Between Modernism and Postmodernism: Lenski's *Power and Privilege* in the Study of Inequalities*

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Gerhard Lenski's classical work on stratification, Power and Privilege, *was an effort to reconcile and to synthesize different approaches to inequality incorporated into the grand theories of the day. It anticipated a variety of developments in the theoretical and empirical understanding of inequalities. These include recognition of the multiplicity of inequalities; emphasis on race, class, gender, and other sources and systems of domination and subordination; and the intersection of these factors in complex patterns to create different standpoints and life consequences. The result was groundbreaking work that underscored the multidimensionality of stratification systems, the variability of their influences, and the notion that their intersection in itself has implications beyond the sum of component parts. In these ways his work foreshadowed the possibilities of finding common ground between modern and postmodern perspectives, to make Lenski the last grand theorist of modernity and a forerunner of postmodern theories of inequality.*

The publication of *Power and Privilege* by Gerhard Lenski in 1966 marked a watershed year for theory and research on stratification and inequality. Subtitled *A Theory of Stratification*, it followed in a long tradition of grand theory in sociology devoted to explaining the inequalities in the production, distribution, and consumption of societal goods and services, both material and intangible, as they varied across time and place. As a successor to the classical theorists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Lenski created a work that could be compared in scope to his predecessors while transcending their limits and incompatibilities and simultaneously benefiting from the methods and findings of modern empirical social science. The ambition of *Power and Privilege* (1966) included reconciling the diverse approaches of Karl Marx and Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and the elitists, Herbert Spencer and modern evolutionary theory, functionalism and its discontents, and applying the ensuing principles to the full sweep of human history.

Partly inductive, partly deductive in its approach, its scope and comprehensiveness matched and even surpassed many of the classical theorists whose work it embraced. It entered the theory sweepstakes at a critical historical moment when social foment in the larger society and in the discipline initiated challenges to longstanding social truths and practices and to principles and standards of classical theory whose philosophical underpinnings were being severely questioned both by more recent empirically based theory and by newer theoretical expressions. In this paper, I attempt to locate this work in the larger intellectual movements that have buffeted sociology and social science in the ensuing years.

STRATIFICATION THEORY

The publication date, 1966, coincided with an auspicious moment in postwar history. It coincided with the coming of age of the baby boomers and the myriad of discontents they brought to the public arena. New social movements and old quests for peace and justice joined forces to create a broad sense of social unrest. Civil rights, Vietnam, second-wave feminism, cold-war skepticism, environmentalism, sexual revolution, drugs, sex, and rock and roll were in the air. These are not necessarily movements initiated by this cohort but ones many of its members embraced and gave voice to.

Power and Privilege was to be read by a generation of students who sought answers to large questions about inequities in the shape and form of the social order, who distrusted authority, who chafed against cold-war repression, and who experimented with rejections of middle-class mores and morality.

The fomentation of the campus and the streets was reflected in academic circles. It became popular to compare students to oppressed minority groups, to advocate resistance and change, and to seek scholarly underpinnings for social protest. At a time when functionalism still held sway in sociology, the dominant theories of stratification appeared to be too comfortable with the inequalities embedded in the status quo. Although so-called conflict theories were not absent from the stratification literature, and a revival of interest in Marxist theory and his critical heirs was also underway, the work of Parsons and his students still firmly dominated what was considered to be mainstream social science and sociology.[1] Resistance to the stifling emphasis on systems and stasis was beginning to pick up steam. Against this background, the appeal of a contemporary theory of inequality that encompassed power and politics, that emphasized conflict and change, and that deliberated the possibility of progress, all the while claiming to reconcile seemingly contradictory views, was irresistible.

Elements of Lenski's Theory

There are two possible approaches to examining Lenski's theory of stratification: a description of the substance of the theory itself, its concepts, arguments, formal structure, evidence, and findings; and a meta-theoretical analysis of its epistemological underpinnings. This paper focuses on the latter; however, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the basic elements of the theory before turning to the second task. The complete exposition of the theory and the evidence marshaled to support it are found, of course, in *Power and Privilege* itself. What follows is neither a comprehensive review of the theory nor a critical assessment but rather is a starting point for examination of its influence at a critical juncture in the development of theories of stratification and inequality.

