

## 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