Social Class and Social Stratification
The Social Pyramid

Pharaoh

Vizier
High Priests, Nobles

Priests, Engineers, Doctors

Scribes

Craftsmen

Soldiers, Farmers, and Tomb Builders
What is Social Class: Theorist behind ideas
Dimensions of Stratification

- **Stratification** is the creation of layers (or strata) of people who possess unequal shares of scarce resources such as income, wealth, power, and prestige.

- Each of the layers in a stratification system is a **social class**—is a segment of a population whose members hold similar amounts of scarce resources and share values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle.

- Karl Marx and Max Weber made the most significant early contributions to the study of social stratification.
Dimensions of Stratification

- The three dimensions of stratification are economic, power, and prestige.
- Karl Marx explained the importance of the economic foundations of social classes. According to Marx, those who own and control capital have the power in a society.
- Max Weber emphasized the prestige and power aspects of stratification. He argued that while having money certainly helps, economic success and power are not the same.
The Economic Dimension

Karl Marx believed that the economy determined the nature of society. He predicted that capitalist societies would be reduced to two social classes.

- Those who owned the means of production—the bourgeoisie—would rule.
- The proletariat, those who worked for wages, would be ruled.
Dimensions of Class

- **Income**
  - Occupational wages and earnings from investments

- **Wealth**
  - The total value of money and other assets, minus any debt

- **Social power**
  - The ability to control, even in the face of resistance

- **Occupational prestige**
  - Job-related status

- **Schooling**
  - Key to better career opportunities
Social Stratification & Birth

• **Ancestry**
  – Born to privilege or poverty makes a big difference

• **Gender**
  – More poor families are headed by women

• **Race and ethnicity**
  – Disparity still exist when comparing majority and minority groups on social and financial variables

• **Religion**
  – Members of protestant denominations (Episcopaliansas and Presbyterians) are identified as the most affluent
A Middle Class Society

• Everyone stands equal under the law
• We celebrate individuality
• We interact mostly with people like ourselves
  – Most do not know “superrich” or those in “poverty”
• The U.S. Is an affluent society
  – Belief that everyone is financially comfortable
• Socioeconomic status (SES) reflects money (income, wealth & power), occupational prestige and schooling
Middle Class

Myth v Reality

Sociology, Tenth Edition
Social Classes

• The upper class
  – 5% of the population

• The middle class
  – 40-45% of the population

• The working class
  – 33% of the population

• The lower class
  – The remaining 20% of people
Figure 10.5  The U.S. Social Class Ladder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Prestigious university</td>
<td>Investors and heirs, a few top executives</td>
<td>$1,000,000+</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>College or university, often with postgraduate</td>
<td>Professionals and upper managers</td>
<td>$125,000+</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Middle</td>
<td>High school or college; often apprenticeship</td>
<td>Semiprofessionals and lower managers, craftspeople, foremen</td>
<td>About $60,000</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Factory workers, clerical workers, low-paid retail sales, and craftspeople</td>
<td>About $35,000</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Poor</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Laborers, service workers, low-paid salespeople</td>
<td>About $17,000</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underclass</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Unemployed and part-time, on welfare</td>
<td>Under $10,000</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Gilbert and Kahl 1998 and Gilbert 2003; income estimates are modified from Duff 1995.
Upper Class

• The upper-uppers
  – The blue bloods
  – Membership almost always based on ascription
  – They have “old money”
  – They are set apart by the amount of wealth their families control
  – Much time devoted to community activities

• The lower-uppers
  – The working rich people
  – The “new rich” by “old money” standards
  – Can still find themselves excluded from certain organizations and clubs
We'll start hiring when you find the money to start buying stuff.
Middle Class

• More racial and ethnic diversity

• Upper-middles
  – $80,000 to $160,000 yearly income
  – Education is important
  – High occupational prestige
  – Involvement in local politics

• Average-middles
  – Less prestige in occupation
  – Few white collar, or high-skilled blue collar jobs
  – Income provides modest security
  – 50% kids attend state-sponsored colleges
Working Class

• Marxist “industrial proletariat”
  – $25,000 to $40,000 annual income
• “Blue-collar” routine jobs with less satisfaction
• Half own their own homes
• Fewer children go to college (only one-third)
• Vulnerable to financial problems caused by unemployment or illness
Lower Class

- 31.1 million Americans classified as poor in 2000
- Others are “working poor” minimum wage jobs
- Half complete high school, one in four attend college
- Own homes in less desirable inner city neighborhoods or rural south
Figure 10.7  Patterns of Poverty

*Note:* Poverty varies tremendously from one state to another. In the extreme, poverty is more than three times as common in Arkansas (18%) than it is in New Hampshire (5.6%).