Lenski's theory of stratification begins with the most basic question of how to explain the unequal distribution of power and privilege in society—the fundamental question of "Who gets what and why?"—and moves on to examine the variation in answers across different social settings, particularly across different societies organized by their dominant mode of production. Lenski defines social stratification as

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[1] The most widely read and subsequently debated theory of stratification, the Davis-Moore theory, argued that the ranking of social positions reflected their importance to society and the relative difficulty of finding competent role incumbents to carry out social tasks (Davis and Moore 1945). Thus, stratification and consequent inequality was a recruitment process designed to ensure smooth social functioning rather than the outcome of power struggles and oppressive practices.

"the distributive process in human societies—the process by which scarce values are distributed" (Lenski 1966:x). The theory is macro; it uses human society as its unit of analysis, but it applies to both inter- and intrasocietal variation, introducing as fundamental postulates assumptions about both the nature of society and the nature of individual units within social systems. These are not necessarily synchronized or compatible. "We must learn to think of distributive systems as reflecting *simultaneously* system needs and unit needs, with each often subverting the other" (Lenski 1966:34, emphasis in original).

Lenski proceeds to outline the dynamics and structure of the distributive system, which revolve around the distribution of surplus or the products of human labor. The dynamics postulate that power primarily determines control over the surplus; therefore, ensuing privilege is largely a function of power. Where little or no surplus exists, there will be little variation in power or privilege. Thus, fundamental to the distributive system is the generation of surplus ("goods and services over and above the minimum required to keep producers alive and productive" (Lenski 1966:44)), and the primary determinant of surplus is type and level of technology. Advances in technology increase surplus and ultimately the ability to control its distribution. In addition to technology, secondary variation in surplus generation is determined by environmental factors and by military and political organization. Control over surplus produces an elite group in a given society who exercise power in a variety of forms, from force to persuasion, from coercion to authority and influence, and in a variety of institutionalized forms. While control of surplus is fundamental to exercise of power, it is not generated solely from private property or control over the means of production as in Marxist theory, but may have a variety of sources, including primarily political ones.

Structure consists of elaboration of the basic units within distributive systems: individuals, classes, and class systems. Individuals are of little interest other than as providing the occupants for different power classes, which is the "aggregation of persons in a society who stand in a similar position with respect to force or some specific form of institutionalized power" (Lenski 1966:75). Other commonly found positions in the stratification literature such as caste or estate denote specific types of classes with particular bases and characteristics rather than representing fundamentally different types of strata. Classes themselves are organized into class systems or "a hierarchy of classes ranked in terms of some single criterion" (Lenski 1966:80), with examples consisting of class systems based on politics, property, occupation, and ethnicity. In theory, almost any stratifying variable—age, gender, sexuality, or any other source of "categorical difference" (Tilly 1999)—could be the basis of a class system. The coexistence of different class systems within a society means that distributive systems are multidimensional, and they differ in importance, complexity, span, shape, degrees of mobility, interclass hostility, and institutionalization. The totality of class systems constitutes the organization of distributive systems, which are basically society-wide phenomena.

The causal dominance of technology forms the basis for the final important component of the theory: the development of a typology of societal types and, therefore, distributive systems, based on technological development. The classification scheme is borrowed from the anthropological literature, specifically the work of Childe (1936, 1951) and Goldschmidt (1959). Societal types range from hunting-and-gathering societies through different levels of industrial production. Presumably, if the work were to be updated today, it would move beyond industrial to current notions of postindustrial societies. While they are presented as categorical differences,

in fact they represent "an underlying continuum ... [that] is a measure of a society's *overall technological efficiency*, i.e., the value of a society's gross product in international markets divided by the human energy expended in its production" (Lenski 1966:93).

Most of the rest of the volume is devoted to examining the empirical evidence culled from the vast historical, anthropological, and sociological literatures to test the viability of the general theory. While some modifications are made, particularly in elaborating on the distinction between technology and economy and elevating the importance of ideological factors, in the end Lenski concludes that the basic outline of the theory holds. And indeed, in this and in subsequent work, he reaffirms the primacy of subsistence technology as the fundamental organizing principle for human societies and their systems of power and privilege (Lenski and Lenski 1970; Lenski, Lenski, and Nolan 1991; Lenski 1994).

