



# Educational Inequality in the United States:

## The Importance of Social Class

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# Growing inequality by income and wealth

- USA is unequal
- \*more than in earlier decades

Highest income tax rate:

91% in 1962

Dropped after 1980, today 37%



# Distribution of Family Wealth 1963-2016 USA

	1963	1983	2016
Top 1% in wealth	\$1.5 million (2016 \$)	\$3.3 million	\$ 10 million
50% in wealth	\$ 41,000	\$ 82,700	\$ 97,300
Bottom 10% in wealth	\$ 19	\$ 724	\$ 950

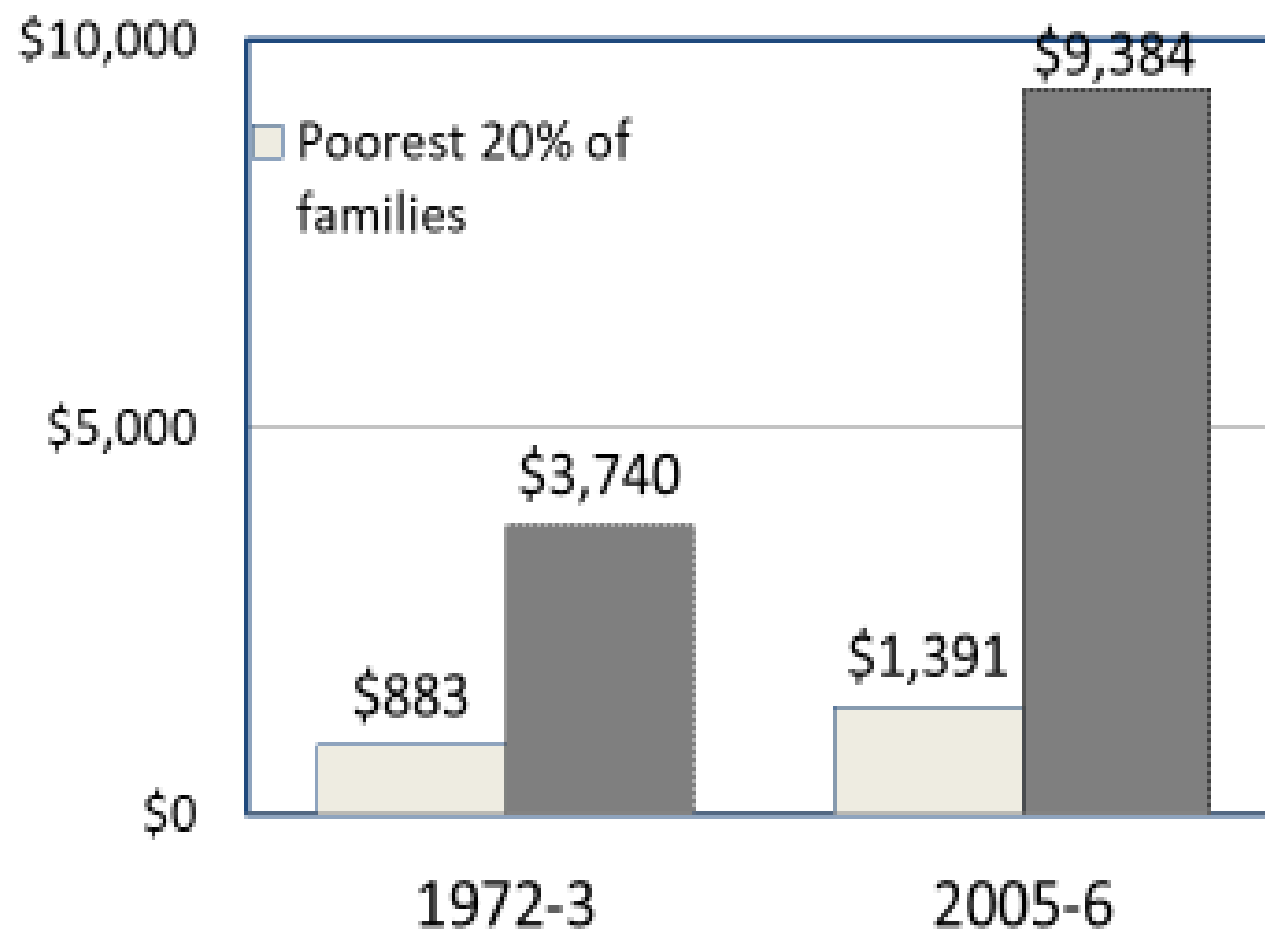
# RESTORING OPPORTUNITY

The Crisis of Inequality and the Challenge for American Education



GREG J. DUNCAN  
RICHARD J. MURNANE

## Enrichment expenditures on children



Authors' calculations based on data from the Consumer Expenditure Surveys. Amounts are in 2012\$.

# Colin Crouch, post-democracy video

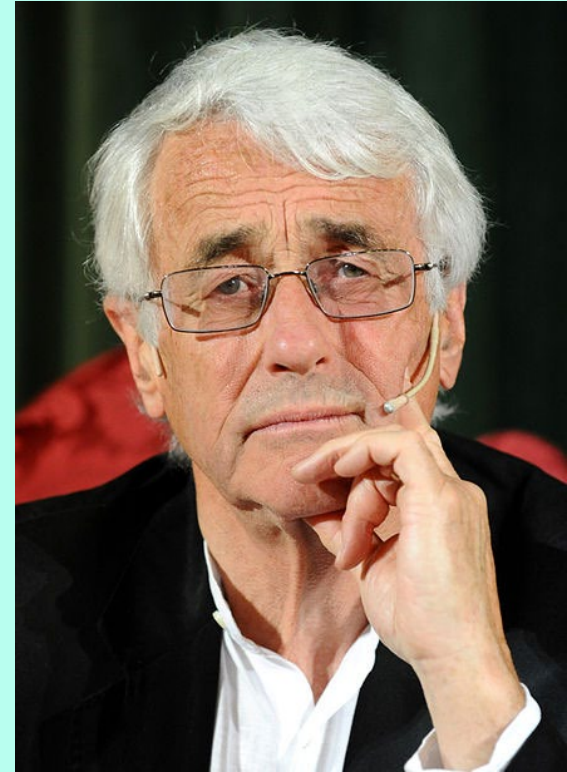
Challenges facing our democratic institutions

lack of vigorous democratic exchange

Generalist education can play a key role in revitalization

Education, valuable

But, in a context of inequality, education is also challenging  
reinforces class divisions in key ways



# Physical reminders of social inequality on planes => airplane rage incidents



Study of one airline and “air rage” incidents  
And physical structure of planes

Katherine A. DeCellesa and Michael I. Norton,  
2016, Proceedings of National Academy of  
Sciences (PNAS)



Presence of first class more associated with  
disruptive behavior on planes

“class-based seating” is “an increasingly large %

“air rage” is “dangerous antisocial behaviors on planes”

