SOCIOLOGY FOR A NEW CENTURY

FOURTH EDITION

CHANGING CONTOURS OF WORK

Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy

STEPHEN SWEET ◆ PETER MEIKSINS

Changing Contours of Work

Fourth Edition

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Stephen Sweet
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Peter Meiksins is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Cleveland State University. He has published widely on the sociology of work, particularly the sociology of technical work and of the professions, in journals such as *Work and Occupations; Sociological Quarterly; Work, Employment & Society; Theory and Society; Technology and Culture;* and *Labor Studies Journal.* He has coedited several books on work and labor and is the coauthor of two books, *Engineering Labour: Technical Workers in Comparative Perspective* and *Putting Work in Its Place: A Quiet Revolution*. His current research focuses on engineers, the environment and the state, and gender and engineering. He divides his time between Cleveland and Amsterdam. He enjoys travel, running, cooking, and reading.

Preface to the Fourth Edition

This book is an effort to make sense of work opportunity—as it was in the twentieth century and as it is today—and how it influences lives on and off the job. When we began writing the first edition of this book, we thought this would be a straightforward endeavor. First, we intended to discuss the "old economy" and the types of opportunities present when most of the labor force was employed in jobs critical to mass production industrial work. Then we were going to write about the emerging "new economy" and the ways new technologies, new organizations, new jobs, a new workforce, and globalization are transforming work. Our unique contribution would be to show the ways that current policies and practices, designed to correspond with needs in the old economy, fail to address the present-day concerns.

When we wrote the first edition, we spent well over a year blocking out chapters, going back into the research literature, writing chapter drafts, restructuring our arguments, and rewriting. With all of these efforts, we faced a recurring problem, namely, that our observations about the old economy kept intruding into what we wanted to say about the new economy, and vice versa. Our work in that first year would have been far easier if we had recognized then what was to become a central theme of this book: *the old economy has not been replaced by a new economy; the old economy is operating within the new economy.*

Once we understood the overlap of the old and new economies, we realized that our thesis would have to be modified, as would the structure of our project. The story of the old and new economies is one of *common social forces* that shape the development of work opportunity. Many features of the old economy, although sometimes in new forms, are central to the dynamics of the new. Our conclusion is that concerns facing workers today result from *structural lags* that have forestalled the implementation of effective responses to changes in the ways work is performed and from *enduring failures* to address the problems of inequality that developed in the old economy.

In the years that followed the publication of the first edition, the global economy tanked, and the housing bubble burst. Job insecurity expanded, homes were lost, and working families experienced compounded strains. But not everything that happened was bad. There were some important expansions in workers' rights, such as increased opportunity to file discrimination suits and expanded opportunities for working women to breastfeed their children. There is now greater access to health care as well. But perhaps the biggest story, in respect to work and opportunity,

concerns the reckless decisions made to serve the interests of those at the very top of the opportunity ladder and the consequences those decisions had on almost everyone else. The economic recovery left behind large numbers of working families, who continue to struggle to make ends meet and live in precarious conditions. And while the affluent have become ever richer, tax laws have been rewritten to further concentrate wealth at the top. The observations we presented in the previous editions remain largely the same, but we provide new and updated statistics, as well as reviews of scholarly research, that show how opportunity divides have continued to expand, rather than contract. It is abundantly clear that the new economy, even in the context of an economic recovery, is not working for everyone.

In the chapters that follow, our goals are to identify the contours of work and how they have changed over time, considering both short-term changes that may have occurred over the course of the preceding decades, as well as the longer-term development of modern ways of organizing work. Our analysis relies primarily on the research of sociologists, but also on that of labor historians, economists, and journalists. Our goal is not to offer comprehensive histories of work, or to detail the experiences of all groups in the workforce, but to document the processes that shape work opportunity and how opportunities have been divided in the United States along class, gender, and racial lines. To do this, we adopted a comparative perspective, placing our analysis of opportunity and policy in the United States alongside the somewhat different realities of work in Western Europe and elsewhere. We also compare the experience of workers laboring today with those laboring in the mid-twentieth century and earlier, and we explore the American workplace in the larger context of an integrated global economy and emerging global networks of trade.

Chapter 1, "Mapping the Contours of Work," offers an introduction to the sociology of work and the unique contributions sociological analysis brings to the understanding of the changing economy. Our concern in this chapter is not so much to detail the nature of work in the new economy, or how changes in work have happened, but rather to indicate what needs to be examined if one is to understand work, society, and social change today. To do this, we outline observations sociologists have made about the ways culture, social structure, and agency shape the opportunity to work and the careers of workers. We introduce this chapter by describing the challenges faced by six workers laboring in the new economy. These individuals illuminate the *diversity* of workers' experiences and how the transition to a new economy is affecting career prospects and introducing distinct strains into family lives.

Chapter 2, "New Products, New Ways of Working, and the New Economy," considers the changing patterns of what is produced and how production occurs. In this chapter, we consider the implications of

concerns such as deindustrialization, the rise of service sector employment, and changing organizational designs and technologies. The primary question we consider here is the extent to which the new economy differs from the old economy in respect to what is created and the labor processes and practices involved in production. This chapter is designed primarily to illuminate why we have concluded that the old economy operates within a new economy.

Chapter 3, "Economic Inequality, Social Mobility, and the New Economy," examines the economic returns received from work and how work opportunity gives shape to the class structure of society. The analysis reveals sobering signs that economic transformations are contributing to a divided economy, one that sustains a two-tiered division between good jobs and bad jobs and one that is funneling substantial shares of the returns of work to a privileged elite. We also consider how the movement of "good jobs" from the United States affects the life chances of workers in emerging economies, as well as more peripheral areas of the global economy.

Chapter 4, "Whose Jobs Are Secure?" and Chapter 5, "A Fair Day's Work? The Intensity and Scheduling of Jobs in the New Economy," consider how security and time commitments to work have changed. We first show the ways work designs in the new economy are contributing to widening job insecurity. Our interest here is not just to detail the extent of risk present today, but also to show how social policies implemented in the old economy set workers up to bear the burden of risk, often at the expense of their families and careers. Chapter 5 extends this history of the present by examining trends in the time spent working and the intensity of work. Here, we discuss the question of why American workers are working more than they did in the past, more than workers in almost every other society, and in many instances, more than they want to. We also consider the implications of work in a 24/7 economy and the impact nonstandard schedules have on family lives.

Chapter 6, "Gender Chasms in the New Economy," examines the issue of gender inequalities at work. We revisit the fundamental question of what constitutes work and why women's contributions to society are commonly defined as something other than "real work" or not worthy of compensation commensurate to that received by men. We also consider the extent to which gender inequalities are disappearing in the new economy and detail why many inequalities persist. We conclude this chapter by examining the approach to handling care work in the United States, how it departs from the approaches used in Western Europe, and its impact on both the quality of care and women's life chances.

Chapter 7, "Race, Ethnicity, and Work: Legacies of the Past, Problems in the Present," examines the proposition that race might be of declining significance in the new economy. We show that racial inequalities persist

but that there are important differences in the ways various minority groups have responded to, and are being treated in, the new economy. We also detail the dominant reasons why racial and ethnic inequalities exist today. Because race continues to be a major policy concern, we consider two of the most pressing debates: the controversies about affirmative action programs and the impact of immigration on opportunity structures.

Chapter 8, "Reshaping the Contours of the New Economy," outlines what needs to change if work is to become a positive experience for all and how opportunities might be distributed more equitably in the new economy. Basing our recommendations on what has been done in other developed societies, we try to offer realistic goals that, if fulfilled, would enhance opportunity and life quality. We also acknowledge that the dehumanizing, unjust aspects of work in the new economy are unlikely to change by themselves and that positive steps must be taken to promote improvements. A variety of agents—including individuals, interest groups, unions, corporations, and government entities—will all need to play a role in reshaping work. In the end, we suggest that government intervention will be the key to bringing the expectations of employers in line with what should be expected of workers. Its level of engagement will hinge on the ability of individuals, activist groups, and unions to exert sufficient pressures.

Our hope is that this book will help readers to understand the origins of current problems confronting working people in the new economy. Beyond this, we hope this book will contribute to a much-needed dialogue about the strategies for liberating workers from poverty, from drudgery, from discrimination, from stress, and from exploitation.

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This book is the result of the contributions of numerous people, from those who cut the trees, milled them into paper, drove the paper to our offices, designed our computers, filled our libraries with books (or at least electronic links to books!), fed us and our children, and heated our offices, to those who printed and delivered the book to your hands. Our intellectual efforts stand on the shoulders of the giants in the field, individuals who introduced the ideas we tried to advance and to whom our thoughts are indebted. We also relied on the efforts of the numerous researchers and officials who collected and organized the data we use to outline changes in work and opportunity. Here, we can only express our appreciation to those with whom we formed close interpersonal ties.

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CHAPTER

1 Mapping the Contours of Work

Perhaps more than any other quality, the ability to plan, organize, and collectively engage in work sets human beings apart from other species. Work occupies most of our waking hours; it is a crucial part of identities and influences life chances. At the same time, work creates problems in lives and, at its worst, it can become a sentence of grinding toil in jobs that offer few rewards. Our understanding that work can liberate but also enslave—and seeing both possibilities exemplified in the modern economy—inspired us to write this book. We wanted to take stock of work today—to consider the types of work opportunities available, chart how jobs emerge and disappear, and gauge the impact of workplace practices on and off the job. Beyond this, we wanted to reflect on how work could be organized so that it *makes sense*—so that it provides the resources people need and brings meaning to lives.

