

that he beautifully develops earlier in the work. More work on the functional consequences would allow him to fill in even more gaps in the literature. Even with these omissions, however, Cuff provides a valuable and nuanced view of the factors that influenced stature for these men in the antebellum period, and he also devises, very cleverly, a way around a troubling and persistent problem in the anthropometric literature. By so doing, he gives scholars a way out and a way up.

REFERENCES

- Fogel, R. W. 1993. New sources and new techniques for the study of secular trends in nutritional status, health, mortality, and the process of aging. *Historical Methods* 26 (1): 5–43.
- Fogel, R. W., and S. L. Engerman, eds. 1982. Trends in nutrition, labor welfare, and labor productivity. Special issue, *Social Science History* 6, no. 4.
- Steckel, R. H. 1983. Height and per capita income. *Historical Methods* 16 (1): 1–7.
- . 1995. Stature and the standard of living. *Journal of Economic Literature* 33 (4): 1903–40.

* * *

Social Facts versus Social Realities in the New Millennium

ALETHIA E. JONES

*Department of Public Administration and Policy**Department of Political Science**University at Albany, State University of New York*

For the Russell Sage Foundation, the first decade of the twenty-first century proves to be an opportune moment to publish two books analyzing a century's worth of census data. The resulting works, *Century of Difference*, coauthored by sociologists Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout, and *One Nation Divisible*, by historians and long-time collaborators Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern, bring formidable academic talent to this task. Since its founding in 1907, the foundation has sponsored the production of objective social science research that illuminates social problems to guide public policy. The foundation has published many census-based studies, including volumes by Frank Bean, Margo J. Anderson, Reynolds Farley, and William Frey. The two newest volumes discussed in this essay uniquely use 100 years of census data.

Following the foundation's sponsorship of books "aimed [at] a wide general readership" (www.russellsage.org), with the intention of providing moments of historically informed reflection at the dawn of a new century, the authors have produced empirically rich, theoretically grounded, and meth-

odologically sophisticated texts that do not burden the reader with academic jargon or methodological minutiae. Readers with a preexisting interest in demography, such as academics and policy wonks, will find these books especially informative. As a political scientist who employs historical methods to study U.S. immigration, race, and public policy, I found their arguments accessible and the vast amount of data easily digestible. These books reflect a tradition epitomized by Gunnar Myrdal's ([1944] 1962) *An American Dilemma* as well as W. E. B. DuBois's scholarship, in which academics conduct objective social science to encourage the construction of a more just society. But the key asset of both books, their careful scholarship, also functions as their Achilles heel. Their very evenhandedness, which shapes many social science texts, makes their policy implications less direct than they could have been in light of the challenges facing the nation at the dawn of a new century.

The four authors agree on key empirical findings, such as the three major issues that defined the century. The first of these is the waves of economic development that redefined how the majority of the U.S. population worked and lived. The early twentieth century found the country in the midst of a transition from a soon-to-be bygone agricultural society to an urban, industrial powerhouse. The early twentieth century found the economy transitioning to one defined by advanced digital technology and a high demand for scientific specialization. Today, the United States confronts challenges similar to those it faced at the beginning of the

Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern. *One Nation Divisible: What America Was and What It Is Becoming*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006.

Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout. *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years*. With contributions by Aliya Saperstein, Jon Stiles, and Jane Zavisca. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006.

twentieth century, such as large-scale immigration; global economic reorganization; major shifts in the organization of work; widening economic polarization; technological innovations; and public debates about national identity. Although the forces at work are similar, the details differ radically. Air travel replaced the steamship as the major source of affordable travel for the masses; immigrants originated from the Global South, not Europe; office parks replaced factories and computers replaced manufacturing equipment; and e-mail and cellphones replaced telegrams as the means of instant communication.

Second, the authors also agree that the last century produced marked improvement in the socioeconomic prospects of racial minorities, workers, and women. Yet the data also show that extreme inequality persists, especially for racial minorities. Both books devote considerable time to wrestling with this paradox. Third, the authors stress government intervention as critical to the construction of a broad middle class and the improved socioeconomic outcomes for women and minorities. As we embark on a new century, the country faces policy choices that will determine whether market inequalities will deepen or be dissipated by means of public programs.