\*incidents in economy seating are 3.84 times higher  
when first class is present versus absent

\*lower with mid-plane boarding

# High rates of inequality are harmful

- Harmful in civic participation
- Harmful for trust
- => schools play a key role
- Known that schools reaffirm and legitimize inequality

# Overview of talk: class-based cultural knowledge shapes schooling

- Part I: Language use
- Part II: Intervention in schools by parents
- Part III: first-generation college students

=>forms of cultural knowledge, cultural resources which help students comply with “neutral” standards

- Working-class students’ resentment towards middle-class

# Inequality: Conceptual Tool: Cultural Capital

- The concept of “capital” has enabled us to view culture as a resource which can yield profits
  - ▣ provides access to scarce rewards
  - ▣ is subject to monopolization
  - ▣ under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next
- Cultural knowledge not sufficiently developed in literature

# Part 1: Language skills

a form of cultural training

Long history of class differences in speech

Provides advantages in schooling



Language Use in the Home and at school

Middle class families:

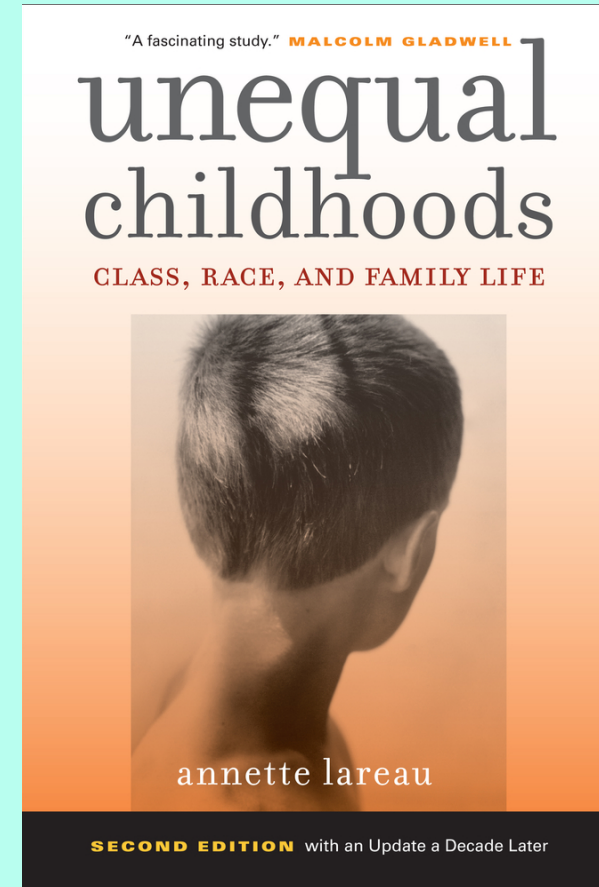
Reasoning

Teach pre-schoolers word sounds,  
letters

Working-class and Poor Families:

Directives

Leave teaching to school



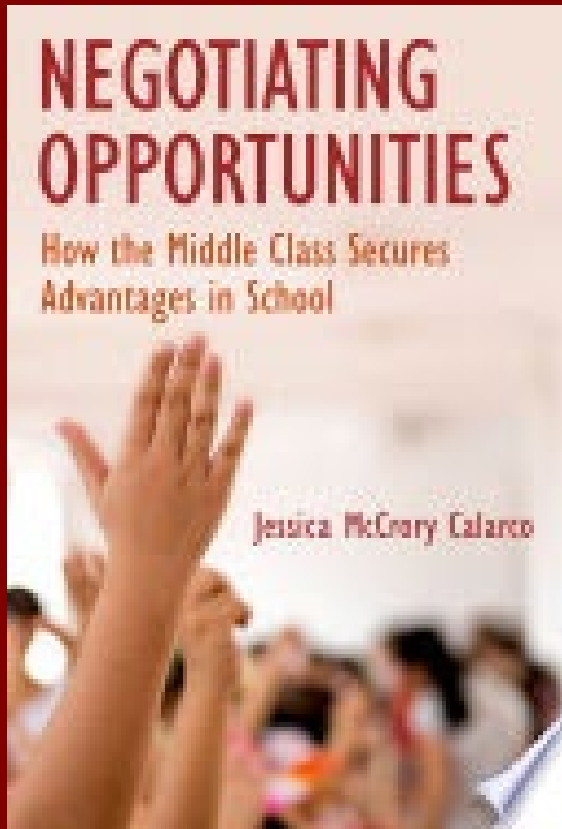


# Averages for measures of parent and child language

Measures and Scores	Professional		Poor	
	Parent	Child	Parent	Child
Pretest score	41		14	
IQ score at age 3		117		79
Recorded vocab size	2176	1116	974	525
Average utterances per hour	487	310	176	168

# Class and help-seeking

- Jessica Calarco: observed kids in 3, 4, 5, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
Middle-class children coached by  
parents directly  
Told to ask for help  
Enacted this in the classroom



Working-class children coached not to  
bother the teacher  
more independent

# Rules of the game unclear: proactive learners

- Teachers expected students to take responsibility for their confusion and ask questions
- Not always completely clear when and how children should ask
- Teachers say: “Let me know if you get stuck” but still ambiguous

# Class differences

- Middle-class students INITIATED requests for help more often
- Middle-class tactics: calling out, getting up
- Working-class: hanging back, waiting
- Middle-class kids gained teachers' assistance, attention, and accommodation for their requests

# Working-class (WC) kids: reticent/passive

- Zach
- Ashley

“While working-class children ...were often loud and playful with friends during free periods, when asking for help, they generally approached their teachers slowly, spoke in quiet or mumbled voices, and avoided direct eye-contact. “

# Classrooms are a zero-sum situation: profits to MC

“Because teachers expected students to seek help when they were struggling, and because they legitimated these efforts (providing students the help that they sought), middle-class students’ help-seeking propensities became a form of cultural capital. Using this cultural capital allowed middle-class students to generate meaningful profits in the classroom, such as completing work more quickly and correctly and deepening their understanding of key concepts.” *Jessica Calaro*

# 4 minute delay for Shannon, Owen moves ahead

- During a Social Studies test in Mr. Potter's class, for example, Shannon, a shy but friendly working-class girl, raised her hand timidly to ask a question. Mr. Potter, however, was standing at the other side of the room, eating an orange, and could not see Shannon's raised hand. As Shannon sat with her hand raised, Owen (a middle-class child) jumped up, grabbed his test, and went directly to Mr. Potter to ask for help.
- Owen slides out of his chair at the back of the room....grabs his test and scurries up toward Mr. Potter.....Owen anxiously asks him to explain the directions for the essay question on the test. Mr. Potter smiles reassuringly and leans down to explain in a low but pleasant whisper.

