SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
Jennifer L. Fackler, M.A.
What is Social Stratification?

- **Social Stratification** – a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy.

- Based on 4 basic principles:
  1. SS is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.
     - Ex: Did rich people survive the crash of the Titanic because they were better swimmers? No!
  2. SS stratification carries over from generation to generation.
     - **Social Mobility** – a change in position within the social hierarchy; can be upward or downward; rare – usually horizontal.
  3. SS is universal but variable.
     - Found everywhere, but what is unequal and how unequal it is varies.
     - Ex: Hair Color in the UK
  4. SS involves not just inequality but beliefs as well.
     - Why people are unequal varies.
     - Ex: Next Slide
IDEOLOGY: THE POWER BEHIND STRATIFICATION

- **Ideology** – cultural beliefs that justify a particular social arrangement, including patterns of inequality
  - Ex: Rich are smart and poor are lazy.
    - Supports inequality by defining it as fair.
  - Major reason that social hierarchies endure.
SYSTEMS OF SS

- **Caste System** – social stratification based on ascription, or birth (closed)
  - Rigid categories assigned, no possibility for change.
  - Dictates work and relationships and rests on powerful cultural beliefs.
  - Typical of agrarian societies.
  - Ex: India

- **Meritocracy** – social stratification based on personal merit (open)
  - Rewards individual performance.
  - Pure form would mean social position is entirely dependent on a person’s ability and effort.
  - No true meritocracies exist.
**Systems of SS**

- **Class System** – social stratification based on both birth and individual achievement (open)
  - Social mobility is possible.
  - Freedom to select work and relationships.
  - Typical of modern economies.
  - Class systems have some elements of meritocracy to promote productivity and efficiency, but keep caste elements (like family) to maintain order and unity.
    - Caste + Meritocracy = Class
  - Ex: USA
Systems of SS

- **Status Consistency** – the degree of consistency in a person’s social standing across various dimensions of social inequality
  - Caste = Low Social Mobility, High Status Consistency
  - Class = High Social Mobility, Low Status Consistency
  - Classes are, thus, harder to define than castes.

- **Status Consistency Illustration**
  - Personal Income: <$35,000/Year ➔ Middle
  - Car: 2010 Hyundai Sonata ➔ Middle
  - Neighborhood: Bellaire/Meyerland ➔ Upper
  - Education: Master of Arts (Graduate Degree) ➔ Upper
  - This person has LOW status consistency!
  - *Evaluate your own status consistency – is it high or low?*
INEQUALITY IN THE US
We are highly *stratified*!
How Long Would You Have to Work to Earn as Much as a Top CEO?

How many years would a minimum wage worker, an average worker or the president have to work to earn the same amount as what these top CEOs earn in a year?

- **CEO of Walmart**: $8,371,057, 555 working years
- **CEO of General Electric**: $9,280,935, 615 working years
- **CEO of Chevron**: $14,837,528, 983 working years
- **CEO of AT&T**: $15,784,831, 1046 working years
- **CEO of Ford Motors**: $17,688,241, 1172 working years
- **CEO of Conoco Phillips**: $24,402,520, 1618 working years
- **CEO of Exxon**: $32,211,079, 2136 working years
- **CEO of Hewlett-Packard**: $34,031,021, 2256 working years

All figures quoted from http://www.afdc.org/
Dimensions of Social Standing

What are they?

Class
- **Income** – earnings from work or investments
- **Wealth** – the total value of money and other assets, minus outstanding debts
- **Social Power** – the ability to control, even in the face of resistance
- **Occupational Prestige** – job-related status
- **Schooling** – level of education; key to better career opportunities

