

**HISTORICAL MATERIALISM BY CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY
DESIGN:
THE LIMITS OF E.O. WRIGHT'S STUDY OF CLASS
STRUCTURE**

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INTRODUCTION

Few sociological debates have generated as much interest as those dealing with Marxist or neo-Marxist class analysis. The most discussed and critiqued contribution to this area in the past decade has been that of E.O. Wright (e.g. Wright, 1978; Wright, 1986a). Wright's project has undergone a number of significant revisions and reformulations, as Wright has continually acknowledged and incorporated suggestions by his critics (see Wright, 1989). This discussion will first review Wright's attempts to extend Marx's analysis of class. Though the author is supportive of Wright's general project to seek high levels of Marxist theoretical integration (1989, p.277), it is argued that this integration is limited by a theory of history based on a flawed thesis of structural determinacy with respect to class. While Wright's efforts are specifically and admirably in the interests of 'grand theorizing' (i.e. viewing class structures as macro-level societal properties), his research focus is on micro-level mechanisms related to individual class positions (pp.274-278). Though much discussion elsewhere deals with this and other issues related to Marxist theories of history, the work of Marxist historian Derek Sayer is presented as an example effective in emphasizing the shortcomings of Wright's analysis. In sum, Wright's practice of placing class position as causally prior to other variables related conceptually to authority, autonomy and property in a cross-sectional survey design provides less of a basis for emancipatory strategy than do traditional Marxist attempts to explain class through historical analysis. The most optimistic prospects for Wright's efforts are finally argued to be in repeating his research in the future, thereby providing a basis for addressing historical evolutions in capitalist class relations.

In his most recent work, Wright (1989) considers a full range of the many criticisms directed at his conceptualization and analysis of class structure. His first assertion is that class as a fundamental determinant of social change is "at the core of Marxian class analysis" (p.269). Theoretical impulses arising from this core feature are, as Wright sees it, torn between developing either simple or complex models of class structure in order to enhance its explanatory power. To occupy class location is thereby for Wright to be affected by a set of mechanisms which limit

individual capacities to make choices and act (p.275). These mechanisms for Wright generate empirically observable effects, one of which is the capacity for collective action (p.280). This derives partially from a model of class in which individual consciousness comes about through commonly lived experiences (in this case jobs) and the theoretical assumption that class structure shapes class conflict (p.286). Wright seems limited in many ways to describing how, in a single historical instance of class relations, classes represent exploitative relations. Marxist emancipatory strategy, on the other hand, can be argued as best achieved by explaining class relations through historical analysis, rather than by explaining various individual conditions by class position through a cross-sectional survey design.

Wright (1986a) contends that Marx's original theory is polarized between analysis of abstract structural maps and concrete conjunctural maps (p.6). The first of these is a structural account of class positions, while the second is concerned with the collective struggles of individual actors. Marx, according to Wright, failed to systematically define and elaborate a concept of "class" (ibid.) and thus provided little basis for linking these polarized elements of structure and action. Despite this, recent theory and research has attempted to bridge this gap between the concrete and the abstract. Wright (1986a) describes the first of these neo-Marxist attempts as dealing directly with the problem of the "new middle class" (p.8). The second of these attempts has focused on processes of class formation. These processes have been characterized through institutional mechanisms which are largely autonomous from class structure, for example, political ideology (ibid.). In general, neo-Marxist theory has attempted to reconcile traditional Marxism with contemporary sociological class theory. Wright's work (e.g. 1978; 1989) has also focused on this reconciliation, and has in this way made significant contributions to neo-Marxist debate. It is in this spirit of theoretical integration that the present discussion weighs Wright's approach with that of a more historically oriented method.

Wright's class theory (1978, 1986a) motivated the design of the survey used in the machine-readable data file: Class Structure and Class Consciousness: merged multi-nation file (1986b). This project was intended to provide data for comparative research of relational dimensions of inequality with special emphasis on authority, autonomy, and property. While providing the basis for scores of interesting studies, it can be argued that these data provide Wright little basis for asserting macro-level theoretical claims. It is argued in the present paper that this limitation is a result of Wright's failure to adequately specify historicity within the context of class formation and the potential for large scale social change. Wright's theory of history is next reviewed, and counter-arguments are presented.