Synthesis and Critique

There are numerous other elaborations, details, and components that flesh out this bare-bones description. For example, an important corollary of the multidimensionality of class systems is the phenomenon of status inconsistency or crystallization.[2] The potential to occupy multiple but inconsistent ranks in different class systems creates stratification outcomes different from those predicted when all positions are congruent. Numerous other concepts such as citizenship, types of power and authority, and notions of the circulation of elites are incorporated into the theory. The student of stratification will recognize the rich sources of this theory in a variety of classical and contemporary theory and research, ranging from Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and C. Wright Mills to Karl Marx, Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, the mid-20th century functionalists, and contemporary anthropologists, all of whom Lenski credits and embraces as he weaves them into the general theory. Clearly, the impetus for this project was to take the numerous strands of theory and research beginning with the earliest social analysis from ancient times and use them to build a synthesis that made sense of the divergent approaches. In his own words, "I found myself confronted ... with the task of bringing together in a meaningful way the diverse and often contradictory contributions of the various theorists.... Eventually I came to see that theories as contradictory as those of Marx and Mosca, or of Dahrendorf and Parsons, can be understood within a single, unified framework.... Applying the Hegelian diaclectic to the past, one easily discovers a meaningful pattern in the otherwise confusing history of stratification theory" (Lenski 1966:vii–viii). Clearly also, although less explicitly stated, a fundamental goal of this project was to rise above the increasing rancor of those vying for theoretical primacy, muting the futile exchanges between functionalist and conflict approaches to stratification theory. Synthesis represented both an intellectual requirement and a political necessity.

If we examine the intellectual underpinnings of Lenski's mission, rather than the substance of the theory itself, a number of elements can be abstracted. In particular, the approach outlined in *Power and Privilege* has the following characteristics:

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[2]Lenski (1954, 1956) previously had been an active contributor to this research tradition, and although it does not form a major part of *Power and Privilege*, it is a central component of his larger contribution to the field of stratification as well as one of the few places where he focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis.

(1) *It is synthetic and integrative.* As discussed above, it attempts to reconcile differing perspectives, ideologies, seemingly contradictory facts, events, and interpretations. This task is accomplished in both word and deed by self-conscious scrutiny of the places where previous theories have diverged or suggest competing explanations, explicit evaluation of the ways this theory bridges differences or concludes that the preponderance of evidence falls on one side or another, and by its sweeping and comprehensive incorporation of past work into its framework.

(2) *It is grounded empirically.* Although certainly not without its biases, and in some cases dated, it nevertheless makes an enormous effort to turn ideological debate into empirical questions, marshaling a vast array of data culled from an impressive array of disciplines, literatures, empirical research, and observation.

(3) *It is rational and analytical,* attempting to use formal criteria to organize and test its major tenets in a way that is no longer in style but that makes the arguments transparent and at least hypothetically testable. As indicated previously, it is both deductive and inductive, setting out a formal logic for the theory and then holding it up to empirical test and modification. The elements of the general theory are outlined using a framework of formal deductive logic that lays out assumptions, postulates, laws, and hypotheses as well as heuristic models that represent the basic components of the theory and their relationships.

(4) *It advocates use of "variable concepts" broken down into their component parts.* Both of these practices are advocated as a means of promoting synthesis of competing and contradictory approaches through reformulating basic problems and concepts. Variable concepts are contrasted with the limitations of categorical concepts that promote "either/or" logic and a restricted range of possibilities. "Breaking down compound concepts into their constituent elements" (Lenski 1966:21) promotes clarity of conceptualization and the empirical specification of suggestive but fuzzy generalizations.

(5) *It situates the study of inequality inextricably in the study of power and politics and vice versa.* Now this seems obvious and trivially true, but at the time the work was published, it was quite possible to see these as separate disciplines and dimensions of social life. Whole theories of stratification prevailed that were oblivious to power and politics, and students of politics could study their subject as a social system as if it could be divorced from the exercise of power. Lenski's work was not the first to argue the link, but the definitiveness of his arguments make it one of the last required to make this case.

(6) *It is grounded in time and space.* Unlike the vast majority of his contemporaries who were still immersed in efforts to create covering laws of human and social behavior typically removed from time and space, Lenski's effort at grand theory explicitly (and somewhat paradoxically) privileges context, placing historical time and movement and geographic space and place at the heart of his theory. Thus, the development of distributive systems is traced and is compared across different types of societies and historical epochs. The method used is taxonomic—societies are classified according to a taxonomy based on technological development that imperfectly reproduces either chronological emergence of different subsistence strategies or ecological determinism. Lenski refers to a societal taxonomy as a social map or as a means to bring order and to reduce noise in an abundance of imperfect data

(Lenski 1994). Although the mapping function of a taxonomy seeks to transcend the case-specific detail of a diachronic account of human society, the act of classification in combination with the data required to accomplish the task brings case variation to the forefront.