This chapter begins this discussion by considering the "contours of work." These contours can be thought of as the terrain on which work opportunities are distributed and traversed. The metaphor of contours is useful because, like geographic topographies, work opportunities have been etched into the landscape by long-term historical forces. Some of these forces resulted in profound changes, wherein old ways of working were abandoned and new methods introduced. This type of radical transformation occurred in the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, and some argue that computer and communication technologies are having a similar effect today. Other forces, however, shape opportunity landscapes in more gradual, ongoing, and cumulative processes. Social divisions created on the basis of gender, with its constantly evolving meanings and practices, are one such force. So are race and social class divisions.

To consider the impact of social forces on work, we introduce here a shorthand distinction that we use throughout this book: the division between the old and new

economies. This dichotomy helps us identify the very real changes that occurred in work in the latter part of the twentieth century, including the introduction of computer technologies, the expansion of a global economy, shifts in the composition of the workforce, new organizational and managerial paradigms, and other transformations that we consider in the chapters to come. The *old economy* represents the various ways of assigning and structuring work that developed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution through the mid-twentieth century. This economy operated with systems oriented to mass production, gendered divisions of labor, unionized labor, and a variety of other enduring workplace practices. It was also an economy in which the United States was a central and dominating economic force. The concept of a *new economy* is used to examine the question of whether the nature of work has changed and, if it has, the extent to which these changes are affecting lives on and off the job. Our primary frame of reference throughout this book is work as it occurs in the United States but also as it is connected to the distribution of opportunities in the global economy.

Though we use the term *new economy*, we have come to conclude that many of the present-day contours reflect the way work evolved in the old economy.[1] Those arguing that there has been a "second industrial revolution" often ignore this. There are new jobs, new workers, and new work designs, and these are changing some of the ways work is performed, by whom, and the returns received. But many of the features introduced by the old economy remain. These "old" features are not simply vestiges destined to eventually die out; they are thriving and may be permanent features of the new economy that will continue to develop during the twenty-first century. Sometimes these old and new features are combined, for example, when low-skill factory work jobs are moved from the developed world to the emerging economies. The jobs may not have changed fundamentally, but the people who are performing them have. In Chapter 2, we consider the issue of production in the old and new economies in greater detail and assess the extent to which work in the new economy has changed and the extent to which it has remained the same.

Our discussion in this chapter is directed to identifying the dominant social forces that shape work opportunity. We organize this discussion by considering three interlocking concerns:

- **Culture**: meaning systems that attach individuals to work, harness their commitments, and direct their efforts.
- **Structure**: opportunities, as well as constraints, that shape what types of jobs can be pursued, by whom, and the returns received.

- **Agency**: personal effort and discretion, whether as individuals or in groups, to direct actions and decisions.

To open this discussion, we consider the lives of six workers laboring in the new economy and the rewards, strains, and constraints work produces in their lives. As you read these examples of what work is like in the new economy, reflect on the ways current opportunity structures allocate resources needed and think about how work provides meaning but also disrupts lives. The challenge we explore throughout this book is finding ways to align culture, structure, and human initiative in pursuit of expanding, work opportunity. In other words, the goal is to reduce the incompatibilities between how jobs are arranged and what workers can bring to—and receive from—their work.

Scenes From the New Economy

The experiences of Meg, Tammy, Emily, Rain, Kavita, and Mike reveal how work lives on and off the job are being shaped by the contours of the new economy. All of these cases illustrate that the effects of historical change (in this case the transition to a new economy) can vary depending on its timing with respect to an individual's biography, as well as to his or her gender, class, and race (Elder and Shanahan 2007; Moen 2001). The stories also reveal how careers unfold when new opportunities are introduced and old opportunities are dismantled.

Exhibit 1.1 Meg: A Successful Trader Strives to Manage a Demanding Career With a Child Who Has Special Needs

Meg started her career as a trader in the male-dominated world of the New York Stock Exchange. Although family connections and good fortune helped her gain entry to Wall Street, her early successes came from hard work, tough-mindedness, and interpersonal savvy. It also helped that she entered the world of Wall Street just as the stock market was to catapult to record high levels in the 1990s. By the age of twenty-five, Meg was promoted to head trader and received a remarkable salary. She also met her husband at the stock exchange.

Exhibit 1.1 (*Continued*)

To support her husband's transition into a law career, Meg followed him to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, Meg landed a position in a firm that was soon to manage one of the largest investment funds in the country, another remarkable leap in an already successful career. Along the way, Meg had two children and benefitted from flexible work arrangements, moving intermittently between part-time and full-time work as the children matured. However, when her third child was born with serious medical needs, Meg decided to take a career break to provide more intense care and supervision, and her employer agreed. However, when Meg tried to return to her job in a part-time capacity, her firm gave her a choice: return full-time or resign. She chose to resign.

Note: Based on *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home* (pp. 28–30) by Pamela Stone, 2007, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Exhibit 1.2 Tammy: A Midcareer Manufacturing Worker Attempts to Salvage a Career and a Community

Tammy was born into a disadvantaged family in 1966 in Youngstown, Ohio. Early on, she was raised by her grandmother, who worked as a maid and companion to an elderly widow, but, at least for part of her childhood, she also lived with her mother, who was trying to recover from drug abuse. The city she grew up in entered a steep decline when she was a child; the steel mills began to close and the neighborhoods deteriorated as the people who lost their jobs left to find work elsewhere.

When she was fifteen, Tammy got pregnant; she broke up with the father and raised the baby on her own. She was determined not to drop out of school or be like many of the other girls around her, so she finished high school on time and later earned an associate's degree. She worked for a while in a supermarket and hoped for a manager's job, but nothing materialized. After a stint on welfare, she was able to find a job working in one of the region's few remaining industrial establishments, the Packard Electric Plant in nearby Warren, Ohio, making electrical components for GM cars. She worked there for two decades (earning as much as $25 an hour), as the plant slowly shrank around her and the union that represented workers grew steadily weaker.

Exhibit 1.2 (*Continued*)

In the early 2000s, a series of corporate and legal maneuvers resulted in the plant becoming part of GM's Delphi Automotive Systems, which was then spun off as a separate company. Delphi eventually filed for bankruptcy in 2005 in an attempt to get out of its union contract and wind the company down. Like many workers who had lived through the company's gradual shrinkage, Tammy did not fully foresee Delphi's decision to close or sell most of its units and eliminate two-thirds of its workforce. Some workers at Tammy's plant would be kept on—but with dramatic cuts to their wages and benefits and likely eventual job loss. The alternative was to accept a lump-sum buyout but also lose most of their pensions. Tammy accepted the buyout, determined to do something else with her life.

Tammy invested some of the money she received from the buyout with a relative who was speculating in real estate. At first, she received good returns on her investment but later lost most of her money when the real estate bubble of the late 2000s collapsed. She had to beg her relative to return a small portion of her investment so that she could keep her small house. She went back to school to earn a bachelor's degree and was approached by a professional organizer who was looking to hire community organizers to help combat the effects of Youngstown's decline. Tammy was passionate about her city and determined to do something, so she got the job. Since then, she has worked on several surveys of her city, which made her even more aware of the decline brought about by deindustrialization. Even as the fracking boom began to create jobs in the region, Tammy could see that most of the people like her in Youngstown were not finding jobs and were being passed by. By comparison, she considered herself lucky.

Note: Based on *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* by George Packer, 2013, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Exhibit 1.3 Emily: A Contract Worker Navigates Insecure Employment

Emily is in her late forties and markets herself as a freelance editor/proofreader. While at one time she was a "regular employee," the job that she previously held vanished when her employer relocated. Her path to becoming a contract worker was not an intended career path. It was a means of rescuing a career that was dislodged.

Exhibit 1.3 (*Continued*)

Emily currently works as an editor with two different employers, a large law firm and small publishing company. She is not considered to be a career employee at either of these companies, does not have a private office, and shares a cramped workspace with another employee. She is not included in many of the office social functions, and her level of involvement with other regular employees is quite restricted. Nonetheless, her job as a freelancer provides her considerably more flexibility than her coworkers, and this is something that she values. And, because she is skilled at her work, her compensation is comparable to what the regular employees make.

Because the terms of Emily's employment rest on her employers' interest in hiring her for subsequent work, she keeps watch for opportunities. She believes that her type of job, based on short-term agreements between employees and their employers, is the wave of the future. While she feels secure in knowing how to do her work, she has a constant sense of insecurity in that she does not know what the future holds for her.

Note: Based on *Freelancing Expertise: Contract Professionals in the New Economy* (pp. 2–3) by Debra Osnowitz, 2010, Ithaca, New York: ILR Press.

