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# Historical Studies of Social Mobility and Stratification

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## Key Words

history, social inequality, social stratification, social endogamy, career

## Abstract

This review discusses historical studies of social mobility and stratification. The focus is on changes in social inequality and mobility in past societies and their determinants. It discusses major historical sources, approaches, and results in the fields of social stratification (ranks and classes in the past), marriage patterns by social class or social endogamy, intergenerational social mobility, and historical studies of the career.

## INTRODUCTION

This review discusses historical studies of social mobility and stratification. It deals with changes in social inequality and mobility in past societies and their determinants. We discuss major historical sources, approaches, and results in the fields of changing social stratification, intergenerational social mobility, career mobility, and marriage patterns by social class. We emphasize occupations as indicators of social position, and we limit ourselves to the Western world, although one hopes the latter limitation is only a matter of time (e.g., Campbell & Lee 2003). We sometimes mention research using survey methods, but the focus is on studies using material from the pre-sample survey period, that is, before World War II.

## HISTORICAL SOURCES

Historical studies are rooted in and limited by the sources. Historians cannot create their own surveys and are at the mercy of sources that are often incomplete, imperfectly suited to their needs, and always created for a purpose other than that for which they use them. Energy is expended in collecting, massaging, and interpreting sources, and the results are often so dependent on those processes that we open this review with a few words on historical sources.

To study social stratification, scholars need data on individuals' position in society. Most historical studies of social mobility and stratification use occupation as the indicator of social position and not education, income, or wealth. Although many people in past societies received some training, there was little variance in formal educational attainment. Income and wealth show greater variance, but in the pre-sample survey period few sources contain such information for a large part of the population. Historical tax data come closest, but they usually cover only a segment of rich adult males, and the size of this segment differs between periods and places. Historical sources that include information on occupation are much more abundant. And indeed, occupation

is a good indicator of social position, and a long-standing research tradition in sociology documents how to construct measures of rank and class using occupational information.

Census data and vital registers form the preferred clay in the hands of historians molding an image of the social structure in the past. Both sources exist in many countries all over the globe (Hall et al. 2000, Lynch 1998). Although American scholars have almost exclusively relied on census materials and Europeans have studied predominantly vital registers, both sources exist in North America and Europe as well as in other parts of the world, including the former European and American colonies. For example, the IPUMS-I project aims to collect data from all censuses worldwide.

A census captures the entire population—although it usually provides most of the information on the head of the household, usually a man—at a particular date. Censuses contain information on marital mobility, in the form of the occupation of the man and, if noted, of the woman. They contain no information on career mobility, except in the rare case of a retrospective question being asked by the census taker. When a family consists of parents and children living at the same address, the census provides information on intergenerational social mobility, but only for those children still living with their parents. To capture career movements and intergenerational social mobility properly, it is necessary to link the census of one year to that of another. This linking has, until now, restricted the popularity of this source for the study of social mobility. Manual linking is time consuming and, in practice, limited to small localities. Automated or semi-automated linkage is becoming more popular now that large national historical databases exist (<http://historicaldemography.net/links.php>, <http://www.nappdata.org>). Whether done manually or by using dedicated software, linkage faces two quite different types of problems: the need not to miss true linkages and, at the same time, avoid false linkages. Especially in the case of common names, such as John Brown, determining whether the John Brown

in the 1884 census is the same John Brown in the 1854 census is not easy (e.g., Wrigley 1973, Hautaniemi et al. 2000, Ruggles 2006). One option is to exclude popular names and other problematic cases, but that might leave one with a rather small and atypical segment of the population. Still, as historical databases grow in temporal and geographical coverage and linking algorithms improve, studies using linked censuses will increase in number. This is desirable because censuses often contain a considerable amount of information that can be used to explain mobility patterns.

The second important source from which mobility patterns in past societies can be distilled is a vital register. Before the introduction of civil registration, churches registered vital events—baptisms, marriages, and burials. Civil registration was introduced in France in 1792 as part of the separation of church and state and spread from there to other countries. Generally, historians have studied church records prior to the introduction of civil registration, and afterwards looked at the civil records. However, the church did not stop recording vital events the moment the state stepped in. Miles & Vincent (1991), for example, have studied Anglican Church registers in the period 1839–1914 in those regions of the UK that remained overwhelmingly Anglican during that period.

Of all vital registers, marriage records are the most informative for studying social mobility. They may contain occupational information on bride and groom and their parents, and sometimes on witnesses as well, as well as other relevant characteristics such as age, ability to sign, place of birth, and residence. Annexes to marriage records sometimes contain other data as well, such as excerpts from the militia registers or notarial records with arrangements on the ownership of the property of the bride and groom. Marriage records do not require linkage to enable one to study either intergenerational social mobility or marital mobility. However, they do not allow one to study career mobility. Understandably, this efficient source is widely used by historians. But that efficiency comes at

a price. Marriage records suffer from missing data, notably information on the occupation of the father of the bride or groom. This information is usually missing if the father is deceased at the time of the marriage of his children. Though annoying, this data limitation has not been conclusively shown to be a problem: The cases for which one has data do not necessarily differ with regard to social mobility from the cases for which data are lacking (Zijdeman 2010). Another disadvantage of marriage records is that the ages of parents and children at the time of the children's marriage are one generation apart; in other words, the occupations are measured at different points in the life cycle. And finally, those who did not marry—a group of varying size—are not included. Generally speaking, comparisons of trends over time will be less affected by these disadvantages than descriptions for a certain time point.

