



Social Stratification

Part I

The division of society into distinct social classes is one of the most striking manifestations of the modern world ... It has often been the source of other kinds of inequality and ... the economic dominance of a particular class has very often been the basis for its political rule.

TB Bottomor



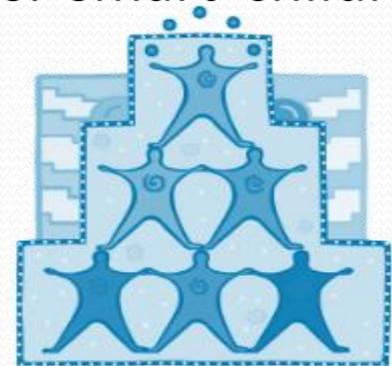
Social Stratification

- ...system of ranking people according to their wealth, property, prestige, power, social status, etc
 - **social differentiation**: variation due to social characteristics
- ... occurs when individuals and groups are ranked according to some commonly accepted basis of valuation in a hierarchy of status levels based on the inequality of social positions
- ... division of society into different strata or layers ... involves a hierarchy of social groups in which members of a particular layer have a common identity and a similar life style



Social Stratification

- Social stratification can be determined by a number of variables, each of which can cause someone to be advantaged or disadvantaged compared to others in society.
- **Social stratification affects people's life chances:** Opportunities individuals do/don't have to engage in certain activities and the opportunities they do/don't have to accomplish certain goals because of where they are located in the social hierarchy (example: smart children born into wealth vs. smart children born into poverty).





Principles of Stratification

- Social stratification is a **characteristic of society** ... not just due to individual differences.
- Social stratification is **universal but variable** (changeable).
- Social stratification involves **inequality, beliefs** and the **unequal distribution of societal resources**.
- The stratification hierarchy remains **relatively stable across succeeding generations**, despite upward mobility among individuals.



Principles of Stratification



- stratification stability
 - Most societies allow some sort of **social mobility**: changes in people's position in a system of social stratification ... may be upward, downward or horizontal.
 - Even though low-status groups manage to make small advances, the **relative position of each social group remains largely unchanged** because members of high-status groups are moving ahead as well.
 - Result: A stratification order that appears to be in constant flux with upwardly mobile individuals but whose essential structure remains the same.



Social Inequality

- ...some types of people systematically experience advantages in society while other types are systematically disadvantaged ... haves and have-nots
- Inequality is found in all societies and increases as societies grow more complex and wealthy.
- Inequality is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is a social selective process that values some things over others.
- Inequality has structural foundations: structural sources embodied in government and other institutions that create and maintain inequality.



Social Inequality

- The determination of who is socially advantaged or socially disadvantaged is based partly on certain **characteristics** individuals possess and partly on how society values or devalues those characteristics.
- Social inequality is a **systematic phenomenon** that affects people in various social classes throughout their lives.
- Affects almost every aspect of an individual's life - from access to material possessions and position in society to health and life expectancy.





Patterned Social Inequality

- Social stratification is patterned social inequality. Saying that inequality is patterned indicates that the differences occur:
 - on a **wide-scale** basis
 - with **regularity**
 - along lines of certain **specific, identifiable characteristics** (race, class, gender)
- **patterned**: If we know whether a person or group possesses or does not possess certain traits, then we will be able to predict with reasonable accuracy how this person or group is likely to fare in the **social hierarchy**: a set of ranked statuses.



Social Mobility

- ...movement of persons or groups within the stratification system
- types of social mobility
 - **vertical:** upward or downward
 - **intragenerational:** change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime
 - **intergenerational:** upward or downward social mobility of children in relation to their parents
 - **structural:** a shift in social position of large numbers of people due more to changes in society itself than individual efforts



Social Mobility

- Mobility varies by income level.
- Mobility also varies by race, ethnicity and gender.
- determinants of mobility
 - steepness of the socioeconomic pyramid: not enough high status jobs to satisfy everyone
 - starting position on the socioeconomic ladder: some begin closer to the top than others
 - structural mobility



Systems of Stratification

Types

- slavery: owners / slaves
- estate: nobility / church / commoners
- caste: birth and occupation
- class: economics and sociocultural traits

Comparative Components

- relative importance of ascribed vs. achieved statuses
- closed (virtually no vertical mobility) vs. open systems
- Depending on how much individual mobility is possible, societies may be classified as either a caste system or a class system.





