

Review

The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility. By GREGORY CLARK. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2013. Pp. 364. \$29.95 (HB), ISBN: 9780691162546; \$19.95 (PB), ISBN: 9780691168371; various prices (eBook), ISBN: 9781400851096.

For nearly a hundred years, and probably longer, a popular take on social class and wealth embraced the trope “The rich get rich and the poor get poorer.”¹ In response to the wide variation in economic status largely believed to be the result of urbanization and industrialization, twentieth-century reformers and activists worked, lobbied, marched, and legislated to close the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Acting on the premise that a rising tide raises all ships, private philanthropy and all levels of government assessed needs and conceptualized new institutional providers in support of women and children. A multitude of programs focused on education, healthcare, social services, and housing reform to address inequality of income.

Gregory Clark, professor of economics at the University of California, Davis, upends the notion that interventions such as these can effect substantive change in his most recent book, *The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility*. In a fascinating and extraordinary use of historical data, Clark and his 11 collaborators, including Neil Cummins, Yu Hao, and Daniel Diaz, creatively correlate surnames with wealth, educational attainment, and class in Europe, Asia, and North and South America. His focus encompasses historic periods ranging from the eleventh-century Norman invasion of England to the 300-year Qing (Manchu) dynasty in China (1644–1912). In contrast to the short-term, two-generation study of wealth and class typically employed by sociologists, Clark utilizes the *longue durée* approach of the French Annales School with a multiple-generational analysis of wealth and some studies lasting up to 17 generations.

For readers who are neither statisticians, economists, nor sociologists, the Introduction to *The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility* provides the context for understanding the issue of economics and social mobility in the ruling and underclasses. The chapters that follow are neatly divided into three sections: Social Mobility by Time and Place, Testing the Laws of Mobility, and The Good Society. This three-part structure details the studies and the findings, presents and explains Clark’s theory of social mobility, and then explores the anomalies and future implications for social policy. Two of the three appendices detail how to utilize data to examine multiple-generational mobility, derive rates of persistence and evaluate surname frequencies. The third appendix is a guide to teasing out the status of your own surname lineage. The book concludes with complete sources for the data used in the figures and tables, followed by an extensive reference section and index.

While social competence is generally understood to be a multidimensional concept that includes social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills, Clark argues that measures of education, wealth, and income are a viable proxy for social competence. He further argues that his measures of social competence are assets more powerful than any social intervention, cultural shift, or economic opportunity (108–113). Clark contends that interventions which promote equal opportunity have not resulted in greater equality, and a better and more democratic approach might be a focus on greater equality of condition. While some may quarrel with his explanation of how nature versus nurture plays a role in social mobility, the argument that creating greater equality is a better path to social mobility than traditional institutional interventions should provoke interesting discussions. The author carefully delineates his use of data in each chapter to show how he conceived

of and used data to derive sophisticated correlations, probability, and persistence rates. For those who benefit from visual representation of data-crunching, the 50 tables provide a wealth of detail and analysis.

Of most interest to *Names* readers is the use of surname data to examine the commonly held perception that societies with better access to education, political franchise, and institutional social structures have greater income equality than those which do not. In particular, the author's use of rare surnames among the elite and the non-elite to measure mobility in occupation, income, and education is both a novel and a creative use of names and naming practices to derive data-driven conclusions. Each of the chapters that focus on specific geographical areas relies not only on a knowledge of historical context but also on insight into the complex social customs, gender relations, religious practices, and economic influences in the era being studied.

The depth and breadth of arcane archival sources are remarkable for both what kind of information has been recorded and where and how it was unearthed. In Sweden, for example, the author looks at surnames that were either associated with the nobility or were "Latinized," and then he analyzes student enrollment at two universities from 1700 to the present. The data show a relatively high correlation between high-status names and university education, which Clark links to wealth. Persistence of status remains high among those with the noblest names (associated with status elements like *-gyllen* [gold], *-silfer* [silver], and *-lejon* [lion]), with lower-status noble surnames ending in *-lund* or *-berg*, and Latinized names ending in *-ius* or *-eus*, as opposed to low-status names ending in *-sson* or *-son*. He concludes that, despite Sweden's extensive welfare state and intentional equity policies, those with Latinized surnames or surnames from the elite groups of nobles were more likely to be and to remain in socially privileged groups. The analysis showed a much slower rate of downward mobility among these groups than would be normally expected. Correspondingly, those with common patronyms ending in *-son* (about 93% of names in the marriage records of pre-industrial Sweden) have a low rate of upward intergenerational mobility for education, occupation, and income. The author concludes that a century of social democracy has created a more equal economic society, but it has not changed the rate of social mobility (43–44).

