Social Class

- The single most important variable in society?
  - It correlates with almost all other social characteristics from birth to death.
    - Rich babies come out healthier and weighing more than poor babies.
    - Rich babies come home to better living conditions in terms of both physical and socio-emotional health, as well as intellectual stimulation.
    - Rich children benefit from schools that spend more on their students, have smaller class sizes, and more enrichment programs.
    - Rich children benefit from raised expectations by their teachers.
    - And so on...

What We Know

- Typically we have a sense of relative privilege and position.
  - You are aware of your socioeconomic position in relation to others.
    - Other families
    - Other neighborhoods
    - Other communities

Positions and Structure

- How did you end up where you are?

- How did others end up where they are?

- The social structure influences and molds your perception.
- The social structure creates different opportunities for different people.
- Having more of something, wealth, power, prestige, intelligence, initiative, earning potential, health, education, taste, verbal facility, etc. results in the reaping of social rewards.
- People in lower-ranking groups (strata) tend to receive corresponding smaller shares of social rewards (that’s really only fair… right?)
The Analogy of Gender

- What would be the consequence of telling young girls that they have had an equal opportunity throughout our nation’s history?
  - Why is there no female president?
  - Why do women earn less?
  - Why are women judged by their appearance more than men?
  - Why do women take so long in the restroom?
  - .... it must be a defect of the gender.

American’s have been willing to credit some amount of racial discrimination as the cause of poverty among racial/ethnic “minorities” and sex discrimination as a cause of women’s inequality, but are very reluctant to recognize class as contributing to perpetuation of poverty in general.

Blind Spots

- High School History Text Books
  - No discussion of:
    - Social class
    - Stratification
    - Income distribution
    - Inequality
    - Upper class
  - Some (minimal) discussion of the middle-class.
    - Middle-class values
    - Middle-class country
    - Middle-class suburbs
      - The rise of middle-class suburbs in the 1950s in particular.
    - By making everyone middle-class you erase class.
Social Stratification

- Social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy.
- Stratification is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.

Stratification Systems

- Characteristics
  - Systems persist for a long time.
  - Systems are resistant to change.
  - The system is bolstered by widely accepted legitimizing rationales.

Slavery

- Can exist in any stratification system.
- Individuals are owned and treated as property.
- Has primarily understood as an ascribed status situation.
- Historically, largely, based on debt, deviance, and war.
- **Legitimizing Rationale** - Ownership of Sub-Humans
  - Old Testament
  - Koran
  - Greeks and Romans
- “Bonded laborers” are imprisoned in virtual lifetime of employment.
  - Guest workers and illegal immigrants are forced to labor for years under terrible conditions to pay off debt or avoid being turned over to immigration authorities.

Caste Systems

- Determined at birth.
- Ascribed.
- Restricted or closed system.
- Endogamy, No intermingling (Separation).
Caste Systems (continued)

- Division of labor between castes.
- Understood hierarchy.
- The Dalit or untouchables.
- **Legitimizing Rationale**: Karma

Estate System

- Determined at birth.
- Can be achieved but most commonly ascribed.
- Closed system.
- Serfs were connected to the land.
  - Mutual benefit: protection for servitude.

- Problems began to arise:
  - Those in the 3rd estate began to do well for themselves.
  - Those in the 3rd estate became commoners.
    - House of Lords
    - House of Commons

Class System

- **Legitimizing Rationale**: The opportunity to “get ahead” is available to all.
- The position you reach is the result of your own effort.
- Inequality is legitimate because people end up where they deserve to be.
- Meritocracy
  - Stratification based on social merit.

Marx and Class

- Economist not a sociologist (so he says).
- Class is best understood as an economic condition.
- Individuals positions in relation to the means of production.
Marx and Class

- Individuals positions in relation to the means of production.
  - **The Bourgeoisie** – Those who own the means of production.
  - **The Proletariat** – The workers who sell their labor to the bourgeoisie.

- The means of production are the resources which are used to produce profit, and therefore wealth.
  - The factories
  - The ideas
  - The resources
    - Labor
    - Natural resources

Communist Manifesto - Intro

- Inequality always existed in society.

The Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

- **Owners** (the bourgeoisie) own the means of production.
- **Workers** (the proletariat) keep the profits they make from their workers’ efforts.
- These two classes are inherently in opposition to one another.
  - Antagonisms are built into the system itself regardless of how individuals think about it.
Latent Functions / Dysfunctions of the Capitalist Economic System

- Change is normal.
  - Constantly change the product that is produced.
  - Constantly change the way in which the product is produced.
  - Constantly change the labor force that produces the product.

- Global expansion of markets.
  - Look for markets to sell to everywhere.
  - Look for natural resources everywhere.
  - Look for labor markets everywhere.

- Periodic economic crises
  - The crises of over-production.
    - More cost effective to destroy the product.
    - Destroy the labor force that produced the product.

The Effect on the Workers

- Live as long as they find work and find work only so long as their labor increases capital.
- Minimum wage is the wage that will keep the worker from starving or freezing, and will also allow the workers to reproduce.
- With increased specialization tasks become increasingly more menial and therefore alienating.
- Laborers become indistinguishable.
- Mom & Pop are unable to compete with newer methods of production.
Marx Wrap-Up

- Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto to incite the worker to the point of revolt. Why has this not happened?
  - **Class Consciousness** - Subjective awareness of common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change.
  - **False Consciousness** - The understanding held by members that does not accurately reflect their class positions.

Ralf Dahrendorf on Class Conflict

- Dahrendorf proposes:
  - Fragmentation has given more people a stake in the system.
  - Standard of living has improved.
  - Workers are better organized.
  - Legal protection for workers.

Weber on Class

- According to Weber social class and one’s standing within the strata depends on:
  - Where one is in the **Market Situation** (i.e. wealth or property).
  - Power / Authority (Legitimate Power).
  - Status Group
    - Prestige
    - Social honor

Bourdieu on Class

- **Economic Capital**
  - Command over economic resources.
- **Social Capital**
  - Command over relationships.
- **Cultural Capital**
  - Material.
  - Embodied.
Social Mobility

- Open vs. Closed Systems
- Vertical Mobility (Upward or Downward)
- Horizontal Mobility
- Intergenerational Mobility
- Intragenerational Mobility

Social Mobility in the United States

- Social mobility through was very high.
- Social mobility within a single generation is typically very small.
- The long-term trend in social mobility, since the industrial revolution, has been upward.
- Social mobility since the 1970s has been uneven.
  - In relation to inflation gains for most Americans have slowed and even begun to fall in the beginning of the century.

Kuznets’s Curve

Some Principles of Stratification

1. Some positions are more important than others and require special skills.
2. A limited number of individuals have the talent to acquire these special skills.
3. Developing talent into skills requires of period of sacrifice.
4. To justify the sacrifice there must be incentives (desired rewards).
5. The rewards are: comfort, leisure, self-worth.
6. The unequal talents / training result in an unequal distribution of rewards.
7. Stratification is positively functional and inevitable for society.
New Propositions (Conflict Paradigm) - Tumin

1. Stratification systems function to **limit** the discovery of the **full talent range**.
2. Stratification systems set **limits** upon the possibility of expanding productive resources (**new solutions, innovations**).
3. Stratification provides the **elite** with political power by which they can **rationalize their advantage**.
4. Stratification **unequally distributes self-image / esteem**; encouraging some horizons to expand and others to diminish.
5. Stratification encourages **hostility** and **distrust, limiting** the opportunity for **social integration**.
6. Stratification **unequally distributes** one’s sense of **membership** within their own society.
7. Stratification similarly **unequally distributes loyalty**, based on one’s sense of connection to their society.
8. Consequently, stratification systems function to **distribute** the **motivation to participate unequally** in a population.

**Dominant Ideology**

- Cultural beliefs and practices help to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests.
- Stratification persists because it is backed up by an ideology (cultural beliefs that justify or legitimize social stratification).
- The idea is that some type of inequality is considered “fair”.

**Income vs. Wealth**

- Income is the amount of money that an individual or family group earns/receives in wages, salaries, investments, etc.
- Wealth is the total value of the assets owned less the debts an individual or family group has.