Exhibit 1.4 Rain: A Chinese Immigrant Finds Work in the American Food Service Industry

Rain is twenty-nine years old and has been in the United States for five years. Born and raised in a village in rural China, Rain says that he came to the United States to escape religious persecution (but it is possible that this story is for the sake of his visa application). His journey to the United States was expedited by a "snakehead," whom Rain paid the equivalent of $70,000 to arrange transport and needed documents. Rain was initially flown from China to Mexico. Like immigrants from South America, he was escorted to the U.S. border and told to "run." Later he was picked up by an associate of the snakehead, who transported him from Houston to New York.

Within Chinatown in New York, Rain was connected to a network of opportunities to work in Chinese restaurants located throughout the United States. In fact, family run Chinese restaurants outnumber McDonald's restaurants in small towns. Moving from town to town, Rain learned to cook Chinese food to suit the American tongue, with its heavier emphasis on sweetness.

Exhibit 1.4 (*Continued*)

It was in the United States that he tasted his first egg roll. Currently, Rain lives in a house owned by the restaurant owner, along with five of his coworkers, all of whom are Chinese immigrants.

Rain's treatment in each restaurant depends very much on the ownership, but a constant is an expectation to put in long hours and labor quickly. He commonly works six-day weeks, and his twelve-hour days begin with chopping vegetables and end with cleaning the kitchen. On the whole, he is thankful for the long hours, because that means more money for him and more money to send home. If an owner is too demanding, Rain's solution is to return to New York, find another restaurant in another small town, and begin again.

He is working hard to pay off his debt and is sending money home, but he has no immediate plans to return to China because his income in the United States is far greater than he could earn in his hometown or in any of the new factories in the urban centers. However, he does feel isolated and lonely. His biggest worry is securing U.S. citizenship.

Note: Based on "The Kitchen Network: America's Underground Chinese Restaurant Workers" by Lauren Hilgers, 2014, *The New Yorker,* October 13, 2014.

Exhibit 1.5 Kavita: A Young Indian Woman Navigates Night Work and Call Center Employment

Kavita is a twenty-two-year-old woman who works in a call center in Bangalore, India. Owing to the time difference that separates Bangalore from the United States, Kavita works a night shift so that her schedule fits American workday rhythms. She has learned to suppress her Indian accent, has familiarized herself with American vernacular, and takes pride in her work. Her job is very demanding, as she has to understand the scripts that guide interactions, quickly understand client needs, and sometimes diffuse hostile encounters from frustrated customers. As soon as one client hangs up the phone, another call is funneled into Kavita's headset and she begins anew.

The night shift that Kavita works carries with it perils. One concern is the very real physical danger that confronts women in Indian society when darkness falls. Even simple necessities, such as going to the restroom outside of the home, carry with them such risks that women try their best to avert physical need. Another concern is the stigma associated with night work, which is traditionally associated with prostitution and other morally suspect behaviors.

Exhibit 1.5 (*Continued*)

Call center work compares favorably to other industries in India, but it is demanding and competition for jobs is fierce. Any position might have as many as five hundred applicants. Kavita sought work at the call center because she wanted the freedoms that her income provides. Many of her coworkers labor because of more desperate financial needs. With her $300/month income she has been able to rent a small apartment and recently hired a maid.

Kavita sees call center work as a stepping-stone in her life but is not inclined to think about the next steps yet. She does heed (to a great extent) her parents' warning that her conduct needs to reflect favorably on family and to be mindful of how women should act if they are to find a good spouse. Living in modern India, Kavita can potentially form a relationship that might develop into a "love marriage" but is pressured by her parents to have an arranged marriage. By virtue of working in the global economy, Kavita and her coworkers are challenging many conventional ways of defining women's place in Indian society.

Note: Based on *Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry* by Reena Patel, 2010, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Exhibit 1.6 Mike: A Disadvantaged Youth Enters a Life of Crime

Mike lives on 6th Street in Philadelphia. Aside from its concentrated poverty and predominantly black racial composition, there are two things to note about Mike's neighborhood: few good jobs are to be found there and police surveillance is pervasive. Because of limited employment options, crime and the illegal work that operates in an underground economy are common. The hyperpolicing that attempts to control Mike and his friends operates with scant tolerance for illegal behavior, focusing on sorting the "dirty" residents from the "clean." Those who are dirty—like Mike, who engages in the drug trade—face likely imprisonment. Not everyone on 6th Street is dirty. Compared to some other residents, Mike was not as entirely disadvantaged. His mother worked multiple jobs and kept a clean house.

Mike was first arrested at age thirteen for carrying marijuana, but unlike the lenient treatment that he might have received if the same infraction occurred in

Exhibit 1.6 (*Continued*)

a middle-class community, he was convicted, given a record, and placed on probation. By the time Mike reached age twenty-two, he had two children with his girlfriend and was selling crack cocaine for extra money to supplement the limited income he earned in a part-time job at a pharmaceutical warehouse. Mike lost his job at the warehouse because he missed too much work while trying to also attend to the needs of his family, including the extra care demanded by his youngest daughter who was born with health problems. When he failed to find a replacement job, he turned to selling drugs as a primary source of income. The rest of his life has unfolded as a story of a life on the run, with incarceration and the prospect of jail time removing him further and further from the hope of ever attaining secure legitimate employment.

Note: Based on *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (pp. 14–19) by Alice Goffman, 2014, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The six vignettes, all based on real people performing real work, give a sense of the diversity, opportunity, and constraint that exist in the new economy. For Meg and Kavita, economic changes have opened new opportunities, but they coexist with enduring sets of expectations about what mothers and daughters should provide to their spouses, parents, and children. These cultural orientations seem more appropriate to another era and lag behind what these workers ideally want for themselves and, in many instances, what they can provide for others. For Tammy, the moving platform of history has introduced new career tensions because the types of jobs she performed during her entire career have become more difficult to find. And as she tried to find security by investing in the new economy, her meager savings vanished. Emily is one of a new breed of contract workers, and she is figuring out how to create security in a context where employers are increasingly inclined to hire workers for short-term task assignments. Rain exemplifies the type of worker who is commonly cast as a social problem—the undocumented immigrant. On closer examination, his involvement in work is probably not displacing any American workers, and his commitment to work conforms to core American ideals of personal responsibility and effort. In contrast, native-born Mike is not integrated into an opportunity structure that lends itself to upward advancement. While he has made mistakes, even if he had not, the odds have been stacked against him from the start. All of these workers challenge archetypal images of the typical worker, someone who holds a secure 9-to-5 job. Taken together, these six individuals help establish the foundation of an

important argument presented in this book: that in the new economy there is no "typical" worker.

The careers of these workers are influenced by demands and social ties off the job. All these workers are making career decisions in the context of their linkages to others. In some circumstances, children are the priority, whereas in other cases, it is the needs of spouses, aging parents, or both (Neal and Hammer 2006; Sweet and Moen 2006). These life-stage circumstances play an important role in shaping worker behavior, expectations, and needs. How people respond to these circumstances is heavily influenced by cultural scripts (e.g., assumptions about what parents should provide for their children) and the availability of resources, which varies from person to person and group to group. And beyond family ties, the contexts of neighborhoods and communities influence one's ability to find work, the resources to prepare for work, and the security to engage in work (Bookman 2004; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002; Swisher, Sweet, and Moen 2004; Voydanoff 2007). In a word, a good characterization of workers' lives on and off the job is *complex*. Work today introduces various strains and tensions, and strains and tensions experienced off the job affect the capacity to work.

Culture and Work

One of the core questions guiding the sociology of work concerns how much work should be performed and the amount of work that should be expected of individuals throughout their life course. Most classic theories of work embrace cultural perspectives that view labor, in and of itself, as a noble endeavor. Karl Marx (1964 [1844]), for example, argued that work is what distinguishes humans from other species, and he highlighted how it enables people to transform their environments to suit human interests. Sigmund Freud (1961 [1929]) argued that work is a socially accepted means by which humans can direct their sublimated sexual energies. As such, he saw work as a means of achieving satisfaction when fulfillment in other parts of life is lacking or is prohibited. Émile Durkheim (1964 [1895]) offered a different thesis, that work and the complex division of labor in society offered a means to create social cohesion. All these perspectives have in common the assumption that work has the potential to cement social bonds and advance the development of civilization. These perspectives suggest that the more work that people are able to perform, the more liberated their lives will be; they would evaluate the new economy in terms of its ability to enable people to work more. This proposition should not be accepted too quickly, however.

Is it a cultural universal that work should be praised and that commitment to work is an indicator of social health? Anthropological and historical studies suggest otherwise. In many cultures, work is defined as the means for day-to-day survival. Subsistence economies operate on the basis of cultural assumptions that work is primarily a means to an end, so that once individuals have enough food and shelter, labor is expected to cease. Such an orientation to work in today's American culture would indicate a moral weakness and be perceived as a threat to social order. But from the point of view of many other cultures, our embrace of work could be considered pathological. If one can obtain enough to eat and gain sufficient shelter by working a few hours a day, so be it. Why should a hunter set out in search of game if the supply of food is adequate (Brody 2002; Sahlins 1972)?[2] And even within geographic regions such as modern-day Western Europe, expectations regarding the age at which individuals are expected to embark on careers, or to retire, vary remarkably. These varied life course scripts result in some cultures expecting ten years (or more) of additional attachment to the labor force than others, with policies that match these expectations (Sweet 2009). When viewed through this lens, Mike's loose attachment to work becomes more understandable and seems a lot less pathological. And note that Meg's decision to exit the labor force at midlife to care for her children carries with it no stigma.

