

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

ANTHONY GIDDENS

Cambridge University

University of California, Santa Barbara

1991

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P A R T T W O

STRUCTURES OF POWER

Power is an ever-present phenomenon in social life. In all human groups, some individuals have more authority or influence than others, while groups themselves vary in terms of the level of their power. Power and inequality tend to be closely linked. The powerful are able to accumulate valued resources, such as property or wealth; while possession of such resources is in turn a means of generating power itself.

In this part, we discuss some of the main systems of power and inequality. The first chapter looks at stratification and class structure—the ways in which inequalities are distributed within societies. This chapter is followed by a discussion of race and ethnicity, which examines the tensions and hostilities often found between people who are physically or culturally different from one another.

In Chapter 9 we move on to connect power and inequality with various types of groups and organizations. Attention is given in particular to the study of the large organizations—like government agencies, industrial firms, hospitals, or colleges—that dominate so much of modern social life. The final two chapters analyze two types of organ-

ization whose impact is particularly far reaching—the state, in Chapter 10, and the military, in Chapter 11. Governments are “specialists” in power; they are the source of the directives that influence many aspects of our daily activities. On the other hand, they are also the focus of resistance and rebellion.

From their earliest origins, states have been associated with the development of military power. Military rivalries and wars have shaped human social development in far-reaching ways in the past, and continue to do so in the twentieth century. We look at the nature of the military in the modern world, the relation between the military and politics, and the global trade in armaments.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

STRATIFICATION AND CLASS STRUCTURE

WHY ARE SOME GROUPS IN SOCIETY MORE WEALTHY AND powerful than others? How unequal are modern societies? How much chance does someone from a lowly background have of reaching the top of the economic ladder? What are the reasons for the persistence of poverty in affluent countries today? These are some of the questions we shall try to answer in this chapter. The study of social inequalities is one of the most important areas of sociology, because the material resources that people have access to determine a great deal about their lives. To

describe inequalities, sociologists speak of **social stratification**. Stratification can be defined as the system of structured inequalities among different groups of people.

Stratification is not just an abstract notion, but concerns fundamental aspects of people's lives—what they strive for, the satisfactions and rewards they are able to gain, and the deprivations they suffer. The following passage comes from Ellen Israel Rosen's study of married working women in "Milltown," an industrial city in New England. The women were mostly factory workers who essentially held down two jobs, because they also shouldered a heavy burden of man-

aging their homes. Some were born in America, others were immigrants—Celia Triano, for instance, is of Portuguese background:

When we spoke with her, Celia Triano was sixty years old. She was currently employed full-time as an assembler in a small firm that made electrical wires and cables. Her husband, Bud, was a metal worker in a local plant that manufactured machine tools. As our interviewer walked through the door, she was welcomed, offered a seat, and almost instantly regaled with photographs of the Trianos' two grown sons. Both had graduated from college and Celia proudly showed the pictures of her sons' graduations—and then the photographs of their weddings.

Celia began working in 1939 when she was eighteen in a rubber factory where, for thirteen years, she made golf balls. Unlike most of her contemporaries, she married late, at the age of thirty-two, the year Eisenhower was first elected president. She stopped working for a full eighteen years while she bore and reared her two sons. In 1970, at the age of fifty, Celia went back to work to put her two sons through college.

Celia's children are somewhat unusual. Most of her friends at work have grown sons who are blue-collar workers and daughters who are secretaries. Yet there is a sizable minority of women who have children who are currently enrolled at the state university. Others have sons and daughters who have already become nurses, engineers, and accountants. One woman on our study, a stitcher in a garment shop, has a son who is a student at Yale. Clearly he is somewhat atypical. Yet, Tina Bologna, his mother, expressed the feelings and aspirations many women have for their children when she told us, "I would stitch any time to send him to school."

When Celia decided to go back to work ten years ago the only job she could find was as a part-time file clerk in a real estate office in her town. She worked there for about nine months and quit when the production job she now holds became available. Working in the cable plant paid more money—money she felt she needed at that point. She has worked there, full-time, for the past nine years.

Celia admits that her husband does not believe that women should work. Yet, he apparently acknowledges that they

couldn't have sent their two boys to school without her salary. He would like her to quit now that their children are out of school and on their own, but Celia continues to work. She says she likes having the extra money. She doesn't have anything special to do now that her children are gone and enjoys being with her friends at work. She says she would like to retire at sixty-two when she becomes eligible for a small pension. (Rosen, 1987)

Rosen's research illustrates some of the forms of inequality with which we shall be preoccupied in this chapter. The circumstances under which Celia Triano has lived out her life are very different from those of some other Americans. She has had to struggle constantly to make ends meet—and has never known the ease and comfort that a high income can bring. Her work in the factory and real estate office has always been seen as of secondary importance to that of her husband, although the couple could not have pursued their aspirations—such as providing adequately for their children—without it.

Although her own life has been hard, Celia Triano hopes for better things for her children and, together with her husband, has worked relentlessly to make these dreams come true. These endeavors have met with some success since her sons have graduated from college and are likely to find better-paying jobs than either of their parents held. In sociological terms, the children are *socially mobile*, having the ability to move up the social scale, as compared to their parents. In a sense, all the members of the Triano family are lucky. They are white and do not face the same barriers to social advancement that confront blacks (see Chapter 8: "Ethnicity and Race"). Yet even for whites, American society is much less "open" than many of its citizens believe it to be, and major inequalities between groups persist.

SYSTEMS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

AMERICAN SOCIETY INVOLVES A SYSTEM OF STRATIFICATION, because the chances for material success that individuals have are strongly influenced by the social background from which they come. We shall study stratification in the United States in some detail later in the chapter, but first of all we have to analyze the different types of stratification that exist, and have existed



in the past. Modern stratification systems differ considerably from those characteristic of previous periods of history, and from those found in nonindustrial parts of the world in the present-day. Four basic systems of stratification can be distinguished: slavery, caste, estates, and class.

SLAVERY

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality, by which certain people are owned as property by others. The legal conditions of slave ownership have varied considerably among different societies. Sometimes slaves were deprived of almost all rights in law—as was the case on southern plantations in the United States—while in other societies, their

position was more akin to that of servant. For example, in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, some slaves occupied positions of great responsibility. They were excluded from political positions and from the military, but they held most other types of occupation. Some were literate and worked as government administrators; many were trained in craft skills. Even so, not all slaves could count on such good fate. For many, their days began and ended in hard labor in the mines (Finley, 1968, 1980).

Those subjected to slavery quite often fought back against their subjection, and many slave rebellions have occurred through history. Because of the phenomenon of resistance, systems of forced slave labor have tended to be economically unstable. High productivity could only be achieved through constant supervision and brutal punishment. Slave-labor systems eventually broke down, partly because of the struggles they provoked, and partly because economic or other incentives motivate people to produce more effectively than direct compulsion. Slavery is simply not economically efficient.

From about the eighteenth century on, many people in Europe and America came to see slavery as morally wrong. Since the freeing of slaves in North and South America, something over a century ago, slavery as a formal institution has almost completely disappeared from the world.

CASTE

Caste is associated above all with the cultures of the Indian subcontinent. The term "caste" itself is not an Indian one, but comes from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning "race" or "pure stock" (Littlejohn, 1972). The Indian caste system is extremely elaborate, and varies in its structure from area to area—so much so that it does not really constitute one "system" at all, but is a loosely connected diversity of varying beliefs and practices. However, there are certain principles that are widely shared. Caste membership is hereditary; no individual may move between castes. Those in the highest caste, the Brahmins, represent the most elevated condition of purity; the untouchables the lowest. The Brahmins must avoid certain types of contact with the untouchables, and only the untouchables are allowed physical contact with animals or substances regarded as unclean.

The caste system is closely bound up with the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Individuals who fail to abide by the rituals and duties of their caste, it is believed, will be reborn in an inferior position in their next incarnation. The Indian caste system is rigid compared to other forms of stratification, but has never been completely static. Al-

though individuals are debarred from moving between castes, whole groups can change, and frequently have changed, their position within the caste hierarchy.

ESTATES

Estates were prominent in European feudalism, but also existed in many other traditional civilizations, tending to develop wherever there was a ruling group based on noble birth. The feudal estates consisted of different levels of social position with their own obligations and legal rights.

In Europe, the highest estate was composed of the aristocracy and gentry, whose wealth and power emanated from large-scale land holdings. The clergy formed another estate, having lower status but possessing various distinctive privileges and often enormous power. The Church itself owned much land and exerted considerable influence over the power of the aristocrats. Those in what came to be called the "third estate" were the commoners—serfs, free peasants, merchants, and artisans. A certain degree of intermarriage and individual mobility was tolerated between estates. Commoners might be knighted, for example, for having performed special services for the monarch; wealthy merchants could sometimes purchase titles and become aristocrats. A remnant of the system persists in Britain today where hereditary titles are still recognized, though the power to rule based on these inherited titles no longer exists. Business leaders, civil servants, and others may be knighted or receive peerages in recognition of their services.

CLASS

The concept of **class** is most important for analyzing stratification in industrialized societies like the United States. Everyone has heard of the notion of class, but most people in everyday talk use it in a vague way. As employed in sociology, the term has some precision. It can easily be understood in comparison with the other forms of stratification. Class systems differ from slavery, castes, or estates in four respects:

1. **CLASS SYSTEMS ARE FLUID.** Unlike the other types of strata, classes are not established by legal or religious provisions. Class systems are typically more fluid than the other types of stratification and the

boundaries between classes are never clear-cut. There are no formal restrictions upon intermarriage between people from different classes.