Using the data contained in 10 censuses to tell a gripping story that will engage the general public is a formidable task. To their credit, these authors successfully subordinate the data to engaging narratives that capture the experiences of families and communities coping with impersonal trends. Although social theories are not explicitly discussed in the texts, their tone and emphasis reflect vibrant debates in their fields. Reflecting postmodern theory, they account for the role of meaning and ideas in shaping individual action. Reflecting decades of discussion on race, gender, and inequality, they consistently account for multiple versions of the American experience, not one generic (de facto white working male) average. But differences in style and emphasis occur because the authors pursue divergent strategies for managing a key limitation of census data—that the numbers tell us what happened but not why.

Historians Katz and Stern envelop the data in a richly layered and thematically driven narrative designed to convey the importance of ideas in shaping society and the dynamics of social change. They observe the limits of numerical facts in conveying the full story by noting that “. . . inequality is always changing and in motion, a set of usually self-replicating relationships captured only incompletely and imperfectly by the coefficients with which it is measured by social scientists” (63).

They openly embrace the challenge of identifying “how and why the character of inequality has changed” over the century (64). They frame their findings around four themes: inequality, diversity, government, and the role of ideas. To capture the complex process of socioeconomic and political change, they interweave macrodevelopments such as industrialization with meso-level responses in institutions and communities while also shedding light on the micro-level impacts on family structures and individual life chances.

A brief prologue and epilogue bracket four lengthy chapters. Chapter 1 presents a bird’s-eye view of macrorends at the beginning of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Chapter 4, titled “What America Is Becoming,” revisits the subjects covered in chapter 1—namely, globalization, the organization of work, cities, family structures, and race—and discusses how late twentieth-century developments do not fit structures established to respond to the industrial era.

Chapter 2 is the thematic heart of the book, with its thorough analysis of the nature and structure of the divisions highlighted in the book’s title. It begins with a careful explanation of the “paradoxical, historically and geographically contingent, multidimensional, state-sponsored, gendered, and self-replicating” nature of inequality (64). This discussion lays the foundation for the complex and nonlinear unfolding of social change. The authors chart government’s evolution from an entity that propagated explicit policies of racist and sexist exclusion to one that endorsed equal rights and fair access for previously excluded social groups. Most recently, reductions in government programs have increasingly burdened individuals with the full cost of obtaining quality health care, housing, and education.

The chapter proceeds to characterize the experiences of women, African Americans, and immigrants over the course of the century. Katz and Stern use a pyramid metaphor to convey the paradox of individual economic mobility coupled with durable structures of inequality and difference. Growing income parity coexists with profound wealth inequality. Upward economic mobility exists, yet it is illusive. Jobs in construction, textiles, and accounting furnished stable pathways to the middle class, but outsourcing, subcontracting, and feminization (wages decrease as more women enter the field) have reduced those advantages just as minorities and women were making inroads in those fields. The authors acknowledge that income, class, and educational differences within groups undermined the almost unilateral poverty that resulted from multiple overt laws that excluded some groups, such as African Americans. Civil rights laws, job niches, and educational attainment have combined to sort subordinate groups through a “series of screens that filter blacks into more or less promising statuses” (87). These “screens” impart a complex status and class inequality inside all groups, thus creating internal differentiation. More than ever before, African Americans can be found at the high, middle, and low end of the economic spectrum (86–101). Whereas the abject exclusion of entire social groups no longer dominates, moderate inclusion has taken hold rather than a robust equity.

In chapter 3, Katz and Stern successfully blend a rich statistical analysis with lively descriptions of the changing lifestyles of American families. The chapter clearly demonstrates the role of ideas in shaping our understanding of experiences. The first half of the chapter shows how catego-

ries such as childhood, adolescence, middle age, and old age are socially and culturally defined; they are not self-evident biological facts directly measured by empirical data. The shifts in the economy and work experience come alive as the authors document how families, not individuals, gradually adjusted to economic pressures. The authors paint a picture of the shift from protective strategies of extended families who pooled their income from all able-bodied workers to anticipatory strategies defined by the small nuclear family and investment in education (153–63). In the former, children enter the workforce as soon as they can transfer their income to the household; in the latter, parents transfer income and resources unilaterally to children, with no expectation of return. These changes occurred in tandem with shifts from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Ironically, the end of the twentieth century finds that adult children who face low pay, few benefits, and a high cost of living increasingly return to the parental household, which helps to re-create a multi-generational household. The book ends with an epilogue that focuses on contemporary debates over national identity and competing definitions of a “true American.”