One important cultural question concerns why work plays such a central role in some societies but not in others. Part of the answer, according to Max Weber (1998 [1905]), is that the societies in the forefront of the Industrial Revolution had been swayed by changing religious doctrines. These religious beliefs, particularly those that underpinned the Protestant Reformation, created anxieties about one's fate in the afterlife. In response, Western European and American culture advanced the value of the work ethic, a belief that work is not something people simply do—it is a God-given purpose. Devoting oneself to work and doing a good job were considered to be ways of demonstrating that a life of virtue reflects grace. And as members of these societies embraced the idea that work is "a calling," they applied themselves to their jobs with greater vigor, creating wealth and affirming to themselves and others that God was looking favorably on their actions.

Although many now question Weber's thesis that the Protestant Reformation was responsible for the emergence of capitalism, the centrality of the work ethic to the development of Western society is widely accepted. So deeply is it ingrained in contemporary American culture that nearly three-quarters of Americans report that they would continue to work, even if they had enough money to live as comfortably as they would like for the rest of their lives.[3] Americans work to affirm to themselves and others that they are virtuous, moral individuals and deserving of respect (Shih 2004). Conversely, those who choose not to work, or workers like Mike who are

unsuccessful in securing a job, are looked down upon and stigmatized. In American society, to be without work is to be socially suspect and unworthy of trust (Katz 1996, Liebow 1967).

The work ethic defines labor as a virtue, but it also has pathological dimensions. The cultural embrace of work may be akin to the flame that attracts the moth. It is telling that many who can afford to work less, and who have the opportunities to do so, choose not to (Hochschild 1997). Psychologists call these individuals "workaholics" (Machlowitz 1980), but as we discuss later in this book, many of those driven to work long hours do so because they are driven by organizational cultures that bestow rewards on those who live and breathe their jobs. The suspicion cast on those who do not hold jobs has created pressures to force work on those who get little benefit from it. Consider that welfare reform legislation, passed in the mid-1990s, requires even very poor mothers of young children to work in order to receive welfare assistance. This requirement defines mothering as "not work" (a concept we return to later) and ignores the reality that when these women do work, usually it is in low-wage dead-end jobs.

Why would people work above and beyond their own economic needs? For some, work is a means to provide for their families, which in turn drives them to work incredibly hard, even in jobs that offer few intrinsic sources of satisfaction (Menges et al. 2017). But need is not the sole driving force. Thorstein Veblen (1994 [1899]) in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* observed that attitudes to work are bound up with materialistic values held in American culture. Markers of status include luxury autos, large homes, and expensive clothing. All of these commodities are conspicuously consumed, put on display to be seen and admired, and set standards for others to follow. By the mid-twentieth century, the drive to purchase social status permeated American society, compelling workers to labor hard "to keep up with the Joneses" and their neighbors' latest purchases (Riesman, Glazer, and Reuel 2001 [1961]). Contemporary American workers engage in the same status game that emerged in the late nineteenth century, but with new commodities (e.g., iPhones, BMWs, and home theaters). Their competition now expands beyond their neighborhoods, as they are saturated with media images of success and have developed numerous ways to accumulate debt (home equity loans, student loans, and credit cards).[4] The result, some have argued, is "affluenza," the compulsion to purchase and spend beyond one's means (de Graaf, Wann, and Naylor 2001). For some members of the new economy, work has become the means to manage spiraling debts incurred while striving to keep up with others who are spending beyond their means as well (Schor 1998).

Because culture also shapes the attitudes workers and employers have toward each other, it is a social force that can create (but also dismantle) opportunity divides. One means by which culture contributes to social inequality is through the construction of social divisions and

group boundaries. Racial and gendered divisions, for example, are based on assumptions that different social groups possess different capabilities. Whether these differences were originally real is immaterial; as the early twentieth-century American sociologist W. I. Thomas noted, what people believe is real often becomes real in its consequences (Thomas and Thomas 1928). In turn, these beliefs contribute to the formation of self-fulfilling prophecies. As we discuss later in this book, cultural assumptions about gender and race shape social networks, influence access to resources, and funnel people into different lines of work.

Beyond setting up boundaries, culture extends into job management practices and the design of technologies. Consider, for example, the enduring legacy of scientific management, one of the bedrock managerial approaches of the old economy. Frederick Winslow Taylor introduced this managerial philosophy (also known as Taylorism) at the beginning of the twentieth century to increase the productivity of workers laboring in factories. He advocated the benefits of redesigning work to wrest control from workers and place it in the hands of management. His *Principles of Scientific Management* (Taylor 1964 [1911]) argued for the separation of "thought" from "execution" to establish clear divisions between managers (whose job was to think and design) and workers (whose job was to carry out managers' instructions). He used time and motion studies to decompose production jobs into the simplest component tasks to increase worker speed and accuracy. And managers' jobs were redefined to absorb worker skills into the machines and organization and to keep the flow of knowledge going in one direction—from the shop floor into managers' hands. The result was the creation of legions of deskilled jobs, the dissolution of many craft skills, and a decline in the individual worker's ability to control the conditions and rewards of work (Braverman 1974, Noble 1979, Pietrykowski 1999). It also fostered distrust and hostility between workers and their bosses (Montgomery 1979).

Why did Taylor advocate this way of organizing work, given its obvious negative consequences for the quality of work life and its negative effects on labor–management relations? In part, it was a response to something real—the fact that workers often did not work as hard as they could. His experiences had taught him that they did not show up to work consistently, took long breaks, and worked at a more leisurely pace than owners desired. These behaviors reflected workers' cultural values and their definition of what constituted a reasonable amount of labor. Likewise, Taylor's interpretation of this behavior was culture bound. He interpreted workers' behavior not as a rational, class-based resistance to employers, but as an irrational unwillingness to work to one's full potential. Taylor, like many Americans of his time, was embracing a cultural denial that class divisions within the workplace existed. His solutions also reflected the culture in which he was living. He advocated a reorganization of the workplace

Exhibit 1.7 The Film *Modern Times* Offered a Poignant Illustration of the Alienating Nature of Work in Factory Jobs in the Old Economy

Source: Max Munn Autrey/Margaret Chute/Getty Images.

based on scientific methods, something that resonated tremendously in a society where science had come to be seen as the solution to many human problems. And he depicted the worker as essentially unintelligent and easily manipulated; Taylor was fond of using an example involving a worker named Schmidt (whom he described as "oxlike"), whom he persuaded to adopt his new system through a combination of simpleminded arguments and limited incentives. This, too, was typical of the dominant American culture at that time; many Americans believed that members of the lower classes, immigrants, and others at the bottom of society were inferior in various ways (including intelligence) to the more successful members of society. Taylor's ideas also reflected an abiding cultural belief in the correctness of capitalism, particularly the proposition that it is natural that some should be owners and others laborers, that the efforts of those at the top were more important and valuable, and that an extremely unequal distribution of the fruits of labor was not just defensible but actually desirable (Callahan 1962, Nelson 1980).

The legacy of managerial philosophies—in this case, scientific management—highlights how culture and social structure intersect. Managerial perspectives that embraced the proposition that workers are indolent and should not be trusted are directly responsible for the creation of many of the alienating, low-wage "McJobs" present in America today. These philosophies initiated the development and application of assembly lines, promoted the acceptance of the idea that some people should be paid to think and others to labor, and fostered divisions between "white-collar" and "blue-collar" jobs. This cultural orientation to work can explain the types of jobs that Tammy held at General Motors, as well as the rationale for eliminating those jobs and moving them elsewhere in the global economy.

These examples of how culture shaped workplaces in the past suggest interesting questions about culture's role in carving out the contours of the new economy. Have cultural attitudes about the role of work changed, and if so, have workplaces changed along with them? How long are people working, and why do they work so much? Have Americans begun to abandon long-standing Taylorist cultural assumptions about the proper way to organize work, or do we continue to construct workplaces on the assumption that workers are lazy, ignorant, and not to be trusted? To what extent do perceived divisions between the members of society continue to deprive some people of access to opportunity? We address these concerns in the chapters that follow.

Structure and Work

In contrast to culture and the way it creates meaning systems that orient people to work, social structure maintains enduring patterns of social organization that determine what kinds of jobs are available, who gets which jobs, how earnings are distributed, how organizational rules are structured, and how laws are formulated. Social structure does not exist independently of culture. Often, social structure reflects cultural attitudes, because people tend to create institutions that are consistent with their beliefs. And structure can also be in conflict with aspects of culture, creating tensions and contradictions with which individuals and societies must grapple. For example, consider how the structural reality of unemployment creates particularly difficult problems in a society such as the United States, where work is valued or structured as a mandatory part of citizenship. Americans are forced to make difficult choices between their cultural ideals and their social structural context: should the unemployed be made to work, or should they be helped because there are no jobs? If the latter, who deserves help, what kind, and for how long?

Throughout this book, we discuss various aspects of social structure, the access to different types of work, the division of labor, the social organization of workplaces, and legal and political arrangements that influence the design of jobs and the terms of employment. Here, we simply illustrate how social structure affects individuals' experience of work by considering how a few aspects of social structure—social class, job markets, and labor force demographics—may be affecting opportunities and workplace practices in the new economy.