2. **CLASS POSITIONS ARE IN SOME PART ACHIEVED.** An individual's class is at least in some degree *achieved*, not simply "given" at birth as is common in the other types of stratification systems. Social mobility—movement upwards and downwards in the class structure—is more common than in the other types.
3. **CLASS IS ECONOMICALLY BASED.** Classes depend upon *economic* differences between groups of individuals—inequalities in possession and control of material resources. In the other types of stratification systems, noneconomic factors (such as the influence of religion in the Indian caste system) are generally most important.
4. **CLASS SYSTEMS ARE LARGE-SCALE AND IMPERSONAL.** In the other types of stratification systems, inequalities are expressed primarily in personal relationships of duty or obligation—between serf and lord, slave and master, or lower and higher caste individuals. Class systems, by contrast, operate mainly through large-scale, impersonal associations. For instance, one major basis of class differences is to be found in inequalities of pay and working conditions; these affect all the people in specific occupational categories, as a result of very general economic circumstances pertaining to the economy as a whole.

TABLE 7.1 SYSTEMS OF STRATIFICATION

System	Basis	Mobility
Slavery	Legal (by force)	None
Caste	Religious	Some (by the movement of whole caste groups, but not by individuals)
Estates	Legal	Some (through intermarriage, purchase of titles, or knighthood)
Class	Economic	Much

In the light of these criteria, then, what is a class? We can define a class as a large group of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the opportunities they have to lead certain kinds of lives. Ownership of *wealth*, together with *occupation*, are the chief bases of class differences. For example, someone who comes from a rich background has opportunities closed to a person born into a poor, inner-city area.

The major classes that exist in Western societies are the **upper class** (the wealthy, employers, and industrialists, plus top executives—those who own or directly control productive resources); the **middle class** (which includes most white-collar workers and professionals); and the **working or lower class** (those in blue-collar or routine service jobs). Celia Triano and her husband are working-class people, but their sons are likely to enter middle-class occupations. In some of the industrialized countries, such as France and Japan, a fourth class—**peasants** (people engaged in traditional types of agricultural production)—has also until recently been important. Celia Triano actually came from a peasant background in her country of origin, Portugal. In Third World countries, peasants remain the largest class.

CLASSES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES TODAY

HISTORIANS GENERALLY AGREE THAT A CENTURY AND A half ago, in the early period of the development of industrial capitalism, there were major class differences. The

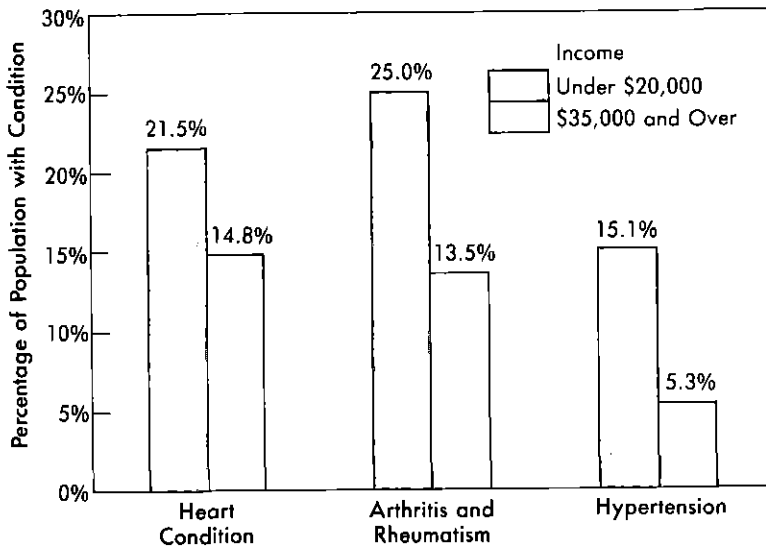
economic gap between the laboring poor and the wealthy industrialists who were their employers was enormous. Since then, some claim, material inequalities have lessened greatly in industrialized countries. Incomes as a whole have risen, the rich are now heavily taxed, and the welfare system benefits those who cannot easily earn a living for themselves. Because of these changes, these observers say, class today has become relatively unimportant.

In reality, this is far from the case. Some kinds of inequalities have been alleviated, but many remain. As we shall see below, there are still major differences in wealth, income, and power between those at the top and those at the bottom of the social scale. Most people are considerably better off materially than in the nineteenth century, but a sizable minority still live in conditions of poverty.

Even physical differences are correlated with class membership. People at the bottom levels of the class system have lower birth

FIGURE 7.1

WHO HAS HEALTH PROBLEMS



This graph shows the percentage of people with various chronic conditions by income level (1985).

Source: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. 1985. *Vital and Health Statistics*, ser. 10.

weights, higher rates of infant mortality, are on average smaller at maturity, less healthy, and die at a younger age, than those in higher class categories. Major types of mental disorder and physical illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, pneumonia, and bronchitis, are all more common at lower levels of the class structure than towards the top (Figure 7.1) (Zola and Kosa, 1975; Luft, 1978; Waitzkin, 1986).

DIFFERENCES OF WEALTH AND INCOME

Let us begin our exploration of class differences by looking at basic divisions of wealth and income within the population as a whole.

Wealth refers to all assets individuals own: cash, savings and checking accounts, investments in stocks, bonds, and estate properties, and so on. **Income** refers to wages and salaries coming from paid occupations, plus "unearned" money deriving from investments. While most people get what money they have from their work, the

wealthy often derive the bulk of their income from investments, some of them inherited.

Wealth

Reliable information about the distribution of wealth is difficult to obtain. Some countries keep more accurate statistics than others, but there is always a considerable amount of guesswork involved. The affluent tend not to publicize the full range of their assets; we know far more about the poor than we do about the wealthy. What is certain is that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a very few. One percent of the adult population in the United States today owns more than 20 percent of the total wealth of the country. More specifically, the wealthiest 10 percent of families own 90 percent of corporate stocks and business assets and 95 percent of bonds. The richest 0.5 percent of the population (four hundred thousand households) owns 40 percent of corporate stocks and bonds. Lower down the scale, 80 percent of the adult American population owns no more than 25 percent of all wealth (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989; Institute of Social Research Newsletter, 1986-87).

Income

One of the most significant changes occurring in Western countries over the past century has been the rising real income of the majority of the working population. (*Real income* is income with rises due to inflation excluded, to provide a fixed standard of comparison from year to year.) Blue-collar workers in Western societies now earn between three to four times as much in real income as their counterparts at the turn of the century. Gains for white-collar, managerial, and professional workers have been slightly higher still. In terms of earnings per person (per capita) and the range of goods and services that can be purchased, the majority of the population today are vastly more affluent than any peoples have previously been in human history. One of the most important reasons for this growth is the increasing *productivity*—output per worker—that has been secured through technological development in industry. The volume of goods and services produced per worker has risen more or less continually, in many industries at least, since the 1900s.

Nevertheless, just as in the case of wealth, income distribution is very unequal. The top 5 percent of earners in the United States receive 16 percent of total income; the highest 20 percent obtain 42 percent of the total. The bottom 20 percent of earners receive only 5 percent of overall income. In 1987, 13.5 percent of the population lived below the federal government's poverty line. In a country in

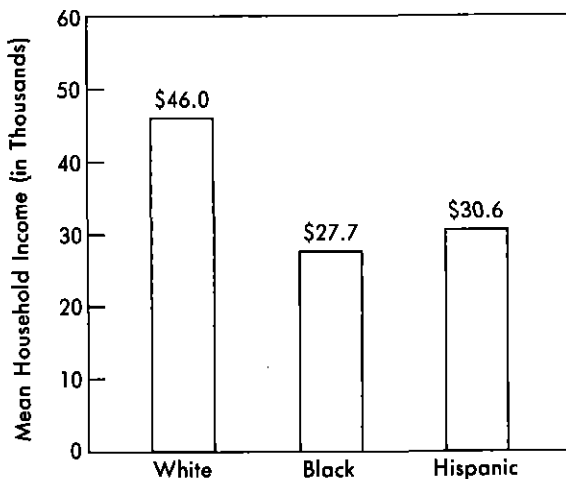
which many are affluent by any standards, and some enormously wealthy, more than thirty million live in conditions in which, according to the official definition, they are unable to afford basic necessities of food, clothing, and adequate housing.

In most Western countries, wealth and income have become more equally distributed than was the case half a century or more ago. But this trend has been less pronounced in the United States than elsewhere. Since the fortunes possessed by the richest Americans are so very large, the disparity between the wealthy and the poor is considerably greater than in most other industrialized countries (Figure 7.2).

CLASS DIVISIONS

Ownership of wealth is a basic dimension by which we categorize groups in a class system. Let us at this point proceed to analyze the main class divisions in the United States. We offer a general portrayal even though there are more complexities and subcategories within the classes than we have space to mention here. Moreover, the identification of classes and class boundaries is a debated issue among sociologists, and no such portrayal would command universal agreement.

FIGURE 7.2 WHO IS MAKING THE MONEY, 1987



This graph compares the average (mean) household income of those in the prime of their working life (age 45–54) by race and Hispanic origin.

The Upper Class

The upper class in American society consists of a small number of individuals and families who own considerable amounts of property—thinking of them as the top 1 percent of the wealthy provides an approximate statistical guide. The upper class includes a core of the “super-rich.” There are about 150 families in the United States worth at least \$100 million. To them, it has been said, “a fortune of a million is only respectable poverty” (Jaher, 1980).

