



What Social Classes Owe Each Other

William Graham Sumner

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WG Sumner (1840-1910) was a sociologist at Yale University, a historian of American banking, and great expositor of classical liberalism. Yes, this is the man often dismissed today as an outmoded "Social Darwinist"--and this book shows why it is so important to the statist that his work is not given a fair hearing. *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* was first published in 1883, and it asks a crucially important question: Does any class or interest group have the duty and burden of fighting the battles of life for any other class or of solving the social problems to the satisfaction of any other class or group? Sumner saw that the assumption of group obligation was destined to be a driving force behind the rise of social management in the future. Capital owes labor, the rich owe the poor, producers owe consumers, one sex owes another, one race owes another, this country owes that country, and so on ad infinitum. How right he was, how incredibly prescient, to see this coming. The assumption behind all these claims, writes Sumner, is that society consists of layers and layers of hidden and roiling conflicts and fights that can only be resolved by state intervention. These conflicts are rooted in the supposed reality that one group wins only at the expense of another group. The gains of some imply the losses of others. The path to achievement in society is trod over the well being of others, and, similarly, the plight of under-achievers is due to injustice. So ingrained is this model of society that it is rarely questioned in public life today. Our politics consists almost entirely of the working out of these supposed conflicts and their attendant demands via public policy. Sumner not only tackles this view directly, he makes a strong contrary claim: under freedom, no group is obligated to serve another by force. 147 pages, 6" x 9", Paperback 2007

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