Caste (These are also influential in class systems.)
- **Ancestry** - most influential component of social standing
- **Race & Ethnicity** - closely linked to social position in the US
- **Gender**
  - W have < income, wealth, & occupational prestige than men.
  - Families headed by women are 6x more likely to be poor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White-Collar Occupations</th>
<th>Prestige Score</th>
<th>Blue-Collar Occupations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College/university professor</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicist/astronomer</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerospace engineer</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
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<td>White-Collar Occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of the clergy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optometrist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
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<td>Secondary school teacher</td>
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<td>Accountant</td>
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<td>Electrical engineer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>White-Collar Occupations</td>
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<td>Blue-Collar Occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Airplane pilot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociologist</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Editor/reporter</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio/TV announcer</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>White-Collar Occupations</td>
<td>Prestige Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Aircraft mechanic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Firefighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dental hygienist</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter/sculptor</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer operator</td>
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### Table 8–2  The Relative Social Prestige of Selected Occupations in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White-Collar Occupations</th>
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<th>Blue-Collar Occupations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Farm laborer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Household laborer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Door-to-door salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>09</td>
<td>Shoe shiner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **Unemployment data for different professions.**
SOCIAL CLASSES IN THE US
SOCIAL CLASSES

- It is difficult to define classes in the US because of our low level of status consistency and our social mobility.

- Four Rankings:
  - The Upper Class:
    - 5% of the Population
    - $170k+/Year
  - The Middle Class:
    - 40-45% of the Population
    - $40k-$170k/Year
  - The Working Class:
    - 33% of the Population
    - $25k-$40k/Year
  - The Lower Class:
    - 20% of the Population
    - <$20k/Year

- Class standing is heavily impacted by opportunity structure.

- Where do you fit? How about your family?
THE DIFFERENCE CLASS MAKES
THE DIFFERENCE CLASS MAKES

- Health
  - Amount and type of h/c available varies by class.
  - Poverty → Lower LE, Higher IM, Poor Health

- Values & Attitudes
  - Vary with position.
    - Old Rich – strong sense of family history
    - New Rich – Conspicuous Consumption
    - Affluent – more tolerant of controversial behavior (like homosexuality)
The Difference Class Makes

Politics
- Conservative vs. Liberal
  - Affluent → Economic Conservatives, Social Liberals
  - Poor → Economic Liberals, Social Conservatives
- Degree of involvement in politics.
  - Affluent → More likely to vote and join political orgs.

Family and Gender
- Size of Families
  - Affluent → Smaller Families
- Socialization practices.
  - Individuality (Affluent) vs. Conformity (Working Class)
- Relationships and responsibilities.
  - Egalitarian (Affluent) vs. Unequal (Working Class)
SOCIAL MOBILITY
SOCIAL MOBILITY

- **Upward** - getting a college degree, landing a higher paying job, or marrying someone wealthy
- **Downward** - dropping out of school, losing a job, or getting divorced
- **Structural Social Mobility** - changes in society or national economic trends that impact everyone
- **Intragenerational Mobility** - change in social position during one person’s lifetime
- **Intergenerational Mobility** - upward or downward movement that takes place across generations within a family
  - Tip to Remember: Think of INTERstate highways, which go BETWEEN or ACROSS states.
**SOCIAL MOBILITY: MYTH VS. REALITY**

- *Is there as much social mobility as we think?*
- **Four Major Conclusions from Research:**
  1. Social mobility over the course of the past century has been fairly high.
  2. The long-term trend in social mobility has been upward.
  3. Within a single generation, social mobility is usually small.
  4. Social mobility since the 1970s has been uneven.
THE AMERICAN DREAM: STILL A REALITY?

- We expect upward mobility.
- Throughout much of US history, our economy has grown and standards of living have risen.
- There are more 6 figure incomes and millionaires now than ever before.
- But…
  - Earnings have stalled for many workers.
    - Income increases have slowed; median income doubled between 1950 and 1973, but it has grown only 25% since then (Graph on Next Slide).
  - Many persons need to hold more than one job.
  - More jobs offer little income (e.g., service jobs).
  - Young people are remaining at (and returning) home.

**NPR’s Myth of the American Dream**

Average family income in the U.S. grew rapidly between 1950 and 1970. Since then, however, the increase has been smaller.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2007).
Poverty in the US
EXTENT OF POVERTY

Poverty: 2 Types
- **Relative** (in relation to others) – United States
- Absolute (life threatening) - Worldwide

Extent of Poverty in the US: 12.3% (36M) in 2006

Poverty Threshold (line)
- 2006: $20,614 (for a family of 4)
- Three times the income needed to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet.
- Average income of poor families is 60% of this amount ($12,500).
The Poverty Rate in the United States, 1960–2004
The share of our population in poverty fell dramatically between 1960 and 1970. Since then, the poverty rate has remained between 10 and 15 percent of the population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2005).
POVERTY ACROSS THE UNITED STATES
WHO ARE THE POOR?

