

BARBARA RESKIN: I'm Barbara Reskin. I'm pleased to welcome you to the first official plenary. You know, we now have a four-day meeting and so last night we had some events on day zero. I was thinking that I might propose next year that we have a three-day meeting and then we could have events starting on day minus-one. I don't know if that will go over, but I think that we have too much to say to each other and too much to hear from each other to fit it in a small number of days. This session, which is a plenary session, and in other words one of the two that I wanted from the beginning when I knew I could control the program this year, is a session on meritocracy. It fits in with our program's theme on description and allocation mechanisms. We have a wonderful panel. We are not going to have a discussant because the issues I think that people raise will be controversial and interesting to you, and we want to have an opportunity for people in the audience to comment. Since there is only this one microphone up in front, what we will do is each panelist will speak between 20 and 25 minutes, 25 probably, that's the way it seems to work out, and then we will stop and that will leave us a good hunk of time, another 25 minutes for discussion. I will ask, because there is only this one microphone up in front, I am going to ask our first speaker to maybe answer two or three questions, and then go to our second speaker and then our third speaker. As you think about questions you want to ask, you can bear in mind that we are going to have to do this in this way because if you shout from there, it is hard to be heard from the back.

Okay, welcome to our first plenary. I am not going to say a lot about our speakers because I would rather hear them, and you should rather hear them than hear me. Our first speaker is Bob Hauser from the University of Wisconsin. He has been working for years trying to understand the roles of education and stratification, and race and equality in particular, and I am happy to have him take over the mike.

ROBERT HAUSER: Thank you. Can we have the first slide here please? Hello? Okay, here we go. First of all, I am just delighted to be here even though I forgot this assignment for most of the last year. Fortunately, Barbara reminded me of it a few weeks ago and so I got to work. Um, I am going to give you a five-slide overview of my talk very very quickly so that you can leave if you are not interested in the rest, or you will have learned everything I have to say in the first few seconds anyway and don't have to pay too much attention later on, and then I'm going to read from my manuscript.

So much for the credits and so forth. There are three themes. The first is "What's the problem?" Sociology does not take variation and cognitive functioning or its social consequences seriously. Variations of cognitive ability play an important part in the stratification process, ...tape cuts out... than racists. Second is the ...tape cuts out... What is cognitive ability and why do we not take it more seriously? There is an aside here because I just find it terribly amusing talking about statistical folklore about livability. And then a more serious question, "How much does cognitive ability vary between and within [redacted]?" "Are

there trends?" Finally, the serious part, some synthesis and speculation. First of all, what about cognitive ability and other variables in the process of social stratification, and that involves looking at the past necessarily. We've gotta think about the future as well, so I will close talking about what the future may hold; meritocracy or more likely, I fear, testocracy. Let's go back, I don't wanna try the high-tech stuff yet.

Despite occasional references to Michael Young's satirical essay, "The Rise of the Meritocracy" and periodic public interest in the place of intelligence in society, students of social stratification mainly ignore cognitive abilities and their consequences. Neither is there any sign that sociologists are actively considering the larger issues raised by Young's essay, namely "What would be the political and social consequences of equalization of opportunity or of the universal use of ability or of achievement tests as tools of social selection?" Perhaps this lack of attention follows appropriately from the facts that children's opportunities are anything but equal, and that cognitive mediocrity dominates our public life, but I will go on anyway. To be sure there is some sociological interest in the use of tests to make decisions about individuals, in school and on the job, but the focus here is more on the testing phenomenon than on the causes or consequences of the things that tests purport to measure. There is also increasing sociological interest in the sources of black/white differences in school achievement. Surely a terribly important issue, but again, that issue is treated in isolation assuming but not examining the importance of cognitive abilities in society. By ignoring cognitive ability, sociologists are open to the accusation that they failed to consider a full range of factors affecting social and economic success and they leave the field open to advocates who claim with remarkably thin evidence and questionable motives that cognitive ability is or will become the key variable in social stratification. Such claims are revived periodically. Think of Arthur Jensen and of Herrnstein and Murray. It will happen again within a few years, possibly encouraged by the consequences of test-driven educational reform. The best way to prepare for the next round will be to have ideas and facts well in hand well in advance.

Following publication of Lowan Duncan's work on occupational mobility, the modern era of research on cognitive ability in the stratification process began with the pioneering research of groups lead by William H. Sewell, Christopher Jenks, and Otis Dudley Duncan. Cognitive ability played a central role in their new models as an exogenous variable, potentially comparable and theoretical in empirical importance to social and economic background. This was not a rigged contest of the sort set by Herrnstein and Murray, but a serious effort to understand how social background and cognitive abilities affect educational, occupational and economic life chances. For some years, this new line of research on state's attainment had brought appeal. Relevant measurement were repeated in national longitudinal surveys. Research methods also improved. However, over the years, much of the original impetus and popularity of status researches dissipated. This devolution has many sources.

One factor within the research community itself is an inordinate and singular emphasis on the analysis of intergenerational social mobility tables. Also, the focus on social psychological mechanisms and stratification by Sewell and his colleagues, along with the failure to find strong empirical evidence that specific social institutions and settings added much to the explanation of attainments in the United States lead some scholars to reject their methods and models and look elsewhere for evidence of the importance of social structure. I'm leaving out all the footnotes, which are the really good parts. I'm sorry.

Cognitive ability and for that matter other social psychological variables, play only a minor role in current research on social stratification and inequality. For example, from 1990 to 1998 I found only three explicit references to cognitive ability in the titles and abstracts of the papers presented at meetings of the ISAs research committee on social stratification. Likewise, the three leading journals of sociology, you know which ones they are, have paid scant attention to the distribution, resources or consequences of cognitive functioning. Since the beginning of 1998, I have found just one paper that directly addresses the theoretical claims of Herrnstein and Murray. The second a methodological controversy over trends in average levels of cognitive ability in the US population. Finally, several papers about peer rejection as a source of low academic achievement among African American students; this is not much.

I have also reviewed the claims of Herrnstein and Murray about why cognitive ability is neglected in research, essentially because of a combination of ignorance and political correctness. I believe their account is a caricature and like much of Herrnstein and Murray's text, it is an odd mixture of fact and fiction both in content and as a characterization of the beliefs and practices of social scientists. There are more serious issues. Social scientists are often reluctant to include standard measures of cognitive functioning in social surveys, either because it takes too much time to obtain a broad and reliable measure, or because survey interviewers may be reluctant to test respondents, or because researchers believe contrary to fact that survey respondents will refuse to respond to such items. In fact, this demonstrated by 30 years of experience in the general social survey and by the recent experience of the health and retirement survey, the Wisconsin longitudinal study, and the study of American families, respondents are more than willing to respond to cognitive items in social surveys. General cognitive ability is of sufficient importance in American society to justify its inclusion in any serious effort to model the process of stratification. However, its importance is by no means as great, nor its malleability as little as suggested by the IQ zealots. In my opinion, some economic thought has also catered to this one-dimensional notion of merit by treating ability as an unmeasured residual. To be sure, the theoretical content of the economic concept of debility is broader, but gradually economists have identified it with the psychologist's measures of the same name rather than with an array of variables beyond those that are most easily quantifiable in economic research.

