



Social Stratification

A Presentation by
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What is Social



Stratification

Stratification is powered by ideology

- Defined as a system by which society ranks categories of people in within a hierarchy
- A relatively recent phenomenon now found in most societies
- Based on three major premises:

Power: ability to impose one's will on others

Prestige: respect and status given by others

Property: wealth and class distinction

Ancient System of Stratification



Four Fundamental Principles of Social Stratification

1. Is a characteristic of society as a whole - *not* simply due to individual differences or personal qualities (i.e. age, gender, attractiveness, intelligence, charisma, or social skills are not the basis for social stratification)
2. Is a universal but variable phenomenon, occurring throughout the world and changing over time
3. Persists over generations, yet most societies have some room for social mobility or changes in position or rank in a system of social stratification (either upward, downward, or horizontal)
4. Involves both social inequalities and belief systems (ideologies)

Stratification & the Advancement of Society

Hunting and Gathering

Little stratification; society depended on each other; ex: men would hunt while the women would gather food

Horticulture, pastoral and Agriculture Societies

Time period that lead to inequality; domestication of and animals; since more was often produced than needed people were able to try other endeavors

Division of labor and Job Specialization

People began to change how they valued certain jobs because of the division of labor in agriculture; manual labor became bottom of totem pole, music or art became top of totem pole; trade of services and goods established

Industrial society (Industrial Revolution)

Steam engines became primary method for running all machinery, causing an increase of social stratification; “Haves” and “Have- not’s” more widely separated

Postindustrial societies (Information Age)

Created a further separation between the “haves” and “have- not's”; information based economy; education more important then basic skills

Ideologies in Society

Ideology can be defined as cultural beliefs which serve to justify and perpetuate patterns of inequality

Examples:

- Capitalism
- Religion
- Conservatism
- Nationalism

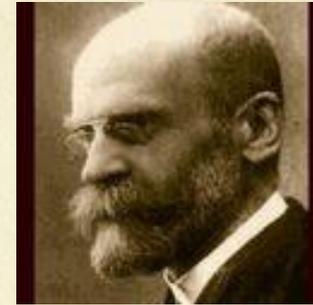


Sociologists and Theorists on Social Stratification

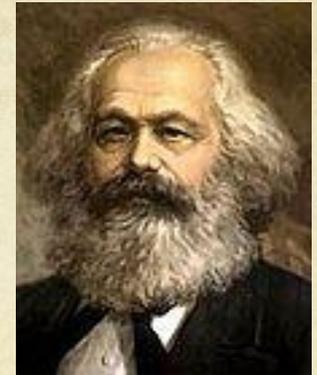
- Karl Marx
- Max Weber
- Emile Durkheim
- Theodor Geiger
- Talcott Parsons