(7) *It very early laid the foundation for integrating and for extending the study of multiple dimensions of inequality*. In its emphasis on the multidimensionality of class systems, it provided a basis for seeing gender, age, and ethnicity as significant components of inequality at a time when class and socioeconomic status vied for sole sources of inequality to be taken seriously by the majority of scholars.

(8) *It is simultaneously lucid, erudite, and accessible* in a way that is all too rare in sociological writing and that puts it head and shoulders above the majority of both predecessors and successors. Although dated in some of its language and assumptions—the universal use of man for humanity, assumptions about women's roles—nevertheless, it expresses its ideas in direct language, avoiding much of the jargon of the work it builds on and providing clear explanations of its concepts.

Elements of Modernism

If we scrutinize these elements of Lenski's theory in conjunction with its substance, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this work epitomizes 20th-century modern social science with everything that is of value in high modernity—rationality, logic, and respect for empirical data and the methods of science. The goals and methods of *Power and Privilege* are avowedly scientific. The theory is elaborated in a deductive framework. Logic and chronicity are respected and form underlying principles of explanation. Explanation itself is the highest objective; it is to this purpose that the methods of social science are harnessed. What is sometimes labeled disparagingly as "linear thinking" forms the basis of the exposition and provides one of the major components of the clarity of the narrative. As part of the scientific enterprise it seeks to "isolate elements, specify relationships, and formulate a synthesis" (Rosenau 1992:8), a description of modernism that could be equally applied to Lenski's stated objectives. It seeks to represent an objective reality through a variety of techniques inspired by the natural sciences and holds out the promise of improved ability to test and to refine the model through improved tools and methods of empirical social science, including methods of quantitative analysis. In short, everything about its purpose, approach, and language is the quintessential project of modernism in social science.[3]

At the same time, there are a number of elements to this framework that are subversive to modernist thought and approaches, perhaps even subversive to its own objectives. In the next section, I argue that key elements in Lenski's theory and approach helped lay the groundwork for a postmodern approach to stratification, one that replaces a theory of stratification with the scrutiny of inequalities.

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[3]Components of this characterization of modernism are sometimes identified and disparaged as positivism. I avoid using this term for a number of reasons: modernism is a broader movement that can be seen to encompass the different strands of epistemology identified as positivism; the term positivism has been applied so broadly as a pejorative label to empirical social science, especially using quantitative methods from the mid-20th century as to have become meaningless; and finally, modernism provides a better and a more philosophically equivalent comparison in its meaning and scope to the movement that challenges it—postmodernism.

FROM MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNISM

While Lenski's theory was not the last effort at grand theory in the tradition of early social science giants such as Marx and Weber, it was a much more ambitious effort than was typical of either contemporary or subsequent sociology. In some ways it was an anomaly from the very beginning in its marriage of empirical social science with large-scale theory construction and its advocacy of quantitative methods in a deductive model while at the same time using largely comparative-historical data in an inductive framework. Its publication coincided with both the narrowing emphasis of mainstream sociology in quantitative models that purported to construct and test middle-range theory and with the broad rejection of this approach by proponents of qualitative methods and constructionist theories. In short, it was written at a time of rising discontent with much of mainstream sociology, the rejection of modernist perspectives by broad segments of the academic and scholarly communities, and the rise of postmodernism.

Postmodernism 101

There are as many variants of postmodernism as there are postmodernists (Rosenau 1992:15; Featherstone 1988:207), ranging from "a synonym for the future" to a "specific philosophical perspective replete with epistemological assumptions, methodological preferences, and substantive foci" (Rosenau 1992:17). It is neither my intent nor competence to present a definitive or comprehensive account of this movement.[4] Rather, I discuss its broad outlines to demonstrate the challenge to modern social science and what this has meant for the study of stratification and Lenski's contributions.

Apart from the variety, fluidity, and lack of specificity of what is labeled postmodern, perhaps its most fundamental characteristic is its opposition to and rejection of the terms and procedures of modern science and, by corollary, social science. It is easiest to describe what it is not and what it rejects rather than what it represents (a suspect term in itself). In particular, postmodernism rejects objectivity, reality, and authority; rejects explanation; rejects deterministic arguments and models; rejects models themselves as part of a larger rejection of "representation"; rejects disciplinary boundaries; rejects globalizing and totalizing views and universals of any sort; rejects strict ordering of chronology, temporality, or spatiality; and generally stands in opposition to all that is elevated by modern science.