The notion that people have a general and persistent level of cognitive ability arose from the work of Spearman, who observed positive correlations among performance in different **cuts out** and suggested that these correlations could be explained by a single unmeasured common or general factor. That's the scheme of the lying analytic scheme essential lying behind the notion of a single general ability factor. The subsequent history of psychometric research is filled on the one hand with confirmations of a finding that performances on cognitive tests are always positively correlated and on the other, with arguments of the existence both of a general factor and of less general subfactors. That is the psychometric accounts of ability are variations on a hierarchical theme including task-specific factors, factors general to like tasks and a factor general to all tasks. I won't elaborate that; those of you who can read path diagrams will know what I am saying here. There is even less agreement about what exactly the general factor is and whether it is purely a statistical construct or an actual entity. That is, what is in common among the tasks that display consistent evidence of common factor causation. For example, in a special issue of the journal intelligence, Linda Gottfredson described intelligence as, and I quote, "the ability to deal with complexity". The collective statement mainstream science on intelligence, which was published in the Wall Street Journal in December 1994 defined intelligence much more broadly. The issue of intelligence just mentioned also reviews and sites numerous other definitions of intelligence of which the clearest was that intelligence is what intelligence tests, measure.

Well, it's easy to make fun of a discipline that cannot agree on the meaning of its actual construct, even within a work intended to display consensual views. But it would be foolish, especially for sociologists within the first in social stratification to take that argument too far. Consider the recent history of our disciplines and efforts to define and measure that most central of concepts, social class. There are also methodological parallels between another of our most widely measured and highly replicable constructs; occupational prestige and the psychometric construct of general intelligence. Thus, despite the vagaries of definition, I admit the possible utility of the intelligence construct strictly on the consistent evidence of its occupational properties. There is little argument against the proposition that people with higher academic ability go higher in school. For example, a classic set of findings from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study was presented by Sewell and Shaw, who showed the percentage of Wisconsin women and men in the high school class of 1957. Each combination of socioeconomic status and cognitive ability who planned to attend college, attended college and graduated from college. By **(13:50)** to the Wisconsin Study Design, there is no problem of endogeneity despite the substantial evidence that schooling also increases measurability. Also, because the Wisconsin study controlled a valid and reliable measure of socioeconomic standing, the net effect of cognitive ability cannot represent any class or cultural

bias in the test itself to the extent that such a bias is reflected in measured social standing.

Finally, one cannot argue that the Wisconsin IQ scores directly affected educational chances because they were used as an administrative tool in college admission. They were not so used in 1957. However, that last issue does analyses of the effects of cognitive ability on schooling and on everything else that follows the completion of schooling, whether the influence of cognitive ability is natural or constructed. That is would we find effective measured cognitive ability in the absence of administrative and organizational mechanisms that measure, label, sort and select students on the basis of test scores, presumably in the belief that such practices are fair, natural or efficient. Would such labeling, sorting and selection, including self selection take place in the absence of formal testing mechanisms? This question cannot be addressed except by comparative analysis.

One standard validation of the psychometric argument is differentials and measured ability by occupation. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to discuss my favorite example here which is how in his 1980 piece, Arthur Jensen both plagiarized and misrepresented Duncan, Featherman and Duncan's analysis of the similarity between occupational prestige on the one hand, and expert ratings of the intelligence required for success in various occupations. However, just to give a flavor of this work I will offer another example. Jensen sites several sources of data providing IQ distributions for detailed occupations in support of the following argument, and I quote, "A certain threshold of intelligence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success in most occupations. Therefore, a low IQ is much more predictive of occupational level than is a high IQ. A person with a high IQ may be anything, from an unskilled laborer to a Nobel Prize-winning scientist, but low IQ persons are not found at all in the sciences or in any of the learned professions." In this connection, for example, Jensen reports that it is a consistent finding in all the studies of occupations and IQ that the standard deviation of scores within occupations steadily decreases as one moves from the lowest to the highest occupational levels on the intelligence scale.

What sort of evidence does Jensen provide in support of this argument and how is it described and used? After a brief and inaccurate discussion of data compiled by the Department of Labor from case studies of the general aptitude test battery, Jensen draws on data from World War II giving scores of about 19,000 white enlisted men in the Army Air Force on the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) along with previous civilian occupation. He describes the inverse relationship between the occupational test score and its standard deviation only with a series of anecdotes, but the correlation, I hope you can see the top and bottom lines there, which show one standard deviation at the top and at the bottom, it's kind of bad. Anyway, the correlation is 0.89 between average level of occupational test score and the standard deviation across those 74

civilian occupation titles. However, this pattern of scores could have several sources. One is the threshold phenomenon described by Jensen. Two others, more plausible in my opinion, are that the AGCT had a relatively low maximum value and that there was truncation at the top of the distribution. The AGCT, like other later tests developed for the military was designed primarily to discriminate among lower levels of ability. Moreover, civilians who scored exceptionally well were placed in the officer ranks. That is, they didn't show up in this picture at all. Harrell and Harrell, the original authors of this data pointed that out but Jensen did not.

This interpretation is bolstered by examination of another large set of data from the same era. Those data are produced in the next figure due to Stewart, which is modeled after remarkable graphic in her 1947 paper. These data pertain to about 81,000 white enlisted men and 227 different occupations drawn from Army records in 1944. Here, the possibility of truncation in the upper regions of the distribution is not so clear, for there is some regular variation in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile figures shown, which are at the tops of the lines in the chart, as well as in the lower end of the distribution. However, we could look at two other sets of subsets of data that she didn't graph. This is for enlisted men in the north where there is some sign of this pattern of decreasing variability. But then, another diagram is for the south and over most of the distribution, there does not seem to be any such pattern except at the very top. So, I want to read you the names of the occupations that are relatively low in variation and ability here, just so you understand the outliers here: salesmen, general clerk, clerk typist, general bookkeeper and teacher. This has something to do with skills that the Army needed at the time. In my opinion, the conventional wisdom of psychometrics here appears to be no more than statistical folklore, and I can only wonder why nobody bothered to question it in 55 years since Stewart's data were published.

I will return to this one in a minute, but let me address one more central question about the relationship between measured cognitive ability and occupations. How strong is the segregation of measured ability by occupation? The conventional wisdom of psychometrics is that segregation is great and that it is accountable in terms of the cognitive demands of occupations, and specifically not by their educational requirements. From the **Gatby** (sp) data, Jensen estimated that 47% of the variance in IQ was within occupations. That is to say 53% between occupations. Gottfredson implied a correlation between test scores and occupations of 0.56. However, she later suggests that the variance of IQ among workers within occupations is only 25 to 33% as large as the general population. That is, 67 to 75%; 2/3 to 3/4 of the variance in IQ occurs between occupations. Is any of this true? I looked first at variation in verbal ability among occupation groups of American adults interviewed in the NORC general social survey from 1974 to 1989. I'll omit the details but the bottom line is that when the general social survey verbal ability measures corrected for floor and ceiling effects, variation in cognitive ability increases as the average level of

occupational ability increases. Now, if you really care about ability, at this point you start worrying about your choice of surgeons, okay?