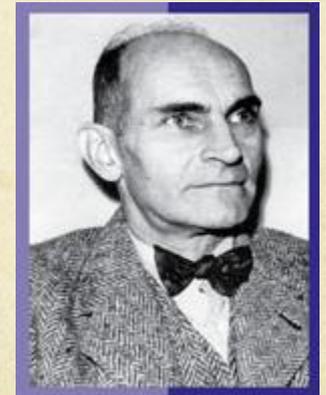
Weber



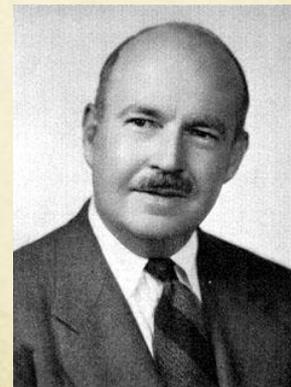
Durkheim



Marx



Geiger



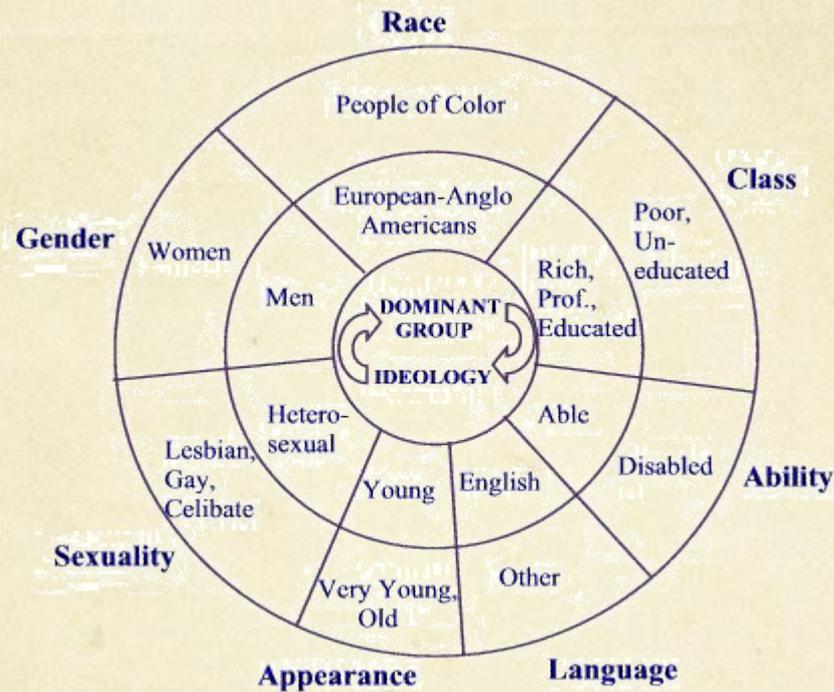
Parsons

“The ruling ideas of any epoch are the ideas of the ruling class because they control the mental means of production”- Karl Marx

Sociological Views on Stratification

- **Karl Marx**- Viewed social stratification as society as a whole; either individuals owned property (bourgeoisie) or worked for others who had it (proletariat) [superstructure and substructure]. Marx was one of the first people that related religious, cultural, and political life as the primary elements in economic structure
- **Max Weber**- Influenced by Marx, Weber developed three dimensions of social structure - Class- economical position, Status- prestige, honor, or popularity in society, and Power -capability to get whatever is desired. Believed there are four main social classes: upper, white collar workers, petite bourgeoisie, and working class, and that stratification was more then ownership of capital
- **Emile Durkheim**- Cited alongside Marx and Weber as one of the fathers of sociology. A man of religious principle, Durkheim was most fixated on societal changes that upheld “integrity and coherence in modernity” thus maintaining a holistic perspective on how aspects of society worked for the good of the whole. Durkheim argued, that when inequalities take place, they occur in the form of *external* and *internal* inequalities
- **Theodor Geiger**- Considered the founder of the theory of social stratification, using the concept to analyze social structures. His view was that society is divided into countless social levels or groups, defined by attributes such as profession, education, upbringing, lifestyle, power, attire, religion, race, politics, and group association, an idea strongly related to social mobility and the standards for an industrial society
- **Talcott Parsons**- One of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century, Parsons combined the theories of Durkheim and Weber, along with others. He attempted to create a single comprehensive structural-functional theory to clarify and organize general and specific characteristics of societies, and brought elements of psychology and anthropology into the study of sociology. Argued that societal differences and institutionalized individualization would lessen the role of class, as a stratification factor, as societies evolved

Circle of Oppression



Socially constructed meaning is *not* an individual issue; rather it is social. Ideology is not rooted in individual thought but upheld and practiced by communities and societies. Everyone contributes to and perpetuates meanings and ideologies

How Oppression Works

- **Internalized oppression:** the innermost circle in the model, occurs when people who are oppressed because of their group membership in society believe the stereotypes and attitudes that are directed at their group
- **Internalized privilege:** occurs when people who are privileged because of their group membership in society believe the stereotypes and attitudes about their group. This is where the elements of entitlement and invisibility come into play. Those who are privileged in a certain category are the standard against which everyone else is measured and named, and therefore they do not typically see their status as privileged but rather as the norm”
- **Individual oppression:** oppression that occurs between two people based on their group membership in society. Individual oppression is when a person who is oppressed in a certain social location is discriminated against by someone who has privilege in that same social location
- **Individual privilege:** when an individual uses her or his group membership to discriminate against another person who is oppressed in that social location
- **Group/Community oppression:** occurs when a person is made to feel “less than” by the group or community she or he is in. Example of marginalization in society
- **Group/Community privilege:** occurs when a person is made to feel that he or she is “one of us” and is welcomed solely based on the person’s group membership
- **Institutionalized oppression:** the outermost circle- oppression that occurs at the macro levels of society. An institution is an organization or group that provides a foundation or structure in our lives, such as family, education, religion, government, and media. Organizations that discriminate based on one’s social group membership demonstrate institutionalized oppression” (The Matrix Reader, 2009, p.145)
- **Institutionalized privilege:** occurs at the macro levels of society and springs from organizations, churches, media, and laws that have been founded on, or are based on the mythical norm, and they discriminate against anyone who is not part of that norm

