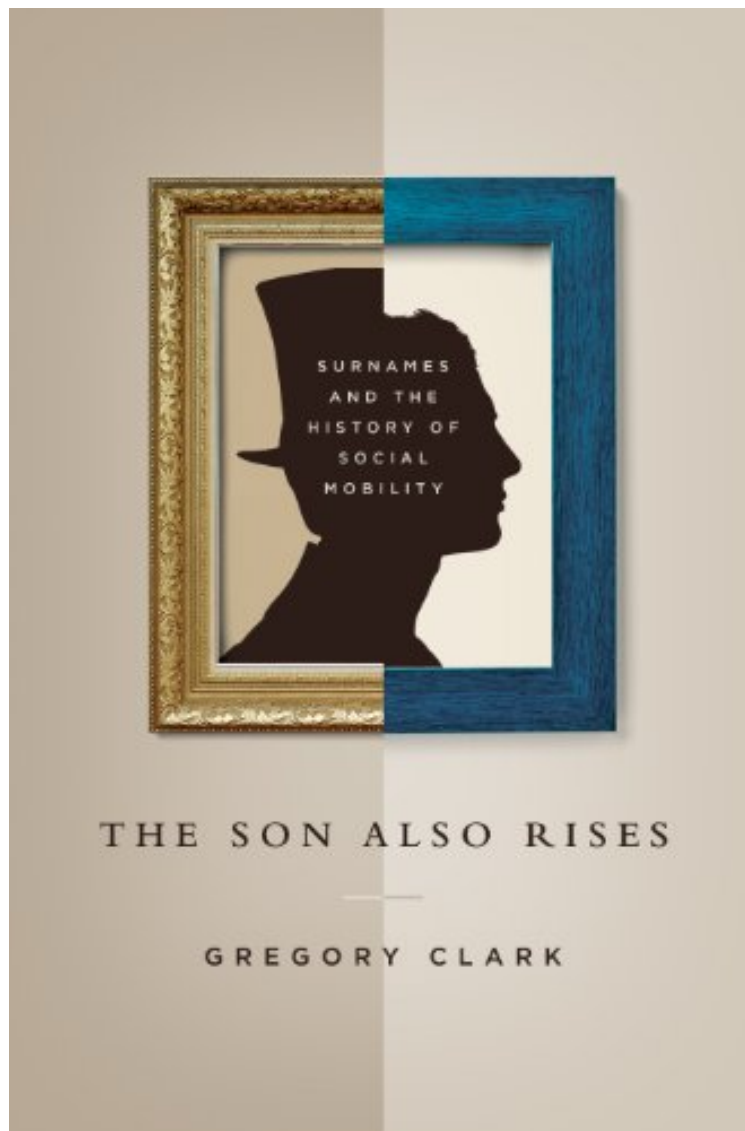


[FREE] The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World)

The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World)

Gregory Clark

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Gregory Clark : The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World):

93 of 95 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating, but the results need to be interpreted with cautionBy