Jansen also argues that the relationship between IQ and occupation increases from youth to maturity. The size of the correlation, he writes, seems to depend mostly on the age of the person whose IQs are related with occupational status. IQ and occupation are correlated 0.5 to 0.6 for young men ages 18 to 26 and about 0.7 for men over 40. So, I looked at data across the life course from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study. I am only going to show you a couple of the figures here. These are for first jobs for women, the same kind of diagram I showed before and then first jobs for me. These are for each of 62 intermediate categories of occupation for women and 65 for me, in which there are at least 30 incumbents. In each figure, I have arrayed the occupations from lowest to highest median IQ score. Obviously, the graphics do show an occupational hierarchy of ability distributions and the hierarchy is generally similar across the life course. The reason I haven't showed you four others that are in four other pictures that are in the paper is because they look exactly like the ones I have just shown you. However, there is no consistent relationship between the average ability level of occupation groups and the range of variability in the ability distributions.

What about the correlation between occupation and ability; How large is it and does it vary across the life course? Table 1 gives three statistics for three occupational relationships, sex and job in the Wisconsin data. The correlation between occupation and IQ score is no more than moderate, 0.39. to 0.44, and as high as 0.8 when corrected for unreliability. The order of the variance of cognitive ability lies between occupational groups. The correlation is slightly larger for men than for women and contrary to Jensen's accusation, it actually declines with age.

I am going to skip a section about ability, occupation and education in which I say that the 23:30 cuts out are basically unwilling to look at the relationship between education and occupational standing once IQ is controlled because it their experience. I will also, in the interest of time, skip over another section and the bottom line is that there is absolutely no evidence of a master trend toward ever increasing differentials or effects of cognitive ability in American society, at least not yet.

Finally, I am going to skip over a section – all the good stuff is gone here. Finally, I am going to skip over a section in which I point out that cognitive ability does have real and important effects in the life course in the occupational career, but they're not huge and they are dwarfed by the effects of all sorts of other social, psychological and structural variables. So, it's important but so are a lot of variables, what's the big deal here? Well, here's the big deal. I think it's fair to conclude that the traditional psychometric literature on cognitive ability popularly resurrected in the Bell curve vastly overstates the case for the role of IQ in the

stratification process. On the other hand, to say that the case has been overstated, even that it's been overstated with great lapses of scholarship and with racist implications, does not say that there's no place for cognitive ability in our understanding of the stratification process. Both as defense against excessive claims on both sides of the IQ debate and in pursuing a scientific enterprise, we ought to seek and produce new evidence of the role of cognitive abilities and social stratification. Perhaps a more compelling reason to invest in studies of the effects of test performance on social stratification is the growing role of tests in the schooling process from elementary school onward. The issue is not meritocracy but testocracy. The latter term testocracy is in my opinion more descriptive of the dystopias that Michael Young described and towards which we may now be headed. It is fair to say, without ignoring the substantial history of test use and misuse in the past century, that we have been and are now experiencing an unprecedented growth in scholastic testing that almost outdoes Michael Young's youthful imagination. The action here is not at the college entrance level, although that has perhaps been the most visible in general. The issue is this; there is a powerful movement for more extensive use of high school exit exams with passing levels set well above minimum competence. There's more controversy than evidence as yet about the effects of these tests, most of it from the Texas exam which actually sets a rather low standard. We will soon learn the immediate consequences of the Massachusetts exam whose passing standard is set at roughly the national average, and of the revised New York Regents Exams. A reasonable speculation is that these exams will encourage early school dropout, especially among African American and Hispanic youth, and that they will create new barriers to post-secondary education and training and to labor market entry. High stakes exit exams will also deny high school diplomas to large numbers of non-minority students, and we have yet to learn the social and political consequences of a reversal in the widespread expectation that the children of the middle class will at least graduate from high school.

The No Child Left Behind Act, NCLB deemed N club by it's critics, introduces a federal mandate for testing of all school children in each of grades 3 to 8. Unlike the Clinton administration's debt proposal for voluntary national tests, N club requires major revision in many of the more progressive and innovative state testing programs to permit assessment of every child at the mandated grade levels. There is every likelihood that new and old tests will be used to raise rates of grade retention, which are already too high in many places. These tests will often be used in violation of professional standards of appropriate test use and with negative long-term consequences for academic achievement and high school completion.

There is much more to be said about the reasons for the current public fixation on tests as a tool of educational reform and about its immediate consequences for the educational system, but as sociologists, we ought to take a longer view and start thinking now about how to measure, analyze and assess the

long-term consequences of tests for life chances. The apparently benign story of the Wisconsin cohort, which I didn't tell you, began more than 60 years ago but we had to wait half a century to learn how it all turned out. What will we know half a century from now about the role of tests and of abilities in the life chances of the youth of the 1990s? Thank you.

BARBARA RESKIN: Thank you very much, Bob. I have to just give a one-line joke that Bob's remark about the variation and the high-end professional jobs. That is, what do you call the person who graduates at the bottom of the medical school class? Doctor. Our second speaker is Mary Jackman, who is a Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Davis, has published books on class stratification and most recently on, The Velvet Glove. Her title, which I'm going to tell you this time today is....oh, I'm sorry. Damn. You know, I have to do this four times and I'm going to get good at it, so come to the Sunday plenary. Her title is Individualism, meritocracy and violence. Thank you.

MARY JACKMAN: Okay, can you hear me alright? I guess it's working. Most people probably think of meritocracy as an ideal toward which we should strive, and ideal that is consistent with equality of opportunity and antithetical to inequality based on description. Most of us have been taught that there are two main kinds of reward systems based on either ascription or on achievement.

Is it not getting it? Okay. And that the principles— Can people hear me? Okay.

And that the principles governing reward allocation through achievement are brave and new and that they directly conflict with and undermine allocation by ascription. That's a nice thought, but it happens to be incorrect.

If you favor the ideal of meritocracy, you are overlooking its many negative implications and if you think meritocracy undermines ascriptive inequality, you aren't looking hard enough on how ascriptive systems actually work. 30:30 taught us some time ago to be wary of meritocracy, so we shouldn't have fallen into this trap. As an ideal, meritocracy is an imperfect concept and as it is practiced empirically in social life where, of course, it has an imperfect application, it functions not to undermine systems of inequality based on ascription but instead to reinforce such systems, both in oiling all the moving parts and providing legitimacy to the overall infrastructure. We humans are an intelligent but morally dubious lot. The human record to date displays an ingenious assortment of methods of expropriating from and controlling those who are unable to protect themselves from such incursions. Against that will, the organizational form of meritocracy is a mere instrument that can readily be adapted in the ongoing expropriation of effort. Indeed, meritocracy is not a novel or modern idea that dislodges expropriation based on more primordial ascription. Instead, it is an old idea that has a long-proven effective since attaining ascriptive

systems of inequality. Far from being a force that is antithetical to ascription, meritocratic principles dovetail conveniently with ascriptive ones.

So, at the simplest level, meritocracy involves the evaluation, advancement and rewarding of individuals based on their credentials and performance according to an established and publicly known set of criteria. On its face, this concept has appeal to those of us who aspire to a system of equality of opportunity, especially to academics like ourselves who spend our lives grading people's work according to how well they meet the stipulations that we have laid out before them. What could be fairer than to evaluate people according to how well they meet the specified set of criteria that have been publically disclosed? So, what's the problem?

