REQUIEM FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM?
UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

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EQUALITY OF INCOME VS. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

*Equality in wealth and income.*

Americans historically not greatly worried about that.
EQUALITY OF INCOME VS. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Equality in wealth and income.
Americans historically not greatly worried about that.

Equality of opportunity and social mobility.
Americans of all parties historically quite concerned about that.
Historically, America has been better on this dimension than most other countries.
This is the “American Dream.”
NARRATIVE OF OUR TIMES?

Since 1970s American society has become more divided along class lines

- Income distribution more skewed
- Class segregation
  - Residential
  - Educational
  - Organizational
  - Marital
- Fraying family and social bonds within working class
- And growing inequality of opportunity?
MEASURING SOCIAL MOBILITY

• Standard method
  • Compares 30-somethings’ SES with their parents’ SES.
  • Implication: Always looking in rearview mirror. Mobility rates today reflect socialization 2-3 decades ago.

• Alternative method
  • Examine trends in socialization among successive birth cohorts
  • Allows projection of social mobility in coming decades.
OUR WORK ADDRESSES THOSE ISSUES

• Look for *trends* in social, cultural, and material resources among successive generations of *American* youth.

• Look for *robust* patterns in multiple data sources.

• Focus on *class* differences:
  • Parents’ education, income, occupation
  • *Just look at white youth* for now

• Racial gaps remain important, but they are increasingly based on class.

• Look for *mechanisms*/*explanations* for growing class gaps.
GROWING CLASS GAPS IN

- Two-parent families, 1980-2010
- Parents’ investment of time and money in their kids, 1965-2010
- Extracurricular activities among high school students, 1972-2009
- Volunteering, church-going, social connectedness, and trust among high school seniors, 1975-2010
- Math and reading test scores, 1945-2005
GROWING CLASS GAP IN BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED MOTHERS

Non-Hispanic Whites Only
Source: National Survey of Family Growth
SAME CLASS GAP APPEARS IN HIGH SCHOOL 15 YEARS LATER

Non-Hispanic Whites Only, * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
GROWING CLASS GAP IN ENRICHMENT EXPENDITURES ON CHILDREN, 1972-2006

Source: Duncan and Murnane (2011)
THE AMERICAN HERITAGE TIME USE STUDY

- Non-Hispanic white mothers
- Mothers’ time investment in children by minutes spent in:
  - basic childcare (e.g., physical childcare, medical care, care of infants or older children) and
  - developmental childcare (e.g., time spent reading/talking to children, supervising/accompanying children/out-of-home care, playing with children, attending school related activities)
GROWING CLASS GAP IN PATTY-CAKE AND "GOODNIGHT MOON" TIME WITH CHILDREN

Average Daily Minutes of Developmental Care Time by Mother's Education

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GROWING CLASS GAP IN TIME SPENT WITH PARENTS (1970s vs 2000s)

Non-Hispanic Whites Only
Source: American Heritage Time Use Study
CLASS GAP IN MATERNAL TIME IS CONCENTRATED AMONG INFANTS

![Graph showing the class gap in maternal time (daily minutes) vs. age of child.](image)
NCES HIGH SCHOOL LONGITUDINAL STUDIES PROGRAM

- Participation in extracurriculars:
  - Sports, academic clubs, band, chorus, yearbook, student government, etc.
- Participation in activities outside school:
  - Music lessons, dance lessons, art lessons, etc.
- Examine non-Hispanic white 10th or 12th graders
GROWING CLASS GAP IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY (EXCL. SPORTS) – 12TH GRADERS

Non-Hispanic Whites Only. * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
GROWING CLASS GAP IN SPORTS PARTICIPATION – 12TH GRADERS

Non-Hispanic Whites Only, * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
SPORTS TEAM CAPTAIN – 12TH GRADERS

Non-Hispanic Whites Only, * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
GROWING CLASS GAP IN MUSIC, DANCE, OR ART CLASSES OUTSIDE SCHOOL – 10TH GRADERS

Non-Hispanic Whites Only, * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
SHRINKING CLASS GAP:
STUDENT GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION
BECAUSE UPPER CLASS 12TH GRADERS DROP OUT

Non-Hispanic Whites Only, * indicates that gap is significantly different than previous survey
“MONITORING THE FUTURE”

- Nationally-representative survey of 16,000 high school seniors per year, 1976-2010
- Non-Hispanic white students
- Community involvement, church-going, social connectedness, trust
CLASS GAPS IN CHURCH-GOING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Church attendance
by Parental Education and Year

Volunteer Work
By Parental Education and Year

Days/Year


Non-Hispanic Whites Only
Source: Monitoring the Future (1976-2009)
CLASS GAPS IN SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND TRUST

Social Connectedness Score
By Parental Education and Year

Most People Can Be Trusted
By Parental Education and Year

Standard Deviations

Percentage

Top Tercile  Bottom Tercile

Non-Hispanic Whites Only
Source: Monitoring the Future (1976-2009)
SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS FACTOR SCORE

Six agree/disagree items tapping social connectedness:

• A Lot of Times I Feel Lonely. (-)
• There is Always Someone I Can Turn to if I Need Help. (+)
• I Often Feel Left Out of Things. (-)
• There is Usually Someone I Can Talk to if I Need To. (+)
• I Often Wish I Had More Good Friends. (-)
• I Usually Have a Few Friends Around That I Can Get Together With. (+)
CLASS AND RACIAL GAPS IN READING AND MATH TEST SCORES

Source: Reardon (2011)
BOTTOM LINE: GROWING CLASS GAPS AMONG AMERICAN YOUTH IN ALL PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS IN LIFE

- Implication: A social mobility crash is coming.
- But why? What suspects should we put into the lineup?
POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Investment in cognitive and “soft-skill” development by upper SES families
- Economic insecurity among lower SES families:
  - “If you don’t know how long you’re going to keep your house or your job, you have less energy to invest in the kids.” (Laura Bush)
- Collapse of white working class family
- Frayed “social safety net” in working class neighborhoods
POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO A “PURPLE” PROBLEM

• Encourage stable, caring, engaged families.
• Boost jobs and wages for the bottom half of the workforce.
• Invest in public education.
• Invest in high quality Early Childhood Ed.
• More “on-ramps” (e.g. community colleges).
• More intensive volunteer mentoring.
• Other?
WHY IT MATTERS

- National productivity: 1/3 of labor force
- Basic fairness: These are all our kids