THE HISTORY OF EMPTY PLACES

Wright (1986a) typifies Marx's analysis of class as elaborating 1) Abstract Structural Maps: The determination of a structure of empty places in class relations which are devoid of people and 2) Concrete Conjunctural Maps: The manner in which the people occupying these empty places organize in class struggle. He argues that Marx emphasized only the second of these analyses: "While he gives us a list of descriptive categories, corresponding to the actual actors in the conflicts, he does not provide a set of precise concepts for decoding rigorously the structural basis of most of those categories" (p.7). Wright's purpose is thus to carry on Marx's work, 'filling in' the elaboration of these abstract structural maps, in order to develop an 'effective correspondence' between the two levels of analysis (p.8).

Wright thus proceeds to apply concepts derived from historical analysis, without himself carrying out historical analysis. He contrasts Poulantzas and Skocpol, claiming that while Poulantzas argues that the level of abstraction of mode of production is sufficient to characterize the historical association of class and state, Skocpol rejects the validity of this level of abstraction, and argues for a "strictly historical (i.e. conjunctural)" analysis of the relationship of the state to class structure (1986a, p.12). Both, claims Wright, are theorizing on the same level of abstraction - that of the level of social formation. In Marxist analysis, according to Wright, social formation equates to mode of production. For Wright, mode of production is hence at the core of the Marxist theory of the "developmental stages" of capitalism (p.17). Given that these stages are in fact "a specific kind of general structural property" (ibid.), the level of abstraction of the mode of production is, for Wright, effective in analyzing historical stages of development.

By combining conceptually four historic modes of production, Wright develops a typology of interpenetrated forms of production. He is then able to identify divergent phases of capitalism, and to thereby provide a range of possible immanent phases (Wright, 1983). Wright furthermore discredits Marx for failing to develop this so-called 'legitimate' form of historical materialism. In focusing on the historical conditions of the formation of "concrete class organizations, parties, shop floor organization unions," Marx is argued to have 1) neglected the structural conditions of class: "institutional variability in class relations in given jobs" (p.9), and furthermore to have 2) failed to develop a link between theorized conjunctural class formation and undertheorized conjunctural class structure (p.13).

In proposing a 'Theory of History' Wright (1986a) provides a "Typology of class structures, exploitation, and historical transitions" (p.115). The types of social formation in this typology are sequentially feudalism, capitalism, statism, socialism

and communism. Wright also provides the 'historical task of revolutionary transformation'. These in turn represent respectively increasing levels of emancipation: individual liberty, socializing means of production, democratization of organizational control, substantive equality, and self-actualization. These increasing levels of emancipation, he claims, represent the conditions by which successful transition to the next stage may be made. The probability of achieving his tasks depend directly on the level of the development of productive forces on each level (p.116). His trajectory of future societies is thus probabilistic, as it is contingent on a set of preconditions (ibid.). The historical transitions outlined by Wright's version of historical materialism are consequently not 'iron laws', but rather provides a range of possibilities which depend on the class structure at each given stage.

This is claimed to be an effective modification of traditional historical materialism, which argues: "whenever a transition from one form of class relations to another becomes historically possible, forms of class struggle will develop that guarantee that some transitions will occur" (Wright, 1986a, p.117). In developing a thesis specifically of "Capitalism's Futures", Wright takes to task rescuing historical materialism from this iron-clad law of history: "one of the central thrusts of historical materialism has always been that historical development occurred along a single developmental trajectory... it is for this reason that historical materialism is often considered a teleological philosophy of history with one final state inexorably pulling social change towards it" (Wright, 1983, p.122). Arguing for a new structural mode of production: "statism", Wright claims to effectively show that there is not one future to capitalism (socialism), but in fact two (socialism and statism). The structural determination of capitalism's futures thus becomes a probabilistic determination rather than an inexorable determination.

Not only does Wright claim to rescue historical materialism from its surfeit of determinacy, but also increases the revolutionary strategist's level of certainty. The primacy of productive relations remains the key to social change, given that this power structure determines the manner in which essential resources can be used: "the decisive alternatives that are historically possible revolve around the system of production and appropriation" (p.123). Thus, in the event of "revolutionary rupture", an active, conscious effort must be made to prevent a restoration of both capitalist power and statist power. Invaluable to the revolutionary is this guide to the 'actual patterns of social change' not readily provided by an unmodified historical materialism (p.123).