The extravagant and sometimes bizarre habits of the super-rich have horrified liberal observers and titillated generations of the less fortunate. Some have lived a frugal and self-denying life while administering their vast assets. Others have made a cult of ostentation, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the very wealthy at this period lived in extravagant homes, quite often modeled upon European palaces or chateaux. The estate of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, at San Simeon, California, had grounds one-third the size of Rhode Island containing his own private zoo. The estate of John D. Rockefeller in Tarrytown, New York, needed 350 employees to run it; its annual upkeep cost \$400,000 in the 1930s—equivalent to several million dollars today. Much money was spent ostentatiously on costume balls and “coming out” events—several hundred thousand dollars were spent upon entertainment each season by those who lived in the most opulent style. Some of the very wealthy devoted themselves to art collecting, building up fabulous accumulations of treasures. The richest man in the United States in the 1920s, Andrew Mellon, spent \$31 million buying paintings—whose value when he died had grown to even larger proportions. On the other hand, some devoted a proportion of their fortunes to charitable ends. John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie were particularly prominent in establishing charity foundations. Carnegie gave away 90 percent of his wealth of \$350 million before he died, and left most of the remainder to colleges, libraries, and scientific institutes. Andrew Mellon and Henry Ford also gave large sums of money to set up charitable foundations.

The gaudy expressions of wealth subsided in the postwar period. Even the Texas oil magnates, who amassed some of the largest fortunes during those years, spent less ostentatiously than their predecessors of the 1920s and 1930s. The collection of art and antiques remains a favorite preoccupation however. The oilman J. Paul Getty spent well over \$50 million accumulating such treasures.

Forbes magazine publishes each year a list of the richest people in America. The list currently includes sixty-six billionaires—individuals who own more than one billion dollars in assets. The wealthiest

of them all is the media magnate and financier, John Kluge, whose fortune amounts to \$5 billion. The owner of the magazine, Malcolm Forbes, was himself extremely wealthy, and went in for the sort of flamboyant spending that has in recent years become relatively uncommon. In 1989, for example, he celebrated his seventieth birthday with a lavish party held in Morocco, attended by the rich and famous invited from all over the world.

The newer entrants among the small group of the very rich tend to have made their wealth from finance rather than industry. An example is Michael Milken, who invented “junk bonds”—share issues giving high interest rates in the short term, designed to help companies finance takeovers. At the peak of his earnings, Milken had an income of nearly half a billion dollars a year. Fate changed for Milken in 1989 as he was indicted by federal prosecutors on ninety-six counts. In April, 1990, Milken pleaded guilty to six felony counts and was fined \$600 million.

Such wealth confers power. The influence of the wealthy stems in part from direct control of industrial and financial capital, and in part from their access to leading positions in the political, educational, and cultural spheres.

The Middle Class

The phrase “the middle class” covers people working in many different occupations. According to many observers, the majority of the population of the United States today falls into this class category, because the proportion of white-collar jobs has risen markedly relative to blue-collar ones (see Chapter 15: “Work and Economic Life”).

There are three fairly distinct sectors within the middle class. The *old middle class* consists of the owners of small businesses, the proprietors of local shops, and small farmers. The numbers of people in this category have declined steadily over the past century, but they still compose a significant proportion of the overall working population (6 percent of the work force in the United States in 1985). Small businesses are much more unstable than larger ones. Most small enterprises fail within two years of being set up; only some 20 percent of those established in any one year in the United States are still in business five years later. Small firms and shops are often unable to compete effectively with the large companies, supermarkets, and restaurant chains. If the old middle class has not shrunk as much as some once thought would be the case, it is because there is a large reservoir of people wanting to try their hand at starting a business of their own. Most of those who go out of business are thus replaced by others.

The *upper-middle class* is made up mainly of those holding managerial or professional occupations. The category includes large numbers of individuals and families, and generalizing about their attitudes and outlooks is risky. Most have experienced some form of higher education, and the proportion holding liberal views on social and political issues, especially among professional groups, is fairly high. In the United States, those from White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) and Jewish backgrounds are disproportionately represented, although there is now also a small "black bourgeoisie."

The *lower-middle class*, an even more heterogeneous category, includes people working as office staff, sales representatives, teachers, nurses, and others. People in this class group tend to have similar social and political attitudes to most blue-collar workers, although there are many variations of outlook.

The diverse character of the middle class as a whole is a reflection of the "contradictory" situations in which middle-class people find themselves. They are often caught between conflicting pressures and influences. Many lower-middle-class people, for example, identify with the same values of those in more remunerative positions, but may find themselves living on incomes below those of the better-paid manual workers who do not have a middle-class position.

The Working Class

The working class consists of those working in blue-collar, manual occupations. As with the middle class, there tend to be marked divisions within the working class as a whole. One important source of such divisions is skill level. The *upper-working class*, consisting of skilled workers, has frequently been an "aristocracy of labor"; its members have had superior incomes, better working conditions, and more job security than those in other blue-collar occupations (Mackenzie, 1973). Some skills, though, have been undermined by technological developments, resulting in a weakening of the position of the workers, or even the extinction of certain occupations. For example, the skilled Linotype operators who used to set the type for newspapers, books, and other printed materials have now nearly all disappeared. The Linotype machine has been supplanted by new print technology based on a computerized photo-electronic process that requires less skilled workers.

The *lower-working class* is made up of those in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, which need little training. Most of these jobs have lower incomes than, and inferior job security to, skilled occupations.

Working-class occupations also differ depending on whether they are full time or part time, and how much job security workers have. Distinguishing between *central* and *peripheral* areas of the economy

helps illuminate this. Central sectors are those in which workers are in full-time jobs, obtaining high earnings, and enjoying long-term job security. Peripheral sectors are those in which jobs are insecure, having low earnings, with a high proportion of part-time workers. Skilled workers, and a proportion of semi- and unskilled employees, (mostly white males) predominate in the central sectors. This group also makes up a large proportion of labor-union membership. Others find themselves in the peripheral sector, where the level of unionization is low (Form, 1985).

Another line of demarcation at the lower levels of the class structure is between the white working class and underprivileged minorities—who compose an **underclass**. Members of the underclass have markedly inferior conditions of work and living standards to the majority of the population. Many are among the long-term unemployed, or drift in and out of jobs. In the United States, blacks are disproportionately represented in the underclass—and have been ever since slavery ended.

STUDYING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

In studying class, it is not enough only to analyze social and economic differences alone. We must also consider how people think about class—not just about what class they believe they belong to, but their attitudes towards others differently situated from themselves. In other words, we have to study not only class but also **class consciousness**—that is, how people think about class and class divisions.

Studies of class consciousness have used various approaches among them, the *reputational* and *subjective methods*, as well as a rather different one, concerned with class imagery.

The Reputational Method

In the reputational method, respondents are asked in which classes they would place other people. One of the best-known studies of this type was carried out by W. Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt in Newburyport, a small town in Massachusetts (Warner and Lunt, 1941; Warner et al., 1949). Lengthy interviews were conducted with many of the residents of the community in order to build up a picture of their views of the class divisions within it. Class categories like “the folks with the money,” “poor folk but decent,” and “nobodies” were consistently referred to by respondents. Six social classes were identified

on the basis of these responses: an upper, middle, and lower class, each having a subdivision.

This reputational approach has been used often since the original studies by Warner and his associates, but can only be effectively applied in small communities in which people *tend* to know each other. Moreover, the method mixes up two phenomena that should be kept separate—class and class consciousness. Class differences exist regardless of whether people are conscious of them.

The Subjective Method

The subjective method simply involves asking people to which class they believe themselves to belong. An early study of this type was carried out by Richard Centers, who obtained responses from a national random sample (Centers, 1949). Centers undertook his research in reaction to a poll organized by the business magazine *Fortune*, which claimed that 80 percent of Americans identified themselves as middle class. Centers observed that the poll had offered respondents only three choices: upper class, middle class, and lower class. He found that if a fourth choice, “working class,” were added, about half of those in his sample placed themselves in this category. People were prepared to see themselves as “working class,” but were unhappy about placing themselves in the “lower class.” Since responses vary according to the questions asked in this way, it is not very clear what value can be placed upon the results of studies of this type.

However, Jackman and Jackman (1983) have recently tried to build upon Centers’s approach to class. They used data from a national survey of attitudes towards and awareness of class in the United States, conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. People were asked to say which of the following classes they considered they belonged to: the poor, the working class, the middle class, the upper-middle class, or the upper class. All but 3 percent of the respondents identified themselves with one of the five class categories. About 8 percent saw themselves as poor, 37 percent as working class, 43 percent as middle class, 8 percent as upper-middle class, and 1 percent as upper class. There was a high level of agreement over which occupations were associated with these classes. For instance, business executives, doctors, and lawyers almost invariably were in the upper-middle or upper-class categories. There were no significant differences between blacks and whites in these assessments.

Images of the Class Structure

A third approach to studying class consciousness involves investigating *images of the class structure*. Research of this sort tends to be more

informative than either of the other two approaches, because it looks more directly at *how* people think about the nature and sources of social inequality. For example, there are attitudes and outlooks that do not employ the word "class" itself, but nonetheless express important aspects of class consciousness. Thus upper-class or upper-middle-class people may sometimes deny that classes exist at all. We may see this sociologically, however, as *itself* an expression of class consciousness. Such people tend to interpret the social world as a hierarchy of positions in which opportunities for advancement are fairly equal for everyone. Their image of stratification corresponds to the contexts of their own experience, but is generalized to the whole society.