Century of Difference is organized around the data instead of conceptual themes. Recognizing the limitations of census analysis, Fischer and Hout stay within them. They clearly state: “Our main task in this book is to *describe* historical trends, not explain them” (8, italics in original). They explore why questions sparingly, relying on statistical manipulations or established scholarly debates. The most decisive shift of the century, they argue, is the shift from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy. Workers now primarily produce services, not goods. The authors report their findings in 10 tightly focused chapters that furnish a concise survey of a century’s worth of data on topics such as education, race/immigration, family, workers, living standards, geography, religion, and public opinion.

Chapter 1 conveys the authors’ central argument, that new divisions have emerged to replace the stark inequality based on being female, African American, or hailing from the South. In 1900, the typical worker (a married white male) walked to work, worked in a physically demanding job six or seven days a week, and worked until he died. By 2000, women (especially mothers) were commonplace at the work site; Americans commuted by car, labored in office cubicles on computers that manage information, and looked forward to retirement (96–97). Brains trumped brawn as jobs in finance, insurance, real estate, science, and technology relied on specialization.

Chapter 2 establishes the book’s key argument: “education became a key sorter of Americans” (3). Educational attainment is one of the best predictors of one’s life experiences and opportunities. A four-year college diploma is the most effective leveling device available because it cancels out the detrimental effect of being from a poor or working-class family (20). The authors artfully show how years of schooling have gradually increased over time as a college

degree gradually replaced the high school diploma as the basic entry-level requirement for good jobs. Among the 1901 birth cohort, 1 in 20 earned a college degree, but by 1991 the proportion had become 1 in 4 (12).

More generally, the amount of schooling expected of adults doubled from a median of 7.4 years in 1900 to 13.8 years in 2000 (10). This technique of reporting statistics in terms of age cohorts effectively conveys changing norms and social expectations and is repeated throughout the text. Going beyond the well-known fact that the marketplace rewards college graduates, the authors explore other dimensions of the importance of higher education: “the college graduate way of having economic security, family stability, social engagement, church and community participation, and optimism” (19). The tendency of the college-educated population to marry each other, known as “educational homogamy,” widens the gap between those with a four-year college degree and those without (19, 124). The final chapter reinforces these findings and decisively calls for massive new public investment in higher education to ensure universal access to a college degree, especially for the poor.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine family, work, and consumption, respectively. Gaps between men and women in pay, hours, and even housework shrank dramatically; blacks, other minorities, and married women are now fixtures in the workplace (135–36). In short, “Pay also depends on a worker’s gender, race, age, and region, but those differences became less important over the century,” whereas the job and education mattered more in determining earnings (97, italics in original). Today, the excluded groups are the elderly, foreign-born, or poorly educated workers who disproportionately occupy substandard jobs defined by low pay, the absence of a pension or health care, an irregular work schedule (night shifts and inconsistent work hours), as well as periods of unemployment. From 1980 to 2000, low-end jobs grew to constitute 1 in 7 jobs, forming the basis for much of the inequity in the U.S. economy (112).

African Americans benefit from the income boost that accompanies educational attainment, but these gains coexist with the deep poverty of the urban poor. Virtually every chapter contains a section on African Americans that demonstrates the exceptional nature of their experience, which leads Fischer and Hout to adapt W. E. B. DuBois’s ([1903] 1989) famous dictum: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”

The authors identify an “emerging racial divide” where, instead of “white versus nonwhite, as it was in 1900, [it will be] black versus nonblack” (45). Their chapter on race and immigration confirm that, even if all immigration ended today, the children of immigrants and the children of U.S.-born racial minorities will create a permanent majority-minority population by midcentury (26). But the “distinctively lower life expectancies, higher incarceration rates, and lower morale” of African Americans suggest more pessimis-

tic outcomes for poor African Americans, despite progress for the group as a whole and for other minority groups (56).

With chapters on religion and public opinion, Fischer and Hout delve into aspects of U.S. culture. They apply sophisticated regression smoothing techniques to over 50 years of polling data on key social issues to disentangle the experiences of subpopulations over time and distinguish their experiences from national trends. This technique allows them to go beyond the standard conclusion that the American public has become increasingly more tolerant of racial diversity. They find that “cohort replacement” explains the growth of public acceptance of interracial marriage as a measure of social acceptance. In short, when older generations with explicitly racist opinions died, they were replaced by baby boomers as respondents to pollsters’ questions, thus reflecting the more liberal view of those who came of age in the civil rights era (51).