Brad Foley [major edit: I spent a couple days working through the math, and checking it with my own simulations, and have convinced myself that my earlier mathematical reservations were completely wrong. I've changed the review to reflect that] The "Son Also Rises" was a fascinating read that seems likely to provoke controversy, but also to advance evidence-based discussions of equality and social mobility. Clark makes two major (somewhat separable) arguments in "Rises". First, that social mobility is much lower, and consistent across societies than anyone would have predicted. Second, that this low-mobility is biologically (in fact genetically) based. The first argument is better supported than the second. Clark's strong genetic conclusions seem to rely on unassailable modelling (I tried) but some shakier genetic conclusions. They can't be dismissed entirely, however. Clark's evidence and reasoning is strong enough that the burden of proof is squarely on those who disagree with him. The implications the modern reader is left to draw are unsettling. Clark's conclusions about the facts of mobility are astonishing. Typically, studies of mobility showed that intergenerational correlations (parent-offspring, typically father-son) in wealth are on the order of 0.4. This suggests ancestor-descendant correlations in wealth should be unobservable after about 4 generations. Across many cultures and times, and many different measures of status, Clark notes that identifiable elite or low-status groups regress to the mean at a rate between 0.75-0.85. This means that in fact differences in status persist for more than 10 generations. Technically, Clark here models status as a single order Markov process, with three major components: time, [measurement] error, an underlying [latent] "social inertia" (my name) term. By this he emphasises we can model inheritance of social status from one's parents in exactly the same way we do height or eye color based on genetics. He notes that if we do so, we don't need to invoke any more complicated processes to explain the observed data (such as the status of extended family). It turns out he's completely right about the models. I checked. If you model the inheritance process without the underlying latent term, you fail to match the data he's presented. If you model the process in the same way you would model additive genetic inheritance you get exactly the right answer. (I did this assuming a heritability of 0.4, parental-midpoint genotypes for the kids, renormalised mean and SD every generation, and a modelled range of assortative mating based on phenotype. I took beta and b values from a number of the examples presented in the book.) But here is where we begin to need to exercise caution. As a colleague is fond of quoting, "All models are wrong, but some are useful." We shouldn't let the simplicity of the model force us into a hasty overinterpretation of the underlying mechanisms. Clark jumps to a much less-cautious genetic interpretation of his results than almost any behavioural geneticist would (or at least should). Inheritance can be both genetic and epigenetic. Epigenetic is just a term that describes inheritance by any means but DNA (this isn't a magical thing: think language or religion). For instance, some primates and hyenas inherit rank from their mothers. Fetal nutrition, maternal stress, early-life stress, and even languages and dialects, have effects on status and all have effects that are known to be transmitted across generations. Famously, maternal grooming in rats has profound (non-genetic) transgenerational effects on a range of personality measurements. It is extremely difficult to separate epigenetic and genetic effects when studying heritability. Clark claims that because he can model inheritance of status as a first order Markov process, it actually is a first order Markov process based on transmitted characteristics inherent in the parents. Therefore, he claims, status is a deterministic product of a genetic "social competence" (his term). This is a strong claim. To his credit he discusses possible objections (such as inheritance of social networks). He also tries to quantify the non-genetic component of status in the best way possible, by examining adoption studies. Two studies, one on Korean adoptees in America, and another on adopted vs biological offspring in Sweden, seem to show a genetic heritability of income or education (here proxies for status) many times higher than conferred familial status. The magnitude of these results is certainly far too high, as any number of factors (such as differences in the way parents and society treat adopted and biological children---see Hannah Williams) will bias these numbers. But at the very least we can find no reason to reject Clark's model, and I was persuaded that there is likely to be a higher effect of genetics on status metrics than I would ever have previously expected. Clearly more, and better, studies need to be conducted in this area. At this point, any reasonable modern reader will be squirming. Raised under the spectre of the effects of early eugenics, racial determinism, and Manifest Destiny, we are rightly disturbed by attempts to reify social differences with biology. I'm reminded of the unproductive furor around "Sociobiology" and "The Bell Curve" (and Gould's error-filled attempt to rebut "The Bell Curve"). Clark spends much time demonstrating that there are no simplistic racial superiority claims to be taken from his data. His biologizing of hereditary class is inescapable, however. He tries to sugarcoat these interpretations with bland liberal prescriptions and platitudes, but they still rankle. There have been notable failures in trying to increase social mobility (like Head Start in the US). But other recent studies have shown that good urban planning (access to public transport, and jobs, and good schools) can dramatically increase social mobility. Even if there is a genetic component to social status, Clark has almost certainly exaggerated it. Genetics certainly doesn't preclude other measures to increase social mobility. Then too, as Clark notes, inequality and mobility are different things, and we shouldn't confuse them. In the end, "The Son Also Rises" was a thought provoking book, and one I'll read carefully again. I'd recommend it, as long as the reader doesn't accept any of the major conclusions without consideration.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Nature Over Nurture Suggested By Novel Means: Family Surnames By Ronald E. Parsons Gregory Clark's research into social-mobility-progress as shown by family surnames is comprehensive and convincing. While it is not a book for the general reader, those who have "good"