Sociological Theories on Stratification



- Social stratification as a **patterned social inequality**
 - Privileged ruling over the oppressed based on society's decree of importance (i.e. race, culture, class, gender)
 - Affects peoples life chance (the ability and opportunity to achieve, overcome, and prosper)

- Social stratification as a **social-conflict paradigm**
 - People treated unequally
 - Unequal distribution of resources

*Those who are more powerful privileged
and having advantageous life chances*

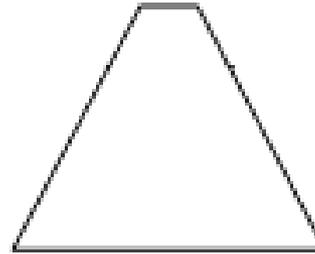
UPPER MIDDLE CLASS



Upper class

Middle class

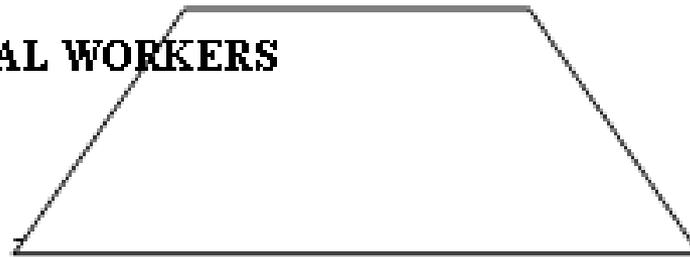
LOWER MIDDLE CLASS



SKILLED MANUAL WORKERS

Working Class

UNSKILLED MANUAL WORKERS



The Poor/Underclass



Sociological Theories (cont.)

○ Social stratification as **structural-functional**

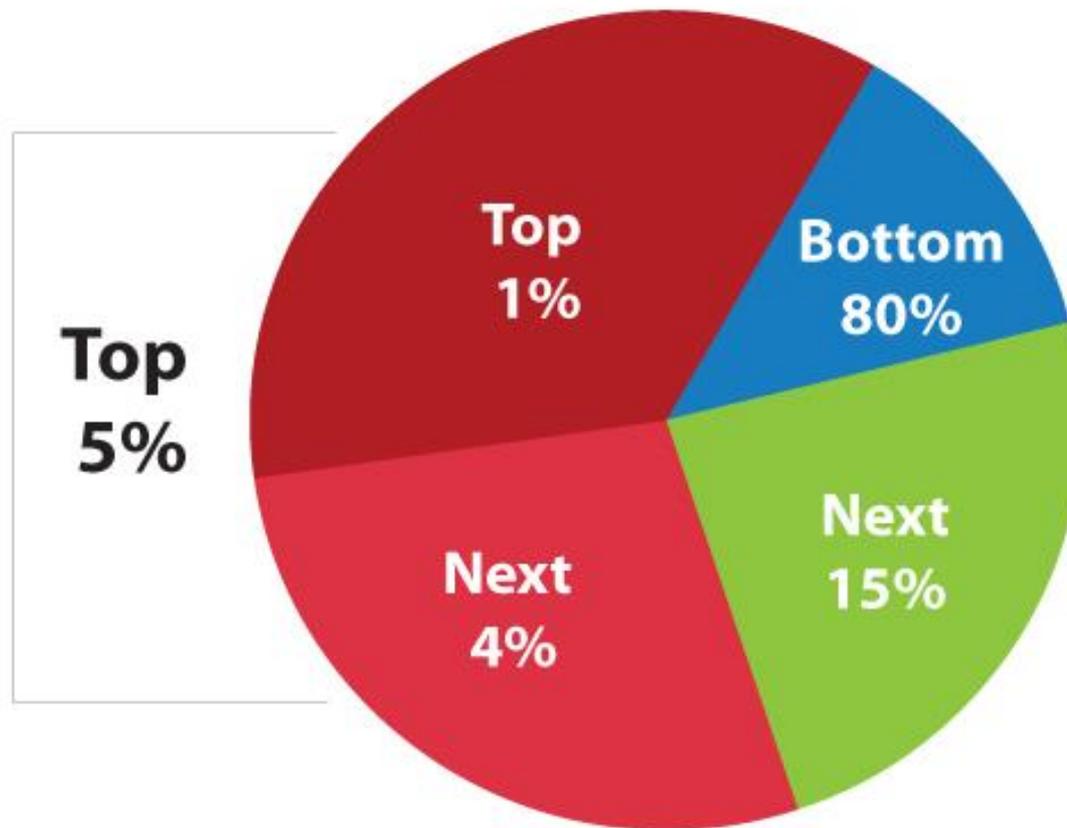
Davis-Moore theory- Some aspects of social stratification are necessary because of the level of intelligence needed for certain jobs. In order to maintain the proper minds to do those jobs they deserve more incentives than others

