

Hodgson, Godfrey. *More Equal Than Others*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004. xxiii+379pp.

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This up-to-date critique of modern American life is a fitting sequel to Hodgson's acclaimed 1976 book, "America in Our Time." However, the conclusions reached by Hodgson are deeply depressing. In discussing the pressures shaping American society in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the author disputes that the rise of conservatism has spread affluence and equality to Americans. On the contrary, he regards America as a country where the post-war liberal consensus has been replaced with a conservatism that has moved far to the right. As a result, America has experienced increasing financial segregation where the wealthy elite enjoy the equality of the book's title at the expense of other financial classes. The book is a commentary on the sour state of the American Dream. What is even more depressing is the author's view that the equality that has been supplanted is not equality of outcome but equality of opportunity.

The subjects considered by the author in his sweep of modern American society include politics, immigration, women, and the South. The author covers topics such as emerging feminism, booming immigration, the long struggle for racial equality and a plea for a bromide against the burgeoning suburbs, where more than half Americans now live and, more important, where two thirds of jobs are located. The author is a master of presenting a mass of facts in a digestible form, as all topics are considered in depth. Hodgson reaches the overall conclusion that the marketing of suburbia has led to stratification of wealth and interest and a politicized class struggle between "the Democratic cities and the Republican suburbs." Hodgson also charges America as complacent and self-congratulatory, quoting the example of Clinton's final State of the Union message: "Never before has our nation enjoyed, at once, so much prosperity and social progress with so little internal crisis and so few external threats."

The chapters on economics, technology and politics are particularly illuminating. In "New Economics," Hodgson suggests that free market capitalism has moved from an economic theory into a cultural template where American society now resembles an old-fashioned Europe with strict class-structured elites. This is a charge that might apply to the elites in New York City and Los Angeles but hardly rural Missouri. Hodgson also highlights the development of a harsh and style of management, citing Lee Iacocca's attitude to his work force: "I've got a shotgun at your head. I've got thousands of jobs available at seventeen bucks an hour and none at twenty." The author comments on the influence of Alan Greenspan and how he treated Republican and Democratic administrations differently. Oddly, Hodgson fails to comment on how Greenspan persuaded Clinton to change promised economic initiatives, such as tax cuts for the middle class, because Wall Street would be formidable opposition and that the bond market would act adversely.

The chapter entitled “New Technology” is a tour de force, as the author reminds us that the world wide web and the internet did not start in Palo Alto. In a far reaching and detailed history of the birth and development of the computer age, Hodgson pays tribute to stalwarts such as Vannevar Bush and reminds the reader that without substantial federal government investment over more than two decades and the input of institutions such as MIT, the successes of persons like Bill Gates would likely not have happened when they did. Further, individuals who made the financial fortunes were not the inventors or “geeks” but the middle men and entrepreneurs.

In the chapter on New Politics, Hodgson suggests that “politics” now has two separate meanings: first, the democratic system including the electoral process and, second, the competition for office which has its own industry, leading to “a complicity in the business of politics.” As a result, the 2000 presidential campaign was lacklustre, a criticism that would have applied equally to 2004.

Despite its disconcerting tone, *More Equal Than Others* makes compulsive reading for those interested in the development of American society over a forty-year period to date. The author’s mastery of fact and clear knowledge and understanding of American society, coupled with a lively writing style leaves the reader asking for more.