It is possible to study career mobility using registration data. This can be done either by linking several records that refer to the same person (for example, the occupation of a man at marriage and at the birth or marriage of his children) or by using population registers. The latter source has not often been used to study careers, but such registers are promising because they often contain many records of occupations and prelinked information on, in principle, the entire population (Maas & van Leeuwen 2004, 2008). Using standard demographic sources as opposed to the personnel files of, say, a bank to study career histories is a recent fundamental redefinition of the field of research (Brown et al. 2004). While personnel files usually contain more information, can be combined with other data from the same company, and are thus more informative, they are also more limited in scope. Using vital registration data to study the whole range of work mobility of the total labor force thus offers a much-needed complementary approach.

Besides censuses and vital registers, many other sources can and have been used to study stratification and social mobility in the past. Noteworthy are the militia registers (Farcy & Faure 2003, Papy 1971, Rishoy 1971), covering

the entire male population at a certain age. The registers note physical characteristics, such as height and health, but also social indicators, including occupations of the young man and his parents, and literacy. Other sources relate mostly to the elites: lists of popes, ministers, members of parliament, students, or voters. Indeed, Sorokin's (1959 [1929]) famous study of social mobility was also based on these sources. Fine as these sources are for the study of elite recruitment—that is, inflow into the elites—they are less ideal for studying flows between the whole social spectrum of the population, including outflow from the elite, and indeed the results are often difficult to compare owing to the varying definitions of what constituted such elites. Sources covering a somewhat larger part of the population include notarial records (Daumard & Furet 1959) and school records (Zijdeman & Mandemakers 2008, Sanderson 1972). Studies that focus on career mobility require longitudinal information on the path of the career along with key personal characteristics. Other sources scholars sometimes use include company records (Gribaudo 1989, Savage 1993); catechetical examination records (Kronborg & Nilson 1978); family trees (Weiss 1991); guild and apprenticeship records (Bearman & Dean 1992, Burrage & Corry 1981, Brodsky Elliott 1978, Rappaport 1989); electoral, tax, and land registers (Pinol 1993, de Vries 1986, van Leeuwen & Maas 1991); and autobiographies (Roy 1984, Masuch 1995, Maynes 1995, Miles 1999).

## PROCESSING OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

In studies comparing occupational distributions over time periods or geographical areas, inevitably the problem of comparability arises. How does one measure occupation in a similar way for all regions and periods? Without a comparable measure, one can never be sure whether the differences observed are true or merely artifacts—a consequence of noncomparable ways of allocating occupational titles from different languages, regions, and periods into

an occupational or class schema. This problem has long hampered historical studies of social stratification and mobility (Kaelble 1981), but it also exists in many contemporary studies (Goldthorpe 1985).

Recently, progress has been made in solving these comparability problems for historical occupational information with the development of a historical version of the ISCO68 classification of occupations (van Leeuwen et al. 2002, 2004). ISCO68 is a coding grid for occupational information drawn up by the International Labor Organization and used by statistical agencies across the world. After many rounds of consultations with leading historians and experts on historical databases, ISCO68 has been converted into HISCO, a tool that can be used to code occupational information as found in historical censuses and vital registers in a comparable way. Coding of occupational titles worldwide is ongoing; the progress so far can be seen on the History of Work Web site of the International Institute of Social History (<http://historyofwork.iisg.nl>).

Whereas researchers of contemporary social mobility and stratification have standard methods to transform the coded occupational information into a class schema (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992; see also Goldthorpe 2000, p. 223, for a theoretical reinterpretation) or into a status or prestige scale (Treiman 1977, Ganzeboom et al. 1992), for historical information, such standard procedures are only now being developed. An important example of how to develop a class schema is that of Bouchard (1996). He identified the main dimensions of class in the past and then set out to construct a set of formal and empirically based rules to score occupational titles on each of these main dimensions, using information from the Canadian Dictionary of Occupational Titles. This procedure has since been adapted to create a class schema linked to HISCO (<http://historyofwork.iisg.nl/docs/hisclass-brief.doc>; Van Leeuwen & Maas 2010). In this new social class schema—HISCLASS—as well as in many class schemas used in local historical studies, the main

dimensions of social class in the past are (*a*) the manual–nonmanual divide, (*b*) skill level, (*c*) the degree to which one supervises others, and (*d*) the economic sector. Employment status, in the sense of being employed, an employer, or a working proprietor is not often given in historical data sets. HISCLASS is grounded on the American Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which includes quantified objective characteristics of occupations as gathered by occupational specialists. Most historical class schemas are based on historical intuition (Bouchard 1996, Schüren 1989). An experiment in which historians directly classified HISCO groups into the classes distinguished in the HISCLASS schema suggested that the results are basically the same (Van Leeuwen & Maas 2010). This is a more general finding. Several studies have shown that there are high correlations both among expert historians as well as between historical intuition and contemporary rankings based on income, education, or social prestige (Hershberg et al. 1974, Treiman 1976, Hauser 1982, Sobek 1996).

The problem of how to scale occupations on a continuous dimension of inequality has been addressed in stratification research on contemporary societies in three ways. First, prestige scales are constructed by asking people to rank a number of occupations according to the level of prestige generally associated with those occupations and then combining the individual rankings to make a single scale (Treiman 1977). Second, socioeconomic status scales are constructed by looking at the average level of income and schooling associated with each occupation (Ganzeboom et al. 1992). These two types of ranking have almost never been constructed for the pre-sample survey period. Occasionally in historical research, other indicators of status have been linked to occupational groups, such as the place of fixed seats in a church [or the order of various guilds in a procession (Burrage & Corry 1981, Lucassen & Trienekens 1978, Ultee 1983)]. Apart from problems of interpretation—the most prestigious guild might be at the front, at the rear, or in the middle of the procession—

these types of data are rare and are generally tied to a specific place and time and thus are not easily usable for comparative purposes.