It can be argued, on the other hand, that Marx's method supports neither an iron-clad law of history, nor a probabilistically contingent one. The charges that Marx's

interpretation of history promotes iron-clad laws, resulted partially from the fact that his method of presentation differs from his method of inquiry (eg. Sayer, 1979, pp.96-103). Marx notes: "(inquiry) has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connections. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully... it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction" (Marx quoted in Sayer, 1989, p.92). "What is designated with the words 'destiny', 'goal', 'germ', or 'idea' of earlier history is nothing more than an abstraction from later history, from the active influence which earlier history exercises on later history" (ibid., p.74).

There is evidence that Marx was hostile toward interpretations of his work as advocating a generalized model of historical determinacy. In rebutting such an interpretation, Marx charges the author with taking out of context incidental texts and "transforming (his) historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed..." (Marx quoted in Sayer, 1989, pp.69-70). Gramsci's criticisms of Bukharin are also suggestive here. Bukharin's division of Marx into two components: 1) "a theory of evolution appearing as sociology" and 2) "a philosophy which amount to crude materialism", leads to an empty typology of historical forms. "Separated from the theory of history and politics, philosophy cannot be other than metaphysics, whereas the great conquest in the history of modern thought, represented by the philosophy of praxis, is precisely the concrete historicization of philosophy and its identification with history" (Gramsci, 1971, p.436).

If one accepts this as a viable interpretation, Marx's methods and conclusions seem opposed to rather than elaborative of those suggested by Wright. Production as an historical abstraction is a theme common among Marxist scholars, but is itself "multiply divided and diverges into different determinations", and as such facilitates the identification of divergent, more concrete features of these abstract continuities (Marx quoted in Sayer, 1989, p.74). While all historical epochs have different determinations of production, they also have certain common determinations. This is given by the very nature of production as an historical continuity (p.74-75). The labour process is the production of use-value, which is necessary for affecting exchange of matter between people and nature. This necessity implies that the production of use-value is common to every phase of human existence. This continuity, however, is not the entire picture and indeed, is not even the most crucial part, in that it fails to provide the differing social conditions of the production of use-value (for example slavery, capitalism or hunting and gathering). From this position, one can assert that Marx's method involves somewhat more

than identifying a rigid model of production relations and that, in fact, such models could only form a single level of abstraction useful only in defining a common aspect from which essential differences can be further concluded. Marx claims: "success will never come with the master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical" (ibid., p.73).

Yet three traditional Marxist theses are redefined according to Wright's "sympathetic" modifications. The first rejects the traditional view (Marx's own) that "socialism is the immediate imminent future capitalism", given that such a transition would necessitate the equalization of two "exploitation assets": means of production and organization (1986a, p.117). There is clearly no logical necessity for these to simultaneously occur, and hence Wright concludes that both statism and socialism are possible futures to capitalism. Second, Wright argues that other classes have the potential to carry out revolution, and hence refutes the Marxist opinion that "the proletariat are the only bearers of a revolutionary mission within capitalism" (ibid.). Third, Wright claims to show that socialism, contrary to Marx, has a "distinctive form of exploitation". Marx, he claims, argued that socialism is not a mode of production and merely constituted an intermediate step to communism (p.118). These three modifications do not, according to Wright, undermine the important notion of progression in Marx's view of historical trajectory, and consequently supposes to retain support for Marx's claims (p.118).

Wright (1986a) provides a typology of exploitation relations which correspond to specific class structures, described as "essentially a typology of modes of production" (p.109). He admits, however, that no society has only one form of exploitation. In order to better characterize the form of exploitation observed in societies, Wright provides three "axes of variabilities", which typify the unique combinations of types of exploitation: 1) "relative weight" of exploitation, 2) the degree of linkage of exploitation to "internal" or "external" relations, and 3) the degree to which various exploitations "overlap" or are "distinct" from each other in a given society.