There are two key problems that rob meritocracy of its luster even in the abstract. First, is what [32:39](#) has called the contingent nature of judgments of merit. Assessments of merit, that is to say the content of what constitutes merit, are made within the framework of specific cultural values. Meritocracies do not grant equal weight to all attributes and skills, they select those that are to be rewarded. Once the criteria for merit are codified, they become the legitimized basis for awarding or withholding rewards from individuals based on how well their individual behaviors meet the stipulated criteria. Since it is the groups who are already in positions of social dominance who are poised to define the social value of various behaviors and achievements, reward systems based on judgments of merit are most likely to introduce criteria for merit that are consistent with the agenda of those who are already socially dominant. In short, the traits that are valued for positions of leadership are those that are manifested by dominance themselves or which dominance themselves better have the means to acquire.

Second, in the same sweep, meritocracies merrily reinforce the concept of rewarding individual performance and thus, they undermine at its core the political impetus to eliminate inequalities between groups. That is, inequalities based on old fashion description. Much as inequality based on ascription might seem at first, to contradict individualistic meritocratic norms. Instead, it becomes morally unacceptable to complain about the inequality between ascriptive groups because the most direct methods of eliminating such inequality, for example quota systems or allocating rewards on the basis of need rather than performance, require one to violate individualistic meritocratic norms. Inequality in outcomes between groups becomes socially defined as acceptable and deemed as morally justified if it appears to result from the application of a rewards system based on well established values that favor some attributes over others.

Attempts to equalize outcomes across groups that override individual merit such as quota systems quickly become illegitimate acts of reverse discrimination because they violate meritocratic principles. Thus, the rewarding of individuals according to merit first propagates and legitimizes values that

morally reinforce the agenda and privileged position of dominant social groups by imbedding their values and attributes in the criteria that are used to grade individuals, and it focuses the collective energy on individuals rather than groups. It provides powerful incentives for individuals to strive to excel at the stipulated criteria and it directs political energy toward the fairness with which criteria are being assessed across individuals. For example, when a female is better qualified than her male competitor, does she get the job or is she paid more? This replaces questions about the legitimacy of the criteria themselves. Those at the bottom of the heap are at risk of looking like they are grouching or like poor sports if they complain about their smaller share of rewards when clearly, they have less merit than their superiors.

Okay, now let's go to the real world where things get messier. Remember, in real life, meritocracy is not used in whole cloth, but instead adapted to meet the political demands of the day. In the real world, not everyone is judged by the same criteria or rather the desirability of certain traits often depends on what descriptive group we belong to. Attributes that are valued when members of one group exhibit them may be exhibited only at a personal cost when members of another group display them. Most significantly, individuals in subordinated groups find that there are personal costs to manifesting too well the attributes that are considered so desirable among dominant group members, especially those traits associated with leadership. Things like assertiveness, self assurance, technical skills and on-the-job smarts. The attributes that are stipulated for positions of leadership and dominance are also the attributes that subordinates are often punished for manifesting. African Americans have been lynched and women have been ridiculed and stigmatized for manifesting such traits in their body language, vocalizations or self-centered claims. Vanderburgh, in his book on the slave drivers of the antebellum south, recounts the case of a black slave driver in South Carolina in the early 1950s who was a little too competent at his job. He managed to gang of 40 field hands so effectively that the management of the entire plantation was soon left in his care. The crops produced by his gang became the envy of the neighboring planters, who then sought him out for advice on the management of their own farms. So far, so good. However, his exemplary competence gave him more self-assurance than a slave would normally have, so that he started to drop the standard differential racial etiquette rules in his day-to-day behavior. His superior competence and his self-assurance led white overseers in the neighboring plantations to resent him and they began spreading rumors that he was getting above himself and might instigate a rebellion. Once the field was planted it was only a matter of time before his owner succumbed to the rumors and provoked an incident with his driver that was intended to test his subservience and which ended, of course, with his shooting his driver mortally because his demeanor during this little test incident was not sufficiently subservient. The more successful the driver was in managing the slave owner's farm, by definition, the more un-slave like he became until it became politically intolerable to those of a higher stature. Albert Bledsoe in his essay on liberty and slavery in 1856

summed up the rules of the game succinctly when he said, “there is no form of human excellence before which we bow with profounder difference than that which appears in a delicate woman, and there is no deformity of character for which we turn with greater loathing than from a woman forgetful of her nature and clamorous for the vocation and rights of men.” Get it? Okay.

At the same time, systems of ascriptive inequality do not close off all opportunities to subordinates. Individual members of subordinated groups do experience different social, economic and political outcomes based on their success in fulfilling designated meritocratic criteria. Systems of inequality based on ascriptive differences such as race or gender do not endure meritocratic rules, quite the reverse. Such rules have a proven effectiveness in stabilizing and promoting ascriptive inequalities. The mistake is to think that in systems based on ascription, all the individuals within each group are treated the same. Of course, they are not. If the prospect of individual advancement were completely closed off, subordinates would have no incentive to embrace current arrangements and the cooperation might break down.

So, how does it work? How are the achievement norms nestled into systems of ascriptive inequality? We can identify three main ways. The first, some rare individuals from subordinated groups do achieve the highest levels of economic, political and social rewards. Some examples of this, the apparent anomaly of notable women political leaders in Asia where most women suffer extreme forms of subordination. African Americans in the United States who enjoy celebrity status as stars of movies, sports or music, and a few African Americans who are sprinkled into the political leadership of the United States, even in such conservative bastions as the Republican party; you think of Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and JC Watts. Such tokens serve to demonstrate that the system can and does absorb talent from the lowest ranks into the highest echelons of society. Their presence legitimizes the lopsided distribution of rewards across groups that are experienced by most other members of society by its suggestion that those individuals who have what it takes to get to the top can get to the top. Therefore, if you didn't make it, it must be because of your own personal deficit.

Second, ordinary members of subordinated groups learn from the get-go that their life chances, even though generally circumscribed by ascriptive criteria can be altered positively by how well they achieve the attributes that are asked of them. High achievers in subordinated groups are those who demonstrate superior performance at the group-specific attributes that are demanded of them. Such individuals do enjoy greater access to social, economic and political rewards than their less successful group peers. The meritocracy here is straightforward. Subordinates who rebel and refuse to manifest the desired attributes are punished socially and economically. Those who strive to meet group-specific demands score points for trying even if they have only partial success in meeting those goals. Those who are the most successful at meeting