Third, another way to scale occupations is to estimate distances between social relationships, such as who befriends whom and who marries whom. The so-called CAMSIS (Cambridge Social Interaction and Stratification) scales of social distance are based on this principle (Prandy & Lambert 2003). A similar estimation technique (but with a different interpretation) has recently been used by Chan & Goldthorpe (2007). These scales estimate the relative position of occupations by looking at interaction patterns between persons with different occupations. If sons of butchers often marry daughters of bakers but rarely marry daughters of factory workers, butchers are closer in social terms to bakers than they are to factory workers.

This procedure has also been used to create historical scales, first for Britain (Prandy & Bottero 2000) and later an international version (Lambert et al. 2008; <http://www.camsis.stir.ac.uk/hiscam>). For the international HISCO-based HISCAM scale, more than a million relationships were derived from marriage certificates for five countries—Canada, Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—for the period 1800–1940. Apart from one universal scale, various scales were made according to country, period, and gender. Differences in the social status of occupations exist between countries, the two time periods, and gender, but they are not large enough to prevent the use of a general scale. Although large amounts of data are needed to scale occupations in this way, this approach still seems more feasible than retrospectively creating a prestige or status scale.

## SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The main question asked in research on social stratification is whether social stratification has changed markedly over time. According to the structural theory of prestige, as formulated by Treiman (1976, 1977), there exists a single, worldwide hierarchy of occupational prestige. Because all societies face similar functional

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### HISCLASS:

Historical  
International Social  
Class Scheme

### HISCAM: Historical

CAMSIS Scale of  
Occupational Status

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imperatives, a similar division of labor develops irrespective of time and place. The more powerful and privileged occupations are the same in all societies, and they are always more highly regarded. Hout & DiPrete (2006, pp. 2–3) referred to this pattern of invariance as the Treiman constant: “The Treiman constant may be the only universal sociologists have discovered.”

Treiman finds support for his claim in the high correlations between the rankings of occupations in different countries and different periods. However, most rankings are from the sample survey period. Hauser (1982) reaches further back by comparing nineteenth-century American occupational rankings (as constructed by knowledgeable historians) with twentieth-century rankings (based on surveys). He argues that the two closely resemble each other. This finding is corroborated by Guest et al. (1989), who compare the relative position of occupational groups in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, using linked censuses, to those in the second half of the twentieth century using surveys. The results from the HISCAM scaling procedure suggest substantial comparability in most status positions but also in some cases important historical specificity (Lambert et al. 2008; <http://www.camsis.stir.ac.uk/hiscam>). A preliminary conclusion may be that Treiman’s claim is largely supported but that it leaves room for deviations pertaining to specific occupations or divides.

One such specific cleavage is the divide between blue-collar and white-collar workers. According to Katz (1975, p. 9), in the mid-nineteenth century this “distinction did not exist with anything like the sharpness it has since assumed.” He illustrates this with total mobility patterns for nineteenth-century Hamilton, Ontario, to support his claim. However, most later research disagrees. Miles & Vincent (1991, p. 52) performed similar analyses on English data and conclude that “the line running between manual working class and nonmanual middle class represented a fundamental cleavage in nineteenth-century

society.” An estimate of interclass distances using log-linear models and American data shows that this is not a European phenomenon and certainly not a myth that present sociologists have imposed on the nineteenth century (Grusky & Fukumoto 1989).

A more specific question asks whether the relative position of artisans changed during industrialization. Artisans increasingly had to compete with factory production. It is claimed that they turned into marginal, semiproletarian workers, reflecting a significant reduction not only in their material conditions but also in their status. Some authors state that artisans, among others, lose their privileged position because the best-paid factory workers gain status, allowing them to merge with the lower middle class (Hobsbawm 1964, Penn & Dawkins 1983, Miles & Vincent 1991). Conclusions from empirical research are mixed. Aminzade & Hodson (1982) studied total intergenerational mobility patterns for Toulouse between 1830 and 1872 and found increasing mobility between artisans and workers. Fukumoto & Grusky (1993) estimated interclass distances for Marseilles in approximately the same period but did not observe any change in those distances between these particular classes.

A final question is whether elites could maintain their exclusive and privileged position during industrialization. Kaelble (1985) summarizes a number of developments that made this more difficult: The rise of large corporations led to the growing importance of education and a separation of ownership and decision making; family businesses declined; and industrialization was accompanied by the growing impact of politics aimed at decreasing societal inequality. Kaelble’s (1985) review of American and European studies on total mobility into the elite supports his claim. After the industrial revolution, a long-term trend toward a larger inflow of nonelite classes into the business elite started. Again, log-linear models lead to different results. Van Leeuwen & Maas (1991) analyzed tax data for Amsterdam during industrialization and found no pattern of increasing access to the ranks of the elite.

## INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIAL MOBILITY

In sociological studies, two hypotheses posit that the degree of intergenerational mobility is basically stable over time. The first is the Lipset and Zetterberg hypothesis (LZ hypothesis) of 1959. Based on a comparison of a dozen mobility tables from different countries, Lipset & Zetterberg (1959) concluded that industrialized societies show comparable degrees of intergenerational mobility, irrespective of their rate of economic expansion. The “logic of industrialism” school supplemented this hypothesis with the claim that before industrialization not only did countries show less intergenerational mobility, but that differences between countries were also greater than after industrialization (Kerr et al. 1973 [1960], Inkeles 1960, Form 1979). Industrialization caused convergence of mobility patterns because, to increase efficiency and decrease risks, managers in all industrial societies recruited on the basis of achievement instead of ascription. Workers, on the other hand, embraced modern universal values, investing in the education of their children and grasping opportunities for upward mobility. Scholars from the logic of industrialism school expected a sudden change in mobility rates during industrialization. Others assumed that industrialization triggered a process of change leading to a gradual convergence of mobility patterns in industrialized countries at a higher level than before (Fukumoto & Grusky 1993). The latter hypothesis contrasts starkly with the original LZ hypothesis.

