by a division of labor that serves to bring the world together by a worldwide economic system. Capitalism plays a role in this division of labor that allows us to see its, “existence beyond national boundaries” (Kerbo 2011). Furthermore, “the primary unit of analysis, however, has shifted from classes within nations to nations that are in many respects like classes” (Kerbo 2011). From this explanation, we can see that nations serve to act on a hierarchical scale, much like the current class system in the United States. Core nations, such as the United States, France, Germany and Japan, are viewed as the *upper class*. Periphery nations, such as Chad, Laos, Haiti and Uganda, can be viewed as the *lower or working class*. The term, semiperiphery nations, such as Mexico, Taiwan, Ireland and Pakistan, refers to nations that are in between core and periphery nations (for a more comprehensive explanation see Kerbo 2011). To tie these types of nations together, the core nations exploit the periphery and semiperiphery nations in terms of economics, which ultimately make the core countries more successful and wealthy. Furthermore, when the world economy persists in these patterns it can be divided in to conflict between proletarian and bourgeoisie, “when this proletarian is located in a different country from this bourgeois, one of the mechanisms that has affected the process of appropriation is the manipulation of controlling flows over state boundaries” (Wallerstein 1979). In other words, core nations control the economic and social conditions of periphery and semi-periphery nations by the conditions associated with capitalism that, “results in patterns of uneven development” (Wallerstein 1979).

Global Stratification Patterns

Now that we have gained a very basic understanding of the emergence of global social stratification and the inequality that accompanies the process, we will turn to comparative global stratification patterns. Figure 7 compares Nordic region countries with the United States and relates levels of occupational inheritance with where a son will end up in a particular society (Jantti 2006).

Figure 7



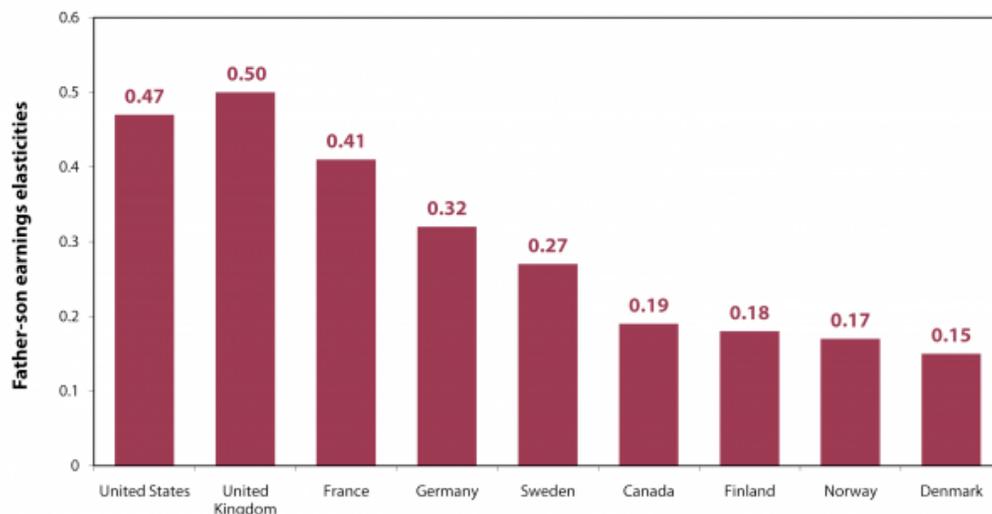
SOURCE: Jantti (2006)

More specifically, we can see that when compared with five Nordic regional countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom), the United States ranks lower in terms of upwards mobility, thus proving more inequality exist. The maroon color indicates the *conditional probability* that a son of a low-income father will end up in the top 40% of society. The blue color indicates the *conditional probability* that a son of a low-income father will end up in the lower 40% of society. We can see that the United States has the extremes of both paths with this set of countries. Based on this study, there

is a probability of 18% that a son of a low-income father will end up in the top 40%, while there is a probability of 67% that a son of a low-income father will end up in the bottom 40% of society. The authors of the study, Jantti *et al.*, draw the conclusion that it is, “harder for sons born in the bottom quintile to reach middle class in the United States” (Jantti *et al.* 2006). This study agrees with the second part of this paper’s hypothesis, there is more social inheritance occurring now than in the past. We discussed intergenerational social inheritance previously in the *Social Mobility and Status Attainment* section. According to figure 2, in the same section, we saw patterns of upward mobility being the highest at 37%.