Those at lower levels of the class structure, on the other hand, tend more often to see stratification in terms of an opposition between "us" and "them." "They" are people who are in authority—officials, bosses, or managers. "We" are those who are subject to that authority in similar conditions of work or are in a situation of relative powerlessness. An illustration of this can be taken from a study of an automated chemical plant in New Jersey (Halle, 1984; Levison, 1974). The blue-collar workers in the plant made a clear distinction between "working men" or "working women" (which refers to their own experience) and people who hold office jobs or are in positions of authority—plus the "people above them," "the rich." Being a working man or woman involves a cluster of related attitudes. Interviewees repeatedly commented "it's working with your hands," "we get our hands dirty," "we do the same thing over and over again," and "we're told what to do." Those in managerial or professional jobs "do not really work," they "just sit on their butts all day."

A typical portion of an interview between the researcher and a worker at the plant went as follows:

RESEARCHER: "What do you mean when you talk about the working man?"

WORKER: "The working man really refers to laboring work, hard physical work."

RESEARCHER: "Are big businessmen working men?"

WORKER: [derisively] "Of course not. They don't do nothing all day."

RESEARCHER: "Am I [a professor] a working man?"

WORKER: "Well, you have a job, but you're not really a working man. It really refers to physical work. Everyone here in the plant is a working man."

Women in lower-level, or "pink-collar," jobs in the plant also felt themselves to be separate from those above them. Here is another extract from an interview:

RESEARCHER: "Are you a working woman?"

SECRETARY: "Oh yes, I have a job."

RESEARCHER: "Are managers working women?"

SECRETARY: "Well, they're not really like us. Like, I do a lot of my boss's job. I screen visitors, I know who he'll want to see and who he won't. And I do a lot of his writing for him, I write a lot of his memos. He doesn't tell anyone else, but he says I write better than he does, so he often tells me what he wants and I write it out." (Halle, 1984)

GENDER AND STRATIFICATION

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LIFE OF CELIA TRIANO, GIVEN AT the beginning of the chapter, indicates that women's work—in the workplace and the home—plays a central

part in the stratification system. Yet studies of stratification were for many years "gender blind"—they were written as though women did not exist, or as though, for purposes of analyzing divisions of power, wealth, and prestige, women were unimportant and uninteresting. Gender in fact is one of the most profound dimensions of stratification. There are no societies in which men do not have more wealth, status, and influence than women.

One of the main problems posed by the study of gender and stratification in modern societies sounds simple, but turns out to be difficult to resolve. This is the question of whether we can understand gender inequalities in modern times mainly in terms of class divisions. Inequalities of gender are more deep-rooted historically than class systems. Men had superior standing to women even in hunting and gathering societies, where there were no classes. Yet class divisions are so marked in modern societies that there is no doubt that they "overlap" substantially with gender inequalities. The economic position of many women tends to reflect that of their husbands, since males are usually the main breadwinners; hence it can be argued that we have to explain gender inequalities mainly in class terms.

Frank Parkin has expressed this point of view very well:

Female status certainly carries with it many disadvantages compared with that of males in various areas of social life including employment opportunities, property ownership, in-

come, and so on. However, these inequalities associated with sex differences are not usefully thought of as components of stratification. This is because for the great majority of women the allocation of social and economic rewards is determined primarily by the position of their families and, in particular, that of the male head. Although women today share certain status attributes in common, simply by virtue of their sex, their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their own occupation but, more commonly, by that of their fathers or husbands. And if the wives and daughters of unskilled laborers have something in common with the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners, there can be no doubt that the *differences* in their overall situation are far more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female status were felt to be so great as to override differences of a class kind would it be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification. (Parkin, 1971)

Women, it can be claimed, tend to be confined to a “private” domain—the domestic world of the family, children, and the household. Men, on the other hand, live in more of a “public” domain, from which variations in wealth and power primarily derive. Their world is that of paid work, industry, and politics (Elshtain, 1981). Even if there are now many women in the labor force, the managerial sphere is still dominated by men.

The view that class inequalities govern gender stratification has become the subject of some debate. John Goldthorpe has defended what he calls the “conventional position” in class analysis—that the paid work of women is relatively insignificant compared to that of men, and that therefore women can be regarded as being in the same class as their husbands (Goldthorpe, 1983). This is not, Goldthorpe emphasizes, a view based upon an ideology of sexism. On the contrary, it recognizes the subordinate position in which most women find themselves in the labor force. Women have part-time jobs more often than men, and tend to have more intermittent experience of paid employment, since many withdraw from the work force for lengthy periods to bear and care for children. Since the majority of women are in a position of economic dependence upon their husbands, Goldthorpe agrees with Parkin that their class position is most often governed by the husbands’ class situation.

Goldthorpe’s argument can be criticized in several ways. First, in a substantial proportion of households the income of women is essential to maintaining the family’s economic position and way of life. In

these circumstances women's paid employment in some part actually determines the class position of households. Second, a wife's employment may strongly influence that of her husband, not simply the other way around. Although women rarely earn more than their husbands, the working situation of a wife might still be the "lead" factor in influencing the class of her husband. This could be the case, for instance, if the husband is an unskilled or semi-skilled blue-collar worker and the wife is the manager of a store. The wife's occupation in such a case would then determine the family's class position.

Third, many "cross class" households exist, in which the work of the husband is in a higher class category than that of the wife, or (less commonly) the other way around. Since few studies have been carried out looking at the consequences of this, we cannot be confident that it is always appropriate to take the occupation of the male as the determining influence. There may be some purposes for which it is more realistic to treat men and women, even within the same households, as being in different class positions.

Fourth, there is an increasing proportion of families in which women are the sole breadwinners. Unless the woman has an income derived from alimony which puts her on the same economic level as her ex-husband, she is by definition the determining influence upon her own class position (Stanworth, 1984; Walby, 1986).

Recent research has supported the conclusion that the economic position of women cannot simply be deduced from that of their husband. A study carried out in Sweden showed cross-class families to be common (Leiuffsrud and Woodward, 1987). In most such cases, the husband had the superior occupation, although in a minority of instances the reverse was the case. The research showed that individuals in such families tended to "import" aspects of their differing class position into the family. Decisions, for instance, about who stays home to care for a sick child were related to the interaction of class and gender in the family. Where the wife's job was superior to that of the husband, he would usually have this responsibility.

WOMEN AND MEN IN STRATIFICATION RESEARCH

Women have only rarely been directly included in research into occupations and work situations (Stromberg and Harkness, 1977; Barker and Allen, 1976). Even where women do appear in research studies, less attention is paid to their activities and attitudes than to those of men. Roslyn Feldberg and Evelyn Glenn (1984) have distinguished two conceptual models used in the study of class and gender differences. One, the *job model*, has been applied mainly to men; the other,

the *gender model*, has been used primarily in relation to women. The job model assumes that basic social relationships are determined by work; that families are headed by men; and that employment and financial earnings are the main influence over an individual's life activities. The gender model accepts that the family is male-headed, but sees the family as determining basic social relationships, rather than work, and treats domestic roles as the main focus of a person's life.

Looking at some studies of occupations, Feldberg and Glenn show that the use of these models actively distorts the conclusions reached. One piece of research they examined, for example, is Robert Blauner's work, *Alienation and Freedom* (Blauner, 1964). Blauner's research included a comparison of men and women working within the textile industry. The jobs studied were mostly routine and uninteresting. Those of the women were more demanding than the men's jobs, because the women's work was more closely paced by machines requiring a consistently fast rhythm of work. Even though the women had worse working conditions than the men, they did not express greater dissatisfaction with their jobs. Blauner comments that this is because work did not have a central importance in their lives, their most important roles were those of wife and mother. In other words, he invokes the gender model. He provides no evidence to support this interpretation, however, although detailed information was gathered about why men held the attitudes they did. The reader of Blauner's book is not told what proportion of the women were mothers and housewives, or what their domestic responsibilities were. Women were presumed to be little affected by the nature of the paid work they did, while considerable research effort was expended to document the ways in which the men related to their jobs.

Feldberg and Glenn concluded:

When several alternative explanations could plausibly be invoked, the one that is most consistent with job or gender models is favored without adequate discussion . . . the search for alternative interpretations is short-circuited. The models offer a ready-made explanation and the researcher follows the path of least resistance. These distortions are serious enough. An even more serious consequence of the models is that they bias the entire direction of research. As is the case of basic paradigms in science, the job-gender paradigm determines *what* is studied. (Feldberg and Glenn, 1984)

Problems in Studying Gender and Stratification

At the present moment, there does not exist an adequate framework within which problems of gender and stratification can effectively be

analyzed. Theoretical and conceptual innovations are needed as well as a reorientation of empirical research. The two models identified by Feldberg and Glenn express long-established shortcomings in analyses of class and the domestic sphere. Those interested in stratification have concentrated upon men, with their households presumed to be "pulled along" with them. Where the situation and outlook of women has been studied at all in sociology, it has been almost always in the domestic setting. Not nearly enough is known of the connections between these two environments.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

IN STUDYING STRATIFICATION, WE HAVE TO CONSIDER NOT only the differences between economic positions or occupations, but what happens to the individuals who occupy them. **Social mobility** refers to the movement of individuals and groups between different socioeconomic positions. **Vertical mobility** means movement up or down the socioeconomic scale. Those who gain in property, income, or status are said to be *upwardly mobile*, while those who move in the opposite direction are *downwardly mobile*. In modern societies there is also a great deal of **lateral mobility**, which refers to geographical movement between neighborhoods, towns, or regions. Vertical and lateral mobility are often combined. For instance, an individual working in a company in one city might be promoted to a higher position in a branch of the firm located in another town, or even in a different country.

