

## CHAPTER 8: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### **Dimensions of Stratification**

social stratification - ranking of people or groups according to their unequal access to scarce resources

social class - segment of society whose members hold similar amounts of resources and share values, norms and an identifiable lifestyle

economic dimension:

- Karl Marx - predicted that capitalist societies would ultimately be reduced to two social classes:

1. bourgeoisie - class that owns the means of production

2. proletariat - class that labors without owning the means of production

- Marx said that control of the economy gave capitalists control over legal, educational, govt. systems as well - the economy determined the nature of society

- income - amount of money received by an individual or group over a specific time period

- wealth - total economic resources held by a person or group (income = your paycheck, wealth = what you own)

- 1997 - 36 million Americans lived in poverty (in 2005, poverty level = \$19,350 for family of 4)

- 10 million millionaire households, 50 billionaires in the U.S.

- richest 20% of American families received over 49% of nation's income - poorest 20% controlled under 4%

power dimension:

power - ability to control the behavior of others, even against their will

- those with power can use it to enhance their own interests, often (but not necessarily) at the expense of society
- unlike Marx, Max Weber said economic success and power aren't the same
  - Weber - expert knowledge can be used to expand power (lawyers)
  - fame is another basis for power (Albert Einstein offered the position of president of Israel in 1952 - he declined, stating, "I know a little about nature, and hardly anything about men.")
- power is also attached to social positions we hold

prestige dimension:

prestige - recognition, respect and admiration attached to social positions - must be voluntarily given, not claimed - people with similar levels of prestige share identifiable lifestyles - example -> kids of upper class -> private universities, attend Episcopalian churches - kids of lower class -> less likely to attend college at all, often belong to fundamentalist religious groups

- in U.S., most achieve prestige because of their occupations - white-collar jobs have higher prestige than blue-collar jobs

**Explanations of Social Stratification**

Functionalism: stratification assures that the most qualified people fill the most important positions, that they perform their tasks competently, and that they're rewarded for their efforts

-inequality exists because certain jobs are more important than others- these jobs often involve special talent and training (reason why doctors make more \$, have more prestige than bus drivers)

Conflict Theory: inequality exists because some people are willing to exploit others

- stratification is based on force rather than on people voluntarily agreeing to it - based on Karl Marx's ideas regarding class conflict

- false consciousness - adoption of the ideas of the dominant class by the less powerful class (term used by Marx)

Symbolic Interactionism: American children are taught that a person's social class is a result of talent and effort (those "on top" have worked hard/used their abilities - those "on the bottom" lack talent/motivation to succeed)

- those in lower social classes tend to suffer from lower self-esteem, those in higher social classes tend to have higher self-esteem

### Social Classes in America

class consciousness - identification with the goals and interests of a social class

upper class - 1% of the U.S. population - at the top are the aristocracy (old-money families: Ford, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, duPont) - membership is inherited

- lower-upper class - achievement, earned income

middle class - 40%-50% of U.S. pop.

- upper-middle class - 14% - business people, professionals, politicians, military officers

- college educated, have high educational/career goals for their kids

- middle-middle class - 30% - a "mixed bag" - many occupations in this group - many only have HS education, some have college degrees - income is around the national average (\$21,181 in 1999)

working class - also known as "lower-middle class" - 30% of U.S. pop. - blue-collar jobs, below-average income, unstable employment, not likely to enter the middle class

working poor - 13% - low-skill jobs, low pay, low-level clerical workers, manual laborers, service workers - don't earn enough to rise above the poverty line (\$17,603 for a family of 4 in 2000)

underclass - 12% - unemployed, part-time menial jobs, some are on public assistance (welfare), lack education and skills, many have physical and mental disabilities, many are single mothers

- How do people end up in underclass or working poor group? - birth, old age, loss of spouse, lack of education/training, alcoholism, physical/mental disabilities - very few paths out

### **Poverty in America**

absolute poverty - the absence of enough \$ to secure life's necessities

relative poverty - a measure of poverty based on the economic disparity between those at the bottom of society and the rest of society

- most disadvantaged groups in U.S.: minorities, female-headed households, children under 18, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living alone or with non-relatives

feminization of poverty - a trend in the U.S. society in which women and children make up an increasing proportion of the poor - reasons for the trend: women earn \$0.72 for every \$1.00 earned by men, women with kids find it more difficult to find/keep regular, long-term employment, lack of good child care facilities adds to likelihood that they won't be able to keep on working