Systems of Stratification: Slavery

- ...a system of stratification in which one person owns another, as he or she would own property, and exploits the slave's labor for economic gain
- the most extreme system of social stratification ... **no vertical mobility**
- Slavery is thought to have begun 10,000 years ago, after agricultural societies developed, as people in these societies made prisoners of war work on their farms. Historically, most slaves were prisoners of war or debtors.
- The basis of slavery is always economic because with it comes a kind of aristocracy which lives on slave labor.



Systems of Stratification: Slavery

- causes
 - **debt**: Individuals who could not pay their way out of debt sometimes had to literally sell themselves. If a slave's debt was not paid off before his/her death, the debt was often passed down to his/her children, enslaving several generations of the same family.
 - **crime**: Families against whom a crime had been committed might enslave members of the perpetrator's family as compensation.





Systems of Stratification: Slavery

- causes
 - **prisoners of war:** Slaves were often taken during wartime, or when a new territory was being invaded. Rome routinely took slaves from the lands it conquered.
 - **beliefs of inherent superiority:** Some people believe that they have a right to enslave those who they believe are inherently inferior to them.
- based on the legal ownership of people



Systems of Stratification: Slavery

- The slave owner has full control including using violence over the slave: a man whom law and custom regard as the property of another.
- Slaves are one of the lowest categories in any stratification system, as they possess virtually no power or wealth of their own.
- not necessarily inherited
- Slavery still exists today, especially in parts of Africa. Debt and sex slavery are common in parts of Asia.





Systems of Stratification: Estate

- ...a three-tiered system composed of the nobility, the clergy and commoners
- no longer exists
- societal stratification based on **ascribed status** (although system did have some flexibility)
- used **religious or spiritual ideology** to justify stratification
- dictated occupation, marriage and relationship options
- Each estate had a status with legal rights and duties, privileges and obligations.