○ Social stratification as **symbolic interaction:**

- Elite class
- Lower upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class (average)
- Working class
- Lower class/working poor
- Unemployed/poverty



Who holds the country's wealth? (2009)



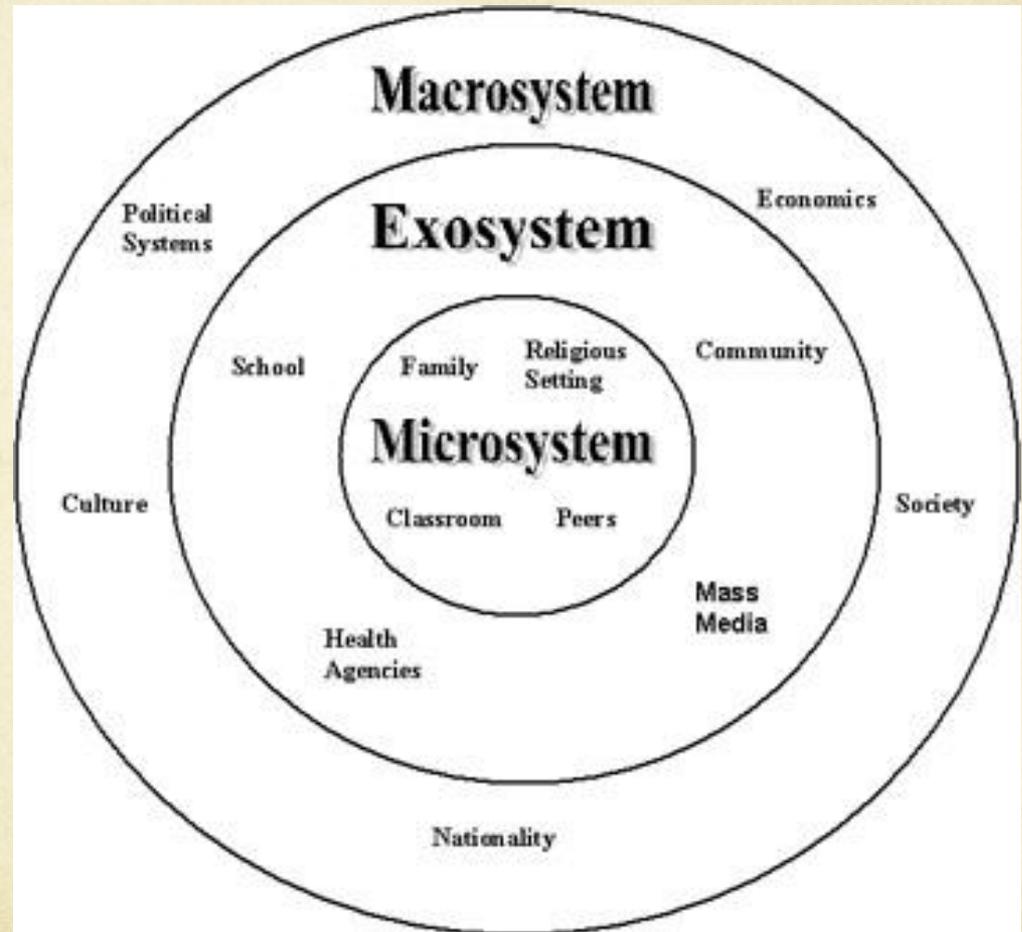
Source: Author's analysis of Broom and Shay (2000) and Forbes (2010).