Shannon, meanwhile, continued to sit with her hand raised halfway. She occasionally glanced toward Mr. Potter, but did not get up. Four minutes later, when Mr. Potter went to throw away his orange peel, he finally noticed Shannon's hand and went over to help.

# WC Kids' Frustration with MC Kids

**Amelia (WC):** “Sometimes when I’m standing in line, there would be a person right in front of me, talking to him, and I’d be right behind them, and then someone else needs help, and they come up like, this is me, standing right here, and they would just come like this [in front of me]. Because kids just think, like, there could be a pretty long line, they’ll just go up to him, and since he’s not really paying attention to the line, he wouldn’t know. And then once he’s [the Teacher is] done talking to that [first] person, he looks over at them [the person who cut], and starts talking. **And I’m thinking: “Hey, I was here first.” And that really bothers me. Because, like, you were waiting there longer. You should get talked to first.”**

# Children are not passive

- Children try to gain access to resources that matter to them
  - \*Teachers' attention
  - \*teachers' help on curriculum
  - \*teachers' comfort
- Zero-sum game
- Middle-class kids more dominant
- Working-class kids are frustrated, at times angry

## Part 2: Parents' intervention in school

- Confusion reigned for working-class and poor parents
- Frustrated, and angry at times
- \*felt system was against them

# Institutions, Information, and Interventions: social class matters

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- Parents want children to succeed
- Turn over responsibility to those with expertise
- Much of the information is hard to acquire

# Social class in transition to adulthood: activation of cultural resources

- All parents want children to succeed
- But: class mattered in the strategies parents adopted
  - ▣ => All parents intervened with children
  - ▣ => Middle-class parents also worked with institutions directly and taught their children about how to work with institutions
  - ▣ These strategies had different levels of *profit*
  - ▣ *Knowledge of institutions was key*

# Middle-class parents “leave no stone unturned”

- School selection
- Classes, interactions with teachers
- High school course selection
- Homework
- SAT preparation
- Athletic progress (teams, playing time)
- College selection
- College major
- Post-college plans

# Follow-Up Study, 2003-2005: Youth 19 or 20 Years Old

- Reached all 12 families
- 2-hour tape-recorded interviews
  - target “child,” mother and father, one sibling
  - a few people declined (i.e., parents of Alex Williams)
- Family members paid an honorarium
- Most youth remembered the study but have only a hazy memory of specific events

# 2014: Kept in Touch with some families; [proposed] follow-up with some families

- In-depth interviews [proposed] with 4 families:

Honorarium of \$100 for interview (and baby gifts)

Interview with spouses and, in some cases, other family members

- Social media contacts with some families
- Annual holiday cards



# Tara Carroll:

Raised by deeply religious,  
low-income grandmother in  
housing project

Phone answering:

“God is good, Hello?”

Mother drug problem

Dad: prison

Older brother: 2 years old

2 years behind grade level  
in 4<sup>th</sup> grade

Tara Carroll:

College application process:

Applied to 7 colleges such as:

Dickinson, Goucher, Haverford

University of Maryland

*Rejected everywhere*

Attended Community College one semester

Lareau, Annette and Elliot Weininger. “Concerted Cultivation Continues: Class, Culture, and Child Rearing.” Pp. 118-151 In *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (edited by A. Lareau and D. Conley). Russell Sage. 2008.

Tara Carroll:

Mother: keen supporter re college choice:

“Go to suburbs!”

“Saw the rejection letters”

“hurtful”

Not a co-participant

Tara on her own (talked to one aunt)

Family gave money for anatomy book

Stacey Marshall,  
African-American middle-class girl  
Mothers has an MA, Dad has a BA

Many organized activities  
when 10  
Loved gymnastics

At 10 mother got her into  
gifted program  
Even though she didn't qualify



# In college, mom advised her: told her to go to see her adviser

- She emailed me first and then she called me one night at eleven o'clock. And it was like, "Well, I can take the cinema course." I said, "Stacey." [Laughs] I said, "Do you know anything about this? Do they even give you a description?" [She said,] "Welllllll, no, not really." But she...was on the computer; she could see that there were seats in this class; the time was right. I said, "Sometimes you can be jumping out of the frying pan into the fire." This course may have an interesting name but, one, it sounds like yeah, you'd be watching movies, but, two, you'll probably be writing about [them]. You have these other courses where you will be writing. You are telling me that you don't like to write..... [I said] "Go see your adviser."

# Stacey Marshall

Intensive participation in high school education and college process by parents, particularly mother

- \*summer science training

- \*high school courses

- \*frequent check-ins with h.s. educators

- \*guidance in course selection in college

- \*attended games, frequently presence

Stacey Marshall

After college, applied to an  
interdisciplinary Phd program

Not admitted to most elite programs,  
but accepted at a school similar to  
University of Iowa

Completed Phd in 2011 at age of 27

Got married, had a baby boy at 28,

Teaches in elite private school

# Educators expect parent involvement, but the working-class parents have a point

- Have many skills
  - But don't have an education College status hierarchy is a specialized body of knowledge
  - Requirements for entrance to colleges
  - The “fit” with a specific college
- => Informal cultural knowledge very helpful, schools presume it

# Part 3: Upwardly mobile college students: proud of independence angry at what don't have



# Rise of “first-generation” students in elite colleges

- University of Pennsylvania 11% (if income under \$66,000 then free except \$500 in fees)
- Princeton University 28% are first-generation students

First-generation: neither parent had a college degree

- \*In-depth interviews with 22 students in an elite “Ivy League” college
- \*2 hour interviews, paid \$30, names not use
- \*racially diverse sample white, African-American, Chinese-American

# Belonging:

## Difficulty connecting with people

- **Ileana**, white, from the South, high school star,
- parents both heroin addicts, raised by grandmom

*“no idea what a literature review was, “What the fuck are you talking about?”*

*“what’s grad school?”*

*“I am white trash. “I’m never going to be one of those people... even if I end up with the same degree, same job... I’m never going to be one of those people.”*

Angry: don't have cultural knowledge, other students' turn to their parents for help

- Managing college or internships: how do you prepare, how do you present yourself
- Some elite students' parents continually coach them
- First-generation kids feel “clueless”

They are proud of their autonomy, but resentful

# Black first-gen shocked at dependence of friends

“My black friends are all middle class....The first day, like move in day, my mom came with my uncle, they dropped the boxes and they left. The expectation was that I would unpack my room and organize myself which is fine. But then I saw everybody else’s parents were staying with them and unpacking their rooms for them. And I was so confused. Even at the end of the year, I packed up all my boxes, taped everything, packed it outside my room so that...we would just take the boxes and go. That was the expectation. But then my friends were like “Oh no,” their parents were going to help them...buy them the boxes when they come. I was like, “What do you mean?” I felt like I grew up to be so independent. I knew I could pack the boxes myself. Why couldn’t you just pack the boxes yourself? Why do your parents have to come here and do that for you?”

