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### Title

*Privilege Lost: Who Leaves the Upper Middle Class and How They Fall.*  
By Jessi Streib. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 192.  
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as a countervailing force, highlights how local contexts deeply shape immigrants' experiences of justice or lack thereof. This firsthand, detailed account of how the U.S. immigration legal system creates inequality is an important read for sociologists interested in immigration, criminal justice reform, and law and society.

*Privilege Lost: Who Leaves the Upper Middle Class and How They Fall.* By Jessi Streib. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 192. \$99.00.

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Scholars of social inequality know that social class is defined by one's education, occupation, and income (although the boundaries surrounding social classes are by no means discrete). Youth who are raised in upper-middle-class families have parents who are privileged across these dimensions and often benefit from parents' experience with college education, professional orientation toward the labor market, and relatively high income. Although decades of sociological research show that upper-middle-class youth tend to become upper-middle-class adults, the intergenerational transmission of privilege is not certain—particularly for millennials, many of whom came of age in the wake of the Great Recession and have faced, at this point, more than a decade of financial precarity.

Such youth are the subject of *Privilege Lost* by Jessi Streib, a book that focuses on youth who grew up in upper-middle-class families but have so far been unable to reproduce their parents' social class. The book draws on longitudinal interviews with 107 white young adults who participated in the National Study of Youth and Religion. These respondents were all born between 1984 and 1990 into what Streib defines as the upper-middle class, and were interviewed up to four times over a 10-year period, starting at ages 13–18 and ending at ages 23–28. Drawing on these interviews, Streib poses three provocative questions that form the core of the book's analysis: Who among upper-middle-class youth is poised for downward mobility? How do these youth experience downward mobility? And, perhaps most interestingly, why do these youth often not anticipate their downwardly mobile trajectory, even as it is happening?

To answer these questions, Streib effectively sorts participants into one of seven archetypes—for example, the professional, the rebel, the artist—who are equipped with resources that differentially prepare them to become upper-middle-class adults. Those with a professional identity, for example, typically have adequate economic, human, and cultural capital to reproduce their parents' class status. They take their courses seriously in high school and college, and they use this time to help prepare themselves for a lucrative career. Those with a rebel identity, meanwhile, may have very different resources at their disposal, and, thus, they develop a different orientation toward school and work than their peers with a professional identity. Youth who are

classified as rebels eschew recognitions from school and work and are instead focused on breaking the rules and developing their own individual identities. By the time these youth participated in their final interviews, at ages 23–28, it was already clear that they were not poised to become upper-middle-class adults.

One of the key strengths of *Privilege Lost* is that Streib illustrates two mechanisms that prevent youth from recognizing downward mobility even as it is happening to them. These mechanisms have been demonstrated in large-scale quantitative studies, but rarely do we have the opportunity to watch these mechanisms unfold using qualitative data. The first is *generational change*, or the fact that today's youth need more resources to enter the upper-middle class than their parents did a generation ago. The bar for being considered upper-middle class, in other words, is higher than it once was. This mechanism is salient especially for groups like the “stay-at-home mothers,” who primarily want to marry and have children but who face a limited marriage market without a college degree. These women routinely experience downward mobility because college-educated men increasingly seek to marry college-educated women—a demographic trend that has clear implications for these women's lives and that did not apply to their mothers, who were able to marry professional men even though they lacked a college degree.

The second mechanism is *life course change*, in which youth are able to move toward class reproduction early in their lives, but their good fortune eventually runs out. Take the rebels, for example, who are able to get through high school and even college with little effort but whose antics are less acceptable in the workplace. These youth may experience downward mobility because professional employers have little patience for those who have spent their lives challenging authority.

*Privilege Lost* is a rich portrait of white youth who were born into the upper-middle class in the late-1980s. The book also raises a number of questions for scholars of social stratification and the life course. As an illustration, one gets the distinct sense that some youth, despite not having a professional job by the time they are ages 23–28, still have more than enough resources to stay afloat. The artists and athletes are able to get by despite not being gainfully employed; the rebels also survive despite somehow only applying for a few professional jobs in their lifetimes. This, of course, would not be the case for those in less privileged positions, such as racial minority youth and those who grew up without considerable family wealth. Yet it may be the case that these youth have not yet achieved a professional identity, at least in part, *because* they grew up with privilege. These youth spent their late teens and early 20s able to pursue their nontraditional pathways because they knew they could access a safety net if they needed to. Such safety nets are a fact of life for many youth in the upper-middle class—which Streib aptly notes when outlining the possible effects of family wealth, which was unfortunately not covered in the data set—but more scholars should focus on how family economic resources differentially enable young adults to take a chance on themselves in their early careers. This is an understudied mechanism of class reproduction that Streib's analysis lays bare.