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Book reviews

America Transformed: Globalization, Inequality, and Power

By G. Hytrek and K.M. Zentgraf; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 238 pages.

This text will be a valuable asset to the classroom for instructors of undergraduate social stratification and inequality courses. Gary Hytrek and Kristine Zentgraf present a concise introduction to some of the key concepts and debates regarding globalization, while maintaining a strong focus on the U.S. experience. More importantly, these authors provide a text that integrates a global perspective with other, more traditional areas of sociological study, such as social stratification, inequality, social problems, and more. Hytrek and Zentgraf argue that globalization is often portrayed as “something out there” disconnected from societal-level changes within the United States. “Surprisingly absent from the literature is a focus on globalization’s impact in the United States. *America Transformed* is designed to fill this gap” (pg. x).

The authors have organized the book into three sections, linking theoretical and conceptual discussions of globalization with an empirical question regarding the impact of global processes on stratification patterns in the United States. Expressed through the more immediate processes of economic restructuring and deindustrialization, Hytrek and Zentgraf describe globalization as a primary force shaping the U.S. patterns of inequality and stratification in recent years.

Part I of the text focuses primarily on the theoretical aspects. Chapter One introduces the reader to some of the primary concepts in the text and provides an overview of the process of change in the United States since 1945. In Chapter Two, the authors delve deeper into the forces of and conditions for globalization, emphasizing the importance of transformations in the global information, communication, and transportation infrastructure, as well as changes in the political and economic realms. Specifically, the rise of the neo-liberal form of globalization is outlined, while the authors point out that this trajectory was neither inevitable nor apolitical. Chapter Three focuses on the globalization debate itself. Is it a useful concept? How do we define it? In this chapter, Hytrek and Zentgraf provide a brief overview of the various scholarly and political positions expressed by many sources regarding the significance and specificity of the concept. This discussion, while necessarily brief, provides a sufficient overview of the primary perspectives. Following the lead of previous scholars, the authors categorize the perspectives as either globalist or skeptic. “We define *globalists* as those who consider contemporary globalization a real and significant historical development, while the *skeptics* are those who understand ‘globalization’ as primarily an ideological or mythical construction that has marginal explanatory value” (pg. 35, authors’ emphasis). The chapter maps out the various positions taken within these categories, such as liberalist and social democrat

among the globalists and Marxist and realist within the skeptics. The authors then consider and compare these positions regarding their level of analysis and conceptualizations of the term, as well as their stand on political, economic, and culture issues.

With Part I as a theoretical context, Part II of the book tackles the question of inequality in the United States more directly. Specifically, the authors present “the basic empirical question of how globalization has altered stratification patterns in the United States” (pg. xiii). The three chapters in this section consider different aspects of stratification. Chapter Six examines economic and occupational changes related to globalization, such as blue-collar and white-collar transitions, changes in the distribution of income and wealth, and poverty. Chapter Seven addresses patterns of immigration to the U.S. and their relationship to current processes of globalization. Chapter Eight provides an analysis of the links between global forces and gender-based stratification. In addition, the authors contemplate the intersection of class, gender, race, and ethnicity and the resulting patterns of inequality. Each chapter in this section brings the global perspective to bear on the specific empirical issue at hand; focusing on the ways that globalization shapes the patterns and experiences of inequality and stratification within the United States. The chapters are nicely illustrated with relevant data throughout, providing the additional benefit of giving students the opportunity to practice reading and interpreting data tables for themselves.

The final section of the book concludes the discussion of the relationship between globalization and stratification patterns in the U.S. It also delves into some of the policy implications of globalization, and describes some innovative community-based responses to globalization and the social problems it creates or intensifies within local communities. Chapter Nine describes several local and transnational social movements that are actively working to alleviate the needs created in many communities by a post-welfare global society. Chapter Ten concludes the book by summarizing the impact of globalization on the United States and examining the relationship between globalization, inequality, and power.

This book is well-organized and well-written. It provides a nice overview of the globalization literature combined with a more specific focus on the U.S. experience of increasing inequality. This text is well-suited to an undergraduate course on stratification or inequality in which processes of globalization are powerfully relevant, but sometimes not clearly addressed. On the other hand, this book is less appropriate for a course on globalization more generally, due to its focus on the United States. While this focus may be less problematic in other courses, a globalization course requires a broader perspective on inequality that is not limited to the U.S. experience. Inequality within the United States pales in comparison to the degree of social, economic, and political inequality experienced globally. Poverty in the United States, for example, is on a much different scale than that found in Sub-Saharan Africa. A course on globalization should fully address both. The authors are clear and upfront about the empirical specificity of their book. Instructors should take this to heart when choosing it for their courses.

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