## First-gen, Black woman: Office hours

I've never been the type of person who, like, have questions, so like at the end of somebody presenting all of this information and they would be like, "Are there any questions? I'm not the type of person to be like, 'Yeah I want to know more about this.'" or kind of like, "No. The information you gave me, that's not all it is."

I would never, I'm not used to asking for help. I was just, I didn't know what office hours were supposed to do.

# Others got help from parents

- My one friend, ...all of freshman year, every time she wrote a paper, she would send it home to them [her parents] and they would edit it two three times and then she would pass.
- Then I have another friend who turned in a paper and it didn't have good grammar and she just got a C on it and she had to go into the professor's office hours, she had to talk to them, explain things, figure out how to convince this professor to let her write it again and then write it again while figuring out the grammatical skills that she clearly did not have. She just figured it out, turned it back in and got an A. When you are first gen, low-income, **it's either you figure it out or you go without it.**

# Within Racial Groups: Feeling estranged

- **Octavia**, African-American, Easton University
- Stepdad--manual labor; mom—depression
- Grew up in very low income neighborhood in city
- Applied to a social justice club: application (essay, long interview, orientation)

*“half of them are upper middle class black kids...*

*“You are trying to protect the marginalized, but you won’t even let me into the club?”*

*“It was just like I don’t even want to be around you people anymore because it’s just so much. But I still have to be here.”*

# First-gen student “jealous” of “roommate”

“I was a little jealous about was my roommate....[She said] "My dad is there to offer, emotional support," or, "My dad understands. My dad understands what failing means."

'Cause my parents only see college as a means of getting a degree and a job. They don't understand the complexities of being a college student.

Like, being able to make friends [or] being able to talk to people who are different than you.....much wealthier. Or, being able to talk to professors.... career, internship searching. All of that. [Internship] interviews. Writing a resume.

The things that are so basic but her parents can understand what that is. And they can say like, "Oh, do this before your interview," or, "Good luck," or being able to say, like, "Oh, oh, don't feel pressured to do well." Like, even tiny words like that.

I wish I could get that from my parents. But they don't understand these sorts of complexities.”

# Feeling Used

- **Ileana**, white, Easton University
- Describes self as white trash “littering” Easton’s campus

*“You think that’s great? What are you going to do for them?”*

*“Why am I suffering, so that your stats look good”*

# Crucial role of cultural skills in key life moments

- Lauren Rivera, “Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms.” *ASR*, 2012,
- *Cultural similarity*

An “investment banking director Max (white, male)

*One of my main criteria is what I call the “stranded in the airport test.” Would I want to be stuck in an airport in Minneapolis in a snowstorm with them? And if I’m on a business trip for two days and I have to have dinner with them, is it the kind of person I enjoy hanging with?”*

Summing up: Inequality Growing  
social institutions have “rules of the game”

a key form of class inequality: cultural resources

❖ pre-school: kids

❖ elementary education: parents

❖ college: first-generation students

=> Growing resentment and anger for excluded

# Policy implications

- Mentorship: one child at a time
- Lay bare the rules of the game:
  - ⇒ ask teachers to explain the obvious
  - ⇒ Explain the basics

Consider the role of schools in reproducing inequality in the relationship between education and democracy



Extra slides

# Fish out of water the upwardly mobile



Study of individuals who have been upwardly mobile

→ 2 hour Interviews with 30 white and African-American adults

→ parents had a high degree (or h.s. dropout) but they had an elite advanced degree (M.D., J.D., Ph.D, M.B.A)

*Sociological Forum*, 2018, Heather Curl, Annette Lareau, and Tina Wu

# Fish out of water the upwardly mobile

- Nick Nolan
- Surgeon: specialty in pediatrics
- Father: worked as a union house painter
- Mother: homemaker, then “lunch lady” at school
- Wanted to become a doctor
- Medical schools in US require an interview

# Fish out of water the upwardly mobile

- very strong test scores, grades, research experience
- “I think I interview poorly.”
- Was not accepted to his top choice; waitlisted at his undergrad Ivy League school similar to Columbia
- Had a work-study job in the ER, they “talked to some people”
- He was admitted to Columbia; now works there

# Resentment towards the privileged



Columbia students seemed helpless:

“kids came to school with brand new computers.... thousands of dollars spent on this machine.....[but] they couldn't take it out of the box, you know, they didn't know how to use it.”

BUT benefits: upwardly mobile “relates better” to patients

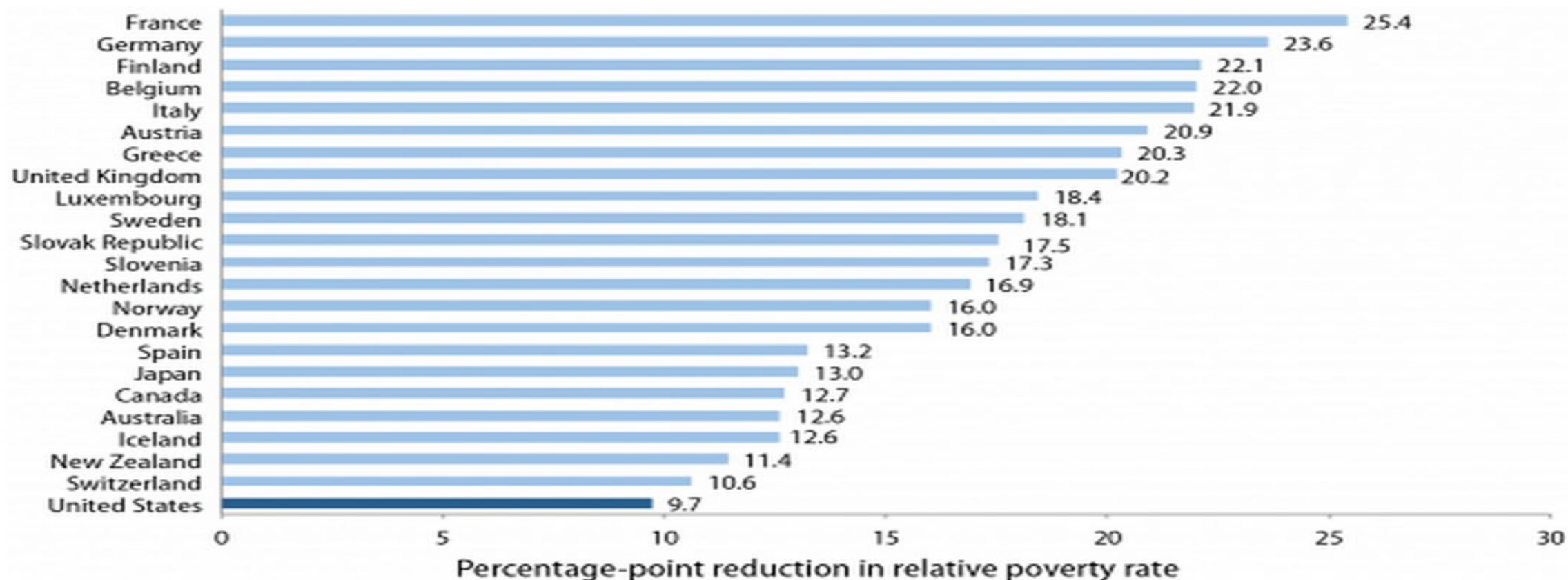
# Others report bewilderment:

