CHAPTER 8: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Dimensions of Stratification

social stratification - ranking of people or groups according to their unequal access to scarce resources

social class - segment of society whose members hold similar amounts of resources and share values, norms and an identifiable lifestyle

economic dimension:
- Karl Marx - predicted that capitalist societies would ultimately be reduced to two social classes:
  1. bourgeoisie - class that owns the means of production
  2. proletariat - class that labors without owning the means of production
  - Marx said that control of the economy gave capitalists control over legal, educational, govt. systems as well - the economy determined the nature of society

- income - amount of money received by an individual or group over a specific time period

- wealth - total economic resources held by a person or group (income = your paycheck, wealth = what you own)
  - 1997 - 36 million Americans lived in poverty (in 2005, poverty level = $19,350 for family of 4)
  - 10 million millionaire households, 50 billionaires in the U.S.
  - richest 20% of American families received over 49% of nation's income - poorest 20% controlled under 4%

power dimension:

power - ability to control the behavior of others, even against their will
- those with power can use it to enhance their own interests, often (but not necessarily) at the expense of society
- unlike Marx, Max Weber said economic success and power aren't the same
  - Weber - expert knowledge can be used to expand power (lawyers)
    - fame is another basis for power (Albert Einstein offered the position of president of Israel in 1952 - he declined, stating, "I know a little about nature, and hardly anything about men.")
- power is also attached to social positions we hold
- prestige dimension:
  - prestige - recognition, respect and admiration attached to social positions - must be voluntarily given, not claimed - people with similar levels of prestige share identifiable lifestyles - example -> kids of upper class -> private universities, attend Episcopalian churches - kids of lower class -> less likely to attend college at all, often belong to fundamentalist religious groups
- in U.S., most achieve prestige because of their occupations - white-collar jobs have higher prestige than blue-collar jobs

Explanations of Social Stratification

Functionalism: stratification assures that the most qualified people fill the most important positions, that they perform their tasks competently, and that they're rewarded for their efforts
- inequality exists because certain jobs are more important than others- these jobs often involve special talent and training (reason why doctors make more $, have more prestige than bus drivers)

Conflict Theory: inequality exists because some people are willing to exploit others
- stratification is based on force rather than on people voluntarily agreeing to it - based on Karl Marx's ideas regarding class conflict
- false consciousness - adoption of the ideas of the dominant class by the less powerful class (term used by Marx)

Symbolic Interactionism: American children are taught that a person's social class is a result of talent and effort (those "on top" have worked hard/used their abilities - those "on the bottom" lack talent/motivation to succeed)
- those in lower social classes tend to suffer from lower self-esteem, those in higher social classes tend to have higher self-esteem

Social Classes in America

class consciousness - identification with the goals and interests of a social class
- upper class - 1% of the U.S. population - at the top are the aristocracy (old-money families: Ford, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, duPont) - membership is inherited
- lower-upper class - achievement, earned income
- middle class - 40%-50% of U.S. pop.
  - upper-middle class - 14% - business people, professionals, politicians, military officers - college educated, have high educational/career goals for their kids
  - middle-middle class - 30% - a "mixed bag" - many occupations in this group - many only have HS education, some have college degrees - income is around the national average ($21,181 in 1999)
- working class - also known as "lower-middle class" - 30% of U.S. pop. - blue-collar jobs, below-average income, unstable employment, not likely to enter the middle class
- working poor - 13% - low-skill jobs, low pay, low-level clerical workers, manual laborers, service workers - don't earn enough to rise above the poverty line ($17,603 for a family of 4 in 2000)
underclass - 12% - unemployed, part-time menial jobs, some are on public assistance (welfare), lack education and skills, many have physical and mental disabilities, many are single mothers
- How do people end up in underclass or working poor group? - birth, old age, loss of spouse, lack of education/training, alcoholism, physical/mental disabilities - very few paths out

**Poverty in America**

- **absolute poverty** - the absence of enough $ to secure life's necessities
- **relative poverty** - a measure of poverty based on the economic disparity between those at the bottom of society and the rest of society
- most disadvantaged groups in U.S.: minorities, female-headed households, children under 18, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living alone or with non-relatives

- **feminization of poverty** - a trend in the U.S. society in which women and children make up an increasing proportion of the poor - reasons for the trend: women earn $0.72 for every $1.00 earned by men, women with kids find it more difficult to find/keep regular, long-term employment, lack of good child care facilities adds to likelihood that they won't be able to keep on working

**Responses to the Problem of Poverty**

- **The War on Poverty** - 1964 - President Lyndon B. Johnson - philosophy: help poor people help themselves - much of budget (60%) was earmarked for youth opportunity programs and the work experience program
- **welfare reform** - 1998 - payments for AFDC (Aid to Families w/ Dependent Children) and food stamps was less than 1% of the federal budget - 3 major elements of welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996:
1. reduces welfare spending  
2. increases state and local power to oversee welfare rules  
3. adds new restrictions on welfare eligibility  
   - Has welfare reform worked?  
     - too early to give a final evaluation  
     - just over 7 million on welfare in 1999, down from 12 million in 1996 when the welfare bill was signed  
     - however, many of those leaving welfare still living in poverty  
       - most hold entry-level jobs, earning less than $7.00 per hour  
   
**Social Mobility** - the movement of individuals or groups between social classes  
   - **horizontal mobility** - a change in occupation within the same social class  
   - **vertical mobility** - a change upward or downward in occupational status or social class  
   - **intergenerational mobility** - a change in status or class from one generation to the next  
   - **caste system** - stratification structure that does not allow for social mobility  
     - India - four primary caste categories (based on occupation, Hindu religion)  
       1. Brahmin - priests, scholars  
       2. Kshatriyas - professional, governing, military occupations  
       3. Vaisyas - merchants, businessmen  
       4. Sudra - farmers, menial workers, craftsmen  
       - below all castes are the untouchables - thought to be so impure that physical contact contaminates the religious purity of all other caste members (collect trash, handle dead bodies)  
     - **open-class system** - social class is based on merit and individual effort - movement is allowed between classes