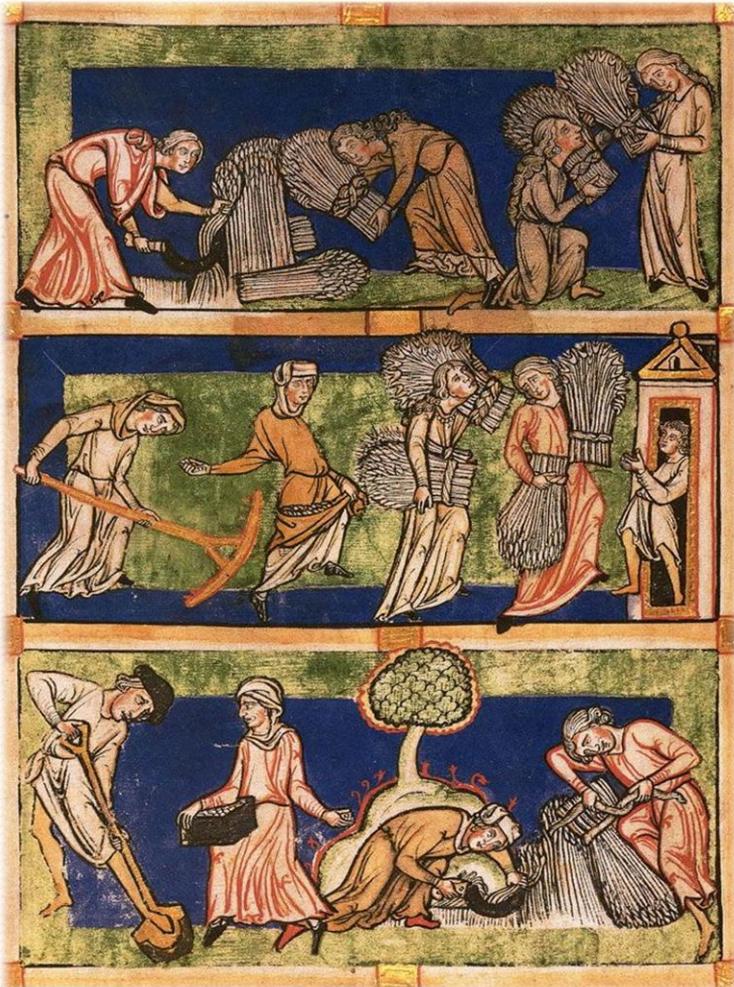


Systems of Stratification: Estate

- The estates represented a broad division of labor and were regarded as having definite functions.
- **Nobles** were born into that class and claimed authority through the divine right of kings. First-born sons inherited the father's wealth and title. The nobility defended society.
- Members of the **clergy** were born into nobility and then became priests, with long-term job security and a comfortable living. The clergy prayed for society.
- **Commoners** consisted of the masses of people engaged in hard physical labor, with virtually no chance of moving up in society. Commoners provided society's labor.



Systems of Stratification: Estate



- Women's estate status was treated differently than that of men. Women could be **virgins**, **wives** or **widows**, as well as associated members of the three work-defined estates.



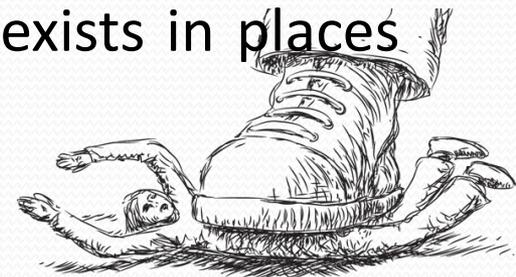
Systems of Stratification: Caste

- ...a fixed arrangement of strata from the most to the least privileged, with a person's position determined unalterably at birth based on ascribed status
- dictates occupation, marriage and relationship options
 - Caste dictates the type of work an individual is allowed to do.
 - **endogamy**: marriage within one's own group or caste, with marriage between castes strictly forbidden
 - Members of different castes neither live nor work near each other and rarely have any contact with one another.



Systems of Stratification: Caste

- uses religious or spiritual ideology to justify stratification, inequality ... Powerful cultural beliefs underlie caste systems.
- ranks people rigidly ... No matter what a person does, he or she cannot change castes. The caste into which a person is born is the caste he or she will have for life.
- A caste system may be determined by many ethnic and cultural factors. European imperial powers in Africa imposed a caste system based on skin color: all whites were in a higher position or caste than any nonwhite.
- The caste system, though no longer legal, still exists in places such as India.