Given the possible combinations of four modes of production, which necessarily involves four types of exploitation (feudal, capitalist, statist, or socialist), Wright attempts to operationalize the "relative weight" of these exploitations. He first rejects the Marxist notion that one or another form of exploitation must remain the "dominant mode", on the basis that two or more forms may in fact carry equal weight in a single society (p.109). Possible operationalizations of relative weight are then identified as 1) "the relative, aggregate magnitudes of... appropriations of social surplus based on property rights by owners of different exploitation-generating assets", 2) "a measure of the 'class power' of those who appropriate surplus", 3) the degree to

which the dominant mode is functionally associated with subordinate modes and 4) the "dynamic effects of different exploitations" (p.109-111).

Wright then proceeds to argue for the fourth approach, but claims that due to the "theoretical underdevelopment of our understanding of the dynamics rooted in each of the forms of exploitation other than capitalism, let alone the possibility of distinct 'laws of motion' forced by distinct combinations of these forms of production" it is overly difficult to operationalize this notion of exploitation (p.112). Wright provides no means of identifying the degree to which types of exploitation overlap, or are distinct from one another. He does assert, however, that in societies where an overlap occurs, a higher degree of class polarization exists. Implied in this is the notion that multiple forms of exploitations, as reflected in class structure, can have an additive effect on class struggle when combined in the same society.

Wright's form of structural causality is neither linear (historic), nor expressive (i.e. reducing the constituent parts to an essence of totality), but rather represents a causality "imminent" in its effects. Though supposing to contribute to conjunctural, historical analysis through survey method, Wright is limited by the historical specificity of cross-sectional data. His model of class structure derives from Marx's historical analysis of the development of capital, but is reduced to expressing the constituent elements of capital (e.g. class structure, class struggle, class consciousness) within a recursive, cross-sectional causal model.

Cohen (1982) comments on the demise of Marxian sociology: "despite the variety of theoretical strategies and political positions that make up the spectrum of neo-Marxian class theory, an unreflective relation to the Marxian original is characteristic of them all" (p.2). In contesting the theory of class boundaries advocated by Poulantzas and Wright, she remarks: "The analysis always proceeds from the side of 'structure', juggling and elaborating categories ad infinitum in order that they might mesh with the 'realities' of social stratification. Yet it is unclear whether these realities are simply given, or, worse, derived from the structures themselves. Since the old class concepts and prejudices are presupposed from the onset, the key dilemma endemic to any class theory based on *Das Kapital* cannot even be posed" (p.10).

Schmidt (1981) represents another opposition, and identifies the dominant lack of interest in history as not simply the demise of current western sociology, but also as a function of the progress of bourgeois society (pp.1-2). A generalized loss of historical consciousness, leads to a failing conception of the nexus of past and future. This further undermines a comprehension

of the causes of present conditions, and delimits the role of individual agency in effecting future states. Wright's analysis of cross-sectional data permits no explanation of the causes of present class structure, and provides no evidence that present exploitative relations are not in fact natural and eternal.

Wright attempts in this sense not even a crude historiographic analysis, but rather proposes a series of hypotheses to be tested within historically decontextualized data. Wright relies on historical analysis only to the point that Marxist analysis has already provided him with static class categories. Failing to incorporate historical data, Wright's form of statistical method is not justified by, but rather tends to require the causal determinacy of class structure. Wright's method in effect does not conform to, but rather opposes the logic of historical materialism.

CLASS STRUGGLE BY CLASS STRUCTURE

The criteria for developing his model of class structure, claims Wright (1986a, pp. 27-37), is based on six constraints: 1) class structure imposes limits on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle. This constraint does not imply that class structure exclusively determines class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle (p.29), but does necessitate the conception of a causal association of class structure on these other elements of class: "The argument that class structure imposes basic limits on class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle is essentially a claim that it constitutes the basic mechanism for distributing access to resources in a society, and thus distributing the capacity to act" (p.28). This mechanism of distribution is a qualifier placed by Wright on the claim made by 'most Marxists' that class structure is identified one way or another as the basic determinant of the other three elements (ibid.). While deeming class structure to be the basic mechanism determining these elements, Wright acknowledges that he is unable to provide a description of the precise manner in which this determination occurs. Though offering that the precise mechanisms are cognitive, or psychological, Wright proposes to inform as to the more important, 'real' social mechanisms of determination.