The second hypothesis claiming stability was formulated by Featherman et al. (1975). It states that “circulation mobility” in industrial societies with a market economy and a nuclear family system is basically the same. The FJH (Featherman, Jones, Hauser) hypothesis differs from the LZ hypothesis in two important ways. First, it refers to circulation mobility instead of the total degree of mobility. Circulation mobility, also called relative mobility, or openness, refers to the relative likelihood of sons or daughters from different social

backgrounds reaching a certain occupational class themselves. Mobility due to changes in occupational structure is explicitly excluded from circulation mobility. Technically, this is effected by calculating odds ratios and estimating log-linear models (Featherman & Hauser 1978, Goodman 1979, Hauser 1980, Hout 1983). Excluding that form of mobility is important because, by definition, the occupational structure changed during industrialization (Simkus 1984). Second, the FJH hypothesis distinguishes between Western types of industrial society and other types lacking a market economy or a nuclear family system. Although not explicitly mentioned, the FJH hypothesis can be read to mean that relative mobility was less common in preindustrial societies than in industrial societies.

The LZ hypothesis had already been investigated before it was actually formulated. Sorokin (1959 [1929]) gathered a variety of information on intergenerational mobility, covering many countries and a long period. He concluded that “there seems to be no definite perpetual trend toward either an increase or a decrease of...mobility.... What has been happening is only an alternation—the waves of a greater mobility superseded by the cycles of a greater immobility—and that is all” (pp. 152–54). This general conclusion is often cited. However, Sorokin also stated that “within Western societies during the last century there seems to have existed a trend toward a decrease of inheritance of occupation” (p. 458) and “in our societies, the percentages of hereditary transmission of occupation from the father to his children is much lower” than in antiquity or the Middle Ages (p. 418).

Probably the first studies to gather individual-level data on intergenerational mobility in the pre-sample survey era were those by Daumard (1957a,b, 1961), in collaboration with Furet (Daumard & Furet 1959). Using more than 2500 marriage registers and notarial death certificates, they constructed father-son mobility tables for Paris in 1749. Unfortunately, this pioneering work has largely been forgotten in the historical stratification



literature, even by French historians (Dupâquier & Kessler 1992, Dupâquier & Pélissier 1992, Gribaudo & Blum 1990, Pinol 1991). Instead, the work of Thernstrom (1964, 1973) on Massachusetts between 1850 and 1880 and on Boston between 1880 and 1970 has served as a model for a flourishing line of research. This is demonstrated by the work of Blumin (1969) and Hershberg (1981) on Philadelphia, Bouchard (1986) on French Canada, Glasco (1978) on Buffalo, Griffen & Griffen (1978) on Poughkeepsie, Knights (1971, 1991) on Boston, and Katz (1975) on Hamilton. In Europe, too, many studies have been carried out (see the reviews by Kaelble 1981, 1985; Miles & Vincent 1993).

All these studies can be regarded as tests of the LZ hypothesis. They study changes in the total degree of mobility in the era of industrialization. Unfortunately, the results are difficult to compare. Conzen (1983, p. 665) voiced her concern about this:

Better described as historical accounting or even bookkeeping than as statistical hypothesis testing, much of the work is based on the implicit assumption that an intelligent look at data cross-classified into standard sets of categories will automatically yield meaningful generalizations. . . . When combined with the multitude of idiosyncratic solutions to data problems, this tendency has virtually guaranteed noncomparability from case study to case study.

Some reviews conclude that the results do not generally support the LZ hypothesis, claiming, in other words, that total mobility did not in general increase during industrialization (Kaelble 1981, 1985; Schüren 1989). Featherman et al. (1975) approached the LZ hypothesis not by looking at what happened during industrialization but by comparing total intergenerational mobility in industrial societies. They too rejected the LZ hypothesis, as did many other researchers, using the same approach (for reviews, see Fukumoto & Grusky 1993, Ganzeboom et al. 1991).

From the FJH study onward, attention shifted to a test of their hypothesis on the similarity of circulation mobility, or relative mobility. As was the case with the LZ hypothesis, different approaches were used to test the FJH hypothesis. A first approach studied the period during industrialization, for example by reanalyzing data gathered by historians working in the New Urban History tradition (Kousser et al. 1982, Landale & Guest 1990, van Leeuwen & Maas 1991, Rishoy 1971, Upton 1985). Most often, the results are not consistent with the FJH hypothesis. For example, Fukumoto & Grusky (1993) compared relative mobility in Marseilles in 1821, 1846, and 1869 and found no change. The few larger studies show mixed results. Miles (1993) analyzed British marriage certificates between 1839 and 1914 and found increasing openness, as did Lambert et al. (2007). Maas & van Leeuwen (2004) studied the Sundsvall region in Sweden between 1800 and 1890 and found that direct class inheritance became rarer over time, but the barriers to mobility over a larger distance became somewhat stronger, resulting in little overall change in relative mobility. Zijdeman (2010) used a slightly different approach—following the status-attainment tradition of Blau & Duncan (1967)—and found increasing influence of fathers' status on their sons' status in a Dutch province between 1811 and 1915. One should note, however, that whereas the Netherlands and Sweden were only starting to industrialize in the period under investigation, this was certainly not the case for Britain.

In the second approach, the period during industrialization is compared with recent years. Grusky (1986) combined several of the American historical data sets collected by New Urban Historians and compared them with survey data from 1973. He found an increase in relative mobility. Guest et al. (1989) took a national sample of the U.S. Census of 1900 and linked that to the 1880 Census. They compared these data with survey data from 1962 and found an increase in relative mobility. Kleining (1971a,b) concluded that in Germany relative

mobility increased in the first phase of industrialization but remained stable thereafter. However, his data and method were criticized (Mayer & Müller 1971, 1972). Kleining used survey data from 1969–1970. The respondent reported on the occupations of himself, his father, and his grandfather. The last two pieces of information were not bound to a definite point in time. Furthermore, Kleining used mobility indices that aimed at, but did not completely succeed in, distinguishing relative from total mobility. According to Mayer & Müller, better analyses would reveal that relative mobility in Germany grew not only during early industrialization but also later on. The debate is not over though, because researchers using other German data have come to different results. Whereas Kaelble (1983) found increasing relative mobility, Allerbeck & Stork (1980) found no increase in openness. Ferrie & Long (2007) have studied mobility patterns in the United States and Britain since 1850, using linked census and survey data. They conclude that relative intergenerational mobility was higher in the United States than in Britain around 1850 but that this gap closed over time.