There are two ways of studying social mobility. First, we can look at individuals' own careers—how far they move up or down the socioeconomic scale in the course of their working lives. This is called **intragenerational mobility**. Alternatively, we can analyze where children are on the scale compared to their parents or grandparents. Mobility across the generations is called **intergenerational mobility**.

MOBILITY STUDIES

The amount of vertical mobility in a society is a major indication of its "openness." Do individuals born into the lower strata have opportunities to move up the socioeconomic ladder? How "open" are the industrialized countries? Is there more equality of opportunity in the United States than elsewhere? Pitrim Sorokin carried out the earliest

studies of comparative social mobility (Sorokin, 1927). Sorokin included a vast array of different societies, ranging from traditional Rome and China to the United States. He concluded that opportunities for rapid ascent in the United States were much more confined than American folklore suggested. The techniques Sorokin used to gather his data, however, were relatively primitive.

Research carried out by Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan (1967), forty years later, was far more sophisticated and comprehensive. Surveying a national sample of twenty thousand males, Blau and Duncan concluded that there was a great deal of vertical mobility in the United States, but nearly all of this was between occupational positions quite close to one another. "Long range" mobility, that is, from working class to upper-middle class, was rare. Although downward movement occurred both within the careers of individuals and intergenerationally, it was much less common than upward mobility. The reason for this latter finding was that white-collar and professional jobs had grown much more rapidly than blue-collar ones. This shift created the openings for some sons of blue-collar workers to move into white-collar positions.

Perhaps the most celebrated international study of social mobility was that carried out by Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix (1959). They analyzed data from nine industrialized societies—Britain, France, West Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Japan, Denmark, Italy, and the United States. The research concentrated upon mobility of men from blue-collar to white-collar work. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, they discovered no evidence that the United States was more open than the European societies. Total vertical mobility across the blue-collar–white-collar line was 30 percent in the United States, with the other societies varying between 27–31 percent. Lipset and Bendix concluded that all the industrialized countries were experiencing similar changes in respect to the expansion of white-collar jobs. This led to an "upward surge of mobility" of comparable dimensions in each of them.

Other researchers since have questioned these findings. They have argued that there are significant differences between countries if more attention is given to downward mobility, and if long-range mobility is also brought into consideration. There seems to be more long-range mobility in the United States, for instance, than in most other Western societies. But on the whole, the similarities in patterns of mobility are more striking than the differences (Miller, 1960, 1971; Heath, 1981; Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge, 1979; Grusky and Hauser, 1984).

Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe (1986) carried out a substantial study of cross-national similarities and variations in mobility, in-

cluding in their work both Western and Eastern European societies. They studied nine countries, including England and Wales, France, Sweden, Hungary, and Poland among others. The results again showed a general similarity between mobility rates and patterns. However, they also found some significant variations as well. Sweden, for example, was found to be considerably more "open" than the other Western countries. Poland also showed high rates of mobility, substantially greater than those of Hungary.

DOWNWARD MOBILITY

Although downward mobility is less common than upward mobility, it is still widespread. Over 20 percent of men in the United States are downwardly mobile intergenerationally, although most of this movement is short range. Downward intragenerational mobility is also a common occurrence. Mobility of this latter type is often associated with psychological problems and anxieties. Some individuals are simply unable to sustain the life style into which they were born. Another source of downward mobility among individuals arises through no fault of their own. Corporate America is flooded with instances in which middle-aged men lose their jobs because of mergers or company take-overs. These executives either find it hard to gain new employment at all, or can only obtain work at a lower level of income than before. Other employers are reluctant to invest in them because of their age.

Many of the downwardly mobile intragenerationally are women. It is still common for women to abandon promising careers on the birth of a child. After spending some years bringing up a family, such women later return to the paid work force, often at a level lower than they left—for instance, in poorly paid, part-time work. This situation is changing, although not as fast as many might hope.

One finding emerges fairly clearly from the literature: Levels of mobility are low compared to ideals of equality of opportunity. In the United States, as elsewhere, most people remain close to the same level as the family from which they came. While many do experience vertical mobility, this is most often the result of changes in the occupational structure, not because there is a high level of equality of opportunity built into the social system.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILITY

Many people in modern societies believe it is possible for anyone to reach the top through hard work and persistence. Why should it be

difficult to do so? In one respect, the answer is very simple. Even in a “perfectly fluid” society, in which everyone had an exactly equal chance of reaching the highest positions, only a small minority would do so. The socioeconomic order is shaped like a pyramid, with relatively few positions of power, status, and wealth at the top. No more than two or three thousand people, out of a total population of 200 million in the United States, could become directors of the two hundred largest corporations.

In addition, those who already hold positions of wealth and power have many chances available to them to perpetuate their advantages, and to pass them on to their offspring. They can make sure their children have the best available education, and this will often lead them into the best jobs. Despite estate taxes, the rich still find ways to pass on much of their property to their descendants. Most of those who reach the top had a head start; they came from professional or affluent backgrounds. Studies of people who have become wealthy show that hardly anyone begins with nothing. The large majority of people who have “made money” did so on the basis of inheriting or being given at least a modest account initially—which they then used to make more (Jaher, 1973; Rubinstein, 1986).

PROBLEMS IN STUDYING SOCIAL MOBILITY

The study of social mobility presents various problems: for example, it is not clear whether mobility from blue-collar to white-collar work is always “upward” (Hopper, 1981). Skilled blue-collar workers may be in a superior economic position to many people in more routine white-collar jobs. The nature of jobs alters over time, and it is not always obvious that what are regarded as the “same” occupations are in fact still such. Clerical occupations, for instance, have changed greatly over the past several decades as a result of the mechanization of office work.

Another problem is that, in studies of intergenerational mobility, it is difficult to decide at what point of the respective careers to make comparisons. A parent may still be at mid-career when a child begins his or her work life; parents and their offspring may simultaneously be mobile, perhaps in the same direction or (less often) in different directions. Should we compare them at the beginning or at the end of their careers?

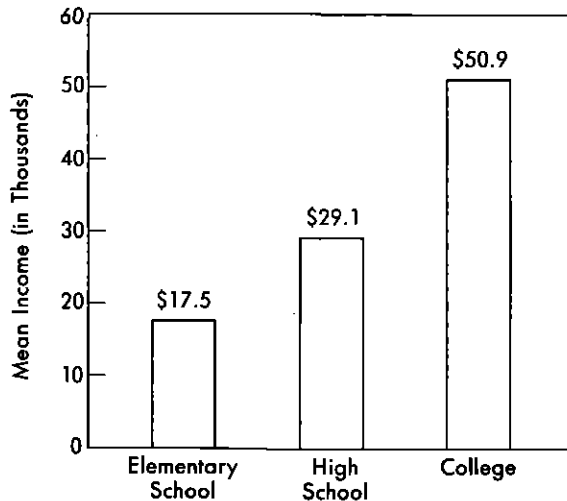
All of these difficulties can be dealt with to some extent. Care can be taken to alter occupational categories when it is clear that the nature of jobs has shifted radically over the period covered by a particular study. For example, we might decide to group higher blue-collar and routine white-collar jobs together and examine mobility into and

out of these jobs as a whole. The problem about where in individuals' careers to make comparisons in studying intergenerational mobility can be resolved—where the data permit—by comparing parents and children both at the beginning and at the end of their respective careers. But these strategies are not entirely satisfactory. What may appear to be precise figures offered in mobility studies have to be approached with caution. We can only draw general conclusions from mobility research, particularly where international comparisons are involved.

YOUR OWN MOBILITY CHANCES

What implications might be drawn from mobility studies about the career opportunities that you are faced with, as someone searching for a good job in the 1990s? Like previous generations, you are likely to enjoy upward mobility. It seems probable that the proportion of managerial and professional jobs will continue to expand relative to lower-level positions (for more information about changes in the occupational structure, see Chapter 15: "Work and Economic Life"). Those who have done well in the educational system are most likely to fill these openings (Figure 7.3).

FIGURE 7.3 INCOME AND EDUCATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT, 1987



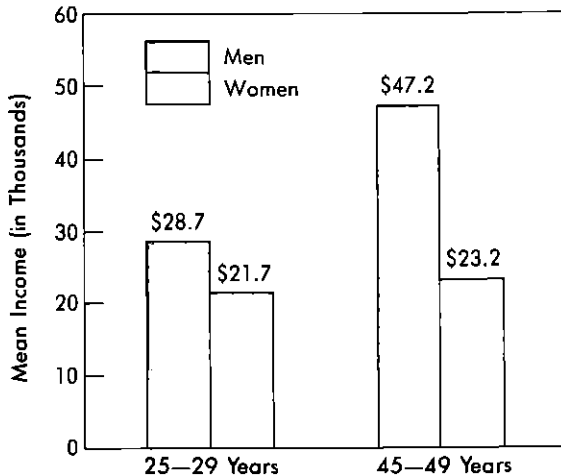
This graph shows the correlation between the level of education achieved and the average (mean) income.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987. *Current Population Reports*, ser. P-60, no. 161.

Yet there are not nearly enough higher-status positions open for all who wish to enter them, and some of you are bound to find that your careers do not match your expectations. Although a higher proportion of jobs are being created at managerial and professional levels than existed before, the overall number of jobs available in the economy may not, in the future, keep pace with the number of people actively seeking work. One reason for this is the growing numbers of women entering the labor force. Another (whose consequences are difficult to sort out fully as yet) is the increasing use of information technology in production processes. Because computerized machinery can now handle tasks—even of a highly complicated kind—that once upon a time only human beings could do, it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that many jobs will be eliminated in future years.