*Source:* By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract 2005*:Table 688.
The Difference Class Makes

- **Health**
  - Amount and type of health care

- **Cultural values**
  - Vary with position

- **Politics**
  - Conservative or liberal
  - Degree of involvement

- **Family and gender**
  - Type of parental involvement
  - Socialization practices
  - Relationships and responsibilities
Endangered species...

- Blue Whale
- Giant Tortoise
- Panda
- Yak
- Rhino

Middle Class Family

Dave Granlund © www.davegranlund.com
Social Mobility

- **Upward (Vertical)**
  - College degree or higher-paying job

- **Downward**
  - Drop out of school, losing a job or divorce

- **Structural social mobility**
  - Changes in society or national economic trends

- **Intergenerational mobility**
  - Change in social position during one person’s lifetime

- **Intergenerational mobility**
  - Upward or downward movement that takes place across generations within a family
Myth Versus Reality

• Among men, mobility has been fairly high
• Long-term trend has been upward
• Intergenerational mobility is small, not dramatic
• Social mobility since the 1970’s has been uneven
• Income, race, ethnicity and gender effects social mobility
Figure 10.6  Poverty in the United States, by Age and Race-Ethnicity

Note: The poverty line on which this figure is based is $18,392 for a family of four.

The American Dream

• Earnings have stalled for many workers
• Many persons need to hold more than one job
• More jobs offer little income
• Young people are remaining at (and returning to) home
• Middle-class slide
  – Median income doubled between 1950-1973; Grown only 25% since
Global Economy and U.S. Class Structure

Global economic expansion
• Jobs changed from manufacturing to service work
• Creates upward mobility for educated people
• Investments for those with money
• “Downsizing” in companies effects “average” workers
Figure 11-1 Distribution of Income and Wealth in the United States

Families Divided by Income 2001
- Richest 20 percent of families
- Second 20 percent
- Third 20 percent

Families Divided by Wealth 2001
- Fourth 20 percent
- Poorest 20 percent
Figure 10.1 Distribution of the Property of Americans

The wealthiest 10 percent of Americans…

- 10% (orange)
- 90% (blue)

…own 70 percent of the nation's wealth

The wealthiest 1 percent of Americans…

- 1% (orange)
- 99% (blue)

…owns 33 percent of the nation's wealth

Source: By the author. Based on Beeghley 2005.
Figure 10.2  Distribution of the Income of Americans

Some U.S. families have incomes that exceed the height of Mt. Everest, 29,028 feet.

Average U.S. family income
$52,000 or 13 feet

Average U.S. individual income
$32,000 or 8 feet

If a 1 1/2 inch child’s block equals $500 of income, the average individual’s annual income of $32,000 would represent a height of 8 feet, and the average family’s annual income of $52,000 would represent a height of 13 feet while the income of some families would represent a height greater than that of Mt. Everest.

Source: By the author.
Extent of Poverty

- **Poverty**
  - Relative (in relation to others)
  - Absolute (life threatening)

- **Poverty threshold (line)**
  - Three times the income needed to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet
  - Adjusted for family size and cost of living

- **Extent of poverty in America**
  - 11.3% (31.1 million) are so classified
  - Another 12.3 million are *near poor* at 125% of poverty threshold
Demographics of Poverty

• Age
  – In 2000, 16.2% of all children were poor, contributing to high infant mortality rate

• Race and ethnicity
  – Two-thirds of all poor are white
  – In 2000, 22.1% of all African Americans and 21.2% of all Latinos lived in poverty, in relation to population numbers they are three times as likely to be poor

• Gender
  – The feminization of poverty:
  – 60% of poor are women
  – Rise in households headed by single women
Explaining Poverty

• Blame the poor
  – The poor are mostly responsible for their own poverty
  – A culture of poverty: produces a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty
  – 1996, time limits of 2 years and total of 5

• Blame society
  – Little opportunity for work
  – William Julius Wilson proposes
    • Government hire people (WPA)
    • Improve schools, transportation and daycare
Homeless

• No precise count
  – How could there ever be?

• Experts “guess-ti-mate”
  – 500,000 on any given night
  – 1.5 million at some time during the course of the year

• Causes
  – They are poor
  – Personal traits
    • One-third are substance abusers
    • One-fourth suffer from mental illnesses
  – One third are entire families due to structural changes in economy “new homeless”
THE END