

demographic composition which the author sees as unbalanced because there was a larger percentage of women in the Soviet Union.

This book is well written and will be understood both by the layman as well as by students of the economic history of Eastern Europe. The volume can serve as an introduction to the social and economic history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe as well as Tsarist Russia. It could also serve as a supplement to a textbook on economic and social life of Eastern Europe and Russia in general.

Humbolt State University
Arcata, CA, USA

SAMUEL P. OLINER

Katherine S. Newman, *Falling from Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1988, pp. xiv, 320, \$ 22.95 (cloth).

Research on social mobility is hardly new. The beauty of this book is that it allows us to see the familiar through new eyes. First, it redirects our attention from the question of "making it"—to "falling from grace." Mobility, Katherine Newman reminds us, is a two-way street where some rise and others fall. In choosing to focus on those who fall, Newman challenges not only the conventions of sociology but also the ethical foundations of our national culture. Though between one-fifth and one-third of adult Americans have experienced downward mobility in recent years, such "skidders" remain an "invisible minority" in scholarship and popular consciousness alike—living proof that hard work, self-discipline, and good old fashioned American pluck are sometimes not enough. Unlike the "disreputable poor" who supposedly lack these very qualities, Newman's "failures" are members of the respectable middle class who have been driven from their once secure occupational niches into the ranks of the under- and un-employed.

Second, *Falling From Grace* is less concerned with mapping the "objective" dimensions of mobility—who moves where and why—than with capturing the more elusive subjective side. The most powerful statistical formula yet devised for predicting occupational attainment cannot begin to tell us how the process of mobility is experienced or how that experience is interpreted by individuals as they move through the social structure. This is Newman's objective, to lay bare, as she says, "the underlying cultural architecture that shapes the *experience* of falling from grace." What ultimately emerges is a revealing blueprint of American culture writ large.

The research is based on 150 in-depth interviews conducted with four very different "middle class" groups. Displaced managers, members of New York City's Forty Plus Club for unemployed executives, blame both the system and themselves for their fall from grace. Victims of office computerization and bureaucratic streamlining, they see their own individual fates closely tied to the impersonal laws of the market-place. Yet, when faced with the fact that other, less experienced managers are still on the payroll while they walk the streets, many rejected managers, deeply imbued with the values of our meritocratic culture, hold themselves responsible. As self-recrimination takes over, they and their families are visited by the "normal pathologies" of alcoholism, divorce, and suicide.

The fall from grace is experienced very differently by air traffic controllers, eleven thousand of whom lost their jobs after participating in an "illegal" strike in 1981.

With both a clear target to blame—in this case, President Reagan, who gave the order to fire them—and a stable community of supporters, institutionalized through their union—the controllers see themselves and their actions as defensible, indeed noble. They cast themselves as “misunderstood crusaders,” fighting the good fight for workers’ rights and public safety. In much the same way, though with less conviction, unemployed production workers hold the company responsible for their plight. For them, the question is not so much whether they are to blame—as it is with managers—but whether they will find a secure place in the emerging post-industrial society.

An even greater challenge to one’s sense of “place” is experienced by middle class women who undergo divorce. Theirs is a story of a precipitous, often painful, decline in social standing. But this decline is not experienced in precisely the same way by all women. For depression-generation divorcees, downward mobility represents a definite sliding backwards into a terrifying state of economic insecurity and social dependence, whereas younger divorcees, whose values were shaped by the social movements of the sixties, view their fall from grace as less threatening, in some cases even expressing a sense of “liberation” from a middle class lifestyle that many found shallow and unfulfilling.

Subjective responses to downward mobility, then, are not uniform. Nor are they randomly distributed. At the outset, Newman identifies the “contexts or circumstances” that influence responses to economic displacement, such as whether the loss is collective or individual, whether the workplace or family is more salient, whether one’s occupational standing is high or low. But the major explanatory task falls to the concept of community. Where community is present, the victims of downward mobility can walk away from economic disaster with their sense of pride and self-worth largely intact. In the case of both fired air traffic controllers and unemployed production workers, membership in a larger occupational community enables them to “externalize” the blame for their fall, thus absorbing few of the psychic costs themselves. Managers and divorcees are not so fortunate. Lacking access to a stable community with which to challenge the dominant meritocratic culture, both groups accept, to varying degrees, a definition of their situation that holds them partly responsible for their plight.

Falling From Grace is much more than a superb ethnographic inquiry into the lives of an important and growing segment of our society. It also uncovers, with insight and compassion, the personal sources of what many observers believe has become a dominant motif of American public life—the “politics of despair.” It is a timely, well-written book, suitable for both scholarly and wider audiences.

University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI, USA

HOWARD KIMELDORF

Herbert J. Gans, *Middle American Individualism: The Future of Liberal Democracy*. New York: The Free Press, 1988, pp. xvi, 217, \$ 19.95 (cloth).

The subjects of Gans’ most recent book consist of those Americans who earn between \$ 15,000 and \$ 37,000 per annum. They make up approximately two-fifths of the population and include those who work at what are loosely termed working and lower middle class occupations. According to Gans these people are “not quite middle