

SOCI 101
INTRODUCTION TO
SOCIOLOGY

SOCIAL
STRATIFICATION
AND CLASS

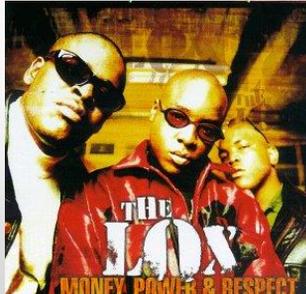
PROFESSOR KURT REYMERS, PH.D.

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Theme: Class, Party, & Status

Artist: [The Lox f/ DMX and lil' Kim](#)
Song: [Money, Power, Respect](#)
Album: [Money, Power, Respect](#)

It's the key to life.
Money, power, and respect.
Whatchu' need in life.
Money, power, and respect.
When you eatin' right.
Money, power, and respect.
Help you sleep at night.
You'll see the light.
It's the key to life.
Money, power, and respect.
Whatchu' need in life.
Money, power, and respect.
When you eatin' right.
Money, power, and respect.
Money, power, and respect.
Money, power, and respect.



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STRATIFICATION = LAYERING



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H. Social Stratification

1. a. Social Stratification

is the categorization of people into a social hierarchy.

b. Stratification is defined materially by access to resources that relate to **standard of living and social position (status)**

c. Stratification is represented symbolically through **socially constructed rankings of social status** (for example, by "occupational prestige")

d. Stratification is culturally universal. All human societies develop stratification systems, although they **don't always look the same**.



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H. Social Stratification

2. The Symbols of Stratification

a. How is social hierarchy created?
What defines the situation of class?

"SES" = Socio-Economic Status

The idea behind SES comes from **Max Weber's** famous essay on [Class, Status and Party](#) (1893).

|| || ||

(Property, Prestige, Politics)

~ or ~ (Money, Respect, Power)

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2. Structure: Measuring Stratification

a. SES = Socio-Economic Status: Money, Power, Respect

i. Income and wealth (Money)

- **Income:** occupational wages and earnings from investments
- **Wealth:** the total value of money and other assets, minus any debt

ii. Political position of authority (Power)

- **Power** is "the ability to control your fate and the fate of others, even in the face of resistance." (Weber, 1893)
- **Examples:**
 - Parents have authority over children;
 - Police officers have authority to use force when necessary;
 - A Supreme Court Justice has authority to interpret the law.

iii. Social prestige (Respect)

- Educational level – MD, JD, PhD, MS, MBA, MA, BS, BA, BBA, BT, AA, GED
- Job-related status – "occupational prestige"
- Honor; fame; celebrity – "positive sanctions"



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2.b. Different Structures of Social Stratification

i. Caste System

A system based on **ascribed status**: birth determines social position. The goal is a **closed system** that maintains **order and stability** in society.
Example: [India](#)

"Caste is the bones.
Race is the skin.
Class is the clothes."
-Isabel Wilkerson, author of
[Caste: The Origins
of Our Discontents](#)



ii. Estate System

A system based on **one's relationship to territory and land**. Three positions exist: **Political and Military Elite (Nobility)**, **Landowners (Gentry) and Religious Leaders (Clergy)**, and **Serfs and Peasants (Commoners)**
Examples: [Feudal Europe](#), [China](#), or [Japan](#)

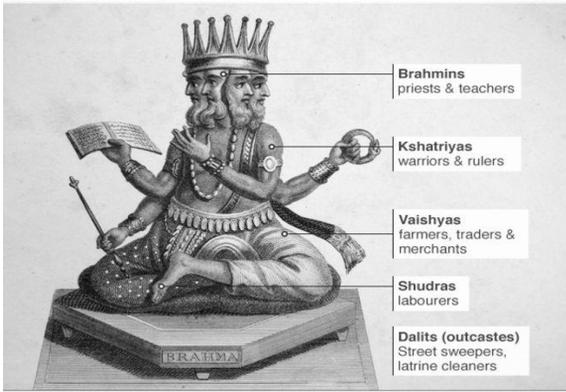
iii. Class System

A system based on **achieved status**, not ascription. The goal is an **open system** of equal opportunity to achieve **economic & social mobility**.
Example: [America](#) – is the U.S. an **ideal class system**?