Class Structures

One of the great contributions of Karl Marx (1964 [1844]) was his analysis of class structures and how they shaped workplace practices and opportunity structures. In his classic analysis of the industrial capitalist economy, he argued that employers' profits depend on the effort put forth by employees, which created incentives to limit wages and to push workers to labor as hard as possible. He also observed that the efforts of workers created far greater wealth for employers than it did for employees. Considering these class relations, Marx argued capitalism would tend to organize work in ways that led toward the creation of a polarized class structure, comprising a disenfranchised working class (the proletariat) and an affluent owner class (the bourgeoisie).

It is hard not to look at dead-end low-wage jobs in the new economy without some appreciation for Marx's core insight. Tammy (the former manufacturing worker) and Mike (the disadvantaged young adult) are what Marx might have expected to see in an advanced capitalist economy. However, the contemporary class structure of the United States is more complex than the bifurcated and polarized structure Marx envisioned, as evidenced by Meg (the trader) and Emily (the contract worker). And the experience of upward movement among the disadvantaged, as evidenced by Rain (the Chinese restaurant worker) and Kavita (the call center worker), adds even more challenges to simplistic Marxist structural models. Although laborers and capitalists exist, large portions of the workforce seem to fit into neither category. Numerous professional and managerial workers have substantial education, some (or even considerable) workplace authority, and higher salaries than the typical frontline worker. Yet it is difficult to describe them as captains of industry or members of the dominant class, given that they are not in charge and work for someone else who has the ability to fire them. Sociologists have argued long and hard about how to describe these intermediate class positions. One sociologist described such workers as occupying contradictory class locations, combining elements of the classes above and below them (Wright 1985).

How best to map the precise shape of the class structure of capitalist societies is a matter for dispute, but what is not disputed is that class matters. For example, class affects people's access to work opportunities, although the precise way in which it does so has changed over time. Before the Industrial Revolution, most children inherited their line of work from their parents through a process known as ascription. Farmers' children tended to become farmers themselves, and craft workers would often learn their trade from their fathers. Women's roles were largely ascribed as well. One's occupation was to a great extent one of the things inherited from one's parents; the cross-generational effects of class were obvious and straightforward. With industrialization, however, the range of jobs expanded profoundly, many new occupations were introduced, and other occupations became less common or completely disappeared. As a result of these changing opportunity structures, fewer children could follow in their parents' footsteps or inherit occupations from the previous generation. By the late nineteenth century, geographic mobility and social mobility became more common, as children ventured farther from their home communities to find work (Thernstrom 1980). Class still mattered, however, because it affected one's access to resources such as education, skills, and connections that determined access to work in an economy where jobs no longer were inherited.

The existence of class also affects the structure of workplaces. Marx felt that the antagonism between labor and capital inevitably produced antagonism at work and led to the development of hierarchical, top-down managerial structures designed to control workers and ensure that the interests of employers predominated. Although the polarized workplaces envisaged by Marx may not be the dominant organizational form, managerial efforts to control labor reflect a strong desire to respond to class antagonisms. They reflect the reality that the workplace is a zone of contested terrain, one in which class conflicts take place, with each side using the weapons at its disposal—including layoffs, speedups, technology, strikes, and even sabotage (Edwards 1979, Montgomery 1979).

Throughout this book, we argue that social class remains one of the most powerful forces shaping employment opportunities and access to resources in the new economy. We examine how a changing economy has altered the reality of class and the extent to which changes in class structure have led to a fundamental restructuring of workplaces away from the familiar patterns of industrial America. We also examine how gender and race matter and how they interact with class to shape complex, contemporary structures of opportunity and workplaces. We focus on social class most directly in Chapter 3, but throughout we emphasize that other social markers (such as gender, race, or age) intersect with class in important ways.

Job Markets and Job Demands

Mike's (the disadvantaged youth) and Tammy's (the manufacturing worker) problems involve not simply finding work, but also finding work that pays a reasonable income and work that they have been prepared to perform. Meg (the trader), on the other hand, possesses highly marketable skills and can command a handsome salary. For her, the problem is securing a job that matches her personal resources. For Emily (the contract worker), the problem is locating new opportunities that enable her to navigate from one job to the next. Rain (the restaurant worker) understood that few opportunities that would allow him to provide for his family existed in his rural village in China, which in turn led him to migrate to where he believed job opportunities existed. All of these workers have concerns that are structural in nature and involve the way opportunities are configured. All have to adapt themselves to the existing range of jobs and the prevailing ways in which jobs are organized. Their personal problems reflect the fact that workers—especially those laboring in times of economic change—face challenges in locating and adapting themselves to opportunities. For many workers, and for those left involuntarily out of the labor force, the most recent economic recession has significantly compounded these problems. Tammy's job loss and failed venture into real estate speculation amply illustrate this concern.

The Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century was clearly a watershed, one that profoundly reshaped the types of jobs available to workers. The most obvious consequence of industrialization was that far fewer people were employed in agriculture and many more were employed in factory work. However, the changes were not limited to the shift from agriculture to industry. Traditional occupations outside of agriculture were also transformed, as new technologies and new ways of organizing work pushed older approaches aside. For example, the mechanization of weaving during the Industrial Revolution completely removed this work from the home and introduced new skills that fit factory labor. Similar stories can be told about many other traditional occupations, including hat making, shoe production, tanning, and tinsmithing (Thompson 1963).

Is the range of employment opportunities available to American workers changing again? It certainly seems that way. Some jobs that used to be plentiful in America (such as the office typing pool) have virtually disappeared, and the skills needed to obtain jobs are changing as well. In the old economy, for example, it was common for children to follow their parents into the mill or factory and receive good wages for performing jobs that required little education. Today, few young people aspire to hold the type of factory job that Tammy used to occupy, largely because many of these jobs have disappeared. As steel mills and factories closed in the 1970s and 1980s, the impact reverberated throughout industry-dependent

"rust belt" communities, forcing their residents to rethink long-standing beliefs about jobs, futures, and how one makes a living (Bartlett and Steele 1992, Bluestone and Harrison 1982, Buss and Redburn 1982).

One way of considering the changing opportunity landscape is to consider the process of creative destruction, a phrase introduced by economist Joseph Schumpeter (1989) to describe the tendency for old methods of production to be replaced by newer, more efficient approaches. In some cases, new technologies make old needs obsolete, as when the automobile extinguished the need for buggy whips. In other instances, technological innovation can replace workers with machines, as was the case with cigarette rollers (Bell 1973). New methods of organizing work can also be used to reduce production costs, for instance, by moving jobs to locales where labor costs are lower (Cowie 2001). And in the case of computers, technologies have not only replaced workers, but also introduced entirely new markets and jobs.

The drive to create ever more efficient and profitable enterprises is influencing the distribution of work opportunities around the world, as we observed by introducing Kavita and her job in a call center. Production now occurs on a global scale, and the forces that disperse work to far-flung locations such as Indonesia (where athletic shoes are assembled) and Bangladesh (clothing) shape the life chances of workers both at home and abroad. Understanding the reasons why work is being dispersed, and the impact on workers' lives at home and abroad, is essential to revealing the trajectory of work and opportunity in the new economy. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States held a dominant position in the global economy. But in the new economy, lower-skilled production jobs previously held by Americans such as Tammy are increasingly being exported to countries such as China, India, Mexico, and Vietnam. While it is important to consider the impact on American workers, we suggest that this is too narrow a focus, as analysis of the functioning of a global economy should not be restricted to the interests of any particular nation and its workers.

Changing employment opportunities also have redefined skill needs, reshaped job demands, and introduced new rewards. They also impose new burdens on workers' lives. Consider the large number of jobs available in various kinds of interactive service work that emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century. These jobs require a different type of work than that performed in the factory, in that the employees typically do not manufacture anything. Workers such as teachers, therapists, or servers provide a service for someone else with whom they are in direct contact. Sociologists have noted that this kind of work places different demands on the worker. He or she must learn interaction skills—how to make others feel comfortable, how to produce the desired kind of social setting, how to deal with various kinds of difficult social situations—*because the interaction is a significant part of the product being sold.* Research on airline flight attendants

performed in the 1980s offers a compelling illustration of how interactive service work is performed. At that time, flight attendants were trained to make customers feel safe in the rigid and sometimes frightening environment of an airplane. To do this, they were coached on techniques to change their internal emotional states to generate the display of warmth required by their employers. As a consequence, however, these types of workers were especially prone to experiencing emotional numbness or burnout (Hochschild 1983). However, today, much less emotional labor is expected from flight attendants, indicating that the definition of how service work is to be performed is open to social negotiation.

New jobs demand new sets of skills, and new technologies and organizational systems also are transforming many familiar jobs. An administrative assistant's job, for example, is quite different from the secretarial jobs that it replaced. In part this is because computer programs have eliminated aspects of the old job (repetitive typing) and created new ones (basic graphic design, data analysis, electronic communication). Bank tellers once were simply clerical workers who processed clients' financial transactions. Now, computerized information systems provide tellers with information about clients' financial positions and prompt tellers to sell various products to the client, all while a close electronic eye monitors what the worker is doing (Smith 1990). Even traditional manual labor is affected. For example, production workers who used to rely on their senses of touch and smell as guides now operate sophisticated computerized systems that make some of their old ways of working obsolete (Vallas and Beck 1996).