> “Wealth signifies the command over financial resources that a family has accumulated over its lifetime along with those resources that have been accumulated over generations.... Wealth is a special form of money not used to purchase milk and shoes and other life necessities. More often it is used to create opportunity, secure a desired stature and standard of living, or pass along class status to one’s children”  -Max Weber
The Importance of Wealth

- Wealth (having it or not) is enduring.
  - It accumulates and perpetuates through generations.
- If there were an equality of opportunity individual class origins should not be a determinant of socioeconomic achievement.
  - Neither poverty nor wealth should necessarily be intergenerational.
  - Volumes of scientific data that demonstrate that people have a greater chance of succeeding in life if their parents are not poor.
    - Health / Mental Health
    - Education
    - Working Life
    - Crime and Justice
    - Luck

The Matthew Effect

- “Once wealth is accumulated wealth leads to income-earning opportunities that are not open to those without wealth” - Thurow (1996).
- Capital gains currently average 4-5% annually.
- Economic growth is currently at 2-3% annually.
- The Gini Index (world-wide: .65)

The Classes

- The Capitalist Class
  - One percent of the population.
  - Worth more than the entire bottom 90 percent of the country.
  - Blue bloods and the nouveau riche.
The Classes (continued)

- **Upper Middle Class**
  - 15 percent of the population.
  - Class most shaped by education.
  - They’ve “made it”.

- **Lower Middle Class**
  - 34 percent of the population.
  - The lower middle class works for the upper middle and capitalist classes.
  - Believe they could experience upward mobility while also feeling vulnerable to slipping down the ladder.

- **The Working Class**
  - 30 percent of the population.
  - Unskilled blue-collar and white-collar workers.
  - Less educated.
  - Jobs are less secure.

- **The Working Poor**
  - 15 percent of the population.
  - Unskilled, low-paying, often temporary work.

- **The Underclass**
  - 5 percent of the population.
  - Little to no connection to the job market.
  - Little to no connection to society.
Poverty

- Absolute Poverty: Minimum level of subsistence that no family should [can] live below.
- Feminization of Poverty: A larger proportion of the poor in the U.S. are women and children.
  - Why might this be? Sociologically speaking.
- Who is to blame for poverty?

| The Poor | The System |

Interactionist View of Class

- What does it mean to belong to a country club?
- What type of interaction does your SES give you access to?
- How do the non-affluent characterize the affluent?
- How do the affluent characterize the non-affluent?
- Consider the meanings attached to being rich or poor.

Cultural Explanation for Inequality

- Cultural Explanation
  - People in different social classes have different values, beliefs, and behavioral norms which are passed down through socialization.
  - These values, beliefs, and behavioral norms are incompatible with success in society.

A Culture of Poverty
Culture, Expectations, Outcomes

- The Pygmalion Effect
  - “Spurters” or “Bloomers”
  - 1 in 5 randomly identified as such.
  - Spurters had significantly better performance on intelligence test.
  - Spurters had significant gains in GPA as well.
    - “If you are the child of lower income parents the chances are good that you will receive limited and often careless attention from adults”.
    - “If you are the child of upper-middle income parents, the chances are good that you will receive substantial and careful attention”.

Structural Explanation for Inequality

- Focus is on the limited access to opportunities that poor people have compared to the more affluent.
- Those who support the structural explanation argue that cultural explanations mask or cover-up the inadequacies and injustices of the social structure.
- Society is primarily responsible for poverty… there is not enough work to support families.
  - W. Wilson

The Job Ghetto - 1995

- Harlem:
  - 18% unemployment
  - 40% living below the poverty line
  - 29% receiving public assistance

- Applicant to new hire ratio was 14:1.
- 54 percent of fast food workers have a high school diploma.
  - One-third of PA recipients in the US have a HS diploma.
- In a years time 73 percent of applicants looking for work in fast food were still looking for work.
The Job Ghetto – 1995 (continued)

- African-Americans accounted for 70 percent of the new hires.
  - They were rejected at a much higher rate than other races.
- Employers preferred applicants who commute.
- Being poor in Harlem means difficulty finding minimum wage work close to home.

Structural Mobility

- Structural mobility has little or nothing to do with changes in the quality of individuals; structural mobility has to do with changes in the social structure of society.
  - Industrialization
  - Technology

Other Factors

- Class differences in birthrates have facilitated some amount of social mobility.
  - People in the upper classes tend to marry later and have fewer children than people in lower classes.
  - The upper class do not produce enough off-spring to meet the demands of the job market.
- Immigration
  - New residents tend to enter into the strata at the lowest rungs pushing residents of low socioeconomic status up, assuming there is an “up” to move to.