- Holly Hunter White woman, late 30's, Lawyer,
- “triumph of opacity”
- “their/there”
- Embarrassed by her mother's clothes

“my mom would show up in college in this black....skin-tight cat-suit, and I would be mortified, because the other moms would be wearing appropriate clothes”

- But: seen as a snob

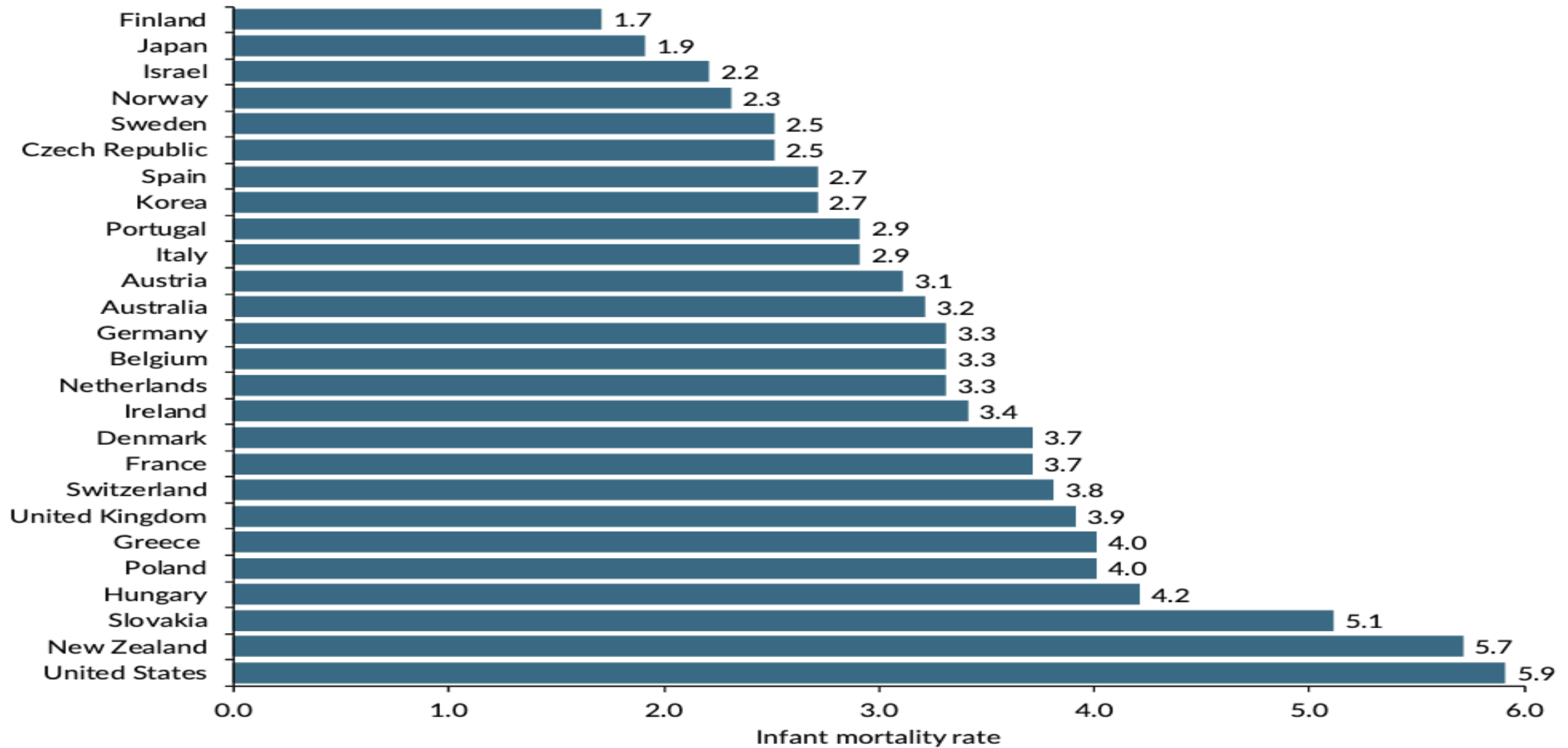
## Extent to which taxes and transfer programs reduce the relative poverty rate, selected OECD countries, late 2000s



Note: This figure plots the differences between each country's pre- and post-tax-and-transfer relative poverty rate, where relative poverty is the share of individuals with income below half of household-size-adjusted median income.

Source: Authors' analysis of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development *Stat Extracts* (data group labelled "late 2000s")

**Figure 1. Infants born in the United States are much more likely to die in the first year of life than those born in our peer nations.**

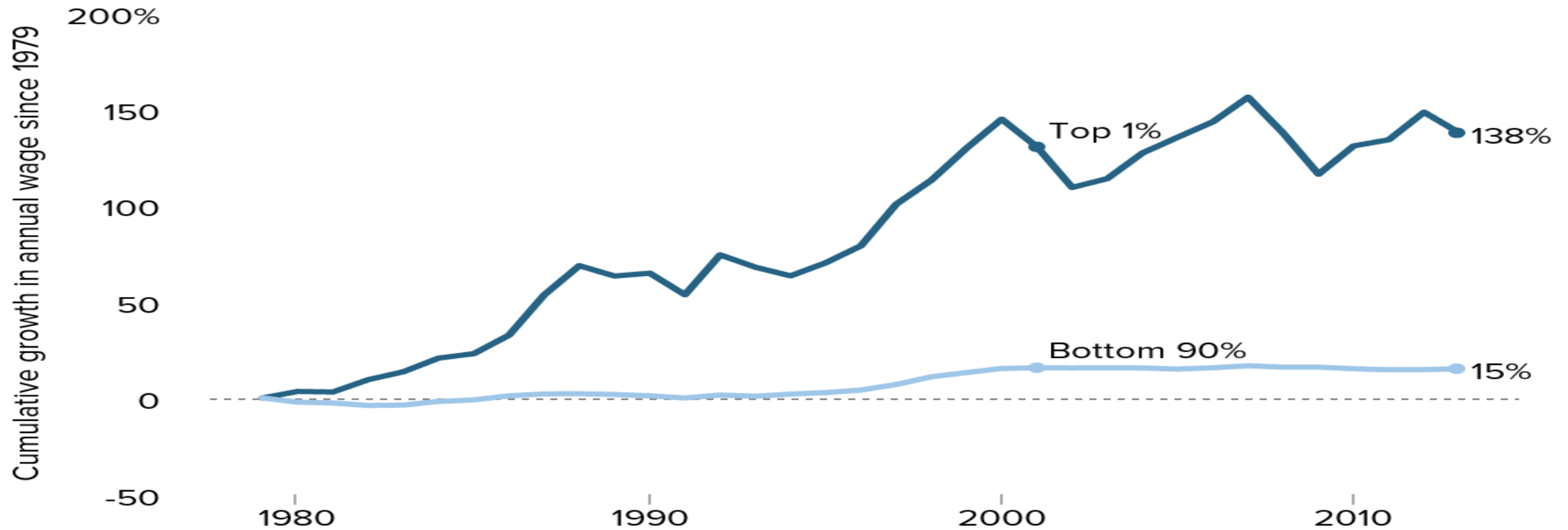


**Source:** Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) infant mortality rates (indicator) for select nations: 2015. doi: 10.1787/83dea506-en (Accessed on September 25, 2018).