the demands made of their group receive social praise, economic gains, and sometimes even a limited degree of political power. For example, women who flaunt beauty rules so as narrow in times, for example, if they refuse to shave their legs or their armpits, or worst of all if they allowed themselves to get fat, are sharply ridiculed and despised. Specific beauty rules may vary from one culture to another, but when you think about it, it's women who have the smallest feet or the most beautifully embroidered slippers, the tightest vagina, the slenderest body, the youngest face who are the most likely to meet with success in both their personal and their work lives. Slaves who are the most slavish, the most hard-working and loyal, differential, affectionate, cheerful, uncomplaining and generally nonthreatening are rewarded by their masters with greater trust, improved material conditions and sometimes more political power within the slave community, for example, made into slave drivers or overseers. These selective incentives encourage individual ambition among subordinates while at the same time providing disincentives for any personal ambition that exceeds or transcends the limits of group membership. These individual incentives not only encourage subordinates to self-police, they often lead subordinates to go so far as to commit violence against their own bodies or psyches in order to make it within the rules. Thus, women take it upon themselves to bind their feet, cut their vaginas, go without food, undergo surgical modification, whatever it takes to earn the rewards to surely come their way if they can outdo their peers in meeting the demands that are made of them. It is not surprising, therefore, that slaves behave slavishly and that it is women, not men who push beauty norms to the limit. The economists then ask whether female genital cutting is really a human rights violation or is it rather a celebrated cultural custom when it is women themselves who promote it and lovingly foist it on their daughters. But, women are just responding to the incentives of the beauty meritocracy just as subordinates in general find that it pays to work at it. Meritocratic incentives thus alleviate dominant group members of the nasty job of coercing subordinates directly.

Third, meritocratic systems do provide individuals from subordinated groups with opportunities for limited advancement and mainstream organizations. Primarily, into lower or middle-level supervisory positions with responsibility for meeting the production goals that have been established at higher levels. A common thread in all systems of inequality is to provide opportunities to the more meritorious individuals from the subordinated group to become the henchman of the expropriative effort. Thanks to henchmen, people at the top do not have to take off their velvet glove. The dirty work is carried out by selected, trusted, higher-achieving members of the subordinated group themselves. For example, factory foremen are taken from the ranks of the blue collar operatives they supervise. Slave drivers and sometimes overseers in the antebellum south were drawn from the ranks of field hand slaves. Black and Latino police officers today are drawn from the ethnic communities they then police. Who better to control and police subordinates than selected members of a subordinate group themselves? Don't they know them best? Even better, it is then subordinates

who crack the whip and thus insight the personal hatred of their underlings as they seek individual success by driving their charges to meet the demands set by more distant dominant group members. Some ambitious slave drivers and overseers in the antebellum south were more demanding and physically cruel than their owners were. It was not unusual for slaves in the antebellum south to appeal to their owners when slave drivers or overseers were too harsh. The slave owner could then intercede as the benevolent, more enlightened paternal figure, even though it was the incentive system that he had put in place that incited some slave drivers to overzealousness as they responded to production demands and sought to earn the favor of the owner.

In summary, meritocracy does not clash with ascriptive inequality but is instead adapted to reinforce it. Meritocratic rules are nestled within systems if ascriptive inequality to provide incentives for subordinates to police themselves or to act as the invisible henchman in the chain of command. This way, subordinates that cooperated in the practice of the expropriation by offering them opportunities for individual advancement that require them to carry out the violent practices that keep the expropriation humming. They do this by subjecting themselves and their loved ones to those practices in order to make it in the social system in which they live and possibly as well, being selected to be the ones who administer the punishments to those beneath them in the chain of command in return for receiving favored treatment themselves. Potential anger is thus displaced onto the more privileged members of the subordinated group who are the visible and sometimes overly zealous henchmen of the system. Or, it is dissipated because the subordinates have been induced to self police.

I argued in The Velvet Glove that dominants try to avoid violent means as they seek to control subordinated groups. That argument needs correction. Dominant groups seek to camouflage the use of violence. The tailoring of meritocratic rules and principles achieves this effect by inducing subordinates themselves to be the visible agents of whatever violence is necessitated by its appropriation. Violence may more easily wear a velvet glove when it is ambitious underlings who are induced to become the agents of the day-to-day dirty work. By nestling meritocracy into ascription, the individual self interest thus displaces the impetus for intergroup political discord. The norms of meritocracy render demands on behalf of whole groups morally unacceptable. The values that are expressed and the attributes that are prescribed and rewarded become not only legitimized but even reified in popular culture. As individual subordinates respond to the meritocratic incentives to participate fully in their enforcement. So far from undermining ascriptive inequalities, meritocracy thus helps to perpetuate them. Thank you.

BARBARA RESKIN: Thank you. The third speaker is Ronnie Steinberg. Ronnie is the Director of Women's Studies and a professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University, and she has been active for years as both a scholar and a policy input person in the comparable worth movement. So, she brings to her

topic both experience from her scholarship and experience from her work in the real world. Her topic/paper is, "Runaway Pay, Runaway Inequality; Meritocracy, Markets and Organizational Culture."

RONNIE STEINBERG: I think the advantage of going last is that you get the last formal word. The disadvantage though is that some others have said some of the things that you want to say so that at moments, and I hope it's only moments, I will be a bit redundant.

The inequality and incomes between the rich and the poor has soared to levels unprecedented in American history, no matter how it is measured. According to Business Week, the average CEO made 42 times the average employee's pay in 1980, 85 times that pay in 1990, and 531 times average employee pay in 2000. In 1998, CEO wages increased 35% as compared to 2.7% for the average blue-collar worker. By 2000, the average compensation for a CEO in the US was \$12.4 million. Only one year later, the average CEO of a standard import company received \$15.5 million in total compensation. Now, according to the AFL-CAO's website on executive compensation, had my 1990 wages increased at the same rate as the average corporate executive, I would now be earning \$567,905...and I don't; certainly not at Temple, but not even at Vanderbilt.

Consider in this context that the national minimum wage rests at \$5.15/hour today, up from \$4.25/hour in 1996 and \$3.35/hour in 1989. If we look at another more restrictive measure of income inequality, the share of income received by those in each of the five income quintiles, the statistics are somewhat less staggering but the trend is equally impressive. In 1947, the year I was born, the ratio of the real income of a family in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile to the real income of a family in the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile was 3.1%. By the mid-1960's, that ratio would drop to 2.95%. Since that time, however, the gap has increased with the most rapid increase coming between 1979 and 1989 when the ratio increased from 3.22 to 3.72%. According to economists, Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk, who calculated these ratios, all of the increased inequality between 1982 and 1989 was accounted for by the income gains of the richest 5%. Two perspectives have dominated the public discussion of these trends. One, about which we've heard a great deal, shaped most notably by Herrnstein and Murray in their 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, holds that the increased inequality in earnings is the inevitable result of meritocracy. The second perspective is offered by economists. In books and articles too numerous to list, many economists point to fundamental shifts in our economic structure that have influenced the market for labor, both on the supply and demand side.

Both of these positions have been absorbed into the language used by corporate America and their spokespersons to explain its own behavior in general and compensation policies in particular. I would agree that in general, some of us earn more and others of us earn less because of factors that can be

associated with meritocracy, with intelligence or mental ability, or even with educational level, however problematic those concepts are to measure validly. I would also agree that evidence on structural shifts in the economy better explains the increase in income disparities than reliance on meritocracy. But, in the context of runaway pay and runaway inequalities, neither prove sufficient in identifying the mechanisms that sent into motion wage inequities of this magnitude in such a short period of time.