surnames should have no trouble navigating through it. The book's premise is that long-established, good surnames correlate well with worldly success. To an equal degree "low caste" surnames of long history seem to condemn their bearers to the opposite. Many studies have shown that worldly success correlates strongly with high intelligence. Mr. Clark seems to argue that society on the whole would be better off if more social mobility existed -- Such expanded social mobility over the long term bringing increased numbers of the disadvantaged into better circumstances via the hereditary phenomenon of regression to the mean. He cites the Nordic populations as examples. Mr. Clark also brings up methods that societies might use to offset social differences between the mobile and non-mobile. Among them are cutting the "merit" requirement for entry to university, a progressive income tax, and direct subsidies to the lower orders, all three are well known to American taxpayers. Overall is an interesting book that is well organized. It contains much detail that this review does not necessarily indicate. Discriminating readers should find the book well worth the time it takes to read. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. You Don't Have to Buy It All To Learn A Lot -- Now, Read Piketty By Anne Mills This book falls into two main parts -- one discussing ground-breaking research in social mobility, and the other drawing conclusions from that research. The research itself is fascinating. The author's interpretation of that research, however, seems to me more open to question than he suggests. My basic problem is that he attributes low long term rates of social mobility to genetics. It seems to me, however, that inherited wealth and inherited status explain a great deal of the social immobility his data reveal. Piketty, it seems to me, may have more to offer in this regard than Darwin. Whether or not you agree entirely with his conclusions, however, this is a thought provoking and valuable contribution to the discussion of social mobility. As both economic inequality and our knowledge of genetics increase, the "received version" of social mobility as a result of social factors rather than genetics is being questioned more and more. This is a discussion with political implications (some very alarming), but it is a discussion that can't be avoided. "The Son Also Rises" makes an important contribution, which -- I hope -- will spur more work. As other reviewers report, Clark's research is based on the frequency with which unusual surnames appear (or don't appear) in various high-status cohorts over time. (He uses unusual surnames to make the statistical task possible). An early example, to illustrate, is the British surname "Pepys". Based on its (low) frequency in the British population, two or three Pepyses would have attended England's elite universities over the past 500 years. Instead, at least 58 have done so -- most recently just 20 years ago. Clark starts off with English and Swedish data particularly intently, because of the high quality of the data, and the long time spans over which it is available. He then looks closely at US data, and then at data from many other countries. Two big surprises emerge from this data (along with a whole lot of minor surprises). First, social mobility as analysed by Clark is much lower than the standard two-generation analysis, which correlates the income of grown children with that of their parents. That measure shows that 30-40% of current status (as measured by income) in the industrialized countries reflects parents' income. Clark's data, however, shows 70% ratios. That's a massive difference over the long run, suggesting that it takes 10 to 15 generations for high status to revert to the norm, rather than 3-4 generations. Second, Clark's data show a remarkable consistency from country to country, and from time period to time period. His data show no more mobility in Sweden than in other countries, despite more than half a century of the welfare state. And his data for medieval Britain show the same degree of mobility as in current day Britain. At this point I hit a problem in evaluating "The Son Also Rises", which is my own lack of statistical sophistication. I don't fully understand how Clark's data can be reconciled with two-generation data, and can't follow his statistical explanations of this. Also, I wonder if the analysis for England and Sweden can be extended to the US, where time series are in many cases much shorter, and very different. I hope that these points will be elucidated for a general reader in later work. Whatever uncertainties one may have about the ordering of the data, however, the data itself is unquestionably very important. When Clark moves on to his primary conclusion -- that low social mobility over time reflects differences in genetic endowments -- seems to me far less compelling than his data. He posits a quality of "underlying social competence" which determines social status, and fades only slowly over time. He also discusses this in terms of various U.S. ethnic groups, where I cannot follow his argument that differences in social status depend primarily on genetics. I can't follow it because (once again) his statistical analysis gets beyond my competence. But I also can't follow it because the time span of groups in the US is way shorter than in Europe, and discrimination still an important factor. Also, I do not follow his argument as to why cultural self-perpetuation does not account for a lot of the persistent high status of some families -- if Daddy and Granddaddy went to Yale, Sonny is far more likely to go to Yale than Joe Blow, no matter how high or low Sonny's underlying social competence. In any event, even though I remain unconvinced on many points and in active disagreement on a few, I still found this book very valuable. I look forward to more research based on the use of surnames -- a very major contribution. Why then only four stars? Because I wish that more effort had been made to make the statistical analysis more meaningful to a general reader.

How much of our fate is tied to the status of our parents and grandparents? How much does it influence our children? More than we wish to believe. While it has been argued that rigid class structures have eroded in favor of greater social equality, *The Son Also Rises* proves that movement on the social ladder has changed little over eight centuries. Using a novel technique -- tracking family names over generations to measure social mobility across countries and

periods—renowned economic historian Gregory Clark reveals that mobility rates are lower than conventionally estimated, do not vary across societies, and are resistant to social policies. Clark examines and compares surnames in such diverse cases as modern Sweden and Qing Dynasty China. He demonstrates how fate is determined by ancestry and that almost all societies have similarly low social mobility rates. Challenging popular assumptions about mobility and revealing the deeply entrenched force of inherited advantage, *The Son Also Rises* is sure to prompt intense debate for years to come.

