

Turner R H. *The social context of ambition: a study of high-school seniors in Los Angeles*. San Francisco, CA: Chandler, 1964. 269 p.
[University of California, Los Angeles, CA]

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 *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 195 publications since 1966.]

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This study represented the convergence of three longtime interests. One was the difference in world view among members of different socioeconomic classes. A second was curiosity about the experience of being upwardly mobile. Both my own mobility from a lower middle-class family and the work of one of my teachers, W. Lloyd Warner, inspired me to wonder whether being upwardly mobile subjected an individual to qualitatively or quantitatively distinctive experiences. The third interest was my fascination with Robert E. Park's¹ marginal-man formulation, wondering whether it applied to the upwardly mobile individual. Because Park had astutely placed the interplay between personal values and interpersonal ties at the core of his analysis, he seemed to get at the heart of the relationship between individuals and society. Changing values and shifting ties are problem enough for any individual,

but the linkage between ties and values immensely complicates the transition.

My study of 2,793 high-school seniors—practically the entire senior class in 10 high schools representative of Los Angeles's full socioeconomic diversity—showed that while in high school, the upwardly mobile boys and girls were not marginal. 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,² 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. Smith³ exemplifies the continuing interest in the impact of the youth subculture on young people.

1. Park R E. Introduction. (Stonequist E V.) *The marginal man: a study in personality and culture conflict*. New York: Russell & Russell, (1937) 1961. p. xiii-xviii.
2. Grabb E G. *The ranking of self-actualization values: the effects of class, stratification, and occupational experiences*. *Sociol. Quart.* 22:373-83, 1981.
3. Smith D M. Perceived peer and parental influences on youth's social world. *Youth Soc.* 17:131-56, 1985.