While the lack of unity in postmodern accounts makes it difficult to specify its positive components, and in its most extreme versions, there are few affirmative or prescriptive tenets, examination of the language of postmodernism suggests its basic approach. Rather than explanation, postmodernists tell a story. Text substitutes for reality and data, and it is free standing: the reader is free to read meaning into the text rather than to accept authorial intention. "Reading" substitutes for interpretation or explanation, and rejection of authority generally undermines any notion of objective truth. Thus, the purpose of social science is to decenter and to deconstruct received wisdom rather than to seek generalizations, patterns, and regularities or to construct global explanation. In place of causality and determinism, there is intertextuality, stressing "infinitely complex interwoven interrelationships" (Rosenau 1992:xii). Representation itself is rejected as impossible, inadequate, and repressive,

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[4]While there are a number of accounts describing postmodern perspectives in sociology and even more that use them (Calhoun 1992; Richardson 1988; Seidman and Wagner 1992), much of what follows depends on *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* by Rosenau (1992).

thus the futility of constructing models and the elevation of the unique. Time and space are collapsed or stretched, distorted or reordered, and generally are disengaged from their normal linear representation.

At its extreme, the postmodern perspective undermines the very existence of social science or the possibility of constructing a systematic study of the social.[5] On the other hand, its radicalism has promoted a confrontation between the claims of mainstream social science and its critics that has laid bare many of the pretensions, blind spots, and biases that undermine any attempt to scrutinize social relations. While most social theory can be classified in one camp or the other, some contemporary theorists attempt to find the middle ground between the competing views (cf. Seidman and Wagner 1992; Calhoun 1992). And some of its precepts have come close to becoming part of a new doctrine for social science. The ideas of the embeddedness of social relations, the importance of social context and situated knowledge, the complexity of relationships between part and whole, the problematic nature of representations, the suspicion of universal laws and other overly general and ungrounded pronouncements, and the rejection of logical dichotomies and standard oppositional thinking are all among standard operating assumptions in much of current sociology that at least in part can trace their lineage to the postmodern critique. They also represent important theoretical refinements in numerous areas of social theory and research.

Postmodern Influences on Stratification and Inequality

At first glance, it appears that postmodernism is the antithesis of Lenski's objectives and accomplishments in *Power and Privilege*, and in a strict sense this is the case. Having established the quintessential modernism of his views of science and of his approach to social science, it would be difficult to argue for the existence of a postmodernist vision for his work. However, if we trace the development of current understandings of stratification and inequality, it is possible to see their intellectual roots in Lenski's reformulation of the discipline.[6]

In particular, in keeping with the fragmentation and proliferation of different perspectives and paradigms in sociology, virtually all strands of theory about stratification can be found in the current literature from increasingly complex variations of status attainment models to Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches. However, two developments have had an enormous influence and have created something close to a new consensus in the study of inequality. The first is the rise and growing influence of feminist theories of gender inequality, and the second is the related development

[5]Rosenau (1992) divides postmodernists into two camps: skeptical and affirmative postmodernism. The former fall into this extreme category of denying the possibility of social scientific enterprise. The latter find ways to justify a positive project of social analysis with varying degrees of inconsistency and contradiction.

[6]The overall influence of *Power and Privilege* is open to question. If quantitative criteria such as number of citations are used, it would be enormous. Similarly, impressionistic assessments of the wide familiarity and pedagogical use it has among sociologists would affirm its influence. On the other hand, if one tries to trace its actual use in subsequent development in the stratification literature, a much more limited judgment emerges. There are some clear examples of its incorporation into the work of major social theorists, including Collins (1975) and Turner (1984). It also influenced some feminist theorists such as Blumberg (1978) and Huber (1991), but theorists in this vein were not uncritical (see Blumberg's rejection of technological determinism) or not particularly influential in the larger body of feminist theory. The dated language and limited and anachronistic accounts of women's work in *Power and Privilege* were barriers to its embrace by feminists almost from the beginning, and the rapidity of subsequent developments in the study of gender inequality overtook and overwhelmed its potential to influence. Finally, its macro-structural approach is not particularly congenial to the emphasis on agency and constructionist approaches in the majority of prevailing explanations of gender inequality (see Chafetz 1997 for a discussion of alternative approaches).

of theorizing about the intersections of race, class, and gender. While it is not possible to trace a direct link between Lenski's work and these perspectives, it is possible to see suggestive connections. Furthermore, while these developments should not be considered postmodern theories in the strongest meaning of the term, each has been influenced deeply and shares many similarities and overlaps with postmodern approaches.