Note that these are **ideal types** (norms) of social stratification for any society: usually, the **reality** of social organization introduces elements of **more than one type** of stratification into a society.

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Brahma and the origins of caste



Source: Alamy

BIBIC

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3. U.S. Class System: The Five Social Classes

a.i. The Social Upper Class = 1% of the U.S. population

"Old Money" (inherited); [The Power Elite](#); [incomes up 10%](#) in past 30 years;
[top 0.1% rake in nearly 50% of all business profits](#) (the super-rich)

a.ii. The Lower Upper Class = 5% of the U.S. population

New Money; Income = \$250K+; national political connections;
high prestige (private school is a must) (the rich)

b. The Middle Class = 40% of the U.S. population

White/Gray Collar workers; Income = \$50K- \$250K;
Local political connections; [Education \(prestige\) is important](#); (the upper middle class)

c. The Working Class = 35% of the U.S. population

The old "industrial class"; [Blue Collar workers](#); Income = \$20K-\$50K;
Prestige (education) not as important (pride in manual labor) (the lower middle class)

----- Poverty Line -----

d. The Lower Class (or "Underclass") = 20% of the U.S. population

[Working poor](#) – Low-skill service work > \$20K income; (the poor)
few opportunities for education
[Welfare poor](#) – no work; not a stable population; [welfare programs](#)

Source: Macdonis, John J. Society: The Basics, 12e

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3. U.S. Class System: The Five Social Classes

- a.i. **The Social Upper Class = 1% of the U.S. population**
Estimated amount of national wealth: **44%** (the super-rich)
- a.ii. **The Lower Upper Class = 5% of the U.S. population**
Estimated amount of national wealth: **27%** (the rich)
- b. **The Middle Class = 40% of the U.S. population**
Estimated amount of national wealth: **25%** (upper middle class)
- c. **The Working Class = 35% of the U.S. population**
Estimated amount of national wealth: **5%** (lower middle class)
----- Poverty Line -----
- d. **The Lower Class (or "Underclass") = 20% of the U.S. pop.**
Estimated amount of national wealth: **-1%** (the poor)

Source: Maconis, John J. Society: The Basics, 12e

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3. U.S. Inequality: The Social Classes

b. Measure of equality using "Quintiles"

Break society equally into fifths: $1/5 = 20\%$ (20/100)
Population of Earners: 320 million = 64 million per Q

Top Q 64 million	Second Q 64 million	Third Q 64 million	Fourth Q 64 million	Fifth Q 64 million
20%	20%	20%	20%	Pov 20%
(upper class 1% and upper middle 15%)	(the middle of the middle class 10%)	(lower middle class 10% and top 10% working class)	(the lower working class 10%)	(lower class in poverty 20%)
Concentration of Wealth				
\$\$\$\$\$	\$	€	€	⊕
85%	10%	5%	1%	-1%

Source: Maconis, John J. Society: The Basics, 12e

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4. a. Theories of Stratification Types: Functionalism vs. Neo-Marxism



- i. 1920s - late 1960s: **Structural-Functionalists** believe that stratification is a function of social values. Society values some positions more than others (for example doctors vs. maintenance workers).
Classic Structuralism: [Social Class in America \(1957 sociology film\)](#)

But many have been quick to point out that these values do not always function well for society. For example, [compare celebrity salaries](#) to those of hard working, important people like [the President](#).

- ii. late 1960s-2000s: **Social Conflict theorists** believe that social stratification is based on how power is distributed in society.

Karl Marx argued that in capitalist nations, power is represented by ownership. Neo-Marxists accept this premise.