Possible Origins or Causes of Social Stratification

- Relatively new phenomenon in history
- Virtually all societies are stratified today, driven by
 - Reciprocity or a mutual “social contract”
 - Dominance and exploitation
 - Resource competition
 - Or as a characteristic of progress

Types of Stratification Systems

- Caste
- Class
- Meritocracy
- Estate/feudalism
- Social
- Cultural
- Political
- Economic
- Classless Societies



Caste System

- Based on ascription, designation, or labeling; immobility

Examples of caste systems existing today:

- India
- South Africa

“The Hindu social system of rural India and racial apartheid in South Africa are used to illustrate caste systems. In such systems three factors underlie the fact that ascription determines virtually everything about a person's life. First, birth determines one's occupation. Second, marriage unites people of the same social standing through the rule of endogamy. And third, powerful cultural beliefs underlie such systems.” (Macionis & Gerber, *Sociology*: fifth Canadian Edition, 2010)

Class System

- Based on individual achievement and birth; not strictly defined; mobility

Examples of class systems existing today:

- The United States of America: upper, middle, and lower classes; the “American Dream” and opportunities for upward mobility

Meritocracy

- Based on personal merit; potentially (hypothetically) very productive system

Examples of class systems existing today:

- In reality such a society has never purely existed
- Societies which richly reward athletes, entertainers, and CEO's of big corporations certainly do NOT operate within a meritocracy

Estate System

- Long history; based on caste system; aka Feudalism

Examples of estate systems existing today:

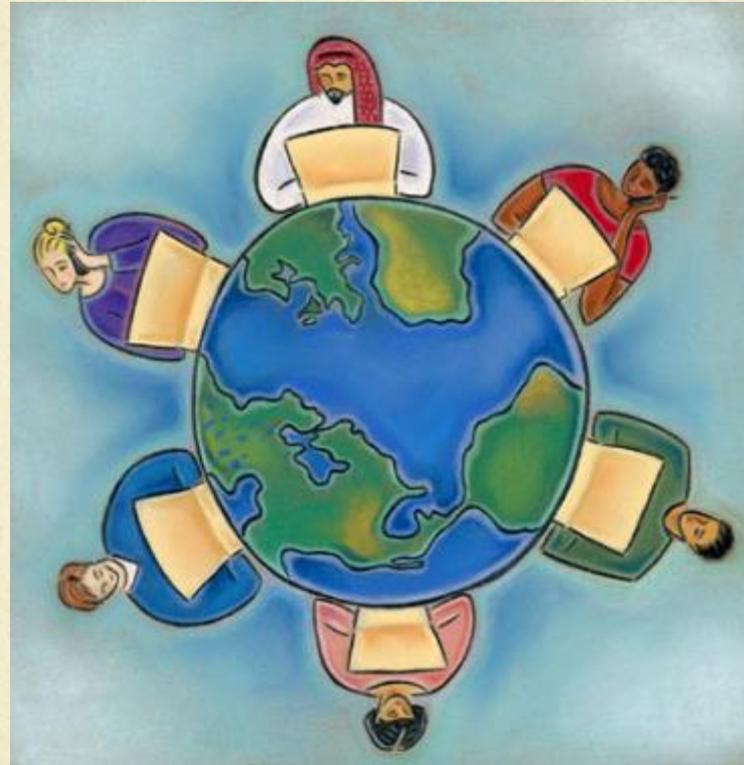
- The United Kingdom is an example of Caste and Class systems combined to create an Estate System
- Japan: mix of traditional and contemporary values

Social & Cultural Systems

Social Systems

On the **macro** scale:
often coincides with other
codependent systems
(i.e. socioeconomic system
of class structure or
sociopolitical structure
of democracy)

On the **micro** scale:
can refer to the structure of
social networks, communities
(geographic, social, cultural,
mutual interest), organizations,
and religious affiliations



Cultural Systems

Early Marxist theorists
defined culture as
“a community of
meanings, which
function independently
in motivating social
behavior” (Antonio
Gramsci, Wiki)