Next, we will briefly examine a study on country comparisons earnings mobility. Figure 8, which originates from a paper written in 2006 by Miles Corak, shows the *elasticity* of father-son earnings in nine comparative countries.

Figure 8: “Intergenerational correlations, fathers and sons, U.S., U.K., Europe, and Scandinavia”



SOURCE: Corak (2006)

We will define elasticity as ‘ratio of attachment’ for this chart. The numbers of this figure indicate the *stickiness* of earnings mobility from father to son in different countries.

Further, we see that the United States along with the United Kingdom rank highest in the

amount of *stickiness* that carries over from one generation to the next in terms of earnings. What this means is that the higher the elasticity, or *stickiness*, of a country the less mobility the country has. It is evident that, “the United States produces less mobility than many of its international peers” (Corak 2006). When we compare the statistics of the United States to those of other countries on figure 8, we see that Denmark, Norway, and Finland (all Scandinavian countries) have the highest amounts of mobility. In other words, this study suggests that Scandinavian countries have less inequality (comparatively, the US has more inequality) and higher rates of mobility when compared to the United States. To explain this discrepancy we move to an article written by Annemette Sorenson that attempts to explain this phenomenon.

Comparative Differences

Sorenson attributes the differences in equality by studying the *equality of opportunity*. The author defines equality of opportunity as follows, “a situation where everyone in society is offered opportunities to compete and be judged according to the same rules and standards” (Sorenson 2006). Furthermore, based on Sorenson’s research, Scandinavian countries have more equality of opportunity in the areas of education, occupation and income attainment. While the article is very comprehensive, Sorenson credits the social and economic equality seen in these specific countries, to policy that is aimed at “equalizing conditions” for children during their most influential years.

Sorenson is also careful to point out that policy may not always be the answer with varying levels of “cultural capital” (Sorenson 2006). Sorenson’s study provides us with some insight of why some countries are more equal than others. Perhaps what the United States lacks in achieving more equality is at the very essence of Sorenson’s work.

Current Situation and the Future of Inequality

We have explored the historical progression of inequality in the United States through social mobility and income distribution patterns; we then turned to other countries that offer us a look at a comparative inequality perspective. It has been seen that inequality has grown in the United States and consequently there has been less social mobility. In the following section, we will examine current trends and what impact they pose on the future of inequality.

Industrialism and Education

As an introduction to the current situation and the future of inequality we will examine an article published in 1960 by Kerr *et al.*, titled *Industrialism and Industrial Man*. It is important to point out that although this article was published in 1960, it identifies many characteristics of industrialized societies and how they have affected different outputs of societies. These characteristics serve as identifying factors of where the United States is headed in the postindustrial world. Patterns of social mobility and inequality will become evident based on the characteristics that can be learned from this publication.

To begin, Kerr *et al.* argue that, “the pre-existing societies and conditions shape and constrain these inherent features [of the industrialism]” (Kerr *et al.* 1960). To put this in a different way, factors and variables from a previous society will always have an impact on what is to come. To relate this to the future of inequality and society in general, we can assume that whatever exist in the future will be derived from whatever outputs a society currently produces. Perhaps this indicates the importance of historical progression of patterns and how they influence futuristic patterns in society.

There are many factors that contribute and accompany the development and future of a society; one of particular importance is education. Education will be discussed because it is highly debated what students should learn and the importance of that subject for the future of society. While some place importance on a particular subject that matches the need they feel is most important, others place importance on quite the opposite. Also, education is one of the most important factors of advancing many characteristics of society, whether that be a prehistoric, such as learning how to domesticate fire, or more modern, such as assembling a car. We see from *Industrialism and the Industrial Man* that, “the industrial society tends to create an increasing level of general education for all citizens... education becomes one of the principal means of vertical social mobility” (Kerr *et al.* 1960). When we relate the previous quote to conditions of today, it seems correct to assume one with more education indeed is more vertically mobile than one without education. This quote also suggests that perhaps the more immediate future is concerned with educational attainment. In terms of inequality and its relation with the suggestions of Kerr *et al.*, it may be acceptable to assume that certain types of education are better than others; some are more *concentrated* than others. Based on this quote and my interpretation, as education becomes more available to industrial and postindustrial society (as the quote suggests), some citizens will *profit* more from education than others. In other words, the return (in terms of investing in one’s education and what one gets out of it) will be greater for some than others, depending on variables associated with inequality. While this is solely my interpretation of the quote, it does offer us a realistic view at the future of education and what societal implications may develop from population increases and securing education for all.