**Note:** The New Zealand IMR is for 2014.

# When it comes to the pace of annual pay increases, the top 1% wage grew 138% since 1979, while wages for the bottom 90% grew 15%

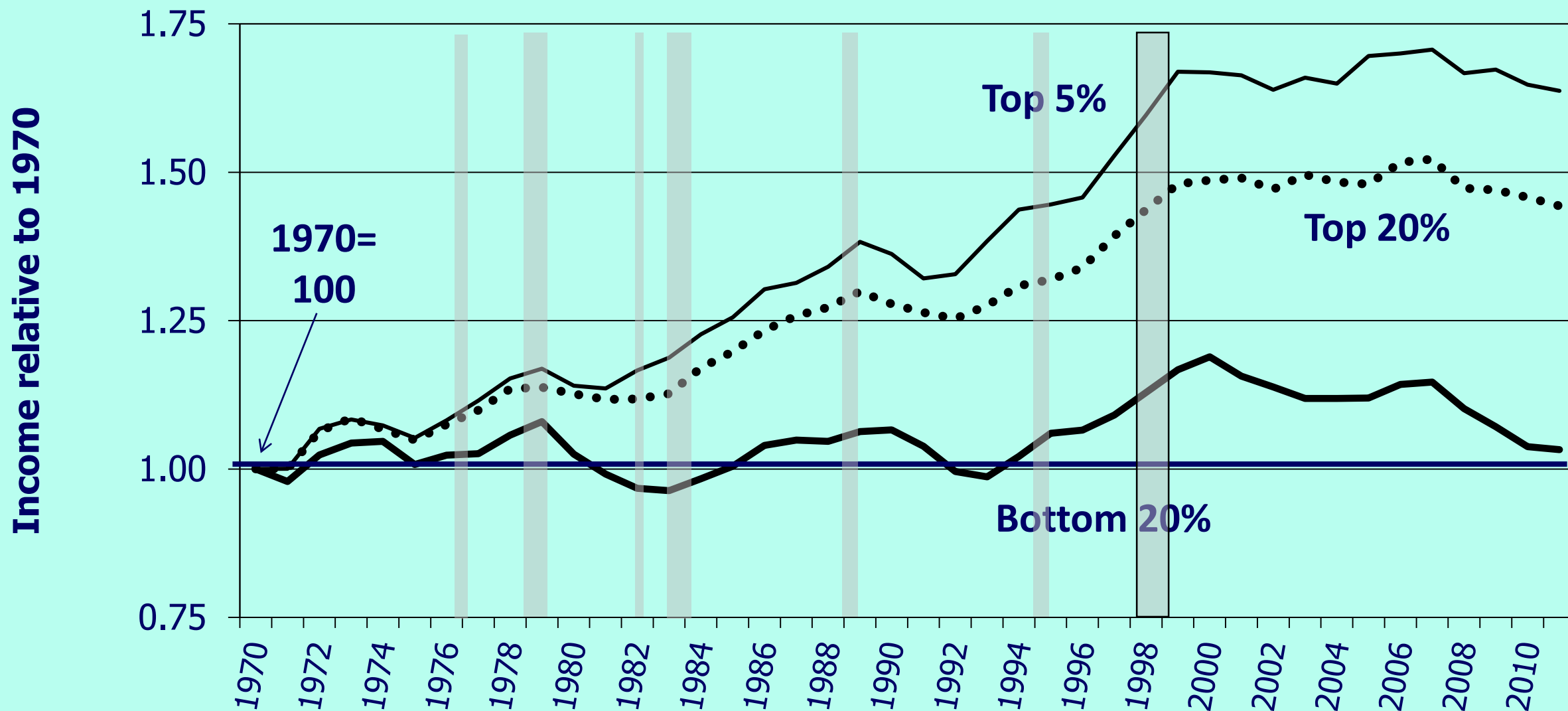
Cumulative change in real annual wages, by wage group, 1979–2013