*Does culture operate
independently from
other systems?*

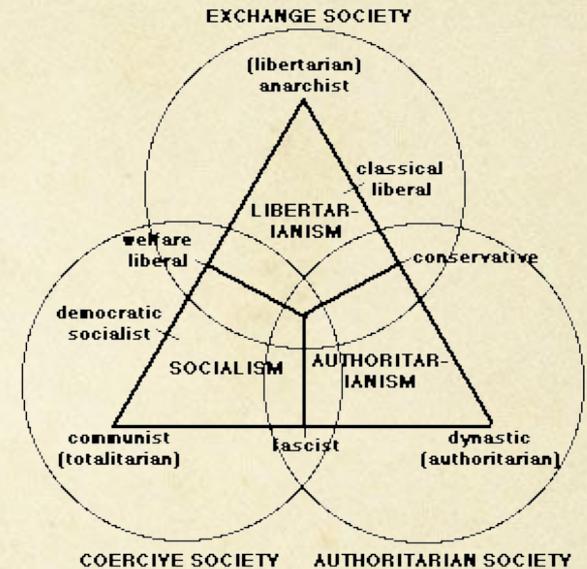
Many modern theorists
argue that it cannot

Political and Economic Systems

○ **Political System:** composed of the members of a social organization (group) who are in power

- capitalism
- statism
- communism
- fascism
- socialism
- monarchy

Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few.
— David Hume, *First Principles of Government*

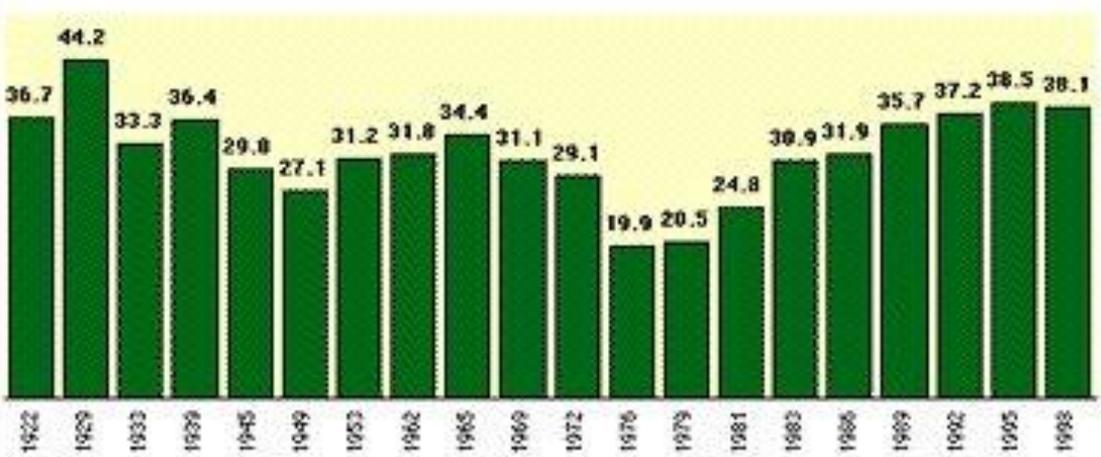


○ **Economic System:** combination of the various agencies, entities, and sectors that provide the economic structure that defines the social community

- Market economy: China and Vietnam
- Mixed economy: U.S. and most other countries to varying degrees