[Who owns American society?](#) (Carlin)
[How do the elite maintain their power?](#) (Chomsky)



Only 2 Social Classes: Political Class (20%); Proletariat (80% Obedient Workers)

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4.a.ii. The Marxist Perspective: Conflict Theory

1. One's position in life are tied to a person's relationship to the **Means of Production** (the factory system in Marx's time)

The result is only **Two Social Classes**:

A person either controls money and equipment (**BOURGEOISIE – owners**) or works for those who do (**PROLETARIAT - workers**)



2. Eventually, years of **class oppression will lead to capitalism's demise through WORKER REVOLUTION**
 - **CAPITALISM** is replaced by **SOCIALISM**; **workers own factories**
 - **SOCIALISM** then leads to **COMMUNISM**; **ownership becomes obsolete (the state will "wither away")**.
3. In the 1960's **neo-Marxism** was embraced by liberal college professors to engage in a discussion of the power structure of American society (in response to the 1950's "Red Scare" (anti-communist propaganda), the Vietnam War, and the nuclear weapons build-up of the Cold War, as well as domestic issues like poverty and increasing crime rates. From this frame of analysis came **feminism**, **environmentalism**, and other **social movements** (SOC1 360 fall semester).

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5.a. Why No Workers' Revolution in America?

i. War and nationalism

- The anxiety of World Wars I and II kept people from revolting

ii. Fragmentation of the capitalist class (ownership for "all")

- We can ALL have a piece of the pie these days (in stock);

iii. White-collar jobs and a general rising of the standard of living (managerial class)

- More prestige (status) for workers;

iv. Increase in unions

- Better wages and benefits: work hours, child labor laws, eliminated sweatshops, increased safety, introduced minimum wage

v. Nonetheless, there is continual resurgence of socialism in America: 1880s, 1920s, 1960s, today(?)

Were the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, and an earlier 2011 movement known as **Occupy Wall Street**, "cracks in the facade"? Or are they just a bunch of **dirty hippies**? Regardless, the **current protests** across America have **drawn attention** to U.S. inequality.



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5.b. Late Modern Capitalism has created great inequality in the U.S., developing a caste-like system. How are classes perpetuated (or made like castes)?

- i. **Wealth and power is highly concentrated** in the upper class (the top 1%). A very small percentage of the population still controls over half of the **corporate stock**. **Inheritance laws (like estate taxes) and tax codes** keep money in the upper class.

- ii. **The law favors the rich**

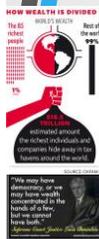
Access to **legal representation for the poor** has been disabled; Poor people can go to **modern "debtor's prison"** for not paying their bills.

- iii. **The educational system reproduces class inequality**

Median income of the family of Harvard student: \$150,000 vs. U.S. Median family income: \$50,000

- iv. **Some ascribed statuses lead to different treatment due to problematic social norms:**

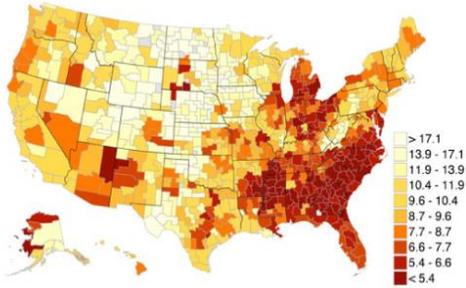
Women, minorities and people of color are victims of **status discrimination**



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The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States

Odds that Child Born to a Family in Bottom Quintile Reaches the Top Quintile



Note: Lighter Color = More Upward Mobility
 Source: Chetty, Hendren, Kline and Saez (2013)
 www.equality-of-opportunity.org

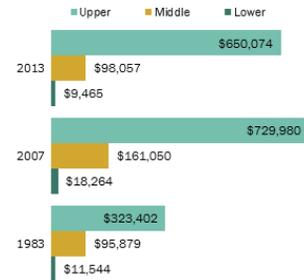


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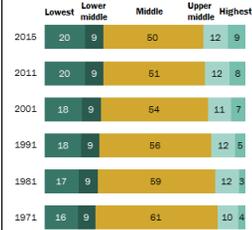
The wealth gap between upper- and middle-income families is growing

Median net worth of families, in 2014 dollars



Share of adults living in middle-income households is falling

% of adults in each income tier



Note: Adults are assigned to income tiers based on their size-adjusted household income in the calendar year prior to the survey year. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements

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