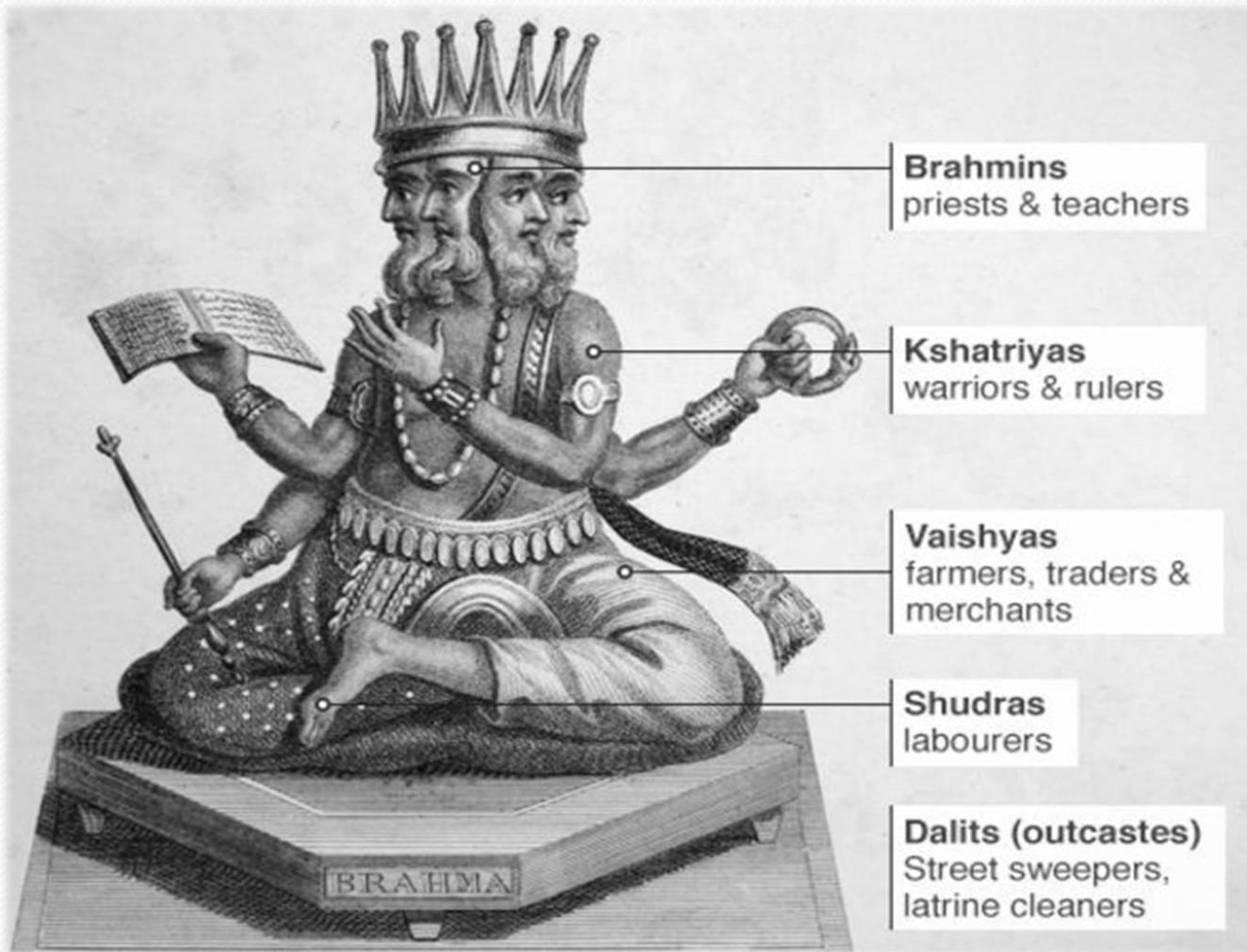


Systems of Stratification: India's Religious Castes

- Hindus based the caste system on the religious ideology of **reincarnation**: the belief that while the physical body dies, the soul of a person is immortal and goes on to be reborn into another body.
- People who are good in their current life will come back to improved circumstances in the next life, but if they are evil, they will be punished in the next one.
- Those who are poor or ill are suffering punishment for having done something wrong in a past life and others should not interfere.



Systems of Stratification: India's Religious Castes





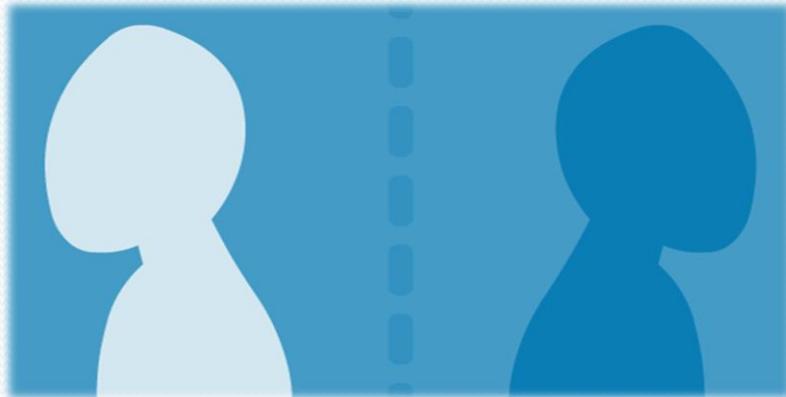
Systems of Stratification: India's Religious Castes