Finally, job opportunities may be less rigidly tied to space and time than they were in the old economy. Today, many workers have opportunities to telecommute and work from home offices. The economy operates 24/7, introducing the prospect of working alternate shifts and reconfiguring work around family lives. This may create opportunities to liberate workers from the traditional 9-to-5 grind and introduce new flexible schedules that more harmoniously mesh work with life—a work arrangement that the investment trader Meg's employer ultimately concluded was not viable. However, it may also allow work to intrude on lives in ways not possible in the old economy, perhaps forcing workers to be on call during "leisure" time in response to a round-the-clock economy. Understanding the impact of these new structural configurations is essential to charting the contours of work in the new economy.

Demography and the New Labor Force

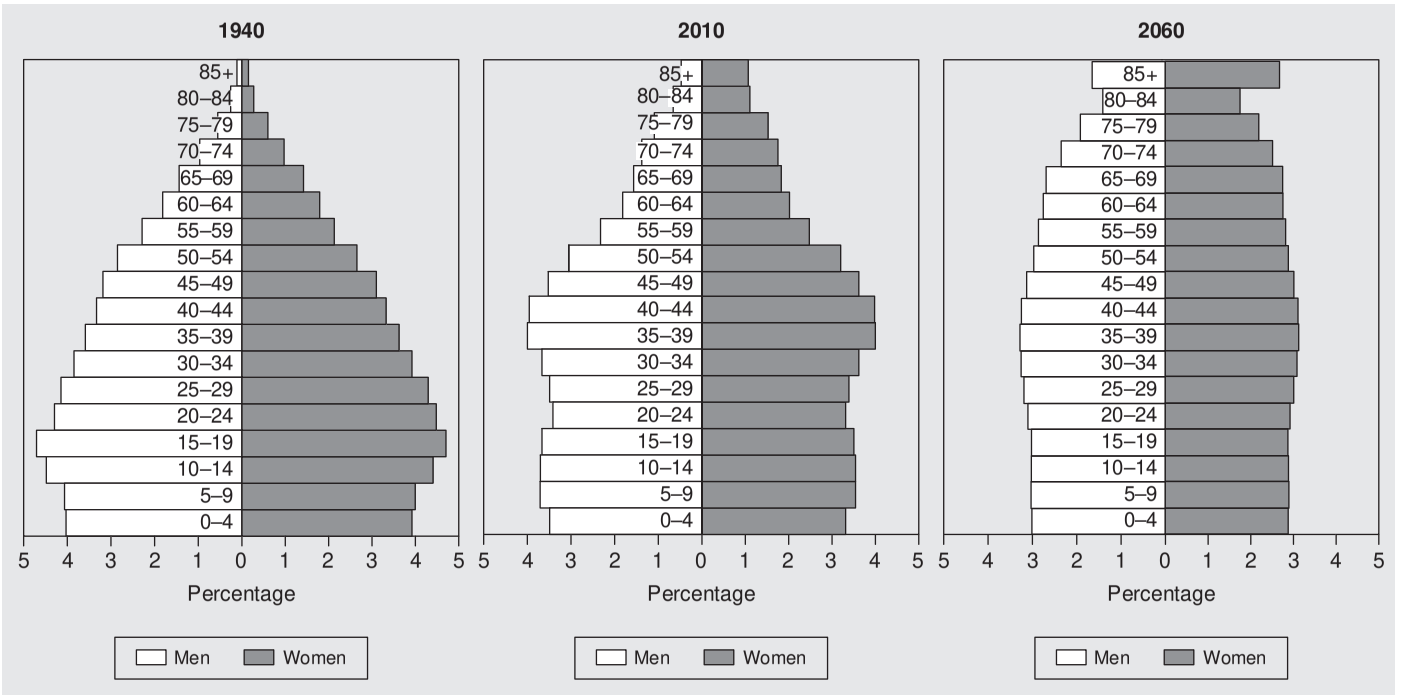
Social structure can influence what jobs are available, but it can also affect who is available to perform that work. A full appreciation of the challenges and opportunities present in the new economy requires consideration of demography and how the composition of a society affects

the placement of workers into jobs and the distribution of opportunities to prepare for and obtain work (Farnesworth-Riche 2006). The paid labor force is substantially different today than it was in the mid-twentieth century or earlier. It contains a far higher percentage of women workers, and its racial and ethnic makeup is also different. We devote two chapters of this book specifically to the intersecting concerns of gender (Chapter 6) and race and ethnicity (Chapter 7); here we introduce the importance of demographic forces by considering how age structures affect the availability of jobs, the availability of workers, the need to work, and the returns received from work.

The U.S. labor force, along with those of many other developed societies, is becoming older. Americans today can expect to live twelve years longer than could those alive in 1940 and twenty-six years longer than those who were alive in 1900.[5] Workers are living longer, and they are healthier when they reach ages that used to be considered "old." This presents new opportunities and new challenges to American workers and their employers. Consider, for example, retirement. Should workers continue to stop working at sixty-five? Why? If people are living longer and staying healthy longer, perhaps work careers should be lengthened. However, older workers generally do not want jobs that demand heavy schedules (Moen 2007). More common is the desire to enter into second or third careers and to pursue work situations that focus less on earning money (although for many that remains important) and more on satisfying creative impulses or making a difference in the lives of others. Unfortunately, most employers do not offer "bridge jobs" that accommodate the possibility of the types of scaled-back employment that fit the skills and interests of these workers (Hutchens and Grace-Martin 2006, Sweet 2014).

The changing age structure of the workforce presents challenges to society as a whole, not just to employers. Exhibit 1.8 shows how the age structure of the United States has changed from 1940 to 2010 and how it is expected to change by 2060. Note that in 1940 the age structure of the United States resembled a pyramid, with most of the population in the younger age groups, with a steady attrition as one approached old age. Only a relatively small group lived beyond age seventy. In contrast, in 2010 the age pyramid looked more like a skyscraper, albeit with a bulge in the middle. This bulge is the baby boom generation, a birth cohort that is steadily aging its way into retirement years. A key structural question concerns how an aging society will provide economic support for the growing numbers of older people. Will they be required to work? Or will society continue to provide postemployment pensions for them? And, if the latter, how will that expense be financed? One can observe that this will be an especially big concern by the time the United States reaches 2060, because at that point 22% of the population will be over age sixty-five (triple the percentage that existed in 1940). But, in comparison to many

Exhibit 1.8 Age Distributions and Predicted Distribution in the United States: 1940–2060



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

other countries, the United States actually is in a relatively favorable position in respect to aging. For example, the Statistics Bureau of Japan (2012) estimated that by 2060, 40% of that country's population will be over age sixty-five. Again, note that while this demographic composition constitutes a structural concern, its origins are linked to both culture and agency. For example, Japan is far less accepting of immigrants than the United States; immigrants tend to be young, so Japan's approach to immigration exacerbates the consequences of native-born families' having fewer children.

An aging population creates a pressure point because of the dependency of those outside of the labor force (the young and the old) on those in the labor force. Consider that the Social Security system, the most important source of retirement income for many Americans, is funded through taxes on currently employed workers. Those taxes become part of the general pool of Social Security revenue, which provides pensions to those who have retired. Some policy makers are concerned that if the pool of retired workers becomes larger and the pool of employed workers becomes smaller, the revenues available to fund the system will be squeezed (Weller and Wolff 2005). There is much controversy about whether this should be called a "crisis," but there is general agreement that ways need to be found to ensure that adequate revenues will be available for the growing population of retired workers.

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and race affect virtually all aspects of the economy and workplace. Demographics play a role at the organizational level, as the experiences of ethnic minorities and women are commonly shaped by their scarcity at the top levels of organizational hierarchies. They are critically important at the community level, as neighborhoods that lack job opportunities hinder the socialization of children into the types of workers needed in the new economy. The neighborhood that Mike grew up in exerted a powerful influence on his career decisions. We return to the critical issues of aging, gender, race, education, and immigration throughout this book.

Agency and Careers

Our last observation in this chapter, and a theme that runs throughout our analysis in this book, is that agency matters. All of the workers we considered made choices. Mike had a child at a young age and dropped out of high school, Meg elected to have three children and to pursue a high-powered career, Tammy took the initiative to return to school, Emily keeps her eyes and ears open for new work, Rain chose to move from his village to the United States, and Kavita applied to work in a call center even against her family's wishes. These observations highlight the ways in

which people direct their life courses and how access to different resources and constraints shapes how lives are constructed over time (Elder 1998, Moen 2001, Sweet and Moen 2006). The life course perspective is essential to understanding the contours of the new economy because it focuses on careers—the patterns of entry, exit, and movement between jobs. People do not just have careers—they forge them.