Finally, many studies tested the FJH hypothesis by using survey data and by studying both differences between countries and changes over time within industrialized countries (Grusky & Hauser 1984; Hauser et al. 1975a,b; Hauser & Grusky 1988; Hope 1981; Hout 1988; Breen 2004). The two largest studies are those by Erikson & Goldthorpe (1992) and Ganzeboom et al. (1989). They came to opposing conclusions. Erikson & Goldthorpe gave their book the title *The Constant Flux*. This summarizes their conclusion that although differences in relative mobility exist between countries and over time, those differences are relatively small compared with what the countries and the periods have in common. Ganzeboom et al. (1989) rejected the FJH hypothesis. They found sizeable differences in relative mobility between countries and a small but cumulative yearly increase in openness. An explanation for the different results may be found in a different approach—comparing a

smaller number of highly comparable surveys with a large number of surveys of different quality—and in a different interpretation of what are small and what are major differences.

In short, two specific components of the LZ hypothesis did not find support in empirical studies. No considerable increase in total mobility during industrialization is usually found, and there exist considerable differences in the degree of total mobility between industrial societies. The tests of the FJH hypothesis are less conclusive. Most studies found no increase in relative mobility during industrialization. This may be the result of a lack of statistical power, given that many studies are small and cover only a brief period. A number of studies show a slow increase within industrialized societies, and there is more support for country differences. The Ganzeboom, Luijkx, and Treiman (GLT; Ganzeboom et al. 1989) hypothesis of an increase in relative mobility after 1955 is a serious rival to the FJH hypothesis, but it is restricted to the survey period.

The factors determining total and relative mobility in past societies, and their regional and temporal variance, have only rarely been the object of research. The study by Zijdeman (2010) is one of the few to use multilevel models to systematically relate intergenerational mobility during industrialization to indicators of economic and social change. He found that the influence of a father's occupational status increased with industrialization and urbanization, decreased with higher levels of geographical mobility, and was not influenced by educational expansion. More studies have tried to explain mobility patterns between and within industrial societies. For example, Rijken & Ganzeboom (2001) showed that intergenerational mobility is smaller in state-socialist countries and periods and that it increases with educational expansion.

## **SOCIAL MOBILITY OVER THE LIFE COURSE**

The historical study of careers is at present being broadened and redefined. Although career mobility can be defined as any change in

occupational or employment status over the life course, a much more specific definition has been prevalent, focusing on orderly upward mobility. This focus on upward mobility is probably due to the predominantly voluntary nature of career mobility, at least in the Western world from World War II to the present credit crisis. With the exception of redundancy, career mobility is often the result of waiting until a position comes available that is better than one's present situation and thus involves upward mobility (Sørensen 1975).

Career mobility in a general way, that is not restricted to segments of the labor force with orderly upward careers, has not often been the topic of historical study. Using linked censuses or register data, some studies compare occupations of a large part of the male population, for example, ten years apart (Boonstra 1993, Chudacoff 1972, Pinol 1993, Prandy & Bottero 2000). The most notable example is the study by Kaelble (1985) comparing American and European cities between 1820 and 1930. He investigated two claims: (a) that American cities showed more mobility than European cities, and (b) that career mobility became more common after industrialization. According to industrialization theory (Treiman 1970), there is both more upward and more downward career mobility in industrialized societies than in agrarian societies. The science and technology of industrial society are less static; they generate continual, rapid, and widespread changes in production methods and products. They thus require continual training and retraining of the workforce, geographical mobility, and upward and downward mobility (Kerr et al. 1973 [1960]). The career mobility tables studied by Kaelble do not support these claims. The proportion of men changing classes did not differ between the two continents, nor was it related to the pace of industrialization. When upward and downward mobility were distinguished, though, American cities showed a higher likelihood of upward mobility for workers than European cities. There were large differences between cities, not related to industrialization. Other processes that may have affected career

mobility during the same period are the rise of hierarchical bureaucratic management structures; the development of internal labor markets; the spread of education; migration regimes; and discrimination on grounds of race, religion, and sex (Jacoby 1984, Brown et al. 2004, Owen 2004). Whether the findings of Kaelble can be explained by these processes or were mere artifacts of different modes of data gathering and classifying occupations remains unclear.

Studies using population registers are rare (Alter 1988; Bras 2002, 2004). Compared with linked sources, these registers often contain more occupational information per person. Using these general sources as opposed to those relating to, for example, a company is more than a change of source. It may be seen as a paradigmatic shift in the history of the career, complementing the older research tradition focusing on structured if not upward careers of only a minority of the population. Maas & van Leeuwen, for example, use Swedish data that contain on average one measurement of occupation per 6 years (Maas & van Leeuwen 2004) and Dutch data with one measurement per 17 years (Maas & van Leeuwen 2008). They find support for increasing career mobility during industrialization in both the Netherlands and Sweden. The Swedish data show that the excess mobility during industrialization was mostly lateral: from unskilled farm worker to unskilled industrial worker.

Most historical studies of career mobility have focused on formal careers, however. Formal careers are work situations in which an underlying structure shapes whatever occupational progression occurs. Such an underlying structure can be a formally defined hierarchical bureaucracy, but also the practice of a specific craft or skill (a professional career model), the development of a successful business enterprise (an entrepreneurial career), or the transmission of property and other resources to one's descendants (a dynastic career) (Vincent 1993).