As we further exam *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, we see Kerr *et al.* assert the importance of urban centers, the large role of government and the web of rules that develop with the growing industrial society. Furthermore, the authors conclude their assessment of the future of social systems by deeming these systems will be, “uniform around the world as compared with today’s situation; but there may be substantial diversity within geographical and cultural areas as men and groups seek to establish and maintain their identity” (Kerr *et al.* 1960). From this conclusion, we can see the authors predict a more globalized world that stems away from differing social systems. Similarly, we see the world economy becoming more globalized in today’s world thus giving credit to this prediction.

Postindustrial

We know that the United States has moved out of the industrialization process and is now in the postindustrial phase. This phase, or current phenomena, primarily consists of a service-based economy, more white-collar occupations and increased use of technology. Figure 9 gives us a look at Gosta Esping-Anderson’s, who will be discussed shortly, interpretation of occupational hierarchies; both Industrial and Postindustrial hierarchies are shown.

Figure 9: Industrial and Postindustrial Occupational Hierarchies

The Industrial Hierarchy	The Service Hierarchy
Managers and executives	Professionals
Administrators, supervisors	Semi-professionals, technicians
Skilled manuals	Skilled service
Unskilled manuals	Unskilled service

SOURCE: Esping-Andersen (1999)

This begs the question of what this means for changes in the stratification system and how these changes will affect the future of our society in terms of equality. Gosta Esping-Anderson points out that, “between 1979 and 1993, the OECD countries lost an (un-weighted) average of 22 per cent of their manufacturing jobs,” other countries such as the United Kingdom and France lost one-third to one-half (Esping-Anderson 1999).

Furthermore, Esping-Anderson, in his work titled *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, attributes the household as being, “the *sine qua non* of how much, and what kind of, employment will grow” (Esping-Anderson 1999). In other words, Esping-Anderson assumes that the household is at the center of the economic structure and can be used to predict future patterns of the economy. This interpretation of the household as the impetus of predicting any economic movement can be looked at through a consumptive thought process. When factoring what a household needs, in terms of consumption, we can predict economic conditions according to Esping-Anderson.

The first work that was examined, *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, dates back a half century, which was the time period where the United States saw less inequality. The second work, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, takes in to account changes in social stratification and was published more recently where we have seen patterns of inequality increasing. Before I attempt to offer a brief view and prediction on the future of stratification systems, I will tie in one last piece of predictive evidence from Sociologist Daniel Bell.

Power and Post-Industrialism

Daniel Bell focused much of his research on postindustrial societies; a particular emphasis that relates to this paper is his work on *Stratification and Power*. Bell believes,

“technical skill becomes the base of and education the mode of access to power; those who come to the fore in this fashion are the scientists” (Bell 1976).

Figure 10: Stratification and Power

Stratification and Power

	PRE-INDUSTRIAL	INDUSTRIAL	POST-INDUSTRIAL
Resource	Land	Machinery	Knowledge
Social locus	Farm Plantation	Business firm	University Research institute
Dominant figures	Landowner Military	Businessmen	Scientists Research men
Means of power	Direct control of force	Indirect influence on politics	Balance of technical- political forces Franchises and rights
Class base	Property Military force	Property Political organization Technical skill	Technical skill Political organization
Access	Inheritance Seizure by armies	Inheritance Patronage Education	Education Mobilization Co-optation

SOURCE: Bell (1973)

Perhaps this assertion may be better explained through a historical societal model in Figure 10. It can be seen from Figure 10 that there are major differences in terms of *stratification and power* throughout different levels of economic steering. This evidence helps predict where future inequality lies and how decisions are made. Figure 10 can be better understood by noting the following, “when there is a change in the nature of the system, new groups come to power” (Bell 1976). I will use this interpretation to further offer my own predictions of stratification and inequality with an emphasis in the United States.