- **Age**
  - In 2004, 17.8% of all children were poor, contributing to the US’ high infant mortality rate.

- **Race and Ethnicity**
  - In 2004, 24.3% of all African Americans and 21.9% of all Latinos lived in poverty.
  - In relation to population numbers, minorities are three times as likely to be poor.
  - **Race & class** are heavily related and often conflated.

- **Gender and Family**
  - The Feminization Of Poverty:
    - 60% of poor people in the US are women.
    - This is largely due to the rise in households headed by single women.
EXPLAINING POVERTY

- Blame the Poor (Conservative)
  - The poor are mostly responsible for their own poverty.
  - Culture of Poverty produces a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty due to hopelessness.
  - 1996 Welfare Reform – limited benefits to 2 consecutive years and 5 years total

- Blame Society (Liberal)
  - Little opportunity for work is what has led to poverty.
  - Wilson Proposal:
    - Government should hire people to improve...
      - Schools
      - Transportation
      - Daycare

- Individual ability and personal initiative both play a role in poverty.
- However, sociologists believe that society is the primary cause of poverty.
ASSESSING THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

SURVEY QUESTION: “WHY ARE THERE PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY WHO LIVE IN NEED?”

IN THE UNITED STATES (AND ALSO IN JAPAN), MORE PEOPLE EXPLAIN POVERTY IN TERMS OF PERSONAL LAZINESS THAN SOCIETAL JUSTICE. IN MOST HIGH-INCOME NATIONS (INCLUDING EUROPEAN COUNTRIES) AND IN LOWER-INCOME NATIONS (SUCH AS MEXICO), MORE PEOPLE POINT TO SOCIETAL INJUSTICE RATHER THAN PERSONAL LAZINESS AS THE CAUSE OF POVERTY.

THE WORKING POOR

- Not all poor people are jobless.
  - 3.2% Work FT
  - 28% Work PT
- Even a minimum wage of $8 per hour will not allow a full-time worker to keep an urban family of 4 above the poverty line.
HOMELESSNESS

- No precise count is available.
  - *How could there ever be?*
- Experts estimate:
  - 500,000 on any given night.
  - 3.5M/Year
- Causes
  - Poverty
  - Deinstitutionalization
  - Personal Traits (*Cause or Result?*)
    - 1/3 are substance abusers.
    - 1/4 suffer from mental illness(es).
  - Many of the homeless are entire families due to structural changes in the economy.
- Homelessness & Status
CLASS, WELFARE, POLITICS & VALUES

- Opinions about wealth and poverty depend on both facts and politics and values.
  - Merit → SS: Common View Among the Wealthy
  - Society → Poverty: Common View Among the Poor

- The US generally blames the poor for their own plight because of our cultural emphasis on individual responsibility.
  - We spend tons of money on education.
  - And very little on public assistance.

- The most striking social inequality is found when we look outside our own borders and look at stratification globally.
ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

Many low-and middle-income countries have greater economic inequality than the United States. But this country has more economic inequality than most high-income nations. These data are the most recent available, representing income share for various years between 1999 and 2004.

INCOME INEQUALITY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
S-F Analysis
Davis-Moore Thesis

- Social stratification has beneficial consequences for the operation of a society.
- The greater the importance of a position, the more rewards a society attaches to it.
- Egalitarian societies offer little incentive for people to try their best.
- Example: Doctors must complete years and years of schooling and take on massive student loan debt. In order to motivate the most talented and qualified people to make these sacrifices, we reward doctors with lots of social prestige and high incomes.
- Critical Evaluation:
  - Societies differ across time and place.
    - How is the importance of an occupation determined?
    - Do rewards actually reflect the contribution someone makes to society?
  - SS can prevent the development of individual talent.
  - Social inequality promotes conflict.
STRATIFICATION & CONFLICT
S-C Analysis
Karl Marx: Class & Conflict

Most people have one of two relationships with the means of production:

- **Bourgeoisie** (aka Capitalists) – people whom own and operate factories and other businesses in pursuit of profits
- **Proletarians** – people who sell their labor for wages
- There is immediate conflict between the groups. *Why?*
  - Capitalists maximize profits by keeping wages low.
  - Workers want higher wages.
- Believed conflict and inequality were inevitable until capitalism was eliminated.

