The upwardly mobile student's progress is facilitated by the informal social organization of the high school, with its prevailing interpersonal preference for the ambitious and with social cleavage more strongly on the basis of destination than of origin. However, this pattern is less clear and students' aspirations are less consistent with their short-term goals in the poorest neighborhoods. The reason was that a "stratification of destination" largely displaced the more familiar "stratification of origin" in these high schools. In spite of the leveling effect of "youth culture," students shared values and chose friends more on the basis of their aspirations than on the basis of their backgrounds. This conclusion ran counter to the received wisdom concerning impediments to upward mobility in the American class system. Of course, the study says nothing about what happens after high school, when the received wisdom may be correct.

Execution of the research required extended negotiation with school officials who worried about political fallout. To ensure suitably controlled conditions, I spent several months administering all of the questionnaires myself, with the help of a research assistant and, in a pinch, a few volunteering graduate students. Data analysis without benefit of computers or funding for more than one part-time research assistant was slow and discouraging. Finding a publisher for a technical monograph was also much more difficult 25 years ago than it is today.

The book responded to a widespread current and continuing interest in the relationship of the school to our democratic institutions. In the field of stratification, E.G. Grabb, among others, has recently explored further how the lower classes come to terms with middle-class values. And in the study of adolescence, D.M. Smith exemplifies the continuing interest in the impact of the youth subculture on young people.

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