**Source:** EPI analysis of data from Kopczuk, Saez, and Song (2010) and Social Security Administration wage statistics

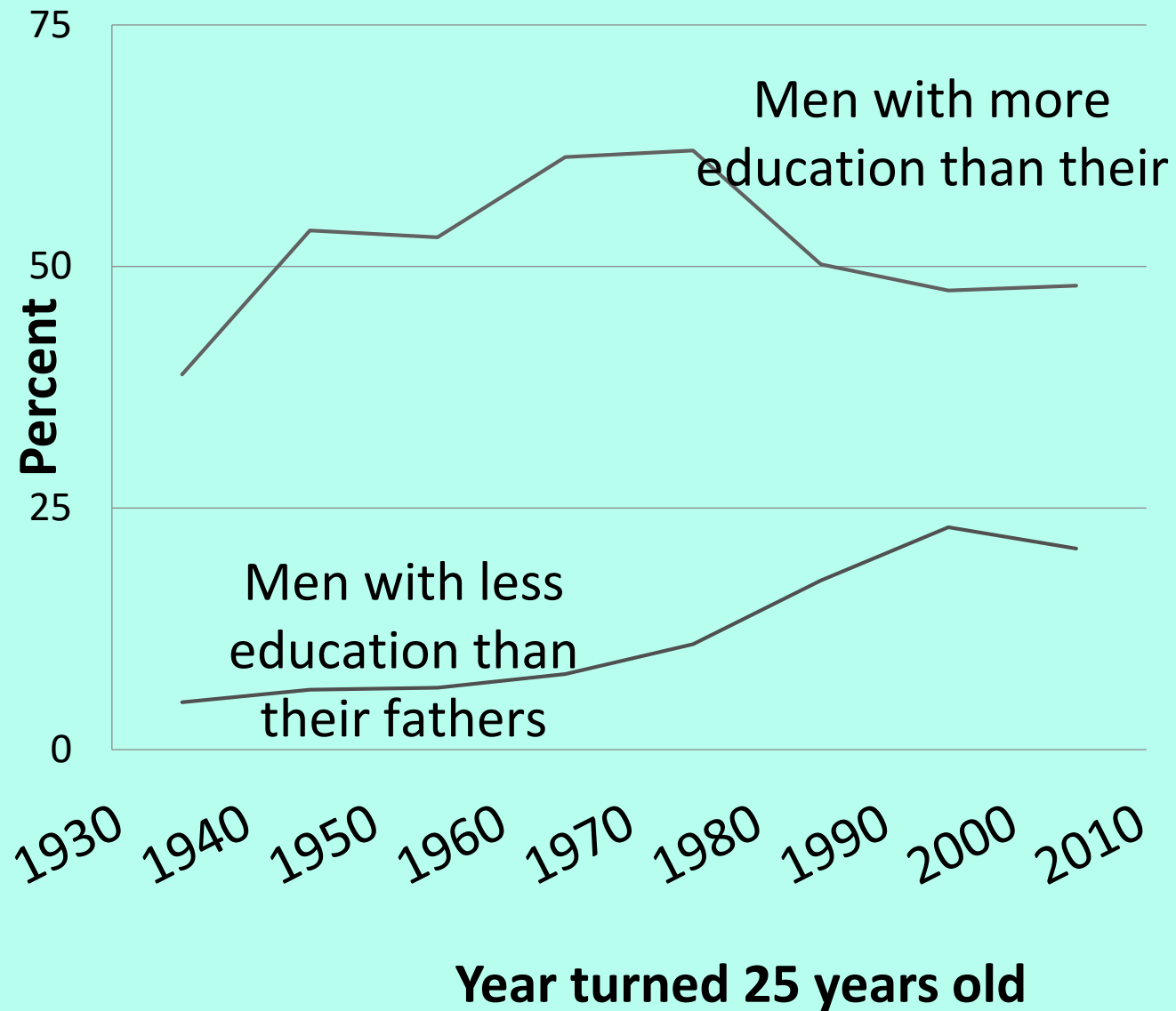
Reproduced from Figure F in *Raising America's Pay: Why It's Our Central Economic Policy Challenge*

# Family income relative to 1970



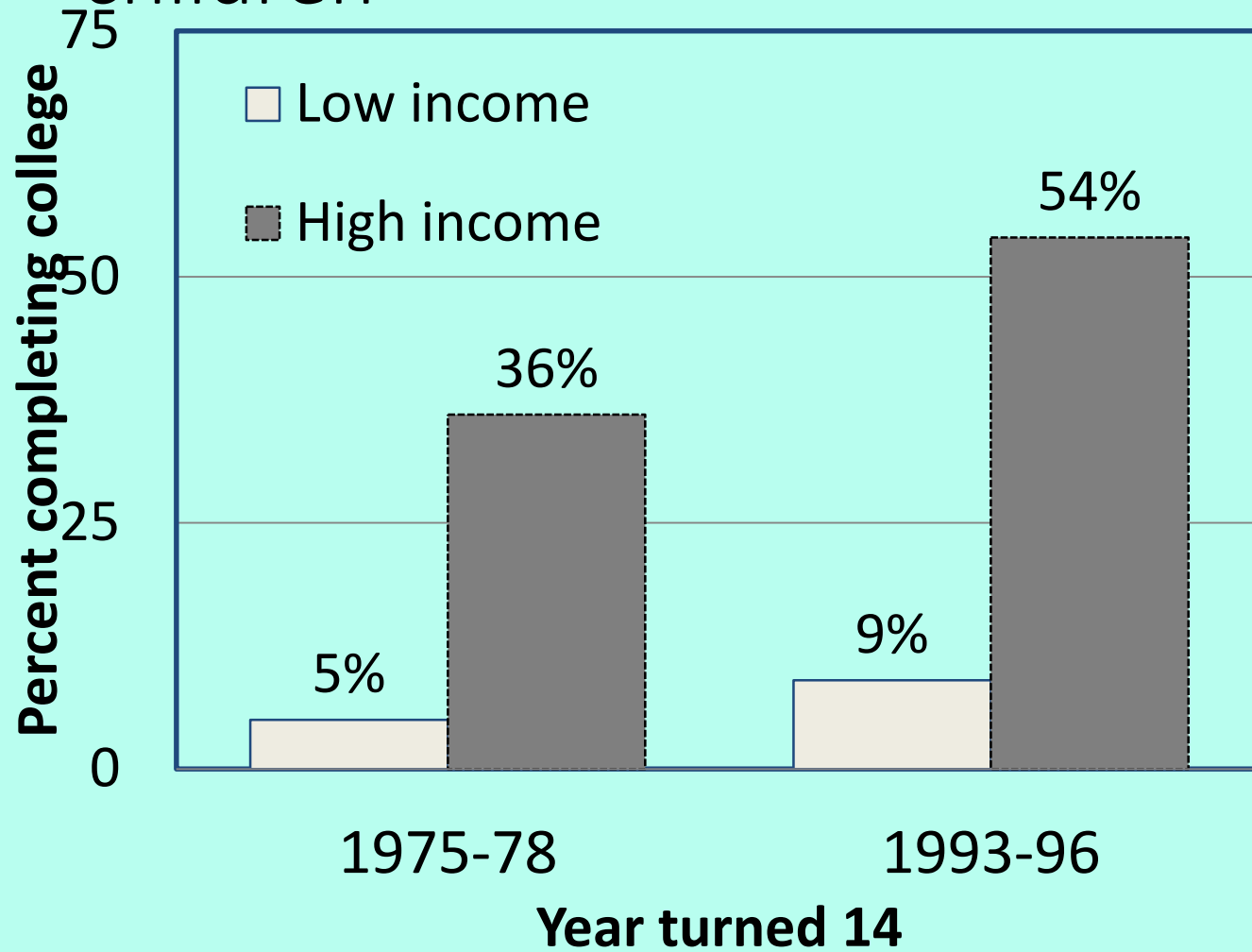
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Shaded areas indicate recession years