### **Responses to the Problem of Poverty**

- The War on Poverty - 1964 - President Lyndon B. Johnson - philosophy: help poor people help themselves - much of budget (60%) was earmarked for youth opportunity programs and the work experience program

- welfare reform - 1998 - payments for AFDC (Aid to Families w/ Dependent Children) and food stamps was less than 1% of the federal budget - 3 major elements of welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996:

1. reduces welfare spending
2. increases state and local power to oversee welfare rules
3. adds new restrictions on welfare eligibility

- Has welfare reform worked? - too early to give a final evaluation - just over 7 million on welfare in 1999, down from 12 million in 1996 when the welfare bill was signed  
- however, many of those leaving welfare still living in poverty - most hold entry-level jobs, earning less than \$7.00 per hour

**Social Mobility** - the movement of individuals or groups between social classes

horizontal mobility - a change in occupation within the same social class

vertical mobility - a change upward or downward in occupational status or social class

intergenerational mobility - a change in status or class from one generation to the next

caste system - stratification structure that does not allow for social mobility

- India - four primary caste categories (based on occupation, Hindu religion)

1. Brahmin - priests, scholars
2. Kshatriyas - professional, governing, military occupations
3. Vaisyas - merchants, businessmen
4. Sudra - farmers, menial workers, craftsmen

- below all castes are the untouchables - thought to be so impure that physical contact contaminates the religious purity of all other caste members (collect trash, handle dead bodies)

open-class system - social class is based on merit and individual effort - movement is allowed between classes

## **SOCIOLOGY**

### **VIDEO QUESTIONS – *People Like Us: Social Class in America***

Answer the following questions on a **separate sheet** using **complete sentences**.

#### **Part I: Bud or Bordeaux?**

##### **Joe Queenan’s Balsamic Vinegar Tour**

1. What is meant by the term “status symbol”? If you can afford to purchase an expensive item – say, a pricey car or a boat - are you automatically elevated in class? Why or why not?
2. What items or physical characteristics do you think label the wearer (clothes) or owner (material possession) as “low-class”? Why do you think so?

##### **The Trouble With Tofu**

3. Describe the issues involved in the choice of a community grocery store in Burlington, Vermont. What is at the heart of this conflict? Which groups does the program indicate are in favor of the co-op, and which the supermarket? What are their reasons for their choice? How would *you* vote on this issue? Explain *your* choice.

##### **How To Marry the Rich**

4. What is your impression of Ginie Sayles? Of Vessa Rinehart? What social class does each appear to belong to? Why do you think so? What do you think of Sayles’ techniques for moving up the social ladder? Why do you suppose Rinehart wants to change her social class?

#### **Part II: High and Low**

##### **WASP Lessons**

5. What does WASP stand for? What does it mean to “belong” to a “WASP” culture?
6. In this segment, what sports do we observe the “WASPS” engaging in? What sports do we typically associate with the upper classes? The middle classes? The lower classes?

##### **Bourgeois Blues**

7. What examples do middle-class African Americans offer about common white attitudes toward them? About upper-class or lower-class blacks’ attitudes?

8. What is the significance of the Jack and Jill club? Is it an appropriate means for black families to foster social relationships or is it a means of excluding and oppressing other blacks?

### **Tammy's Story**

9. What does it mean to be “invisible” in the United States? In what ways is Tammy Crabtree invisible, and to whom?

10. Why is she considered “trash” by her neighbors? What is her own view of her life and her future?

**SOCIOLOGY**  
**VIDEO QUESTIONS: “A Class Divided”**

Answer the following questions on a **separate sheet** using **COMPLETE SENTENCES**.

1. Describe the experiment conducted by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher Jane Elliott. Explain how she divided the groups and describe the rules that she made for the participating students. What did the teacher do to “turn the tables” on the second day of the experiment? What did the students say or do to show they’d been affected by the experiment? What had they learned from it?
2. Fourteen years later, several students who were part of the original experiment reunited with their teacher. What lessons had they learned from this experience? Give examples of how their lives had been affected by being participants.
3. What rules and procedures did Jane Elliott create in her experiment at the prison employee seminar? What were the reactions from those placed in the oppressed group? What were some observations made by the participants after the experiment?
4. Do you think this experiment should be conducted with 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Oak Park schools? Why or why not?