Both *One Nation Divisible* and *Century of Difference* reflect significant sophisticated approaches that should satisfy methodologists. The authors use, supplement, and innovate with census data. With the support of able research teams, they have constructed some new techniques to extract valid and consistent trends from a century of ever-changing census data. For example, to address the nettlesome problem of changing racial categories on the census form, Fischer and Hout create a catch-all “continent of origin” measure (Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas). Katz and Stern place their statistical innovations, especially in the area of family demography, in their endnotes, making it more difficult to locate their methodological contributions. Fischer and Hout highlight their statistical innovations in three succinct appendices.

Fischer and Hout’s organizational structure is better suited for course adoption in upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses. Individual chapters can easily be used as background material in courses on gender, poverty, as well as other subjects. In addition, each chapter presents data in reverse chronological order. Students who came of age in the era of President Bill Clinton and cell phones will appreciate discussions that begin with contemporary data and known cultural references before shifting to less familiar material from the first half of the twentieth century. Katz and Stern’s multilayered analysis on the process of social change furnishes a range of critical observations that serve as an excellent counterpoint to Fischer and Hout’s focus on outcomes. For example, Katz and Stern’s discussion of the multiple definitions of cities (edge cities, global cities, network cities, postindustrial cities, informational entities) complements Fischer and Hout’s chapter on suburbanization. Whereas Fischer and Hout observe that there are more female managers now than ever before, Katz and Stern note that many of them can be found at McDonald’s and Wal-Mart. Fischer and Hout discuss income inequality; Katz and Stern discuss wealth inequality. Overall, *One Nation Divisible* raises probing questions about the nature of

social change, the role of categories and meaning, and the multiplicity of inequality that makes it an excellent source for class discussion and lectures. The excellent charts and graphs in both books also facilitate their use in lectures and class discussion.

The data show that the story of the twentieth century is one of worker protections, higher education, and social welfare policies that encourage, even subsidize the growth of the middle class. But the dawn of the twenty-first century has brought an erosion of those developments. If census analysis can render a service to society by chronicling our past and shedding light on our future, it seems we need more than the data to chronicle patterns of difference. In *Social Science for What?* historian Alice O’Connor (2007) analyzes the evolution of the Russell Sage Foundation’s sponsorship of objective social science research and finds that the research of the Progressive Era was explicitly tied to political struggle. Social science data documented problems of industrial capitalism (e.g., child welfare, predatory lending, and workplace injuries) to stimulate interventionist public policy to assist workers. But in the 1970s, “value-neutral” and “disinterested” social science that was removed from direct engagement with political struggles and policy change was seen as a more effective way to influence public policy and displaced the earlier model. For O’Connor, scholarship that diligently reports objective facts about social science fails to “frame a public conversation about inequality” (145, italics mine). She argues that foundations and social scientists must recognize that the facts they investigate reflect normative commitments. Researchers must explicitly marry their facts to the social question, that is, the “the fundamentally normative question . . . [that addresses] the vision of what the ‘good society’ looks like” (144–45). The liberal emphasis on neutral facts and silence on values has unwittingly conceded the public’s imagination to conservative visions of a private, individualized, and moralizing society where inequality is natural and government need not intercede to equalize opportunity structures (145).

Both books reviewed here reflect the strengths and weaknesses of this neutral approach. They perform ably on the research question, but their relationship to the social question is muted. By focusing on inequality, the normative commitment of the books is obvious; however, the authors never explicitly discuss it, adopting the stance of neutral bystanders instead. Neither book explicitly discusses the meaning and value of equity. Nor do they discuss the detrimental aspects of inequality for society. How much inequality is too much? How do we know if we have reached a sufficient degree of fairness? No light is shed on these questions. Another irritating problem lies in the fact that compared with European nations, the United States furnishes similar opportunities for intergenerational mobility. Fischer and Hout’s examination of comparative data finds that among the wealthy advanced nations, “none constrain their citizens appreciably more or less than others” (134).