The focus on formal careers not only is driven by substantive interests, but also is facilitated by the availability of historical sources.

Sources, such as payroll books and insurance registers, provide much information that enables a researcher to get an overview of more or less complete careers, but only within the specific organization that is the object of study. Although most historical studies of formal careers are not theoretically driven, the main claim about changes over time that can be distilled from these studies is that upward routes of mobility close when the organizations exist longer.

Formal careers in large bureaucratic organizations already existed in early modern Europe. Clear examples are the Catholic Church, the navy and army, and large mercantile companies, such as the English East India Company and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) (Van Leeuwen & Lesger 2005). Careers in these organizations did not usually stretch from bottom to top. Sons from the elite, the nobility, and the patriciate usually entered the organization at a higher level and also had the best opportunities for upward mobility. The lower classes entered the organization at the bottom and could expect to rise only to some extent. Early in the existence of the organizations, the chances were better that people of lower descent could make a career. For example, in the early years of the English East India Company and the Dutch VOC, the highest positions were open to the merchants who founded those companies. Soon, however, the urban patriciate of the Dutch Republic took control of access to the top positions in the VOC, claiming them for themselves and their own offspring. The same process of closure was visible in the navy and the army. From the mid-seventeenth century in seafaring countries such as England and the Netherlands, the navy underwent a process of professionalization, and formal career paths for officers came into being (Bruijn 1993, Duffy 1998). From then on, officers were recruited almost without exception from the great nobility or, in the case of the Dutch Republic, from the urban patriciate, too. Research often notes exceptions to the general rule of closure. Those exceptions were very ambitious and gifted men. Giulio Mazzarino

(1602–1661), born in Pescina, near Rome, and a commoner by birth, was a very talented man. His qualities brought him into contact with Cardinal Richelieu, first minister of France under Louis XIII. Louis XIII and Richelieu spoke in his favor, with the result that Pope Urban VIII promoted him in 1641 to the rank of cardinal. Another famous example is the Dutchman Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter (1607–1672), son of a beer porter's assistant. He started his working life as an apprentice on the ropewalk. Working his way up in the merchant navy and as a privateer, he first became a captain in the Dutch navy, rising through the ranks to become an admiral (Bruijn 1993). These European examples of the American dream were probably just as rare as American instances of low-rank individuals rising to prosperity and prominence.

Craft guilds are another example of formal hierarchical organizations structuring career mobility. Members of those guilds could rise from the lowly position of apprentice to become first a journeyman and later a master. As time progressed, the position of master in a guild often became restricted to only the children of the master, his other relatives, or other masters. For a large group of apprentices and journeymen, the prospects of upward mobility became very meager (Van Leeuwen & Lesger 2005).

From the nineteenth century onward, hierarchical bureaucratic and managerial organizations became much more common. Weber even argued that formal careers could only arise in the modern state and in large modern corporations (Weber 1976, p. 956). The internal labor markets within these large organizations can be seen as a response by employers to the risk of losing qualified personnel, often after having invested in their training costs. A clearly defined career path for employees made it more attractive for qualified personnel to stay within the same firm. Miles & Savage (2004) argue that creating formal careers was also a strategy to reduce wage costs by creating new grades beneath existing jobs. Several of those new organizations have been the topic of research:

Lloyds Bank between 1890 and 1936 (Savage 1993, Stovel et al. 1996), the Post Office and the Great Western Railway (Miles & Savage 2004), the Union Bank of Australia between 1850 and 1970 (Seltzer & Simons 2001), Pullman repair shops from 1920 to 1950 (Hirsch & Reiff 2004), and the Canadian Pacific Railway in the period 1903–1929 (MacKinnon 2004). Although relating to an older organization, the study of officers of the Dutch navy between 1890 and 1990 fits into this series (Oosterhuis 1992).

Again, these studies generally show declining opportunities for upward mobility over time. Savage (1993) describes how the prospects for promotion among clerical employees at Lloyds Bank deteriorated over time. The unrest that caused was eventually stopped by a change in the bank's employment practices, favoring male clerks over female clerks. Miles & Savage (2004) observe the same process in the Post Office and the Great Western Railway: As long as those organizations grew, career prospects were good; however, that growth stopped just after formal careers were introduced, making it impossible for the organizations to fulfill everyone's career expectations.

## MARITAL MOBILITY

Marriage leads to mobility if people marry outside their own social class. There is a well-known and often used theory that people tend to marry within their own group because of individual preferences, third-party influences, and structural constraints imposed by the marriage market (Kalmijn 1991, 1998), and this theory has been used to derive hypotheses on expected changes in endogamy over time (Van Leeuwen & Maas 2005). We provide an overview of those hypotheses below.

Many studies, of contemporary and of past societies, have shown that people are more likely to marry others from the same social class (Hout 1982, Jacobs & Furstenberg 1986, Kalmijn 1991, Bull 2005, Dribe & Lundh 2005, Kocka 1984, van de Putte et al. 2005, Matthijs 2001, van de Putte 2003, Pélissier et al. 2005, Maas & van Leeuwen 2005). Individual

preferences are a primary explanation for those findings. People are said to prefer a marriage partner from their own social class for cultural reasons (Bourdieu 1984, Kalmijn 1994). Sharing the same culture makes the marriage easier: It increases the likelihood of the couple sharing the same tastes and it makes it easier to do things together, raise the children, and trust each other. At the same time, people would not mind marrying a wealthier partner.