Class struggle, in Wright's schema, provides the 'transformative principle' of class, but is ultimately determined by class structure (p.30). His second conceptual constraint is thus: 2) "class structures constitute the essential qualitative lines of social demarcation in the historical trajectories of social change" (ibid.). Not only does class structure determine class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle, but it also "limits the possibility for other aspects of social structure" (p.31). Class structure, in this way "constitutes the central organizing principles of societies" and within the area of classical Marxism "the crucial historical line of social demarcation remains class relations" (p.31). From these premises,

Wright is able to claim that "class structure is the central determinant of social power" (p.31).

Organizational status is hence for Wright, a function of class structure, which in turn imposes limits on an individual's or a collectivities' capacity to act. Consciousness is the "realization by the subordinate class that it is necessary to transform the class structure if there is to be any basic changes in their capacities to act, and the realization by the dominant class that the reproduction of their own power depends on the reproduction of the class structure" (1986a, p.28). Though acknowledging that class struggle constitutes the central transformative principle of class structure, Wright argues that this process is itself determined by class structure.

Wright's third constraint is simply 3) the concept of class is a relational concept. This argument simply dissociates Marxist, relational class concepts from gradational, typically income determined class concepts. Wright argues that gradational class concepts could not possibly provide the necessary "demarcations" upon which a theory of history could be developed (p.35). 4) The social relations which define classes are intrinsically antagonistic rather than symmetrical. Stated simply, classes constitute opposing interests. Consequently, 5) the objective basis of these antagonistic interests is exploitation, and hence results in exploitative relations. Finally, 6) the fundamental basis of exploitation is to be found in the social relations of production. Here, Wright argues that Marxist class models are necessarily production-centred.

In studying a cross-section of class structure, consequently, Wright limits his approach to testing hypotheses in which class position is causally prior to other variables measured in his survey. While he identifies this as a distinct contribution fundamentally opposed to other types of class analysis (1989, p.269-78), he also claims to be committed to a high level of Marxist theoretical integration (ibid., p.277). The impetus for this commitment comes partly from Marx's untimely death during his work on class categories in the last chapter of Capital Volume III: "What Constitutes a Class" (see Tucker, p.441). Marx identifies the three "big classes" of modern society as: 1) wage labourers 2) capitalists and 3) land owners. Though Marx views the class divisions of his England as "obliterated" by middle and intermediate strata, he views the process of capital as one of increasing polarization or "the (concentration) of scattered means of production into large groups" (p.441). Answering what constitutes a class, Marx responds (at first glance) "the identity of revenues and sources of revenues" (p.442). This, however, is seen as far too simplistic, given that, for example, physicians and officials also constitute separate classes with this criteria. Marx hence proposes that each class further involves an "infinite fragmentation of interest and rank into which the division of

labour splits labourers as well as capitalists and landlords" (p.442). This suggests again that Marx's concept of class should not be reduced to crude analytic categories, but as a continuing process of polarization and concentration of class interests.

Sayer (1979) describes the paradox of Althusserian interpretations of Marx, which seems relevant in addressing Wright's specific approach. They attempt to overcome Marx's difficulty by ensuring a correspondence of concept and reality. The "mystifactory mechanism" which corresponds to ideological and phenomenological forms could not be located as a subjective error of experience, but must rather be seen as a subjective falsehood. In other words, reality is not misinterpreted, but rather misrepresents itself. If consciousness itself was to be doubted, a scientific interpretation of reality would be impossible. Marx could not begin to promote the "falsity of ideology (through a) materialist theory of consciousness" if he were to accept that this falsity is only subjective (p.31).

Emancipation, could not, for Marx, be promoted through such an investigation as is prescribed by Wright (1989, p.16). It is not the subjective illusions of capital, but rather the illusory function of the objective forms of capital which promote human alienation. It is an empirical analysis of the historical development of these objective forms that provides the historical revelation that capital is not given by nature, but is rather imposed on people, by people.

Sayer (1979) argues: "fetishism involves a two-fold transgression of proper categorical boundaries... on the one hand, properties which distinguish phenomena as individual members of classes and hence ought properly to be the object of historical categories are subsumed under transhistorical categories and explained by theses logically capable of accounting only for the characteristics of the classes to which they belong... and on the other hand, the historical attributes of the phenomena are thereby falsely universalized (p.46). Wright's analysis of class categories does not avoid the fetishized nature of class, but in fact contributes to it. For instance, the class distribution of respondents appears to Wright only as a cross-sectional description, not as historically contingent on capitalist forces of production. "Fetishism presents a dehistoricized, desocialized world whose makers are reduced to passive spectators in a mystery not of their making. Marx's critique points behind this, to a history. This is how Marx promotes the overcoming of human self-alienation" (Sayer, 1979, p.47).