- **Brahman caste:** usually consisted of priests or scholars and enjoyed a great deal of prestige and wealth
- **Kshatriya (warrior) caste:** those who distinguished themselves in military service
- **Vaishya caste:** business-people and skilled craftspeople
- **Shudra caste:** those who made their living doing manual labor
- **Harijan (Dalit or Untouchable) caste:** thought to comprise only inferior people who were so repulsive that an individual who accidentally touched one would have to engage in extensive ritual ablutions to rid him/herself of the contamination



Systems of Stratification: South Africa's Caste System

- **apartheid system:** the total separation of the races
- Relegated black people to a caste far below that of whites: could not vote, receive an education or mix with whites in any way.
- The work of Nelson Mandela and others who fought for black equality have made apartheid illegal in South Africa but, like the caste system in India, some prejudice and discrimination remain.





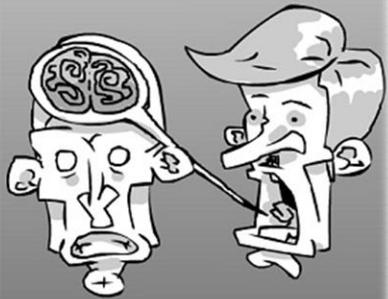
Systems of Social Stratification: Class

- ...individual's place in the social system is based on **achieved statuses**: statuses that we either earn or choose and that are not subject to where or to whom we were born
- **status consistency**: a condition in which a person's social status is high in one regard but low in another (janitor paid high wages)
- Those born within a class system can choose their educational level, careers and spouses.
- **social class**: people considered peers in society because of similar life chances, life circumstances and opportunities



Systems of Social Stratification: Class

- Social mobility is a major characteristic of the class system.
- Stratification persists because it is backed up by an **ideology**: cultural beliefs that directly or indirectly justify social stratification.
- An ideology or pattern of beliefs justifies social inequality in the US, which legitimizes or justifies a particular societal arrangement.
- **ideological hegemony**: the control over the production of cultural symbols ... The elite has many weapons at their disposal in order to keep society and the lower classes under control, including the use of force and the mass media.

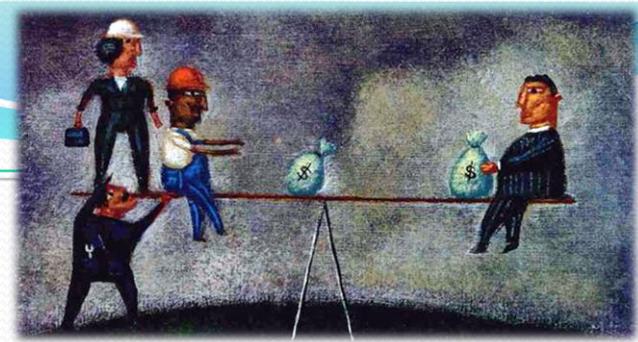


IDEALOGY



Systems of Social Stratification: Class

- Class stratification persists because it is backed up by an ideology.
- **legitimacy**: the belief that existing social and political institutions are the best one's for society
- Most of the media gives the same messages of free enterprise, equality of opportunity, individualism, hard work and consumerism.



Determinants of Social Class

- **wealth and income:** Possession of substantial amounts of wealth is the main characteristic distinguishing the upper class from other class groups in society. Persons having more wealth and income generally have higher social positions and more respect in society partly because of the way of life it permits or enforces (A social class is basically a way of life.) and partly because of what it suggests about one's family life and way of life.
- **occupation:** Some kinds of work are more honorable and hold a higher position than others. The high-prestige occupations generally receive higher incomes. Occupation is also one of the best clues to one's way of life and to one's social class membership.