The main claim with respect to changes in preferences has been made by Shorter (1975). He states that at the end of the eighteenth century preferences for marriage partners in Western societies changed from being rational to being romantic: “[T]he most important change in nineteenth- and twentieth-century courtship has been the surge of sentiment . . . . People started to place affection and personal compatibility at the top of the list of criteria in choosing marriage partners. These new standards became articulated as romantic love” (p. 148). There is some discussion as to whether this change started as late as Shorter claims (Stone 1977, Macfarlane 1986), but if it took place, endogamy based on economic preferences, and to a lesser extent endogamy based on cultural preferences, should have declined.

However, the choice of a marriage partner was an individual choice only to a limited extent. Parents, peers, and institutions, such as the Church, have tried to influence partner choices and still do so. In early modern Europe, formally arranged marriages were to be found only among religious minorities and the elites (Spierenburg 1990). Nevertheless, Segalen (1983, p. 41) writes that in traditional society, “The individuality of the couple, or rather, its tendency towards individuality, is crushed by the family institution, and also by the social pressure exercised by the village community as a whole.” Parents had legal power over their children because their children needed their parents' permission if they wanted to marry before coming of age—and there have even been societies, such as Imperial China, where this parental power continued until the death of the parents (Wolf & Huang 1980, Watson

& Ebrey 1991). In addition, the parents could use their economic power over their children to influence their children's choice of a marriage candidate. Of course, if their parents had already died by the time the children decided to marry, or if the children had migrated to distant places, parental consent could usually not be enforced (Sherkat 2004). Several studies have shown, for example, that children were more likely to marry within their own class if both parents were alive (van Poppel et al. 1998, van Leeuwen & Maas 2002). Increasing longevity is thus expected to have increased the power of parents over their children and increased migration to have decreased it. This latter effect is also predicted by modernization theory (Goode 1964, Phayer 1977, Shorter 1975, Traer 1980).

Industrialization offered young people the possibility of finding work at an early age for wages that allowed one to escape the parental household (Shorter 1973, Treiman 1970, Tilly & Scott 1978). This was accompanied by developments decreasing the economic dependency of parents on their children. The rise of state-based social security schemes made older—and to a lesser extent younger—people less dependent on their family. Parents could increasingly afford to let their children marry whomever they wanted because they no longer regarded their children as necessary for their own future well-being.

With the advent of industrialization, certain older customs of dating under the influence of parents and peers in marital choices disappeared. In many European societies before the twentieth century, work evenings existed where young, unmarried women worked under the supervision of their mothers, while observed by groups of boys (Mitterauer 1990, Shorter 1975, Tilly & Scott 1978). Another tradition was that of night courting, in which groups of young men visited young unmarried women in the evening. Ultimately, the favorite stayed overnight as a prelude to marriage (Wikman 1937, van Leeuwen & Maas 2002, Fischer-Yinon 2002). Only boys from the rural neighborhood were allowed to participate.

In some regions, groups of young men made a habit of beating up suitors from outside the village (Flandrin 1975, Le Goff & Schmitt 1981, Segalen 1983, Weber 1976). Those customs have largely died out. The same is true for the direct influence of the Church.

In the third explanation for class endogamy, people meet and mate likeminded people because meeting contexts tend to contain similar people (Blau & Schwartz 1984, Kalmijn 1998). Examples of contexts where people meet similar potential partners are schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and family networks (Kalmijn & Flap 2001). Participation in schooling has increased dramatically over the past two centuries. The most important factor affecting class endogamy in this context is access to secondary and tertiary education, which became more widespread during the twentieth century. It is claimed that this educational expansion led to higher rates of marriage between different classes (Blossfeld & Timm 2003). Educational expansion at levels before the age of dating could also affect class endogamy through the content of the instruction given. Before the twentieth century, schools instructed children in the virtues of a class-structured society (Chisick 1991, van Leeuwen 2000). In the meantime, that type of instruction has disappeared or, in any case, become less explicit, causing greater tolerance of marriages between members of different social classes (Treiman 1970; Shorter 1971, 1973).

Many people find their spouse at work (Kalmijn & Flap 2001). Therefore, changes in the labor market are bound to affect marital mobility. The more women that participate in the labor market, especially in gender-mixed companies, the greater is the likelihood of men and women meeting at work. The rise of industry and of large bureaucratic organizations from the mid-nineteenth century onward has led to a greater likelihood of workers marrying outside their social class (Miles & Vincent 1993, Brown et al. 2004). In societies where it was common for girls to seek employment elsewhere as a servant before marriage, such

service could broaden their marriage horizons not just geographically but also socially, as the girls acquired the skills, social and otherwise, valued in the social circles of their employers (Bras 2004). A decrease in service over time would, in that case, have meant an increase in social endogamy, whereas an increase in service would have meant the opposite.

Many people marry someone living close by (Kasakoff & Adams 1977, Fisher 1980, Morgan 1981, Pullum & Peri 1999, Stevens 1991). If neighborhoods consist of people from the same class, this may cause social endogamy. Conversely, changes in spatial segregation would lead to changes in the likelihood of people marrying within their own class. However, little is known about changes in such segregation over time. Improvements in the means of transportation would bring more potential partners within reach outside the immediate neighborhood and, depending on the degree of spatial segregation, more potential partners, too, from other social classes (Rosental 2004, van Poppel & Ekamper 2005, Kok & Mandemakers 2005, Pooley & Turnbull 1988). Related to the issue of segregation is that of the size (within a certain region) of a particular social group and the extent to which groups defined by other characteristics (religion or ethnicity, for example) cross-cut with social classes (Blau & Schwartz 1984, Catton & Smircich 1964, Stevens 1991). Such cross-cutting increases the likelihood of marriages between social classes because, for some people, the characteristic defining the cross-cutting group is more important for partner choice than social class itself. Religion has become less important over time, which would lead to a development toward greater class endogamy.

