The Constant Flux: A Study of Class Mobility in Industrial Societies

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Author: Michael P. Weber
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Main content

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It required nearly two decades and several dozen books before the social mobility craze among American urban and social historians burned itself out. The Constant Flux may reignite the fire. The most comprehensive comparative study of its kind, the authors have reconstructed raw data from national mobility studies in fifteen nations to examine and challenge the generally accepted conclusions offered by these studies. The authors admit to certain curiosities about the rates and extent of social mobility in the nations under analysis. They raise questions about the relationships among such factors as a nation's level of industrialization, its cultural heritage, its political system, and the mobility experiences of its inhabitants. They are more interested, however, in determining why, "such a range of different and often contradictory theories [about mobility] exist and persist in regard to issues which are in large part empirical." The reconstructed data are used to evaluate theories which seek to establish connections between mobility and economic development. Liberal theory, for example, suggests that the structure and occupational needs of industrial societies provide sustained opportunities for upward mobility for a significant proportion of the society. The more advanced the nation, the greater the...