Future Predictions

There is little doubt that the growth of inequality is affecting many aspects of the world. As Sociologist Anthony Giddens boldly declared, “Along with ecological risk, to which it is related, expanding inequality is the most serious problem facing the world society” (Giddens 1999). Additionally, globalization has been attributed to much of the

growing inequality. My interpretation is while globalization can account for some of the emerging inequality trends, there is much more to it. For instance, globalization has indeed helped Asian nations prosper (see Firebaugh 2003, *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality* for more on this topic). Some may even argue that these nations will see a complete turn around to their pre-industrialization identities in the next 50 years. Based on the prior discourse, it is known that US inequality is on the rise, social mobility is slowing down and occupational inheritance is increasing. The question now becomes, what does this mean for the future?

What the United States will see in its more immediate future, the next 25 years, is the strengthening of the trends previously mentioned. There will indeed continue to be less social mobility, the United States social structure will begin to deepen more so than widen. Citizens of the United States will be more merged in to certain classes and from those classes we will see continuing occupational inheritance. The main cause of this will be increasing inequalities in income distribution. Furthermore, as more and more people begin to stick, or settle, in certain classes my prediction is that the economy in the United States will even out, or not significantly increase, for a brief period of time. During this time period, I believe it is possible to see other countries compete for economic power and dominance. China and the European Union (EU) both show promising signs of economic strength and dominance. Evidence is already emerging; there have been several predictions concerning the potential of China's remaining, "untapped market." Further, the European Union currently is estimated to have the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP), when looked at through all of its 27 member countries, compared to that of the United States and China. In economic terms, the future of the United States will have

several foreign competition challenges and they will be met by domestic challenges as well. Both types of these challenges will have an impact on inequality and what it means for generations to come. The emergence and struggle of competing power will play a decisive role in politics as well. I believe we will begin to see more technology at the expense of jobs and resources. This may mean more flexing of the United State's military muscle to maintain and assert the US's position as a global power. Despite all these factors, inequality will continue to rise in the United States.

Conclusion

Overall, the original hypothesis proved to be correct. The first part of the hypothesis will be analyzed, which predicted there is less equality/ achievement now, in 2011, than there was 50 years ago in the United States. Perhaps the most important evidence concerning this portion is income attainment data. From this evidence we see increasing inequality of income attainment and distribution, which does not seem to be slowing, only increasing. The second part of the original hypothesis suggested that there would also be less social mobility and more social inheritance. We have seen patterns of social mobility decrease, from what they were 50 years ago, for several reasons. Two of the main reasons being economic and technological developments, which have played a fundamental role in social mobility changes. These two reasons have shifted occupational workforces and other economic conditions further away from what they were 50 years ago, thus creating unequal changes. In regards to social, or occupational inheritance, there has been an increase since the time period of 50 years ago. The fact that social mobility is

decreasing in the United States suggests that people are staying where they are in the class system, which gives more opportunity for more occupational inheritance.

In addition to proving this paper's hypothesis, attention was given to the United State's comparative perspective and future outlook in terms of inequality trends. The evidence in this paper suggests that the United States shows patterns of some of the worse comparative inequality. The current situation and future of inequality in the United States focused much on economic development and how factors of a changing economy contribute and manipulate inequality trends.

There are several important closing remarks that are valuable to the future of social stratification and inequality research. *Blau and Duncan's* research in 1967 remains some of the most important and monumental research concerning this topic. In order to gain a more in-depth, current and factual analysis of this subject; more research is necessary in this respective area. Additionally, *most* of the research I came across on this topic lacked any useful or relevant discourse on women in the stratification system, particularly in the historical context. The importance of women in the stratification system is very important, perhaps this lack of incorporation speaks to the high amount of inequality found in this subject area. Patterns of occupational inheritance and social mobility in the United States, and other parts of the world, remain an area under studied and in need of more current data, which could potentially lead to more equal conditions.

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