If you are a woman, although your chances of entering a good career are improving, you face two major obstacles to your progress. Male managers and employers still discriminate against female applicants, compared to males seeking the same positions. They do so at least partly because of their beliefs that “women are not really interested in careers,” and that they are likely to leave the work force to begin families. This latter factor substantially affects opportunities for women. This is less because they are uninterested in a career than

FIGURE 7.4 WHO GETS PAID BETTER



This graph shows the average (mean) income at various ages for men and women (1986) who have graduated from college.

because they are often forced to choose between a career and having children. Men are rarely willing to share equal responsibility for domestic work and childcare. Although many more women than before are following nontraditional paths—determinedly organizing their domestic lives in order to pursue a career—there are still major barriers in their way.

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

RIGHT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLASS SYSTEM ARE THE MILLIONS of people in the United States who exist in conditions of poverty. Many do not have a proper diet and live

in miserable conditions; their average life expectancy is lower than the majority of the population. In addition, the number of individuals and families who have become homeless has greatly increased over the past decade (Table 7.2).

Many affluent people pay little attention to the existence of poverty, so some have made it their goal to bring the phenomenon to public consciousness. In 1889, Charles Booth published a work showing that a third of Londoners were living in dire poverty (Booth, 1904). The result was a public outcry. How could it happen that, in a country which at that time was probably the wealthiest on earth, at the center of a massive empire, poverty should be so widespread? Booth's work was taken up by his namesake, General William Booth of the Salvation Army. His book *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1984; orig. pub. 1890) opened with figures derived from Charles Booth's calculations, showing there to be 387,000 "very poor" people in London, 220,000 "near to starving," and 300,000 "starving." Almost a quarter of a million copies of William Booth's book were sold within a year, so dramatically did he capture the public imagination. Poverty, he proposed, could be drastically reduced by the means of practical programs of reform and welfare.

Seventy years later, a somewhat parallel situation occurred in the United States. In his book *The Other America*, Michael Harrington shocked the American public with the finding that many millions of people in the country were without the basic requisites for meeting minimum standards of life (Harrington, 1963). Harrington's book also became a bestseller. In May 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared an "unconditional War on Poverty," whose object would be "to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty." The United States had long since supplanted Britain as the world's richest nation, a country vastly more wealthy than Britain had been at the

TABLE 7.2 PROFILE OF THE HOMELESS*

Average income	\$181.90 per month
Receiving public assistance	45%
Average age	36
Race:	
Black	63%
White	25%
Hispanic and other	12%
Sex	63% male
Average years of education	11
Currently Married	6%
Single women with children	21%
Jail experience	53%
Prison experience	11%
Symptoms of alcoholism	19%
Hospitalized for mental illness	20%
Those exhibiting symptoms of mental illness needing treatment	45%
First-time homeless	50%
Reasons for homelessness:	
Eviction	50%
Arguments	21%
Building destroyed	17%
Received court order for eviction	14%



* Based on interviews at soup kitchens with 535 meal recipients who are homeless.
 Source: "Homeless in Chicago": 1988 study by the School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago.

time of the work of the two Booths. Yet large numbers of the population continued to live in circumstances that denied them the bare essentials of social health and housing. The War on Poverty was designed finally to achieve the objectives that William Booth had planned some three generations earlier.

THE WAR ON POVERTY

After his inauguration into office, President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed his "Great Society" legislation through Congress. Not only would there be large-scale increases in spending on existing social welfare programs, but numerous new programs would be established to deal with an affluent America's impoverished. Welfare spending went up by 400 percent, from \$77.2 billion in 1965 to \$286.5 billion

TABLE 7.3
FAMILIES BELOW THE
POVERTY LEVEL

	In Millions	Percentage
1970	9.78	15%
1975	9.63	13%
1980	10.87	12%
1983	12.70	14%
1986	12.27	13%

Source: Congressional Budget Office, *Trends in Family Income: 1970-1986*. February 1988.

ten years later. The increase in spending on welfare did have discernible effects in reducing the level of poverty, although these fell far short of anticipations. In 1972, as measured by official statistics, the numbers of the poor fell to their lowest mark in the postwar period. Those living below the officially defined poverty line fell from just under 40 million to about 23 million. Since then, however, the numbers of the poor have again climbed, although the actual proportion to the general population of individuals and families living in poverty has remained fairly stable (Table 7.3).

The War on Poverty programs fell victim to various economic and political forces, which reduced their level of success. For example, the Job Corps was designed to teach young people the skills needed to enter the job market. But the U.S. economy was such that the job openings were simply not there for them. In the early seventies, a new period of recession set in, reducing job opportunities still further. The Head Start program, which offered preschool education to the poor, made some real gains over time, but it became unpopular among some sections of the white working class, who did not see immediate results for the large price the program cost. Politically, the United States was deepening its commitment to the Vietnam War at the same time, which competed with the antipoverty programs for funding. The War on Poverty frequently lost out.

WHAT IS POVERTY?

How should "poverty" be defined? A distinction is usually made between *subsistence* or **absolute poverty** and **relative poverty**. Charles Booth was one of the first to try to establish a consistent standard of subsistence poverty, which refers to lack of basic necessities needed to sustain a physically healthy existence—sufficient food and shelter to make possible the physically efficient functioning of the body. Booth assumed that these requirements would be more or less the same for people of equivalent age and physique living in any country.

This is essentially the definition that is used most frequently in the analysis of poverty in the United States. The official poverty line is fixed by calculating the average cost of food providing adequate nutrition, this figure is then trebled to cover clothing, housing, medical care, and other necessities. Weightings are introduced for size of family and area of residence. The official poverty line for a family of four living in an urban area in 1985 was \$10,989. Using this figure, in 1985, 14 percent of the population of the United States, about 33 million people, were living below the poverty line. This figure hides

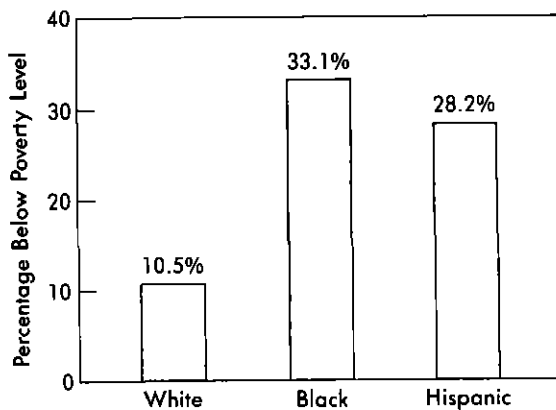
major differences between people of various ethnic background; whereas 11 percent of whites live in poverty, 29 percent of people of Hispanic origins do so, and 31 percent of blacks (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987).

Subsistence definitions of poverty have definite shortcomings. Defining what the "basic necessities" of life are is more problematic than it sounds, because it is hard to separate the notion from the living standards of the majority of the population. The majority of the world's population lives in dwellings that do not contain a bath or shower; but it would be hard not to see piped water as a necessity in an economically developed society. It makes sense to see poverty in relative rather than absolute terms. As the economist John Kenneth Galbraith has written in a classic work:

People are poverty-stricken when their incomes, even if adequate for survival, fall markedly below those of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the necessary minimum for decency. . . . They are degraded for, in the literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable. (Galbraith, 1985)

In some ways it is more accurate to speak of "poverties" rather than "poverty" when we survey a society like the United States (Figure 7.5). In the very poorest parts of the South, particularly between Vir-

FIGURE 7.5 PERSONS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN



ginia and Louisiana, people (the majority of whom are black) live in conditions close to those found in an impoverished Third World country. According to the National Association of the Southern Poor, "People in the area . . . live in houses insulated by cardboard with tin roofs, in converted stables or chicken coups. Many have no toilets, indoors or out. Often they must transport water from long distances. Most babies are born without the assistance of any medical advice. The sleep of residents is sometimes disturbed by children crying from hunger; and our organization has witnessed hunger pacified by sugar and water for entire households, including babies, for periods of up to 10 days" (Harrington, 1984). Their level of poverty is considerably greater than that of most blacks living in even the most deprived neighborhoods in Northern cities.

The poorest groups of all in the United States are those whose land it once was, the Native Americans. Their rate of unemployment is the highest of any minority; their life expectancy is well below that of blacks, and their rate of infant mortality very high. Yet some of Native Americans still retain enough of their traditional culture to provide a meaningful focus for their lives.

Why Are the Poor Still Poor?

Well-developed and systematically administered welfare programs, in conjunction with government policies that actively assist in keeping down unemployment, reduce poverty levels. There exist societies—such as Sweden—in which subsistence poverty has been almost completely eliminated. An economic and political price has to be paid for this. First, such societies require high levels of taxation. Second, the integration of a full welfare system into an already bureaucratic government inevitably gives those agencies a great deal of power.

Where the distribution of wealth and income in a country is mainly left to mechanisms of the market—as in the case in the United States—greater material inequalities tend to be found. For example, the Reagan administration (1981–1988) pursued a market strategy in order to take the burden of providing welfare off the federal government. The theory underlying "Reaganomics" was that cutting tax rates for individuals and corporations would generate high levels of economic growth, the fruits of which would "trickle down" to the poor. The evidence of the past few years does not support this thesis. This type of economic policy may or may not generate acceleration of economic development, but the result is to expand the differentials between the poor and the wealthy, actually swelling the numbers of those living in subsistence poverty (Block et al., 1987).