In this presentation, I want to offer a third, more sociologically informed perspective for understanding the cultural and institutional factors at play within corporate America that account for increasing pay disparities. Specifically, I will argue that what we are seeing at work is a new organizational culture, one that Kevin Phillips terms the Financialization of America in his aptly titled, *Arrogant Capitol*. That culture rests on elite definitions of merit, performance, success, reward, that are seemingly universalistic, but which end up differentially benefitting these same elites. These cultural values have been institutionalized in new rules that govern every-day corporate, social and economic relationships. To illustrate my argument as it relates to compensation, I will examine shifts in the values imbedded in current compensation practices for executive compensation as well as for non-managerial employees that mirror and justify the observed disparities. This focus on organizational culture, power relations and institutional rule making allows us to explain with greater precision how runaway pay for executives coexists with increased poverty and modest gains in family incomes for the average two-earner American family.

Let's first consider the meritocracy perspective, and I will try to cut my remarks on that a bit short since we have heard so much about it. Meritocracy, as you have heard in the other two papers is a term coined by Michael Young in his widely read book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* published in 1958. It refers to a system of rewards that is justified on the basis of some criteria of merit. Young's meritocracy is a government, not an economy or a society staffed by a hereditary elite, cognitive elite whose position is secured by the possession of advanced mental skills and passed on from generation to generation through the genetic inheritance of these skills. This is identified by quantitative tests. Omar Jerzen (sp) accurately posits that criteria of merit are inherently normative, that the general idea of merit must be conditional on what we consider good activities, the promotion of goodness, or the compliance for the rightness. Nicholas LeMan, writing on the emergence of the SAT and other tools views meritocracy as the moral equivalent of religion. Meritocracy as used in everyday life is vague and malleable. It is consistent with the American values of individualism and equal opportunity. According to Kenneth Arrow, Sam Bowels, and Steve Durlauf, over 90% of Americans surveyed in the 1970s believed that pay and privilege should be rewarded solely on the basis of merit. People with more ability should earn higher salaries. Ability can be a powerful claim on society's resources.

Research motivated by the idea that rewards can and should be explained by individual merit typically take two forms. The first and most controversial body of research examines heritability, measured as the impact of IQ, SAT or other ability scores. A second set of studies often offered as a refutation of the significance of heritability equates merit with educational attainment. First, meritocracy as heritability. Innate cognitive ability or intelligence as the basis for achieving meritocracy runs deep in American society. Thomas Jefferson believed in a natural aristocracy among men, the grounds of which are virtue and talents. He saw this as the basis for selecting a natural aristae into the offices of government. Of course, we are speaking of white males. The vision of talent and virtue reemerged after World War II immediately prior to the expansion of higher education, when a small group of education elites primarily from Harvard University sought to transform higher education from an elite finishing school for rich, white men of credible lineage to an elite finishing school for those white men demonstrating the mastery of a body of scientific knowledge who would assume positions of political leadership. What emerged from their efforts proved a far cry from their original aspirations. Obviously, the meritocratic ideas of virtue and intellectual government leaders has never materialized, but tests to measure talent and mastery of a body of knowledge did. SAT was a direct descendent of these ideas. These tests became entangled with many other testing instruments purporting to measure IQ, innate mental ability, scholastic potential or achievement. At some point, however, the distinction between the capacity and willingness to learn and innate inheritability faded and believers inheritability appropriated these test taking tools for their own objectives. In 1969, Jensen estimated that 80% of the average difference in intelligence between Negroes and whites (to borrow his phrase) was due to heritability. Herrnstein and Murray in 1994 extended this analysis to connect intelligence in economic outcomes. We learned that they reluctantly and on the basis of irrefutable evidence from their original analyses, conclude that intelligence is the most important determinant of economic success in present day America. Then, with the aim of dismantling affirmative action, they point as did Jensen and many others before him, to race, ethnic differences and IQ to explain differential outcomes.

I am going to skip the section on the technical discussion of these measures, but I will say that recall the tense warning that merit requires a judgment about what is considered valuable. It requires a judgment about what is deserving of reward. What does innate intelligence mean, and why is it measured in terms of, for example, identification of certain patterns, rotating shapes, recognizing verbal analogies and so on? Who decided that these are the important dimensions along which people were more or less smart? Who decided that these dimensions should determine power, privilege, prestige and economic rewards? To what degree are they even job-related? Alternatively, for example, why not construct a measure of Daniel Coleman's emotional intelligence? At least he argues that these sets of abilities are essential to competent work performance. It may well be that what constitutes merit is the power to define it is consistent with the talents of the advantaged, in this case,

elite white males of high IQ. If a few women and male minorities happen to score high as well, so be it, you've managed to justify eliminating many of them as your competitors. Finally, it is ironic that we have come so far from Jefferson and Young's original vision that meritocrats would serve the public good. What do Herrnstein and Murray's meritocrats serve? If pay disparities of the last two decades are any indication, justifying economic inequality on the basis of innate cognitive differences appears to be serving private and infectious greed; a term that I take from Allen Greenspan.

Now, meritocracy is education. The best contemporary research on the relationship between schooling and subsequent earnings, which now incorporates women and male minorities within its samples, offers robust evidence that educational attainment raises earnings even when controlling for measures of family background, school and community context and performance on cognitive tests. Indeed, as Hauser and his associations indicate, the value of attaining a high school degree and especially a college degree has increased. At the same time, Ashenfelter and Rouse conclude the economic benefits of additional schooling are as strong among those of low scholastic ability as among those with higher scores. I contend, however, that these findings, suggestive as they are, also represent a significant departure from **Jefferson's Aristoy a Virtue of Talent**, or Young's intelligent plus effort elite, although for a different reason. We may value as meritorious, a society that extends greater rewards to those with higher education but it is not a meritocracy. How many people can have merit and it still be a meritocracy? Nor does the observed relationship between schooling and economic rewards explain changes in returns to education of the last three decades.

Consider as well that Danziger and Gottschalk found that since the 1980s, inequality in incomes grew among individuals with equivalent levels of education, and they report income inequality has increased especially among highly educated employees. To explain these patterns in the relationship between education and economic rewards, we need to turn to structural changes in the economy, especially technological changes, and the demand for different types of labor. Even more important, it is necessary to uncover and make visible organizational cultures and institutional practices of privileged education. Isn't pay ultimately determined on the basis of employee attributes and job requirements that employers value and reward subject to economic constraints? What systematic evidence is available to employers to justify the education requirements that are so readily attached to job specifications? Even in our models of returns to education do we know or assume that more educated employees perform better, exert more effort, produce more and thus, are paid more.