Winner of 2015 Gyorgy Ranki Prize, Economic History Association Honorable Mention for the 2015 PROSE Award in Economics, Association of American Publishers One of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2014 One of Vox's "Best Books We Read in 2014" "The Son Also Rises . . . suggests that dramatic social mobility has always been the exception rather than the rule. Clark examines a host of societies over the past seven hundred years and finds that the makeup of a given country's economic elite has remained surprisingly stable."--James Surowiecki, *New Yorker* "An epic feat of data crunching and collaborative grind. . . . Mr. Clark has just disrupted our complacent idea of a socially mobile, democratically fluid society."--Trevor Butterworth, *Wall Street Journal* "Audacious."--Barbara Kiser, *Nature* "[A]n important book, and anybody at all interested in inequality and the kind of society we have should read it."--Diane Coyle, *Enlightened Economist* "The Son Also Rises. . . . That is the new Greg Clark book and yes it is an event and yes you should buy it."--Tyler Cowen, *Marginal Revolution* "Startling. . . . Clark proposes a new way to measure mobility across nations and over time. He tracks the persistence of rare surnames at different points on the socio-economic scale. The information he gathers is absorbing in its own right, quite aside from its implications."--Clive Crook, *Bloomberg View* "Clark casts his net wider. He looks at mobility not across one or two generations, but across many. And he shows by focusing on surnames--last names--how families overrepresented in elite institutions remain that way, though to diminishing degrees, not just for a few generations but over centuries."--Michael Barone, *Washington Examiner* "Deeply challenging."--Margaret Wentz, *Globe Mail* "Who should you marry if you want to win at the game of life? Gregory Clark . . . offers some answers in his fascinating new book, *The Son Also Rises*."--Eric Kaufmann, *Literary* "This intriguing book measures social mobility in a novel way, by tracing unusual surnames over several generations in nine different countries, focusing on intergenerational changes in education, wealth, and social status as indicated by occupation."--*Foreign Affairs* "No doubt this book will be as controversial as its thesis is thought-provoking."--*Library Journal* "Gregory Clark's analysis of intergenerational mobility signals a marked shift in the way economists think about social mobility."--Andrew Leigh, *Sydney Morning Herald* "The thesis of *The Son Also Rises* is, fundamentally, that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Ingeniously, Clark and his team of researchers look at the persistence of socioeconomic status through the lens of surnames in more than 20 societies."--Tim Sullivan, *Harvard Business* "Clark has a predilection for investigating interesting questions, as well as for literary puns. . . . [J]ust as Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century*, calls into question the role of capitalism in wealth creation, Clark calls into question the role of capitalism in social mobility."--Theodore Kinni, *Strategy+Business.com* "Clark's book is not merely intellectually clever, it's profoundly challenging. Especially for Americans, it calls into question of ourselves as individuals, as well as our long-standing image of our society. Let's hope he's wrong."--Benjamin M. Friedman, *The Atlantic* "Adopting an innovative approach to using surnames to measure social mobility, *The Son Also Rises* engages the reader by presenting data that comes to life as it is anchored by names we see in our daily life. . . . A book with valuable insights derived from a well-designed research, it is strongly recommended to all serious readers interested in building strong democracies, for high social mobility is at the heart of a vibrant democracy. Policy makers will gain the benefits of counter-intuitive conclusions that this book throws up with its multi-generational study. Academicians interested in social justice and social activists engaged in promoting social mobility too will have a lot to chew on."--*BusinessWorld* "Clark continues the project begun in his *A Farewell to Alms*. Here, he offers a controversial challenge to standard ideas that social mobility wipes out class advantages over a few generations. . . . An important, challenging book."--*Choice* "[T]his is a well written and thought-provoking book. . . . I look forward to his next book--and his next Hemingway pun!"--Edward Dutton, *Quarterly* "Clark's book begins a fascinating and important conversation about social mobility. . . . Clark's findings are important to engage with, and they will factor into discussions about social mobility for years to come."--Laura Salisbury, *EH.Net* "[I]t's one of those rare, invigorating arguments which, if correct, totally upends your understanding of the way the world works. Right or wrong, I've thought about it more than anything else I read in 2014."--Dylan Matthews, a *Vox* "Best Books We Read in 2014" selection "[A] provocative book."--Richard Lampard, *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* "The Son Also Rises makes for stimulating reading, and I recommend it."--Chris Minns, *Investigaciones de Historia Economica* "From the Back Cover" "This is the most exciting research on the 'American Dream' of social mobility to come along in many years. *The Son Also Rises* provides deep insights into not only the ability or inability of children to surpass their parents' socioeconomic class, but also into the surprising importance of the family to generate prosperity in general."--William Easterly, author of *The White Man's Burden* "The Son Also Rises is a remarkable challenge to conventional wisdom about social mobility. Using highly original methods and ranging widely across world history, Clark argues that the activities of governments impact mobility much less than most of us

think--and that the only sure path to success is to be born to the right parents. Everyone interested in public policy should read this book."--Ian Morris, author of *Why the West Rules--for Now*"An important and original contribution to the literature on social mobility, *The Son Also Rises* is provocative and adversarial, and a brilliant tour de force. Bravo!"--Cormac O'Grada, author of *Famine: A Short History*"*The Son Also Rises* is clever, thoughtful, and well written, and provides a completely new perspective on an enduring issue--the extent of social mobility. This very provocative book will garner a great deal of attention."--Joseph P. Ferrie, Northwestern University

About the Author
Gregory Clark is professor of economics at the University of California, Davis.