Most Americans, of all social classes, have more negative attitudes

TABLE 7.4 COMPARATIVE PUBLIC OPINION ON WELFARE

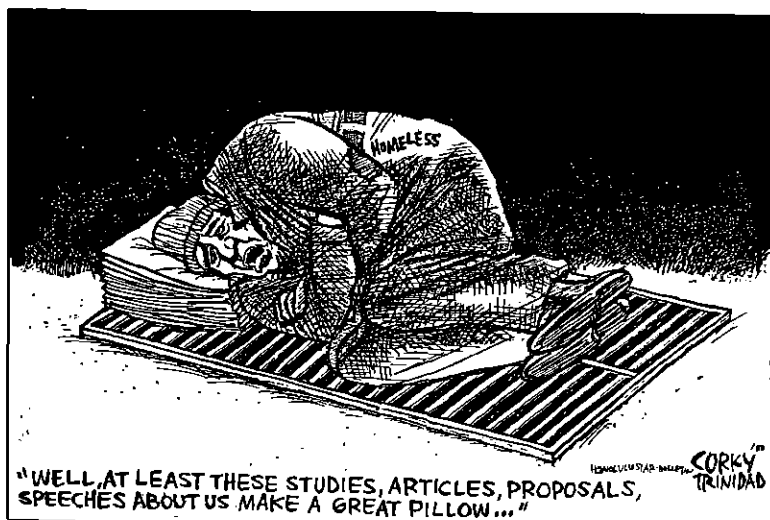
	Strongly agree/agree that the government should . . .	
	provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income	spend more on benefits for the poor
Hungary	78%	72%
Italy	67%	83%
West Germany	51%	80%
Britain	59%	82%
Netherlands	48%	55%
Australia	36%	59%
United States	20%	58%

Source: Smith, Tom W. (1989).

towards welfare provisions and benefits than is the case in other Western countries (Table 7.4). Surveys repeatedly show that the majority of Americans regard the poor as being responsible for their own poverty, and they are antagonistic to those who live on "government handouts." Most believe that people on welfare could find work if they were determined to do so (Waxman, 1977). These views are completely out of line with the realities of poverty. About a quarter of those officially living in poverty are actually working. They are, however, in a difficult situation because they earn too little to bring them over the poverty threshold and too much to allow them to be candidates to receive any welfare. Of the remainder, over 60 percent consist of children under fourteen years of age, those aged sixty-five and over, the ill or disabled. Only a minute proportion (about 2 percent) of able-bodied men are on welfare.

Other myths about the poor abound. Families on welfare are not, as is often thought, large; the average number of children is the same as for the rest of the population. In spite of popular views about the high level of welfare cheating, fewer than 1 percent of welfare applications involve fraudulent claims—much lower than in the case of income-tax fraud, where it is estimated that more than 10 percent of tax is lost through misreporting or evasion.

What accounts for the marked disparities between beliefs about poverty and welfare spending, and the actual facts? One reason is the sheer strength of the beliefs in economic individualism that are so dominant in the United States. Even if overall rates of social mobility are no higher in the United States than elsewhere, successive genera-



tions of immigrants have risen from conditions of initial poverty to positions of some affluence. The persistence of discrimination against blacks and Native Americans dovetails with views that they make up the majority of welfare recipients and are disinclined to seek work where it is available.

Yet the strength of public reaction to the periodic disclosure of the level of poverty suggests that a contributing factor is also the lack of "visibility" of the poor. Most of those in the more privileged sections of society rarely visit the urban or rural areas in which poverty is concentrated. Some issues connected with poverty, such as high rates of crime, regularly command public attention, but the widespread existence of poverty tends otherwise to be put out of mind. Poverty has periodically been "rediscovered" from the time of Charles Booth on. For a while the plight of the poor stirs the conscience of the more favored, but public concern soon fades away.

THEORIES OF STRATIFICATION IN MODERN SOCIETIES

SO FAR, WE HAVE DEFINED STRATIFICATION, EXAMINING closely types of class division, the influence of gender, social mobility, and poverty. In this section we step back and examine some broad theories by which thinkers have attempted to *understand* stratification. The most influential theoretical approaches

are those developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920). Most subsequent theories of stratification are heavily indebted to their ideas. We shall also analyze two later theories put forward by Erik Olin Wright and by Frank Parkin. The ideas of Marx and Weber have made a deep impact upon the development of sociology, and have influenced many other areas of the discipline besides the study of stratification. Other aspects of their writings will show up in subsequent chapters. (For an overall survey of their work, see Chapter 22: “The Development of Sociological Theory.”)

KARL MARX: MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND THE ANALYSIS OF CLASS

Marx was born in Germany but spent much of his life in Britain. Although his ideas have always been controversial, Marx’s writings have been influential worldwide. Many authors (including Max Weber) who reject Marx’s political views have drawn widely upon his writings.

Most of Marx’s work was concerned with stratification and, above all, with social class, yet surprisingly he failed to provide a systematic analysis of the concept of class. The manuscripts Marx was working on at the time of his death (subsequently published as part of Marx’s major work, *Das Kapital*) break off just at the juncture where he posed the question, “What constitutes a class?” Marx’s concept of class thus has to be reconstructed from the body of his writings as a whole. Since the various passages in which Marx discusses class are not always consistent, there have been many disputes between scholars about “what Marx really meant.” The main outlines of his views, however, are fairly clear.

The Nature of Class

For Marx a class refers to people who stand in a common relationship to the **means of production**—the means by which they gain a livelihood. Prior to the rise of modern industry, the means of production consisted primarily of land and the instruments used to tend to crops or pastoral animals. In preindustrial societies, therefore, the two main classes were those who owned the land (aristocrats, gentry, or slaveholders) and those actively engaged in producing from it (serfs, free peasantry, and slaves). In modern societies, factories, offices, machinery, and the wealth or capital needed to buy them become more important. The two main classes are those who own these new means of production—**industrialists** or **capitalists**—and those who earn their living by selling their labor to them—the working class or, in

the now somewhat archaic term Marx sometimes favored, the "proletariat."

The relationship between classes, according to Marx, is an exploitative one. In feudal societies, exploitation often took the form of the direct transfer of produce from the peasantry to the aristocracy. Serfs were compelled to give a certain proportion of their production to their aristocratic masters, or had to work for a number of days each month in the lord's fields to produce crops consumed by the lord and his retinue. In modern capitalist societies, the source of exploitation is less obvious, and Marx devoted much attention to trying to clarify its nature. In the course of the working day, Marx reasoned, workers produce more than is actually needed by employers to repay the cost of hiring them. This **surplus value** is the source of profit, which capitalists are able to put to their own use. A group of workers in a clothing factory, say, might be able to produce a hundred suits a day. Selling half the suits provides enough income for the manufacturer to pay the workers' wages. Income from the sale of the remainder of the garments is taken as profit.

The Complexity of Class Systems

Although in Marx's theory there are two main classes in society, those who own the means of production and those who do not, he recognized that actual class systems are much more complex than this model suggests. In addition to the two basic classes, there exist what Marx sometimes called **transitional classes**. These are class groups left over from an earlier type of production system, which persist long after that system has disappeared. In some modern societies, for example (like France, Italy, or Spain for much of the current century), substantial numbers of people remain peasants, working in much the same way as their predecessors did—although, of course, they no longer stand in a feudal relation to aristocratic landowners.

Marx also drew attention to splits that tend to occur within classes:

1. Among the upper classes, for instance, there are often conflicts between financial capitalists (like bankers) and industrial manufacturers.
2. There are divisions of interest between small business people and those who own or manage the large corporations. Both belong to the capitalist class; but policies that favor large businesses are not always in the interests of small ones.
3. Within the working class, those who are more or less permanently unemployed have worse conditions of life than

the majority of workers. These groups often consist largely of ethnic minorities.

Marx believed that the maturing of industrial capitalism would bring about an increasing gap between the wealth of the minority and the poverty of the mass of the population. According to him, the wages of the working class could never rise far above subsistence level, while wealth would pile up in the hands of those owning capital. In addition, laborers would daily face work that is physically wearing and mentally tedious, as is the situation in many factories. At the lowest levels of society, particularly among those frequently or permanently unemployed, there would develop an "accumulation of misery, agony of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutality, moral degradation. . ." (Marx, 1977; orig. pub. 1864). Marx was right about the persistence of poverty within the industrialized countries, and in anticipating that large-scale inequalities of wealth and income would continue. He was wrong in supposing that the income of most of the population would remain extremely low, as well as in claiming that a minority would become more and more wealthy relative to the majority. Most people in Western countries today are much better off materially than were comparable groups in Marx's day.

MAX WEBER: CLASS AND STATUS

Like Marx, Max Weber was also German. Although illness prevented him from following an orthodox academic career, he had a private income and was able to devote much of his life to scholarly study. He is regarded as one of the founders of sociology; his writings range more widely than the study of stratification, spanning many fields of history, legal theory, economics, and comparative religion.

Weber's approach to stratification is built upon the analysis developed by Marx, but modifies and elaborates it. There are two main differences between Weber's theory and that of Marx.

First, although Weber accepted Marx's view that class is founded upon objectively given economic conditions, he saw a greater variety of economic factors as important in class formation than was recognized by Marx. According to Weber, class divisions derive not only from control or lack of control of the means of production, but from economic differences that have nothing directly to do with property. Such resources include especially the *skills* and *credentials*, or qualifications, that affect the types of jobs people are able to obtain. Those in managerial or professional occupations earn more, and have more favorable conditions of work, for example, than people in blue-collar jobs. The qualifications they possess, such as degrees, diplomas, and

the skills they have acquired, make them more “marketable” than others without such qualifications. At a lower level, among blue-collar workers, skilled craftsmen are able to secure higher wages than the semiskilled or unskilled.

