



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 25
Issue 3 *September*

Article 18

September 1998

Against the Odds: Social Class and Social Justice in Industrial Societies. Gordon Marshall, Adam Swift and Stephen Roberts.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(1998) "*Against the Odds: Social Class and Social Justice in Industrial Societies.* Gordon Marshall, Adam Swift and Stephen Roberts.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 3 , Article 18.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss3/18>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



prognostications will be translated into a viable emancipatory project.

Gordon Marshall, Adam Swift and Stephen Roberts, *Against the Odds: Social Class and Social Justice in Industrial Societies*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1997. \$29.95 hardcover.

Although utopians have long dreamed of creating a world where all citizens are equal, this dream has not been realized. Instead, inequalities of various kinds continue to characterize contemporary societies. It is partly for this reason that the debate is no longer concerned with the possibility of attaining equality, but with the arguments that justify inequality in terms of acceptable social justice criteria.

On argument of this kind invokes the notion of equality of opportunity. Proponents of this view believe that inequalities between human beings are fair if everyone has equal opportunity to succeed. Usually this means open access to education and equal opportunity to utilize the knowledge and skills offered by schools, universities and other educational institutions. If everyone has equal opportunity to achieve, unequal outcomes may be justified.

This book examines the equality of opportunity argument with reference to a massive amount of statistical data for countries as varied as Britain, Japan, Russia, the United States and several East European nations. Although these studies show that educational opportunities have increased significantly in recent decades, they reveal that those who come from higher class families continue to have better life chances than those who come from lower class families. In addition, it found that people born into upper class families continue to do well even if they do not utilize educational opportunities. The authors conclude that class continues to be a fundamentally important determinant of success, and that enhanced educational opportunity is not an adequate justification for inequality.

This important book is not only academically interesting but important for social policy making. It suggests that the provision of educational opportunities is not a quick solution to the problem of inequality. Class barriers and other structural impediments continue to play an important role and must be addressed if equality and its negative consequences are to be overcome.