Without an explicit discussion of the virtues of a more equitable society, the conservative argument that inequality is necessary for economic productivity and growth remains unaddressed. The authors appear to rely on an implicit moral appeal that presumes that all inequality is unjust, epitomized by the exclusions of African Americans and women. O'Connor (2007, chap. 6) argues that in a world where conservative imagery of lazy welfare queens guides policymaking more than mountains of data on the actual experiences of the poor, raw data are not enough. Scholars (and the foundations that fund them) need to offer a clearly articulated alternative social vision based on explicitly held values. Ironically, the retreat to neutral reportage from the sidelines leaves the authors documenting the public's quiescence while workers' wages and rights erode, the cost of higher education increases, and health-care costs shift onto workers' shoulders. Fischer and Hout's chapter on consumption finds that a rising equality of consumption masks growing inequalities of income. Virtually every family owns multiple television sets, drives a car, and plays video games. Katz and Stern find that workers strive harder to obtain individual success in the prevailing system. They work multiple jobs, mothers enter the workforce, and individuals increase their debt. These individualistic strategies remove the focus from changing the system itself, even though President George W. Bush's 2001 tax cuts reduced "the taxes of the poorest fifth of Americans by 1.2 percent . . . and of the wealthiest one percent by 51.8 percent . . ." (68).

Both works suggest that the combination of persistent inequality coupled with growing demographic diversity requires a new set of public policies designed to widen opportunities. The authors approach policy recommendations differently. On the one hand, Katz and Stern stand on the sidelines and dutifully report events. They offer "no prescriptive answers" (173), reporting instead on the "Darwinian contest" (224) of ideas and definitions that compete for dominance as "the inadequacy of the old definitions that still largely frame public discussion" (173) comes under attack from different segments of society.

They describe policy decisions in the areas of family policy, labor statistics, and immigration to capture key moments of public decision making that will shape our collective future. For example, divorcées, blended families, grandparents seeking parental rights, gay families, and reproductive technologies (e.g., artificial insemination) pursue rights for diverse family forms and challenge the naturalization of the heterosexual nuclear family enshrined in law and corporate policies. But these struggles face determined opposition from conservatives who rely on biological notions of the "natural" nuclear family to win policy battles (196–207). To reveal the socially constructed nature of conservative arguments, Katz and Stern rely on a subtle juxtaposition of facts from their chapter on families to demonstrate that public policy legitimates and rewards some family formations and not others. The "we report and let the reader decide"

approach to policy choices robs us of the benefit of their considerable insight, experience, and judgment that a more explicit argument would provide.

On the other hand, Fischer and Hout make a direct recommendation—the national government should drastically expand access to higher education, on a scale comparable to the land-grant universities of the past. They acknowledge that long-standing racial gaps in educational achievement make it less likely that African Americans will pursue higher education (17). But that simple caveat does not wrestle with their own evidence that the consequences of segregated housing leave many poor African Americans unprepared for college, especially if they are high school dropouts. Nor do Fischer and Hout consider the role of community colleges and for-profit proprietary schools in the higher education field. Finally, they do not address the consequences of ignoring their recommendations.

Neither book fully grapples with the implications of data that they cannot measure, which can understate the scope of the problem. As careful researchers, both sets of authors admit that they lack data on groups who are difficult to study with official statistics, such as ex-convicts and the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants. But their conclusions adhere to measurable outcomes without considering how these "missing variables" affect their recommendations. If a large percentage of African American males have criminal records, then do we need a new set of policies to reintegrate a significant segment of the population, especially with respect to access to higher education? Their recommendations not only understate an impending crisis of deep inequalities but also circumscribe their policy recommendations.

The role of these books in public debate about the country's future is unclear. Both texts appear to rely on an implicit model of academic research informing citizens and policymakers, but they may be too long for the layperson and too complex for policymakers. Fischer and Hout's clear structure and straightforward recommendations better fit those policy briefs used by foundation officers, advocacy organizations, and others who influence the policy process and social priorities. Unfortunately, the abundant data do not effectively provide answers to the larger questions facing society so as to emerge from a crowded marketplace of ideas and capture the public's imagination. Overall, both are excellent compilations of data and incredibly useful texts that describe where the United States has been and where it is heading.

REFERENCES

- DuBois, W. E. B. 1989. Intro., H. L. Gates. *The soul of black folk*. New York: Bantam. (Orig. pub. 1903.)
- Myrdal, G. [1944] 1962. *An American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- O'Connor, A. 2007. *Social science for what? Philanthropy and the social question in a world turned rightside up*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.