Narratives in each of the subsequent chapters are equally intriguing, with somewhat disheartening conclusions. Studies of rare English surnames in Chapter 5 stretch over 700 years from when surnames were first formed and include elite names such as *Baskerville*, found in the Domesday Book of 1086. Rare surnames from the student rosters at Cambridge and Oxford and probate records are compared to rare names in the general population. The findings show a slower regression to the mean with a higher intergenerational correlation for wealth and prosperity. Although there is a gradual rise to the mean for poorer folks, the sons of the elite had, and continue to have, greater advantage. As Clark notes, the upper-class names reek of class privilege and distinguished lineage (88).

In subsequent chapters the author continues to compare rare surnames across various cultures and reaches similar conclusions. A sampling of the societies studied includes Chile, where the rare surnames of the indigenous Mapuche are compared to the European colonizers, including Basque, German, and Italian landholders. Despite the Westernization efforts and educational reform of the Meiji period and the elimination of the imperial elite in 1947, Japanese surnames associated with the Samurai and the Kazoku (families of the ancient court nobility) continue to be overrepresented in high-status occupations. In India, the practice of endogamy — marriage within one's social and economic class — resulted in distinctive first names for women (*Krishna* and *Sumita* among Brahmin elite versus Muslim *Salma* or Christian *Mary*). Bengali Brahmins of the highest caste dating back to the tenth century C.E. are four times more frequent among modern-day physicians, professors, and engineers. Unfortunately for onomastic and/or genealogical purposes, the rare surnames of the elite and the lower castes do not appear in the index and must be ferreted out in each individual chapter.

Clark challenges current assumptions about economic equality with this close review of mobility rates. He argues that these rates are lower than conventional measures, occur at a similar rate for

different measures of status, do not vary across societies, and are resistant to social policies (107). Using the evidence of rare surnames, Clark reduces social mobility to a simple law expressed as:

$$x_{t+1} = bx_t + e_t$$

where x is the underlying social competence of families; b is a relatively high persistence rate (0.7–0.8), and e is a random component (109, 125). Clark's Law of Social Mobility, tested across 800 years of rare surname data, shows that mode of governance, institutions, and social policy do not appear to have an impact on economic status. While the rich may not get richer and the poor may not get poorer, they nevertheless fall or rise more slowly on the economic ladder than previously thought and, moreover, that movement is due to social competencies and familial status which are unrelated to outside interventions. *Names* readers will find this innovative use of surnames to tease out a law of social mobility a groundbreaking approach to onomastics.

The Son Also Rises was selected as one of *Choice's* Outstanding Academic Titles in 2014. It was the winner of the 2015 Gyorgy Ranki Prize from the Economic History Association and received an Honorable Mention for the 2015 PROSE Award in Economics from the Association of American Publishers. The range of reviews in both academic (*Journal of Economic History*, *Literary Review*, *Journal of Modern History* etc.) and more general publications (*Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg View*, *New Yorker* etc.) attests to its widespread appeal. Author Cormac O'Grada provides us with perhaps the most succinct description when he asserts that the book is "provocative, adversarial and a brilliant tour de force."²

Notes

¹. "Ain't We Got Fun?" came from a musical revue called *Satires of the 1920s*. The music (Richard A. Whiting), published in 1921, was a popular foxtrot and the lyrics (Raymond B. Egan and Gus Kahn) resonated with the jaunty culture of the Roaring Twenties.

². See: <http://press.princeton.edu/quotes/q10181.html>. Accessed November 6, 2016.

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