# Men's intergenerational mobility



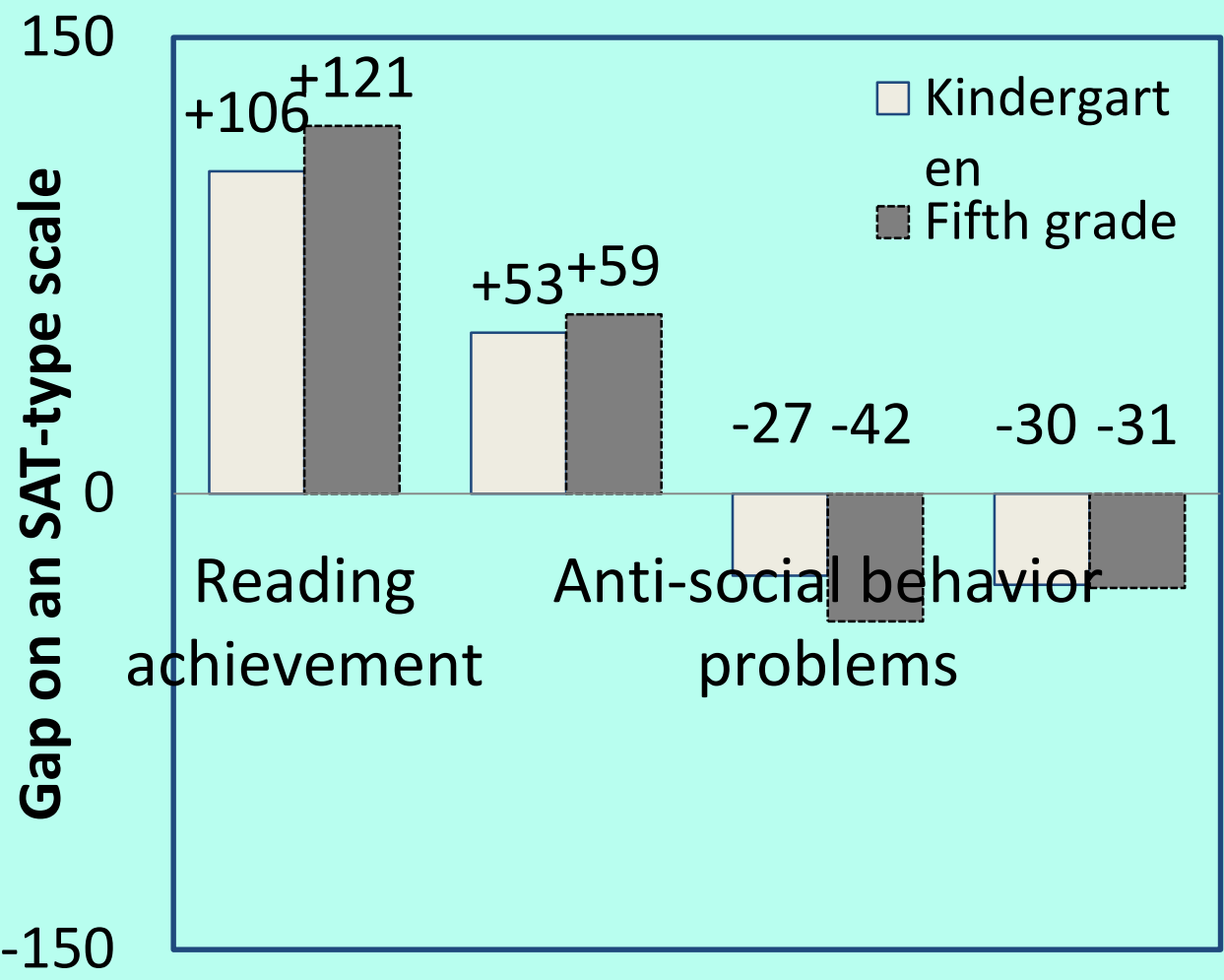
Source: Hout and Janus (2011)

Figure 2.3: College graduation rates for low and high income children



Source: Authors' calculations based on Bailey and Dynarski (2011). Low and high incomes are defined as the bottom and top quartiles of the parent income distribution.

# Skill and behavior gaps between high- and low-income kindergarteners and fifth graders



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten cohort. Bars show standardized differences between children in the top and bottom

# Help-Seeking & Grades

Requests per Student		
MC	Higher Achieving	7.3
	Lower Achieving	8.1
WC	Higher Achieving	2.0
	Lower Achieving	0.7

# 4 types of request

<sup>a</sup>Within each subject-period, requests are aggregated across the four classrooms in fifth grade.

<sup>b</sup>**Assistance:** direct (“Can you help me?”) and indirect (“I don’t get this”) requests for interactive support for problems students are having with projects, activities, assignments, and physical aspects of the classroom environment.

<sup>c</sup>**Clarification:** direct (“What does this mean?”) and indirect (“This doesn’t make sense”) questions about general classroom instructions, directions for specific activities, and questions on tests, worksheets, and assignments.

<sup>d</sup>**Checking-of-Work:** direct (“Can you check this?”) and indirect (“Is this right?”) requests for teachers to look over or judge the accuracy of students’ actions during classroom activities and their completed work on assignments, projects, and tests/quizzes.

<sup>e</sup>**Information:** requests for teachers to provide additional knowledge or instruction (e.g., “Did they find water on the moon?” “How do you use a protractor to draw 420 degrees?”).

**Table 1: Students' Requests for Help From Teachers, by Social Class and 60-Minute Subject Period<sup>a</sup>**

	<u>Math</u>		<u>Language Arts</u>		<u>Science</u>		<u>Flex Time</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	(Test/Quiz)		(Writing Activity)		(In-Class Project)		(Various Activities)			
	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC	WC
Students Present	41	11	39	11	39	14	41	14		
<u>Types of Requests</u>										
<b>Assistance<sup>b</sup></b>										
Requests per Student	0.88	0.27	0.36	0.18	0.36	0.00	0.27	0.14	<b>1.88</b>	<b>0.56</b>
(Total Requests)	(36)	(3)	(14)	(2)	(14)	(0)	(11)	(2)	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(7)</b>
<b>Clarification<sup>c</sup></b>										
Requests per Student	1.02	0.18	0.87	0.18	0.82	0.21	0.73	0.07	<b>3.45</b>	<b>0.64</b>
(Total Requests)	(42)	(2)	(34)	(2)	(32)	(3)	(30)	(1)	<b>(138)</b>	<b>(8)</b>
<b>Checking-of-Work<sup>d</sup></b>										
Requests per Student	0.56	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.46	0.00	<b>1.63</b>	<b>0.00</b>
(Total Requests)	(23)	(0)	(13)	(0)	(10)	(0)	(19)	(0)	<b>(65)</b>	<b>(0)</b>
<b>Information<sup>e</sup></b>										
Requests per Student	0.10	0.00	0.28	0.00	0.23	0.00	0.20	0.00	<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.00</b>
(Total Requests)	(4)	(0)	(11)	(0)	(9)	(0)	(8)	(0)	<b>(32)</b>	<b>(0)</b>
<b>Total Requests per Student</b>										
(Total Requests)	<b>2.56</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>1.66</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>7.75</b>	<b>1.20</b>
	<b>(105)</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>(72)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(65)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(68)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(310)</b>	<b>(15)</b>

# Class-Based Cultural Repertoire of Child Rearing Strategies

## □ **Converted cultivation**

- ▣ Parents believe that they have an obligation to foster the growth and development of children's talents and skills

## □ **Accomplishment of natural growth**

- ▣ Parents provide and presume children spontaneously grow and thrive