Let me turn now to structural changes in the economy. The available research on the effect of supply and demand for labor and of structural changes in the economy, namely deindustrialization and globalization, on the increase in

income inequality over the last three decades is strikingly inconclusive. Indeed, as economists Danziger and Gottschalk admit, they admit that attempts to explain the exponentially increasing income disparities have left economists perplexed. At best we learned that outsourcing of parts for domestically produced goods plays a tiny role in explaining the increasing income disparities, and that technology decreased the value of the skills of workers with lower levels of education and increased demand for workers with higher education. However, this finding of theirs is also based on logic and speculation because the relationship between technological requirements, education and economic rewards is not measured but is inferred from the simultaneous increase in employment and wages of highly paid workers. After all, there is no other economically plausible way to explain it. Even so, Danziger and Gottschalk feel comfortable concluding, and I quote, “we know that economic forces outside the control of either firms or politicians contributed to the inequality. These forces such as technological change and increased globalization of markets improve efficiency even as they impose equity costs. To suggest that corporate America and US government policies stand outside the forces stimulating technological changes and globalization flies in the face of the well-documented historical reality of the last 30 years. Even more problematic for my purposes is their justification of equity costs on the grounds of efficiency. While it sounds like a technical standard, efficiency like merit is a normative concept that is vague and malleable. Efficiency is not inherently good. Rather, it, like education has characteristics that render it good under some circumstances for some people. When efficiency for example is defined as maximizing the prices of stocks, and it has been within corporate America for some time, then for sure efficiency is a value that serves the interests of some at the expense of others. Is it really efficient that income disparities are now 531:1?

I will skip my last section here and turn right to organizational power. How then can we describe the shift in organizational culture? Business Week, the New York Times and others in the popular press have called it a Silicone Valley Culture or a Dot Com Mentality. It is driven by a set of ideas set into motion by stockholders represented on corporate boards of directors and refined and implemented by management consultants who do their bidding. For those of you who make it a habit to read the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, business magazines or even the USA Today, the contours of this culture will be familiar. It is grounded in the belief that if you find and hire the smartest people, those who think outside the box, and you create sufficient incentives for them to think creatively, then they and the company they run will succeed. The smartest people will be quick to adopt new technology, new ways of organizing labor, etc to convince stock analysts and others to invest in their companies. Those who are smart succeed. Those who succeeded made money for existing stockholders. Money then proves the smarts of the executive team. Since many of the companies that drove these compensation trends were creatively marketing services or even just their images in new and imaginative ways; in tangibles if you will, the measurement of performance was reduced to the value in dollars of

a share of stock, because that at least, in the early 1990s began to predict pay, especially at the top. It is not surprising then that compensation consultants hired to design new executive compensation practices use the concept already available to them, pay for performance, performance equals value of stock as the basis for ascertaining executive productivity. To further enhance incentives for productivity, executives receive stock options as a major component of their compensation package; the higher the price per share of the company's stock, the higher their pay. Never mind that no academic study has proven that high pay creates higher performance. Let alone that high performance results in high prices for shares for stock. It didn't matter. As long as compensation committees of corporate boards of directors believed that the value of their stock was a function of the innovativeness of their executive team, they were willing to pay compensation consultants to design ever more create pay packages. Once these compensation packages were designed, compensation-consulting firms could begin to market them, especially in the early 1990s during a time of enormous economic expansion. The fear of losing an executive team also fueled the implementation of these systems. Once in place, these packages took on a life of their own. It was increasingly difficult not to pay executives these skyrocketing wages. Indeed, it is not surprising then that even as the value of stock declines as it is today, the base pay bonuses and stock options of executives continue to increase. By contrast, compensation consultants have also redesigned components of job evaluation methodologies so that they yield a much bigger pay gap between managerial and non-managerial workers, especially between jobs requiring a college degree or management responsibilities in historically male blue-collar work.

I am going to skip the examples as well as skip my discussion on where women and minorities fit into that. As I have said elsewhere, job evaluation systems are social documents that embed within them assumptions about the value of work at a particular historical moment. While job evaluation was originally developed to make the content of work the best reflected and existing wage structure. It is used today in a more proactive way. In the name of meritocracy and efficiency, operational lies as smart and making money. Compensation systems are used to shape and change existing pay relationships. The contemporary modification of these systems certainly parallels observed trends in wage disparity.

Let me make a few concluding remarks. While newspapers and magazines across the world began explaining current corporate improprieties using the few bad apples theory offered to them by corporate spokespersons in the Bush Administration, journalists and commentators began what is now approaching a tidal wave of recognition that, ah hah - Something is wrong with the system. One need only to look at the parallel tendency in the reporting and editorializing on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church to appreciate the fundamental shift in perspective these arguments represent. Until this time, arguments justifying compensation disparities have rested on two intellectual

perspectives, both academically and among the general public. One perspective suggests that new corporate executives represent a meritocracy who are worthy of any rewards that they receive; they are the deserving rich, and so on. The other perspective regularly offered to explain what is happening relies on the economic analysis of markets. We no longer see much discussion of the risks corporate executives assume when they accept the obligation of maximizing corporate stock value, nor do those who claim that we pay executives on the basis of their performance carry much weight when executive pay continues to increase as performance measures collapse. Now it is argued by compensation committee executives of corporate boards that pay increases are necessary to retain their top executives during this ostensibly temporary downturn. These market models of economists are being honored as they are being violated in practice. These explanations as utilized assume the form of a malleable hegemonic ideology capable of explaining everything and thus, nothing. It is time for sociologists to enter this dialog. We have the analytic frameworks already in place to understand the dynamics of an organizational culture that justifies excessive inequalities on universalistic criteria that differentially benefit few. We have the not-so-new institutionalism, which points to organizational arrangement, rules, formal procedures and informal processes as mechanisms through which biased techniques are made to appear neutral. We can bring these frameworks as I have done in the most cursory way above to the detailed examination of compensation practices. I just have a few more sentences. Moreover, our theories of power are sophisticated, pointing not just to the explicit exertion of muscle, but also to how frameworks like pay policies embed within them assumptions that differentially advantage some over others. We understand that certain arguments of values are normative and reflective of the minority who seek to benefit from them. And, we even have theories that can account for the use of intellectual frameworks as tools for legitimating in a distracted society, but we need to make our perspective accessible and relevant. For those of you who are old enough to remember the reference to Michael Harrington, we need to publish a new version of the other America. Only this version needs to focus not just on the poor but on this new class of wealthy executives, members of corporate boards who created them, and the wannabes who seek to emulate them. Thank you.

BARBARA RESKIN: We are going to have a chance to have conversation now between people in the audience and the panel. I have to say that when I organized this panel; there are two plenaries that the president gets to organize and I got my fantasy people and they all did even better than I had hoped and expected. Thank you all very much, it was a wonderful panel from my point of view and, I hope the audiences. What we are going to do now is if you have questions, I would like you to ask them from the mike if you are comfortable doing that, 2 or 3 questions to Bob, 2 or 3 questions to Mary, and then 2 or 3 questions to Ronnie, and I will kind of monitor it so we have about 5 minutes for each and can end more or less on time. Questions or comments/statements, but not more than a minute please in what you have to offer. You can just come and

line up, which means that anyone who wants to talk gets to take their talk in turn; Not meritocratic but at least a predictable system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question, which is really a plea is to Bob, but it really is addressed to the topic of this panel all together. I agree, by the way that this was a most impressive panel. As for Bob's presentation specifically, I thought it was overwhelming. I applaud virtually everything you had to say except for one word and I am sure that I will applaud the parts that you skipped over when I get a chance to read them, except for the one word. The word is ability. Twice you talked about cognitive functioning and I almost jumped out and shouted, "That's the word, not ability!" Functioning. Performance. Those are words that apply to how people behave in test situations, which can affect peoples' futures and can be affected by peoples' experiences. The word ability, though I don't think you intend it, in the literature and in discussion has a connotation of exogenous, of built into the wiring system, of not being modifiable by experience. I listened very closely as you talked and I couldn't hear a single time that you used the word ability that performance or functioning wouldn't have done as well without these connotations, so my question if it's a question is "why do you continue to use this out motive verb?" My plea is, all it would take would be to tell your word processing program every time the word ability appears, substitute performance.