Compared with the detailed theoretical expectations, the number of historical studies on changes in class endogamy in the pre-sample survey period is small. Historians have studied endogamy by region and age much more than endogamy by social class (Brunet et al. 1996, Duhamelle & Schlumbohm 2003, Gehrman 2003, van Poppel et al. 2001). As is the case with intergenerational mobility, studies focus

on the total degree of exogamy and on the likelihood of relative exogamy. The theory as to which type of marital mobility is referred to is not, however, as clear as it is in the case of intergenerational mobility.

Studies on the total extent of marital mobility found surprisingly little change over time. Mitch (1993) compared marital mobility in England and Wales in 1839–1843 with that in 1869–1873 and found that the total extent of exogamy hardly increased. Federspiel (1999) found the same for Berlin in the first half of the twentieth century, as did Dribe & Lundh (2005) for southern Sweden and Bras & Kok (2005) for a Dutch province in the nineteenth century. Borscheid (1986) compared the pre-Romantic period (up to 1806) with the post-Romantic period in the German city of Nürtingen and actually found exogamy decreasing over time.

Relative endogamy was studied for the town of Rochdale, 1856–1964 (Penn 1985, Penn & Dawkins 1983). It did not change during that period. The same conclusion was reached for Rendalen in Norway between 1750 and 1900 (Bull 2005) and in southern Sweden (Dribe & Lundh 2005). For Leuven between 1830 and 1910, van Bavel et al. (1998) found that relative endogamy did not change over time if intergenerational mobility (and its consequences for marital mobility) was taken into account. Maas & Van Leeuwen (2005) made a short comparative study of homogamy patterns in a small number of regions in the nineteenth century with data that were coded completely comparably in HISCLASS. Here the variation in relative endogamy between regions was much more striking than changes over time.

Again, few studies explicitly relate endogamy to the macro characteristics thought to cause change. Noteworthy exceptions are the studies by Bras & Kok (2005), Zijdeman (2010), and Zijdeman & Maas (2009). Bras & Kok found support for the importance of cross-cutting: in nineteenth-century Zeeland, the likelihood of marrying outside one's own class was greater in small municipalities with religious minorities. The hypothesis that migration stimulates exogamy found

support in their study, too. They also tested the hypothesis—not discussed above—that depressed marriage prospects increased the likelihood of endogamy, and that hypothesis is also supported. For the same Dutch province, Zijdemans & Maas (2009) show a clear increase in exogamy over time and greater exogamy in more modern municipalities.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Occupations, and not income or wealth data, form the common coin for historical studies of social mobility and stratification. They provide almost universal comparable indicators of both the social and economic standing of individuals in the past. Most historians and sociologists would agree with this statement, unlike economists, who prefer measures based on remuneration. In fact, with a little imagination, Sorokin (1959 [1929]), often regarded as the founding father of sociological studies of stratification, could, given the temporal breadth of his work and the sources he used, be regarded as a historian. Given this common ground, it is the more remarkable that comparative or long-term historical studies of social mobility and stratification are rare. One reason for this is the invisible disciplinary fence between history and sociology that hampers historical sociology but does not make it impossible, either in theory or in practice, as Sorokin's work testifies. Connected with this is the fact that stratification sociologists work with survey data generated by themselves or others with stratification issues in mind. Those data are post-World War II and thus leave out most of the historical past, even though important sociological theorizing on trends and causes of stratification refers to the historical process of industrialization and modernization that, at least in the Western world, had run its course by the time the surveys started. Historians, in contrast, only took a greater interest in the post-World War II period once the century had run its course; they draw on sources they did not create and that are often relatively difficult to work with.

Even though theorizing on the determinants of social mobility is more advanced in sociology and economics, historians have for the most part been a little wary of borrowing from those theories and testing them.

Comparative historical studies on social mobility and stratification are also relatively rare because both historians and sociologists prefer to use occupational titles rather than payments as a yardstick. The problems economists face when converting monetary units from one country or time period to another may on occasion seem overwhelming; nonetheless, they pale in comparison with the problems faced in making occupational titles, of which there are tens of thousands, comparable across time and space and then converting these into comparable measures of social class and rank. Those problems have now been overcome to a considerable extent.

And the rise of large-scale historical databases with events taken from censuses and vital registration ensures that historical data are there as well, open to any scholar, including social scientists with an interest in the past for its own sake, in placing current processes in the context of those in the past, or in extending the testing grounds for sociological theories to a timeframe that is longer (and thus more suited to the study of slow processes) and to a set of background processes that is more varied (and thus more suited to testing theories). We are now on the brink of seeing this happen. The fact that this moment and this momentum have come now also reflects the realization that multilevel models with measurable community characteristics are an important step forward in testing sociological theories. The gradual rise of historical databases with such characteristics means that, though still difficult and time consuming, it is now starting to become possible to test theories on social mobility against a wide range of human experience in past centuries, and hopefully not just in the Western world. For historical studies of social mobility and stratification, these are exciting times.



## SUMMARY POINTS

1. Historical sources exist that are equivalent to surveys used by stratification sociologists.
2. Occupations form the common coin of comparison.
3. Recent measures have become available to compare occupations, classes, and ranks over time and between regions.
4. The earlier lack of such measures severely limited historical stratification and mobility research in general and the testing of sociological stratification theories in particular.

## FUTURE ISSUES

1. Scholars can now fruitfully continue the search for the Treiman constant of social ranking in past societies and start to document and explain deviations.
2. Truly comparative large-scale testing of historical variations in absolute and relative mobility is needed.
3. Scholars may explain these variations by linking them to determinants on a regional level using a multilevel regression design.
4. Scholars should consider redefining the field of the history of the career by looking at total career trajectories of the whole labor force.

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## RELATED RESOURCES

- Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations (HISCO), <http://historyofwork.iisg.nl>
- International Commission for Historical Demography, <http://historicaldemography.net>
- Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International, <https://international.ipums.org>
- North Atlantic Population Project, <http://www.nappdata.org>





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