

p. xix: "I doubt that Americans can be universally affluent without also being equal. I doubt it not only for historical reasons, but for several theoretical reasons, well known to economists, having to do with the distribution of factor ~~shares~~ shares and the behaviour of investment, but which I felt were too technical to be handled well in a nontechnical book." This is borne out in the final chapter where he declines to allow any of the usual proposals about taxing into equality as being viable.

Ch. I. Sets forth the myth of a singular middle class which most Americans think they belong to.

Ch. II. Goes through the development of this myth in terms of Galbraith's Affluent Society, The New Class, the outer-directed man [Reisman & Galbraith are his two main well-intended mythographers]

Ch. III. The Sixties brought Kennedy & the hope that this New Class would carry forth the social Revolution--its two themes being style (life à la Kennedy) and service (social legislation). The discordant voice: Harrington's The Other America, which led to the war on poverty. OEO's failure due to New Class technocrats not seeing the problem really clearly.

Ch. IV. America before the Fifties. The very rich & the very poor have always been there and two sets of m.c. between. The division of wealth throughout our history has been the same. This chapter skimmed, and 19th-century history might be reexamination. [My general observation: because the U.S. did not have an hereditary blood ruling group, but all rulers de facto nouveau, then we had a new upwardly mobile group of necessity. Such is true to a large extent synchronously in early generations, but it had to become diachronically hereditary due to the transmission of wealth.]

Ch. V. The Twenties, the "Prosperity Decade" in George Souche's title). Kolko and Pechman show that there are not different from the Fifties in terms of the distribution of wealth. Lampman says wealthy spread money ~~to~~ in family to avoid taxes, so the increase in number of families at top is deception--not new families really. In short, no "quantum leap" since WW 2, as myth has it.

Ch. VI. Contemporary America. The Poverty of "New Beginnings". Theory of new beginnings has it that 1) things bad, but better than in past; 2) at this moment we are going to take off for final resolution. [I.e., a kind of kairos theory.] Shows that the reported declining poverty is usually due to a phoney redefining of what constitutes poverty,

Ch. VII. The Rich. The cultural values of rich are commonly believed to be those of the middle class, only with more money to play with. The New Class doesn't talk about rich much, though Galbraith has good quotes. The top 1 percent in USA get more money in one year than does the bottom 22 percent. Lampman's figures help us to visualize the difference. The concentration at the top did decline after the 1920s, but in the 1950 it rose again, and still is doing so presumably. [Income is usually the measure, seldom hereditary wealth.] Uses Lundberg for the Superrich. In terms of centimillionaires in 1968, the new ones got there chiefly by government-protected devices: oil depletion allowance and "defense hardware." New Class should concentrate upon the very rich as well as upon the very poor. [In course of chapter, shows that life of rich is unbelievably more opulent than upper middle class--and that top half of one percent would boggle minds of aristocrats of an early age.]

- Ch. VIII. The Lower Middle Class. Uses Rosow's report to Nixon in 1970 to show how Blue-Collar worker is sinking. The tension between blue-collar & blacks may be due chiefly to the former's general sense of insecurity & suspicion that they are being screwed somehow. L. Keyserling's plan in 1962 or so to define the "deprived" as those from ~~xx~~ \$3,000 to \$5,000 (above poverty, that is), was rejected for one reason because it would have meant saying that one-third of affluent America was "deprived". "To a nation convinced of its own happy influence, this would have been an intolerable insult." (p. 151)
- Ch. IX. Upper Middle Class. Really a very small group. Clear evidence that predominance of this class follows education.
- Ch. X. The New Class and the Seventies. European middle class thought of as a minority, in USA as a majority. It is a myth, if 1/5 of this country is really badly off. ~~Are~~ Is the situation remediable? Diljas says his new class an evil in socialist Yugoslavia; Galbraith makes them the heroes here. [False issue--the evil here is hereditary wealth, which Yugoslavia doesn't have. Its elite and class are identical, whereas ruling class & elite here are distinguishable in some good measure.] Of the two ways to resolve, one is growth, the other redistribution. Growth is the old GNP argument, which environmental dangers are sufficient to deny--not to mention that it is basically a trickle down system which means rich can get richer ~~much~~ faster than the poor can. Redistribution concerns the income tax chiefly. But this quote from Pechman is noteworthy:

"Estate and gift taxes are levied only on a small proportion of privately owned property in the United States. About 3 per cent of the estates of adult decedents and less than one-fourth of the wealth owned by the decedents in any one year are subject to estate or gift taxes. The relatively small size of the tax base is explained in part by the generous exemptions which ~~it~~ exclude a large ~~portions~~ proportion of the wealth transfers, and also by defects in the taxes that permit substantial amounts of property free of tax." Federal Tax Policy, p. 182.-- but no evidence that Pechman sees this as a great evil.

The growth of state & local taxes at the same time means that taxes are more & more regressive on the poor. Transfer payments by govt. balance things out in an unfortunate way: the least well off are paying most to support the utterly destitute. Guaranteed annual income is a sublimated form of transfer. For those who argue that it's at least necessary to get it instituted, so that it may grow to something respectable, Parker says the nemesis is increased cost. Suggestions like Galbraith's that the 30 billion necessary could be taken from military ~~taxes~~ are those of one who "indulges in fantasy" [Seems absolutely resigned to military budget remaining great.] A complete revolution in the tax structure is necessary. The ways to do it: oil depletion costs us \$9 billion a year, & other Nixonomics show no disposition to soak the rich. Pechman's quotation worthwhile:

"The long list of needed revision in our federal, state and local tax system should convince anyone that the reforms now being contemplated will not make a significant change. The influence of the groups arrayed against a significant redistribution of the tax burden is enormous, and there is no effective lobby for the poor and the near poor.

It may be that, at some distant future date, the well-to-do and the rich will have enough income to satisfy not only their own needs, but also to help relieve the tax burdens of those who are less fortunate. In the meantime the tax system will continue to disgrace the most affluent nation in the world." ~~Federal Tax Policy~~ ("The Rich, the Poor, and the Taxes they Pay", p. 43.)

[Ch. X, cont] Parker blames the New Class for disseminating the myth of the middle class. We must demolish the myth and establish a new one which corresponds to reality (accepts Levi-Strauss' dictum that myths are the glue of society).

Ch. XI. "Equality and Affluent America". Toqueville saw equality in 1830; Bryce saw it disappearing in 1889. Today hardly anyone talks about equality, so Parker reviews the idea as it was classically expressed in Rousseau, and put into force by Jefferson in the USA. Rousseau defined it as riches--which Parker says means wealth and income today (NOTA BENE)--(p.191)--and Jefferson spoke of the "artificial aristocracy founded on wealth & birth [which is] a mischievous ingredient in government and provision should be made to prevent its ascendancy." p. 193--from Democracy: by Jefferson, ed. S. Padover, p. 126. In the Virginia legislature, just after writing the Declaration of Independence and sought to eliminate this artificial aristocracy by laws vs. entail & primogeniture, & forcing equal division of lands of intestates among all children. "These laws, drawn by myself, laid the ax to the foot of pseudo-aristocracy." [no source given] Jefferson believed that equality largely achieved already in the USA, and was out to protect it by legislation [but obviously he thought of inequality as tied to land holding, in the old aristocratic style, and couldn't yet know of the transference of it to inherited wealth.]

This whole chapter needs more scrutiny to see if the intellectual history of the change in notion of equality in 19th century is really useful. In the end, Parker himself offers no answer--he holds it "in abeyance".