Sociologists are often accused of arguing that people are simply "pawns" or "cultural dopes" of the larger social structural and cultural contexts in which their lives are lived. The depiction of individuals as victims of external forces ignores the capacity of individuals to direct their own lives and those of others (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Garfinkel 1967). However, the effective application of agency depends on resources. People with unlimited resources at their disposal are in a far better position to design their own lives than are those who have few resources. An important consideration is whether the new economy advances agentic capacity or undermines it. On the one hand, the new economy may be creating a context that is expanding the control individuals have to direct their life courses, in essence making lives less scripted than in the old economy (MacMillan 2005). Many old structural barriers have been removed (such as segregation laws) and so have the cultural barriers that funneled women and ethnic minorities into restricted ranges of occupations. Before the enactment of civil rights legislation and the women's movement, the prospects that women and racial/ethnic minorities like Barack Obama, Sheryl Sandberg, Hillary Clinton, or Sonia Sotomayor could move into positions of power were slim to nil. At the same time, each can rightfully claim that their successes should be attributed to agency, as their achievements would not have happened without the combination of incredible talent and incredible hard work. Today, one can quickly generate a sizable list of minority group members and women who have moved into professions from which they once had been entirely absent. And some have gone so far as to argue that personal effort can trump disadvantages imposed by factors such as race and gender. However, as we discuss in detail throughout this book, ample evidence indicates that women and minorities are at a distinct disadvantage in securing many types of jobs (Grusky and Charles 2004, Reskin, McBrier, and Kmec 1999). And beyond disadvantages created by social divisions, evidence indicates that more and more workers are in precarious jobs, undermining their control and the capacity to plan their lives (Kalleberg 2013a). The extent to which the new economy is fundamentally altering the possibilities for people to shape their own biographies is one of the central questions posed in this book.

Numerous ethnographic studies reveal that workers are not simply passive recipients of culture and structure; they use personal initiative to

influence how their jobs are performed and the returns they receive from work (Darrah 2006, Richardson 2006, Roy 1955, Tulin 1984). To illustrate agency at work, consider Michael Burawoy's (1979) observations of production workers in the machining industry. These workers' jobs were regulated by quotas, wherein they had to make a specified number of parts to earn their base pay. But when they surpassed those quotas, they could "make out" and earn additional money. Quotas constituted a social structure, operating with explicit rules that were rigged by management to increase productivity. However, Burawoy observed that the machinists invented a variety of tricks to game this system. For example, they kept quiet about the easy jobs in which quotas were underestimated and complained incessantly about the impossibility of meeting quotas on virtually all other jobs. They bribed supervisors to get the easiest jobs and curried favor with coworkers to provide the stock needed to get their jobs rolling. When given an easy quota, workers overproduced and then hid their "kitties" that they turned in for extra compensation at a later date. In sum, these machinists showed that when workers are confronted by cultural and structural arrangements, they also engage in strategic action to influence how these arrangements affect their lives. Underpinning much of the research on agency is the question of equity and how it is socially negotiated. One wonders whether, if the economy has changed significantly, the strategies workers use to assert their will have changed as well.

Finally, it should be added that agency also operates at a collective level. Workers make efforts to carve out work lives for themselves, but they also collaborate to reshape the contours of work and create more satisfactory work opportunities for others. An obvious example is that workers band together in organizations such as unions or professional associations that use the strength of numbers to press for needed changes. Union publicity materials that describe unions as the "people who brought you the weekend" remind us that collective action obtained the taken-for-granted days off workers now enjoy. Similarly, the professional associations formed by doctors, lawyers, and others help protect those workers from competition, define what are acceptable (and unacceptable) professional practices, and generally shape the conditions under which those types of jobs are performed. Throughout this book, and particularly in the concluding chapter, we examine how collective action has shaped workplaces in the past and how it might do so in the future. Is the new economy making certain forms of collective action by workers obsolete? Is it creating openings and needs for new kinds of collective action? What are the key issues around which workers band together to effect change? Ultimately, if the workings of the new economy are to be improved, it will require the application of agency.

Conclusion

In this first chapter, we focused on the ways that sociological perspectives reshape the consideration of work. Our goal was simply to highlight the observation that a new economy does exist and that understanding it requires that we examine changes in culture and social structure, as well as consider how individuals and groups respond to those changes (agency). Although work is commonly considered a means to obtain a paycheck, we argue that it is much more than that. The design of work corresponds with cultural templates that guide workers to their jobs and script social roles. Workers live within social structures that allocate opportunities and construct barriers that block access to meaningful employment. And within these contexts, workers have responded both individually and collectively to manage their responsibilities and reshape society.

The stresses experienced by workers like Meg, Tammy, Emily, Rain, Kavita, and Mike are probably familiar to readers of this book. Because of the instability of jobs, changing opportunity structures, the challenges of meshing work with family, and the challenges of finding good work, many workers find themselves struggling in the new economy. One of the great contributions of sociology is its capacity to reframe these types of personal problems as being public issues (Mills 1959). In the chapters that follow, we consider the extent to which work opportunities are changing, as well as the impact these changes have on lives on and off the job. Our focus, throughout, is on identifying stress points, opportunity gaps, the ways in which workers adapt to these strains, and what can be done to close the chasms that separate workers from fulfilling jobs and reasonable conditions of employment.

NOTES

1 Of course, these are not the only phrases used. Others use the term *Fordism* to describe the old economy, and depending on the political slant of the analysis, *post-Fordism* and *flexible specialization* are used to describe the new economy, as are *knowledge economy, global economy,* and *postindustrial economy*.

2 It is worth emphasizing that describing hunting and gathering societies as "poor" is misleading. Though they lack the variety of possessions contemporary Americans enjoy, their members often live healthy and fulfilling lives.

3 Authors' analysis of the General Social Survey. Retrieved from the General Social Survey website at www3.norc.org/GSS+Website.

4 Approximately one-third of American families rent their homes, one-quarter live at or near the poverty level, and nearly one-half will experience divorce. These facts are seldom represented in television's portrayals of the "typical" American family.

5 American men now live, on average, to be seventy-six years old, and American women have a life expectancy of eighty-one years.

CHAPTER

2

New Products, New Ways of Working, and the New Economy

One of the most popular themes in discussions of work is the idea that recent changes in work constitute the equivalent of a second industrial revolution. Consider, for example, the impact computers have had on the ways jobs are performed and designed. Computers enable workers to correspond at great distances, telecommute from home, and access a wide array of information. These "smart machines" have absorbed many workers' jobs and replaced human hands with robotic pincers that move with exacting precision. Computers also have spawned new markets for software and hardware, creating new jobs requiring new skills. Their reach spans the world, enabling near-instantaneous transmission of information, as well as the coordination of complex trade relationships that link companies with one another in global webs. It is hard not to conclude that computers have sparked revolutionary changes—not only in what is being produced and how jobs are designed, but also in the geographic distribution of work. What impact do these types of changes have on current and future generations of workers?

The use of the concept of a "new economy" (or alternate terms such as *global economy*) is widely accepted as a shorthand way of saying that work today is remarkably different than it was in the recent past. But in this chapter, we open this assumption to debate. If there is a new economy, what are its distinguishing characteristics? We argue that jobs *have* changed in profound ways. There are new technologies, organizational designs, industries, and markets. The economy has become increasingly international. These changes have introduced the need to develop new skills to fit changing opportunity structures. But what is equally true is that many aspects of the "old economy," including the design of jobs to require limited skill, have either survived or been reproduced in new forms. After all, for every successful computer programmer who works at a company like Microsoft, one can find three poorly paid workers laboring on hamburger assembly lines at companies like McDonald's.[1] Understanding the new, the

old, and the old in the new is the key to understanding the diverse needs and experiences of today's workforce.

In this chapter, we consider some of the major changes said to characterize work in the new economy, including the decline of mass production and manufacturing work, new skill requirements, the impact of new technologies, the emergence of new cultures of control, the gradual decline of organized labor, the rise of flexible work arrangements, and globalization. In each case, we argue that there have been significant changes but also that there are persistent features that reflect the perpetuation of the old economy within the new.

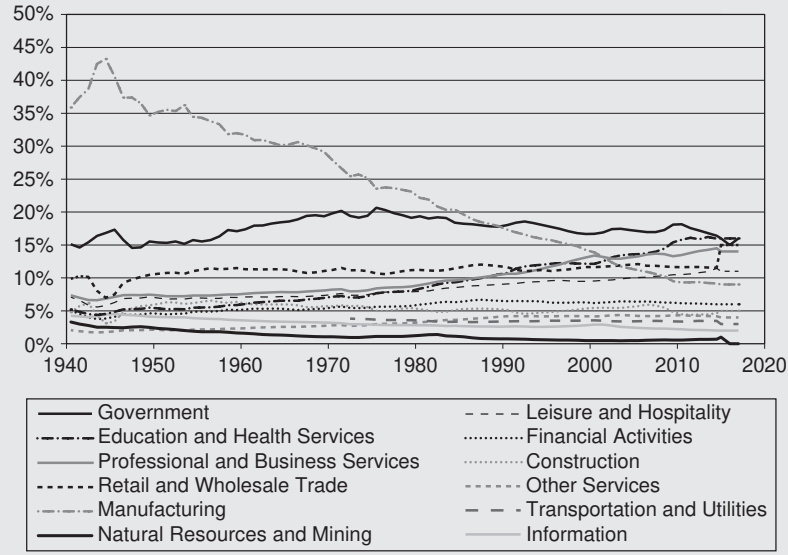
A Postindustrial Society?