ROBERT HAUSER: On the whole, I agree. One issue here is that I want to make sure people know what I'm talking about. There is a lot of prior places in which that term appears. I tried in some instances to use the term cognitive abilities, which is somewhat broader, and I am getting into aging stuff now. When I talk about cognitive functioning, people really think that I'm talking about something altogether different, which it's not. I can't particularly argue with you except in the instance of because this was put together rather quickly, except in the instances where I am clearly referring to what other people have to say. I can't argue with that. I live in a manichean world in which there are good psychometricians and bad psychometricians. The bad ones who I mostly talked about this afternoon, well, we've already talked about them. The good ones actually use ability in a very specific sense in which they mean it's the thing that is being measured by the instrument that you are currently using. That usage seems to me to be quite all right.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I would like to raise a question to Mary. I agree with, of course, the central thrust of your argument about the ways in which practices that go under the rubric meritocracy can reinforce rather than challenge ascription, but you made a stronger statement, which was that it does nothing other than reinforce. You made it seem that this is a well-oiled functionalist machine in which there are no tensions, no contradictions between a notion of allocation based on a person's achievement however defined, and of allocation on the basis of attributes of birth. Now I think one needs an account of these relations that brings out the contradictory qualities of both reproduction of a set of

relations and undercutting of them. We have, after all, the quotes you gave about femininity had a very old-fashioned ring and have been repeatedly challenged in the contemporary contexts, and in which we find increasingly that women are able to take leadership positions without being regarded as therefore deviant and objects of ridicule. In all sorts of settings where more universalistic standards which are continually being challenged to be more universalistic rather than rooted in traditional male forms of performance. I just think that there is a more contradictory quality of the relationship between ascription and achievement rather than this perfect, functional, well-oiled homeostatic machine as you seem to suggest.

MARY JACKMAN: Your point is well taken. I guess what I react to is that in overstating what the contradictions are that we blind ourselves to how they can work quite consistently with each other. Especially since meritocracy today in the real world is not practiced in any pure form but in some adaptive form, it can adapt itself quite readily to ascriptive system of inequality. You're quite right. In principle, they appear to be different things and they could be different things, it's just that in the real world I haven't seen them act in ways that really seem to contradict each other in a concrete pragmatic way, an empirical way. I do tend to focus on the pessimistic rather than the optimistic so I'm sure that I over draw the pessimistic side of things. The main thing that I think people should think about is just that when people think about even something like slavery, they think that all slaves were treated the same and there were no opportunities for individual advancement, and that's what made it bad. That wasn't the thing that was wrong. There were opportunities for individual advancement and in fact, that's what kept it humming. So, that's the main point I'm trying to make rather than there is no way ever that some meritocratic principles might not be used in ways that might contradict a more ascriptive system.

BARBARA RESKIN: I have a question. If people aren't comfortable coming to the front or aren't able to; it's not easy for you, feel free to ask the question from farther back. As long as we're addressing various panelists, if you have a question for any panelist and you want to ask it from where you are or from the microphone, please go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Actually, I suppose this is a simple question. In listening to all of the speakers, I kept on wondering what the counterfactual was in the sense. In the ideal world, what would be the mechanism for the giving of rewards? In all the cases that are being presented here, and I'm really behind the lines, if something permits some member of a group to get ahead but the rest of the group stays behind, this is not good. What would be? In your eyes, what would be an appropriate way to distribute rewards? It's kind of underlying the basic points you're making. I think Bob is the least fair one to answer this. I don't think that you were making quite the claims that the others were making.

RONNIE STEINBERG: I probably don't need the microphone. In any event, let me start by saying in an ideal world you wouldn't have ratios of 531:1, so we start there. What in fact is an acceptable level of inequality under the assumption that probably inequality of rewards is necessary to some degree to create ways in which some people who work harder or do whatever they are doing that is valued higher get paid more in some way? I personally would not propose a society that is completely egalitarian in income, but I do think that it's outrageous to have inequalities of 531:1. Second of all, I think that using cultural categories as ideologies to obscure what is "really going on" needs to be exposed. I think that's what we in the panel were doing today as opposed to offering alternative models of the basis for acceptable inequality. It seems to me that would be the next step. One of the things I would like to say personally, although now you're asking me a normative question. So, from my normative point of view, I would like to see multiple dimensions upon which rewards are allocated. In other words, that we have a society that values many different talents and not just inherited birth, because that is something that is valued in our pay system and our ascriptive system. It would not just value some definition of smarts in terms of performance in schooling. It would not just measure some performance in sports as a basis for creating economic outcomes in hierarchy so that we would have many many different dimensions and they would be explicit so that people could make better choices about the degree to which they even wanted the economic resources that were available to them and if they wanted them, in what ways would they want to pursue it? I am willing to begin a dialogue as to what that good society would look like, but not able to specify it probably to your liking because mine may be different than yours.

MARY JACKMAN: Actually, I don't think it matters what any of us thinks the ideal should be. Our job is not to do that. Our job as sociologists is to analyze how we think it works now and get a better understanding of that. The other stuff is personal stuff; what you personally endorse as what kind of inequality you would like or whether you think that there should be inequality at all. I think it is more important for us to focus on how we think things work now so that we have a better grip on it, and then where we got with that in our own personal ideological proclivities is, I think, our own business. It doesn't really contribute much to the overall understanding of the world we actually do live in.

BARBARA RESKIN: I am going to weigh in here because I have thought about this quite a bit in the context of employment and in debates about affirmative action. I agree it's counterfactual so I get to respond counterfactually, but imagine a situation in which the reward is positions to be filled and it's incumbent upon the person who is filling the positions to designate what skills the incumbent has to have and you identify a pool. I can imagine and I throw this out for the purpose of discussion and thought and sociological thought, is what would happen if we really said, "what do you need to do the job?" and paid attention to measuring what you needed. Do you need to type 65 words per minute? Do you

need to read a dictionary? Do you need to be able to get up in the morning, sit down at your desk and be awake? Whatever those things are. Ronnie spent a lot of time in an enterprise in which trying to assess what gets valued in the workplace, employers do do this, and having identified those skills and having identified a pool of applicants interested in filling the position. Have a lottery. I say this partly because as a sociologist, I fundamentally believe that we are productive. We perform in response to the settings in which we work. We know this in a variety of fields. We know that social situations matter and that social structures matter, that we can put a very talented person in a job with tools that don't permit them to use their talents and productivity, and they're not productive. You can take people who we wouldn't predict as being particularly productive, and over the years of training graduate students, I've had some students that I didn't think would be big successes, and they are giant successes. I think the structures in which we find ourselves have an enormous impact on what we do. I think in fact, we could imagine a counterfactual in which you do have to define; if you have to leap tall buildings, everyone can't do it, but identify the people who can leap tall buildings and then use a lottery. So, there's a possible answer.