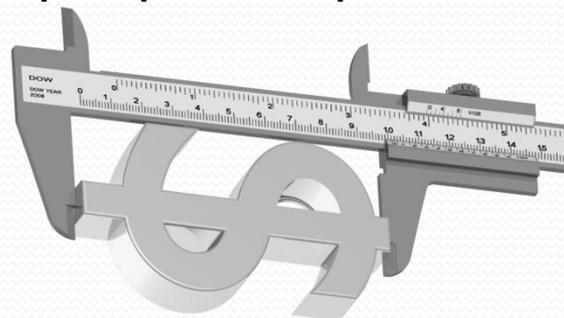
Determinants of Social Class

- **education:** There is a close reciprocal relationship between social class and education. To get a higher education one needs money plus motivation. Upper-class children already have money, family tradition and social encouragement. One's amount and kind of education affects the class rank he/she will secure.
- **prestige:** Refers to the respect and admiration with which an occupation is regarded by society. Prestige is independent of the particular person who occupies a job.



Measuring Social Class

- To measure social class standing, sociologists have developed three main methods.
 - **objective method**: ranks individuals into classes on the basis of measures such as education, income, occupational prestige
 - **reputational method**: places people into various social classes on the basis of reputation in the community
 - **self-identification**: allows people to place themselves in a social class





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Karl Marx

- Conflict theorists see conflict, not function, as the basis of stratification. In every society groups compete for power. Groups that gain power use it to manipulate, control and exploit the groups beneath them.
- Marx saw classes as defined by people's relationship to the means of production.

Capitalists

(*Bourgeoisie*, those who own the means of production)

- bourgeoisie/capitalists: people who own factories and other productive business

Workers

(*Proletariat*, those who work for the capitalists)

- proletariat/workers: people who sell their productive labor to the capitalists

Inconsequential Others
(beggars, etc.)



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Karl Marx

- The class in power imposes its ideology on the entire society and **false consciousness** occurs when people in a class accept an ideology that is contrary to the best interest of that class.
- False consciousness will exist until the exploited stratum develops a sense of **class consciousness**, at which time the stratum will become a true social class and begin challenging the ruling class.
- Marx's theory has been enormously influential but his work has been criticized for failing to recognize that a system of unequal rewards may be necessary to motivate people to perform their social roles effectively.





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Karl Marx

- Why hasn't western capitalism experienced a Marxist revolution?
 - The capitalist class has fragmented and grown in size, giving more people a stake in the system.
 - The proletariat has changed.
 - Blue-collar occupations (lower prestige work involving mostly manual labor) have declined.
 - White-collar occupations (higher prestige work involving mostly mental activity) have expanded.



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Karl Marx

- Why hasn't western capitalism experienced a Marxist revolution?



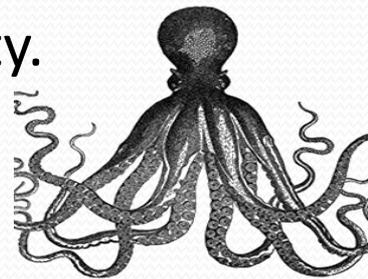
- Workers are better organized than they were in Marx's day and their unions have been able to fight for reform.
- Government has extended legal protections to workers.
- However, (a) wealth remains highly concentrated, (b) white-collar jobs offer no more income, security, satisfaction than blue-collar jobs did a century ago, (c) class conflict continues between workers and management and (d) the laws still favor the rich.



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Gaetano Mosca

- Human nature is self-centered and no society can exist unless organized.
- All but the most primitive societies are ruled by a numerical minority: **the political class**.
- Every society can be split between two social classes: the one who rules and the one which is ruled.
- Leadership means inequalities of power.
- Modern elites have **superior organizational skills**, which are useful in gaining power in modern bureaucratic society.





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Gaetano Mosca

- Elites are not hereditary in nature and people from all classes can theoretically become elite.
- There is a perpetual condition of conflict and recycle of the elite.





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Ralf Dahrendorf

- Conflict doesn't come about naturally, but as a result of power.
- Society is held by enforced constraint where some positions are delegated power and authority over others.
- Society is composed of **imperatively coordinated associations**: associations of people controlled by a hierarchy of authority and power.
- The differential distribution of authority invariably becomes the determining factor of systematic social conflicts.
 - command class v. obey class
 - those with authority v. those without





continued in Social Stratification Part II