One of the earliest forecasts of an emergent new economy came from sociologist Daniel Bell (1973), who argued in the early 1970s that America was entering a "postindustrial" era, in which the manufacturing-centered economy of the past was being replaced by an economy directed toward the provision of services. Bell was among the first to note something that subsequently became obvious to most Americans, particularly those located in the so-called rust belt of the industrial Midwest—employment opportunities had shifted away from manufacturing to other sectors of the economy.

Exhibit 2.1 shows that in 1940 the number of employees working in the manufacturing sector in America was more than double that in any other sector of the economy, accounting for over one-third of all employment. Until 1989, the manufacturing sector remained the largest employment sector. But as the population of the United States grew during the latter part of the twentieth century, manufacturing employment did not. Today, instead of employing one in three workers, as it did in the mid-twentieth century, manufacturing enterprises employ fewer than one in ten workers.

There are various explanations for this trend. Some argue that nearly all low-skill, low-wage manufacturing work is being funneled to developing economies, while the advanced economy of the United States focuses on knowledge work and services (Fröbel, Heinrichs, and Kreye 1982). However, it is also possible to argue that this simply reflects something "old"—the continued effort of employers to find the least expensive ways to produce goods (Cowie 2001). From this point of view, manufacturing remains central to the economy; however, it now takes place on a global scale, rather than on a national one. Yet another interpretation emphasizes that the United States is unusual—the decline of manufacturing employment is more pronounced here than elsewhere. Rather than

Exhibit 2.1 Trends in Employment in Twelve Major Sectors: United States, 1940–2017



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

reflecting a long-term, general trend away from manufacturing, the U.S. pattern may reflect a choice by American employers to seek low-wage sites for manufacturing rather than invest more heavily in improving techniques at home (Appelbaum and Batt 1992). It may also reflect domestic economic policy choices favoring a strong U.S. dollar and the U.S. government's tolerance of policies in countries such as China, which keep their currencies artificially low. Such policies hurt U.S. manufacturing exports and make imported goods cheaper, resulting in stagnant or declining manufacturing employment in the United States (Scott 2015). All of these processes have played a role in shaping opportunity in the new economy.

The number of manufacturing jobs has declined in the United States and other economically advanced countries, but should we conclude that we are truly postindustrial? In the new economy, manufacturing enterprises continue to employ more than 12 million American workers. This may be an underestimate, as many industrial employers make increasing use of temporary workers, many of whom are not counted as industrial workers in government statistics. Although manufacturing employs a smaller percentage of Americans than it once did, it remains a major force in the

economy and creates demand for the products and services generated in other parts of the economy (Hatton 2011, Scott 2015). It is not at all clear that manufacturing employment is in an inevitable long-term decline to the point where it will disappear entirely. Rather, it remains an important but less dominant part of what is now a more diversified economy. It is also important to recognize that while the United States might view trends as "losses," other countries, particularly those in the global south, view the movement of manufacturing jobs as "gains," resulting in substantial economic improvements in those societies (Pandian 2017).

The fact that manufacturing opportunities have stagnated and declined in the United States does not mean that manufacturing jobs will entirely disappear. Nor does it mean that the *ways of working* that developed in the old economy are on a path to disappearing as a result. The practices of the old industrial economy are woven into the design of many jobs central to the new economy.

The End of Mass Production?

It is generally agreed that economic activity in the old economy centered on the production of manufactured goods (e.g., automobiles, steel, chemicals, appliances) in large quantities for mass markets. The Ford Model T is the classic example of what the American manufacturing economy produced—an affordable and highly standardized car, mass-produced by American workers in a central factory location (Chandler 1990). Coordinating hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of workers at a single location meant that employers such as Henry Ford had to develop bureaucratic management systems, complete with rigid job definitions, rules of conduct, and productivity expectations (Edwards 1979).

The dominant managerial approach of the time was to follow the practices of scientific management, which encouraged the replacement of skilled workers with cheaper, more dispensable low-skill workers, while removing discretion from the shop floor and placing it in the hands of management (Braverman 1974). Finding ways to enhance productivity through job simplification, replacing people with technology, and improving managerial control over what was happening in the workplace were all central to this approach. The assembly line epitomized this philosophy, a combination of technology and organization that harnessed workers to labor at repetitive, simple tasks. To appreciate how this affected the performance of work, consider the difference between making automobiles using highly skilled workers (as many of the first automobiles were made) and the assembly line methods pioneered by Henry Ford. Instead of relying on a skilled (and hard to replace) craft worker who controlled how

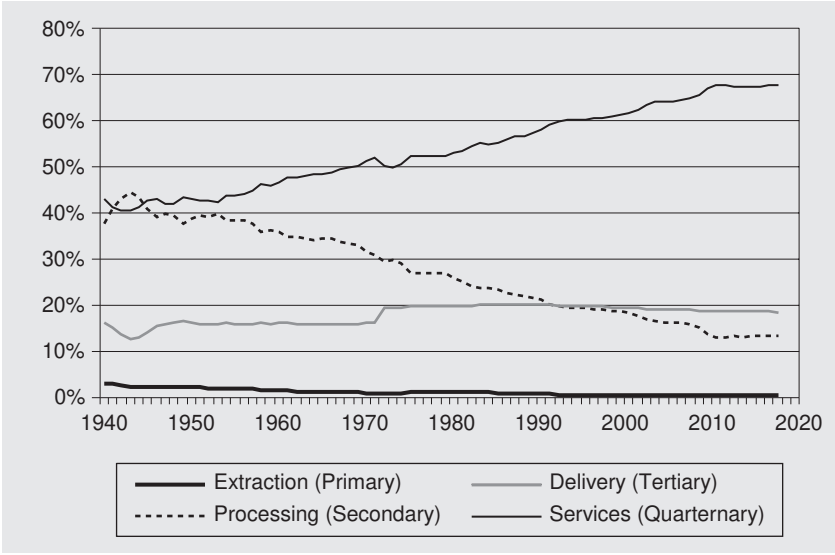
the work was done, the assembly line created jobs that required very little training, involved relatively simple repetitive operations, and dictated to the worker how the job should be performed. Perhaps most importantly, the worker lost control over the pace of work, as the assembly line pushed work forward at a speed primarily determined by management. The result was the creation of legions of deskilled jobs, the dissolution of many craft skills, and a decline in the worker's ability to control the conditions and rewards of work.

This approach was enormously successful and formed the basis for the growth of the giant American manufacturing enterprises (e.g., Ford, General Motors, U.S. Steel) that dominated the American economic landscape and symbolized American economic power worldwide. This approach also fostered distrust and hostility between workers and their bosses, who developed an "us versus them" mentality, in which each side saw the other as having interests fundamentally opposed to its own. Thus, as managers tried various tricks to speed up work, those laboring on the front lines developed alternate approaches to try to restrict production (Burawoy 1979, Edwards 1979).

If manufacturing is in decline, is mass production? To address this question, consider work as it is performed in different "megasectors"—broad groupings of different types of economic activity. Each of these sectors makes a distinct contribution to the economy—in extracting resources, in processing resources, in delivering goods, and in providing services.[2] The trends for employment in these sectors are represented in Exhibit 2.2, which shows the growing importance of service sector work, as well as the proportions of the labor force employed in other industries that seem (on the surface) to have helped society progress beyond mass production. However, consideration of many of the jobs within each of these sectors highlights how the typical strategies for organizing work in the manufacturing-based economy have been exported to other sectors and shape how work is performed outside manufacturing.

For most of human existence, most workers engaged in the extraction of raw materials—working in the areas of farming, fishing, forestry, or mining. But by the early twentieth century, these workers composed only a relatively small segment of the U.S. workforce. Those few who remain on farms today perform work that bears little resemblance to the pastoral ideals of the family farm. Rather, most farming occurs as part of agribusiness, in which the methods of mass production have been applied to the raising of livestock, poultry, and produce (Schlosser 2005). The extension of mass production into farm work has required some farmers to learn to use advanced technologies to manage production. However, it also has contributed to the creation of a divided opportunity structure that limits prospects for workers (such as migrant farm laborers) to grow and advance. Mining remains an intensely physical activity. Underground mining uses

Exhibit 2.2 Trends in Employment in Megasectors: United States, 1940–2017



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

single-purpose machinery (such as "continuous miners") to grind the earth and place ore on conveyors. These technologies operate as assembly lines that run in reverse. Other forms of mining, such as strip mining (or even mountaintop removal, in which whole mountains are demolished and the ore removed in the process), rely on heavy equipment and systematic processing of materials and operate on a scale that could only be characterized as "mass" production. All newer mining technologies require the application of greater skills than the older manual operations, but they also substitute massive equipment and sophisticated technology for human labor. This is one enduring persistent feature of the old economy, the drive to improve productivity by replacing labor through the use of complex technologies and managerial innovations. It also operates on the basis of massive scale implementation, indicating that mass production is not in decline.

The processing megasector focuses on the refinement of raw materials into finished goods, the intent of manufacturing and construction enterprises. As Exhibit 2.2 shows, processing work has declined significantly in the United States, which seems to support the "end of mass production" thesis. Yet, if we look at work within these sectors, mass production techniques have not been eliminated. It is true that there have been significant changes