Second, Weber distinguished another aspect of stratification besides class, which he called **status**. He in fact adapted the notion of status groups from the example of medieval estates—the German word he used (*Stand*) means both “status” and “estate.” Status refers to differences between social groups in the social honor or prestige they are accorded by others. Status distinctions often vary independently of class divisions. Social honor may be either positive or negative. Positively privileged status groups include any groups of people who have high **prestige** in a given social order—for instance, doctors and lawyers have high prestige in American society. **Pariah groups** are negatively privileged status groups, subject to discrimination that prevents them from taking advantage of opportunities open to most others. The Jews were a pariah group in medieval Europe, banned from participating in certain occupations, and from holding official positions.

Possession of wealth normally tends to confer high status, but there are many exceptions to this principle. The term “genteel poverty” refers to one example. In Britain, for instance, individuals from aristocratic families continue to enjoy considerable social esteem even after their fortunes have been lost. Conversely, “new money” is often looked upon with some scorn by the well-established wealthy.

Whereas class is objectively given, status depends upon people’s subjective evaluations of social differences. Classes derive from the economic factors associated with property and earnings; status is governed by the varying *styles of life* groups follow.

Weber’s writings on stratification are important because they show that *other dimensions* of stratification besides class strongly influence people’s lives. Most sociologists hold that Weber’s scheme offers a more flexible and sophisticated basis for analyzing stratification than that provided by Marx.

RECENT THEORIES OF CLASS

The ideas developed by Marx and Weber are still used extensively in sociology today, although rarely without modification. Those who have worked in the Marxian tradition have further elaborated Marx’s original ideas, and followers of Weber have built upon his formulations. Yet, since the views of Marx and Weber were complementary, many subsequent authors have drawn upon both. We can find examples in the work of Erik Olin Wright and Frank Parkin.

Erik Olin Wright and Contradictory Class Locations

The American sociologist Erik Olin Wright has developed a theoretical position that owes much to Marx, but also incorporates ideas from Weber (Wright, 1978, 1985). According to Wright, there are three means of control over economic resources in modern capitalist production, and these allow us to identify the major classes that exist. These three modes of control are:

1. control over investments or money capital;
2. control over the physical means of production (land or factories and offices);
3. control over labor power.

Those who belong to the capitalist class have control over each of these elements within the production system. Members of the working class have control over none of them. In between these two main classes, however, there are groups whose position is more ambiguous. These people are in what Wright calls **contradictory class locations**, because they are able to influence some aspects of production, but are denied control over others. Many white-collar and professional employees, for example, have to contract their labor power to employers in order to obtain a living, in the same way as manual workers do. Yet at the same time, they have a greater degree of control over their work setting than those in blue-collar jobs. For instance, lawyers who work for large corporations might be in a contradictory class location. While they do not own the means of production, they still have a considerable amount of control over their work situation. Wright terms the class position of such workers "contradictory," because it incorporates the characteristics of the classes both above and below them. Workers in contradictory class locations are neither capitalists nor manual workers, yet share certain common features with each.

Frank Parkin and Social Closure

Frank Parkin (1971, 1979), a British author, has proposed an approach drawing more heavily from Weber than from Marx. Parkin agrees with Marx, as Weber did, that ownership of property—the means of production—is the basic foundation of class structure. Property, however, according to Parkin, is only one form of **social closure** that can be monopolized by one group and used as a basis of power over others. We can define social closure as any process whereby

groups try to maintain exclusive control over resources, limiting access to them. Besides property or wealth, most of the characteristics Weber associated with status differences, such as ethnic origin, language, or religion, may be used to create social closure.

Two types of processes are involved in social closure. The first type, *exclusion*, refers to strategies that groups adopt to separate outsiders from themselves, preventing them from having access to valued resources. Thus white unions in the United States have in the past excluded blacks from membership, as a means of maintaining power and privilege.

An emphasis on credentials is another major way by which groups exclude others in order to hold on to their power and privilege. In some U.S. school systems, for example, only those who have earned a secondary-school teaching certification in their subject, awarded by a school of education, are allowed to teach in the public schools. The second type, *usurpation*, refers to attempts by the less privileged to acquire resources previously monopolized by others—as where blacks struggle to achieve rights of union membership.

The strategies of *exclusion* and *usurpation* may be used simultaneously in some circumstances. Labor unions, for instance, might engage in usurpatory activities against employers (going on strike to obtain a greater share of the resources or a position on the board of directors of a firm) but at the same time exclude ethnic minorities from membership. Parkin calls this *dual closure*. Here there is clearly a point of similarity between Wright and Parkin. Dual closure concerns much the same processes as those discussed by Wright under contradictory class locations. Both notions indicate that those in the middle of the stratification system in some part cast their eyes towards the top, yet are also concerned with distinguishing themselves from others lower down.

STRATIFICATION, STRUCTURE, AND ACTION

STUDYING STRATIFICATION RAISES ACUTELY ONE OF THE perennial theoretical problems of sociology. We are all deeply influenced by the social circumstances in which, as children, we are raised, and the position in society in which we find ourselves as adults. Those who are born and brought up in an impoverished ghetto area of a city do not choose their circumstances of life. Those circumstances affect individuals' lives in an objective fashion,

molding their views of themselves and their general attitudes towards society at large. These views and attitudes, in other words, result from structural characteristics of the societies of which people are members. As Emile Durkheim (1982, orig. pub. 1895) expressed this, social structure is *external* to individuals and *constrains* their behavior.

On the other hand, no one is completely a prisoner of their social environment. People from disadvantaged backgrounds sometimes attain high positions. We all actively make choices, seek to achieve ambitions of various sorts, and to some extent can overcome barriers that society places in our way. A society is plainly not external to our actions in the same fashion as a building is—for societies only *consist* of human actions and relationships. We create society in the diversity of social activities we carry on day in and day out.

It has not proved easy for sociologists to show how these two aspects of society can be reconciled. The main theoretical traditions of sociology tend to divide up according to where they place their main emphasis. Some—like traditions of thought indebted to Durkheim—concentrate attention upon how our actions are conditioned by the social world. Others (like symbolic interactionism) stress much more the active, creative character of social conduct. Each view has some truth in it. The problem is to analyze how these views mix. You should reflect on this as you read through subsequent chapters, because there are few areas of sociology in which the issue does not emerge in one way or another. The issue is discussed in some detail, along with other major theoretical dilemmas in sociology, in Chapter 22 (“The Development of Sociological Theory”).

SUMMARY

1. Social stratification refers to the division of people socioeconomically into layers or strata. When we talk of social stratification, we draw attention to the unequal positions occupied by individuals in society. In the larger traditional societies and in industrialized countries today there is stratification in terms of wealth, property, and access to material goods and cultural products.
2. Four major types of stratification systems can be distinguished: slavery, caste, estates, and class. Whereas the first three of these depend upon legal or religiously sanctioned inequalities, class divisions are not “officially” recognized, but stem from economic factors affecting the material circumstances of people’s lives.
3. Classes derive from inequalities in possession and control of material resources. An individual’s class position is at least in some

part achieved, for it is not simply “given” from birth. Social mobility, both upwards and downwards in the class structure, is a fairly common feature.

4. Class is of major importance in industrialized societies, although there are many complexities in the class system within such societies. The main class divisions are between people in the *upper*, *middle*, and *working* classes, and the *underclass*.
5. Most people in modern societies are more affluent today than was the case several generations ago. Yet the distribution of wealth and income remains highly unequal. The wealthy have various means open to them of transmitting their property from one generation to the next.
6. Analyses of stratification have traditionally been written from a male-oriented point of view. This is partly because of the assumption that gender inequalities simply reflect class differences; but this assumption is highly questionable. Gender influences stratification in modern societies in some part independently of class.
7. In the study of social mobility, a distinction is made between *intragenerational* and *intergenerational* mobility. The first of these refers to movement up or down the social scale within an individual's working life. Intergenerational mobility is movement across the generations, as when the daughter or son from a blue-collar background becomes a professional. Social mobility is mostly of *limited range*. Most people remain close to the level of the family from which they came, though the expansion of white-collar jobs in the last few decades has provided the opportunity for considerable short-range upward mobility.
8. Poverty remains widespread in the United States. Two methods of assessing poverty exist. One involves the notion of *subsistence poverty*, which is a lack of the basic resources needed to maintain a healthy existence. *Relative poverty* involves assessing the gaps between the living conditions of some groups and those enjoyed by the majority of the population.
9. The most prominent and influential theories of stratification are those developed by Marx and Weber. Marx placed the primary emphasis on *class*, which he saw as an objectively given characteristic of the economic structure of society. He saw a fundamental split between the owners of capital and the workers who do not own capital. Weber accepted a similar view, but distinguished another aspect of stratification, *status*. Status refers to the esteem or “social honor” given to individuals or groups.

BASIC CONCEPTS

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
CLASS
SOCIAL MOBILITY
STATUS

IMPORTANT TERMS

SLAVERY	INTRAGENERATIONAL MOBILITY
CASTE	INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY
ESTATE	ABSOLUTE POVERTY
UPPER CLASS	RELATIVE POVERTY
MIDDLE CLASS	MEANS OF PRODUCTION
WORKING OR LOWER CLASS	CAPITALISTS
PEASANTS	SURPLUS VALUE
WEALTH	TRANSITIONAL CLASSES
INCOME	PRESTIGE
UNDERCLASS	PARIAH GROUPS
CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS	CONTRADICTIONARY CLASS LOCATIONS
VERTICAL MOBILITY	SOCIAL CLOSURE
LATERAL MOBILITY	