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## PARENTS' JOBS INCREASINGLY SHAPE HOW FAR KIDS GET IN LIFE

*New research adds to evidence it's become harder in recent decades for Americans to get ahead*

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The American Dream of upward social mobility is less common than once thought, and it has become increasingly difficult for workers to achieve in recent decades, according to new study.

Just over half of Americans born in the 1980s have ended up with better jobs than their parents, according to an article by New York University sociology professor Michael Hout in the journal "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences." That's down from two-thirds of people born in the 1940s.

"Your circumstances at birth – specifically, what your parents do for a living – are an even bigger factor in how far you get in life than we had previously realized," Mr. Hout said in statement.

The study approached social mobility by assigning scores to occupations ranging from housekeeper to surgeon, based on the idea that people's jobs provide a reliable indicator of their socioeconomic standing.

In many cases, upward mobility as defined by Mr. Hout would hardly be noticed by a layperson. One point on the author's scale corresponds to the difference between a receptionist (26 points) and a hairdresser (25 points). A 15-point improvement – from food-preparation worker to medical assistant, for example – is more perceptible but has also become considerably rarer. So-called "long-distance mobility" from one generation to the next declined from 37 percent of men born in 1945 to 22 percent born in 1985.

Mr. Hout's paper adds to a growing body of research on the dimensions of socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. Stanford University economist Raj Chetty found in a December 2016 paper that the ratio of Americans who earn more than their parents fell to 50 percent for children born in the 1980s from 90 percent for children born in the 1940s.

Fading upward mobility may reflect slower economic growth in recent decades and less structural change in the U.S. economy, which rapidly industrialized in the 20th century and then transitioned to services. In effect, this meant that more white-collar jobs were available to Americans born in the 1940s than to the largely blue-collar generation that preceded them.

Since the 1980s, Mr. Hout says, the job market has undergone less transformation. At the same time, real income gains have accumulated mainly among the affluent.

"Generations of Americans considered the United States to be a land of opportunity," he said. "This research raises some sobering questions about that image."