Top 1% Share of Household Wealth

Percentage Share of Household Wealth Held by Top 1%, 1922-98



Distribution of Wealth in the U.S., 2001

Top 1% own 33%
Next 4% own 26%
Next 5% own 12%

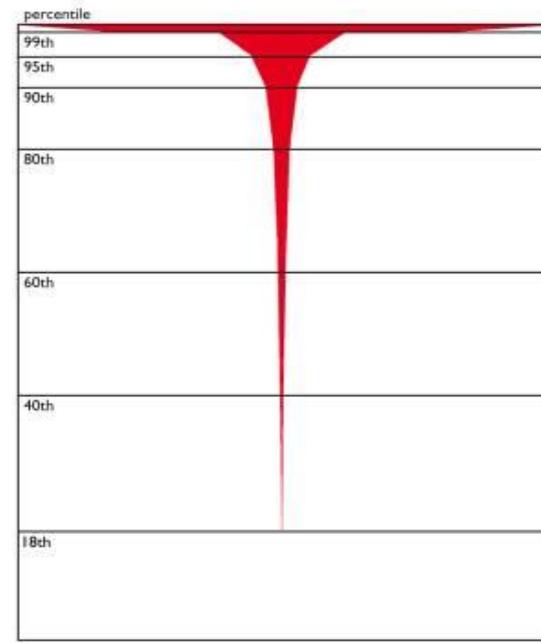
Next 10% own 13%

Next 20% own 11%

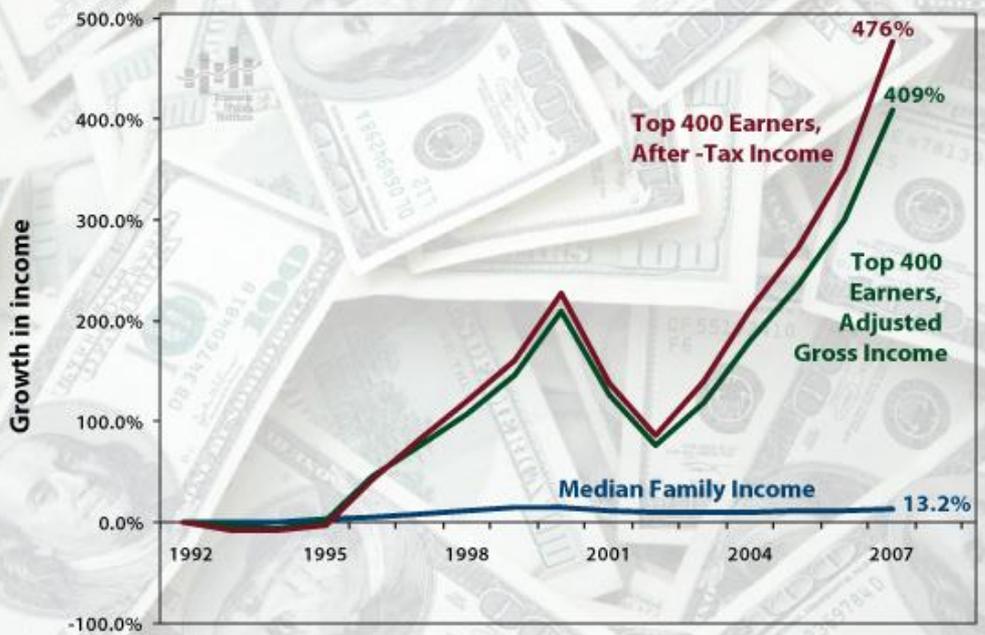
Middle 20% own 4%

Next 22% own 0.3%

Bottom 18% have zero or negative net worth

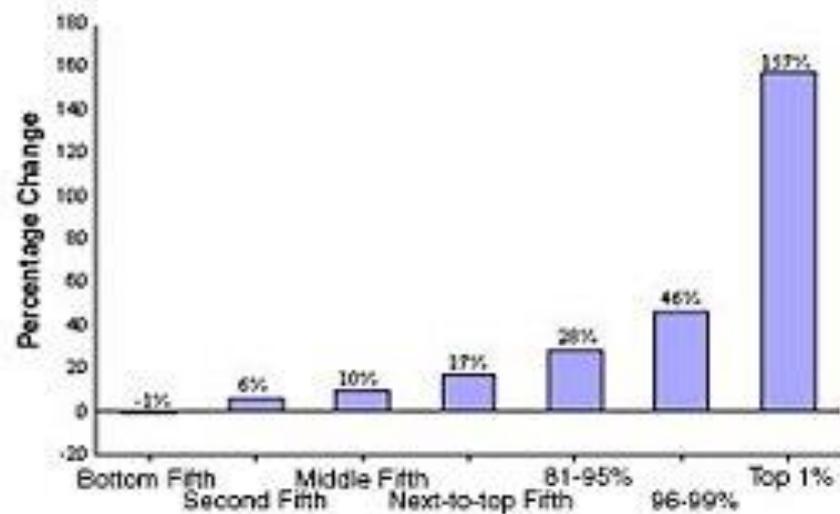


Percentage change in income



Source: Internal Revenue Service and U.S. Census Bureau.

Change in Average After-Tax Income, 1979-1997



Income Gaps Continued to Widen in the 1990s

Classless Societies

- An egalitarian society in which there are no hierarchies, class distinctions, or stratification

Examples of classless societies existing today:

- There do not appear to be any truly classless societies in the world today
- Russia (claims to be) a classless society but is stratified into occupational classes instead of social; government officials are highest ranking, intellectuals next, then laborers and peasants; typically there is inequality in distribution of valuable resources

How do Systems Operate to Support Social Stratification?



- According to systems theory, we understand that no system or individual operates independently from another
- This interconnected nature allows us to see the way power, influence, and maintained control affect social stratification as we understand it today

Who historically has remained in a position of dominance and power?

How have we as a socio-cultural system maintained this stratification?