**Social Conflict** – the struggle between segments on a society over valued resources (lies at the heart of Marx’s thinking)

- Most important type is *class conflict*, conflict arising from the way a society produces material goods.
  - Wasn’t created by capitalism; it’s just more open in the capitalist system.
**Karl Marx: Class & Conflict**

- This oppression should drive the working majority to organize and overthrow capitalism.
  - Marx predicted a revolution!: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!” –Karl Marx, 1848
  - Advocated for socialism, a system of production that could provide for the social needs of all.
    - “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”
  - This revolution has not occurred because we have become complacent due to rising standards of living and minimal gains through the labor movement.
KARL MARX: WAS HE RIGHT? YES!

- Wealth still remains highly concentrated.
  - 35% of privately owned property is owned by 1% of the population.

- White-collar jobs offer little:
  - Income
  - Security
  - Satisfaction

- Any workers benefits acquired came from struggle.
  - Conflict and distrust still remain as obstacles between management and workers.
  - Little has been won recently and much has been lost.

- The law still protects the rich.
Max Weber: Class, Status & Power

- **Class Position** – economic inequality; continuum from high to low.
- **Status** – social prestige; social position that a person holds
- **Power** – the ability to achieve desired ends despite resistance from others
- **Socioeconomic Status (SES)** – a composite ranking based on various dimensions of social inequality

Inequality in History:
- Status is the main difference in agrarian societies (honor).
- Class is most important in industrial societies.
- Weber predicted that power would become the most important as industrial societies become bureaucratic states, but this has not really occurred.
Hope!

- How do you feel about the current state of economic affairs in the US?
- What can we do about it?
- What **should** we do about it?
- In 1944, FDR proposed a Second Bill of Rights.
  - What are your thoughts on this?
  - Positives? Negatives?
  - Is there anything you’d add? Remove?
STRATIFICATION & INTERACTION
S-I Analysis
STRATIFICATION & INTERACTION

- People’s social standing affects their everyday interactions.
  - People generally socialize with similar people.
    - Live with similar people due to SS.
    - Spend time with similar people due to SS.

- **Conspicuous Consumption** - buying and using products because of the “statement” they make about social positions
  - The way we dress, the car we drive, and even the food we order say something about our budget and personal tastes.
  - Example: (1) What does a Porsche say about someone? How about a Yugo? How about a Prius? (2) What does ordering buffalo wings say about a person? How about caviar?
# Social Stratification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural-Functional Approach</th>
<th>Social-Conflict Approach</th>
<th>Symbolic-Interaction Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the level of analysis?</strong></td>
<td>Macro-level</td>
<td>Macro-level</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is social stratification?</strong></td>
<td>Stratification is a system of unequal rewards that benefits society as a whole.</td>
<td>Stratification is a division of a society’s resources that benefits some people and harms others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the reason for our social position?</strong></td>
<td>Social position reflects personal talents and abilities in a competitive economy.</td>
<td>Social position reflects the way society divides resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are unequal rewards fair?</strong></td>
<td>Yes. Unequal rewards boost economic production by encouraging people to work harder and try new ideas. Linking greater rewards to more important work is widely accepted.</td>
<td>No. Unequal rewards only serve to divide society, creating “haves” and “have-nots.” There is widespread opposition to social inequality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Discussion & Conclusion**

- What is social stratification? What are the 4 characteristics of SS?
- What’s the difference in class and caste systems?
- What do S-F say about SS? S-C? S-I?
- What are the dimensions of SS in the US?
- What is social mobility and what types are there?
- What is the extent of poverty in the US? How is that determined?
- What are some of the explanations for poverty?
- *Any questions?*