A major component of feminist theories of gender inequality has been the questioning of what is usually identified as mainstream, positivist epistemology. As Chafetz (1997) points out, there is little that is unique to feminist theory in these critiques. Virtually all can be found in other traditions and empirical work that has little interest in or relevance to women, gender, or feminist social science. However, they form an important unifying strand in many feminist perspectives, and their intellectual debt to postmodern approaches is unquestionable.[7] In particular, standpoint theories as developed by Smith (1987, 1990) and Collins (1990) emphasize the importance of decentering male-centered theory and research; the existence and diversity of multiple perspectives; the futility of claims for objectivity or objective knowledge, especially under conditions of social exclusion; the importance of situated and contextual knowledge; and the rejection of abstraction, overgeneralization, totalizing concepts, and either/or logic. As a substitute for the objectification rampant in male-dominated mainstream theories, they advocate for knowledge situated in the everyday experience of a myriad of actors to include prominent roles for women, African Americans, and presumably, in principle, other excluded groups. Overlap and influence of postmodern perspectives are obvious.

A closely related development that is partially the outgrowth of standpoint theories in general and Collins's work specifically is the growth of what is usually termed a race, class, and gender perspective to studying inequality. This approach takes as axiomatic that these systems of inequality coexist and intersect in a "matrix of domination" that juxtaposes forms of oppression not as "either/or" relationships but as "both/and" that can be experienced simultaneously and interactively. The notion of interaction forms a primary means of representing this relationship, borrowing from the statistical literature the model of a multiplicative rather than an additive function to describe the relationship among the different sources of domination. Collins suggests that this approach can transcend these three systems to include other sources such as age, religion, and sexuality. Finally, one can simultaneously occupy positions of domination and subordination across the different systems. In many ways this concept echoes the earlier formulations of status inconsistency, which hypothesized an interactive relationship between different social ranks. While there have been a number of critiques of the statistical metaphor of interaction (Chafetz 1997), the idea of multiple intersecting sources of inequality is firmly established in the literature.

These perspectives, along with a number of related theoretical developments, such as critical race feminism (Wing 1997) and postcolonial feminism (Alexander and Mohanty 1997), share certain common views with the postmodern critique and have indelibly stamped the study of social inequality in ways that have become paradigmatic in the study of stratification and inequality. In particular, it is no longer possible

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[7]Actually, in recent work, both Collins (1998) and Smith (1999) do question the links between standpoint theories and postmodernism. They each mount vigorous critiques of postmodern theories for the standard reasons: postmodernism lacks a concept of the social and undermines the potential for agency and collective action, and they draw clear contrasts with their own approaches. Nevertheless, I would argue for all the reasons discussed in this paper that a postmodern sensibility informs their approaches even if there are significant divergences in specific assumptions and applications.

to maintain a unitary system of inequality or to fail to recognize the importance of social locations and identities beyond class as a major component of any stratification system. Gender, race, and ethnicity have become axiomatic as intersecting systems of inequality both in concert with class and beyond. Increasingly, they are combined with other sources such as age, sexuality, citizenship, and religion, many of which were of interest to Lenski. In recognition, it now has become standard to refer to inequalities in the plural, rather than the singular, inequality or the somewhat dated stratification with its metaphorical reference to unidimensional graded geological strata.

BETWEEN MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Lenski is the quintessential modern sociologist with all the baggage the label supplies. At the same time, his work presages the insights and contributions of some post-modern approaches in his appreciation of context and of multiplicity, the rejection of false alternatives, and polarized dichotomies in favor of a variable science. Thus, when we speak of inequalities in the plural as when we now typically do, when we speak of race, class, gender, and all the other sources and systems of domination and subordination, when we look at the way these intersect in complex patterns to create different standpoints and life consequences, and when we reject false dichotomies and an oppositional logic, we are in many ways demonstrating the legacy of the man who underscored the multidimensionality of stratification systems, the variability of their influences, and the notion that their intersection in itself has implications beyond the individual sum of component parts. In the spirit of synthesis and integration that marks Lenski's effort to reconcile the conservative and liberal perspectives and insights and debates of his contemporaries, his work foreshadows the possibilities of finding common ground between modern and postmodern perspectives in a way that may help to overcome the polemics and politics of our day and may create new synthesis.

Power and Privilege was published early in the second half of the 20th century. Many of its details are open to question and to subsequent findings and under-standings. Its language and assumptions reflect the time it was written, but its enduring contributions stand the test of time. These include supplying the bridge between the modernist study of stratification and the postmodern project of reading inequalities.

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