CONCLUSION

Wright (1986a) claims to defend what he identifies as "The core theses of Marxism" (p.2). He terms his segment of the academic community "analytic Marxism"; "The systematic interpretation and clarification of basic concepts and their reconstruction into a more competent theoretical structure" (ibid.). In reference to Marx's unfinished section of Capital, volume 3 "What Constitutes a Class", Wright proposes that Classes (1986a) represents an extension of Marx's theory of class structure and class formation "faithful both to the theoretical agenda forged in Marx's work, that is, understanding the development of the contradictions of capitalism, and the political goals that agenda was meant to promote" - understanding the conditions for the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society (p.16).

Historical materialism can be viewed as an approach wherein the various forms of exploitation as manifested in certain historical instances are studied. This materialist conception thus generates a higher level of theoretical abstraction whereby specific, less abstract societal forms can be understood. The key to Marx's analysis is not the generalized mode of economic exploitation as prescribed by Wright, but rather the specific historical forms or manifestations of this universal fact.

Wright's empiricism fails to move beyond describing existing structures, and is never conditioned by an awareness of the diachronic. This implies that to understand a structure, one must also understand both its transformations, and the range of its possible transformations. Though Wright (1989) admits that his method of class analysis "risks losing the dialectical and dynamic character" of Marxist explanations, he claims that these risks are worth taking (p.16). Admitting further that his empirical operationalizations of Marx's theory of class have generated only modest insights, they have nonetheless served to "clarify a range of dilemmas" (ibid.). Given, however, serious departures from both Marx's methods and observations, Wright possibly reifies a questionable version of Marx's classes, rather than extend his explanations.

Wright admits that while progress has been made in the conceptualization of class through his project in the past decade, "nevertheless the goal of producing a class structure concept which is at one time theoretically coherent and empirically comprehensive remains elusive" (1989, p.270). His approach remains, however, that of increasing the complexity of his various class structure typologies as a means of enhancing their explanatory power. In discussing advances made in his project, Wright alludes to the value of a general Marxist theory of history. His new structural typology, Wright argues, has a "much stronger connection to the general Marxist theory of history than did the earlier framework. The structural typology on which the class structure map was based

had a clear standing within the general theory of the historical trajectory of social forms" (p.306). However, conceptually basing a class typology on a generalized notion of epochal forms of material relations is no more than paying a lip service to the logic of historical analysis. The transformative principles providing the means to emancipation at each stage can only be implied, and not directly accessed through Wright's micro, ahistorical research focus.

This is not to say that Wright's project is not valuable, for it is in fact highly valuable. The survey has provided data for a wide range of interesting and important studies (e.g. Clement, 1990; Hubka and Gillespie, 1989; Baer et al, 1987; Black and Myles, 1986; Winn, 1984) and has made significant inroads to combining classical social theory with contemporary quantitative research methods. However, as I have argued above, class is more interesting as a dependent variable than as an independent variable and, in the interests of social change, is best seen as a process rather than as a structure. This opposition, on the other hand, is a fact of meta-theory, and is not to be resolved presently, if at all. The most valuable contribution of Wright's work will possibly be made, ironically, at the point that his project itself becomes a part of history - data of a past phase in capital relations. Historians, for example, often rely on centuries old church records to understand past demographic compositions. Marx's 18th Brumaire is a now famous schematic of class interests and material relations. Erich Fromm's survey of class consciousness among the working class in Weimar Germany is a fascinating and insightful study during an important period in world history (Fromm, 1984). The value of these sources of data to the social researcher today lies in the capacity to observe an historical trajectory. The rise of quantitative social research has involved a number of ongoing survey projects (eg. The General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada) enabling for the first time study of changes in survey data over time. Given recent changes in the world order, the predicted decline of U.S. economic strength and the continuing rise of global capital, it seems likely that Wright's in depth study of class structure will increase in value in the coming decades.

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