“A stratified society is one marked by inequality, by differences among people that are regarded as being higher or lower...it is logically possible for a society to be stratified in a continuous gradation between high and low without any sharp lines...in reality...there is only a limited number of types of occupations... People in similar positions...grow similar in their thinking and lifestyle...they form a pattern, and this pattern creates social class.”

-Dennis Gilbert,
The American Class Structure, 1998

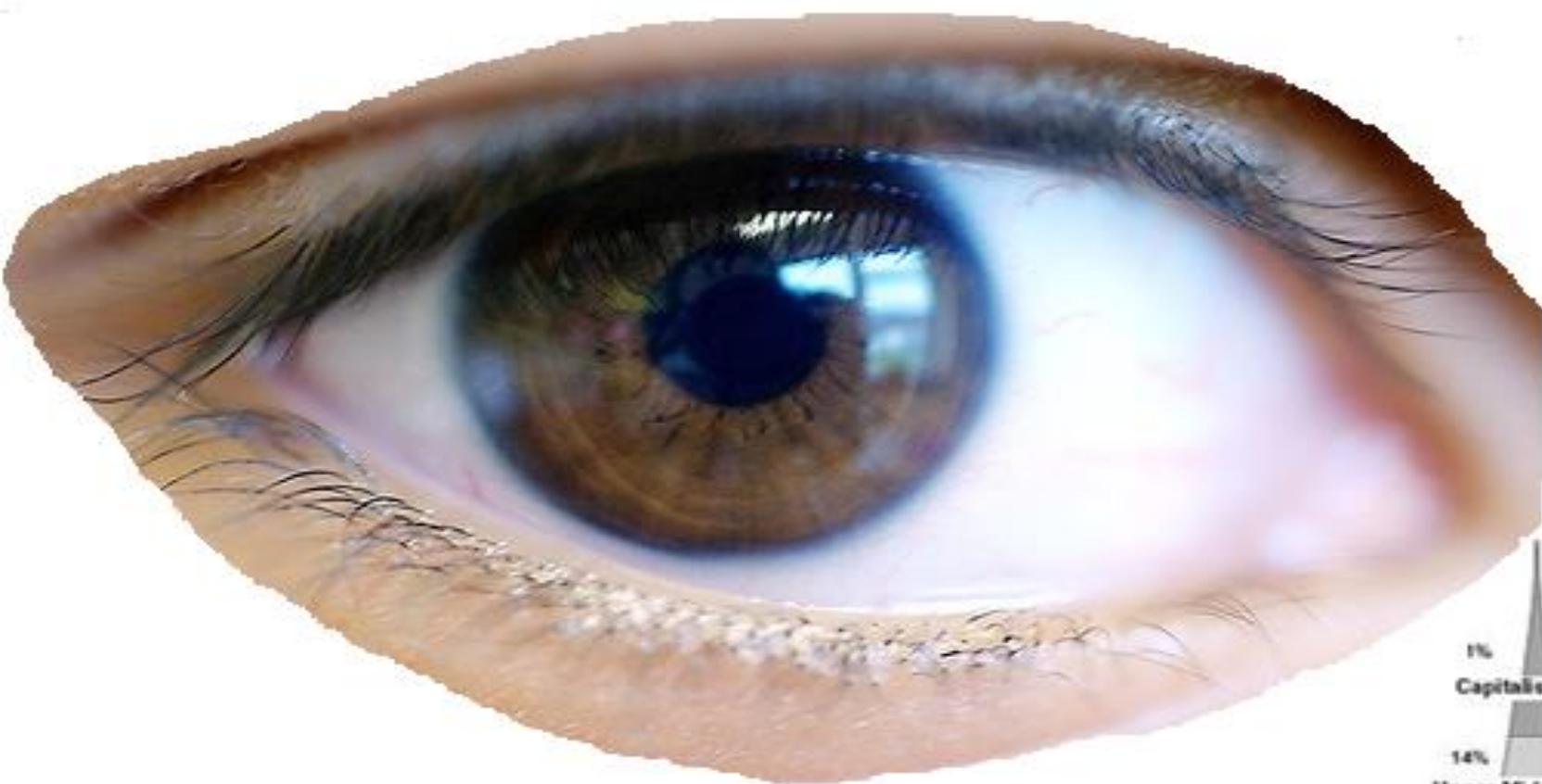


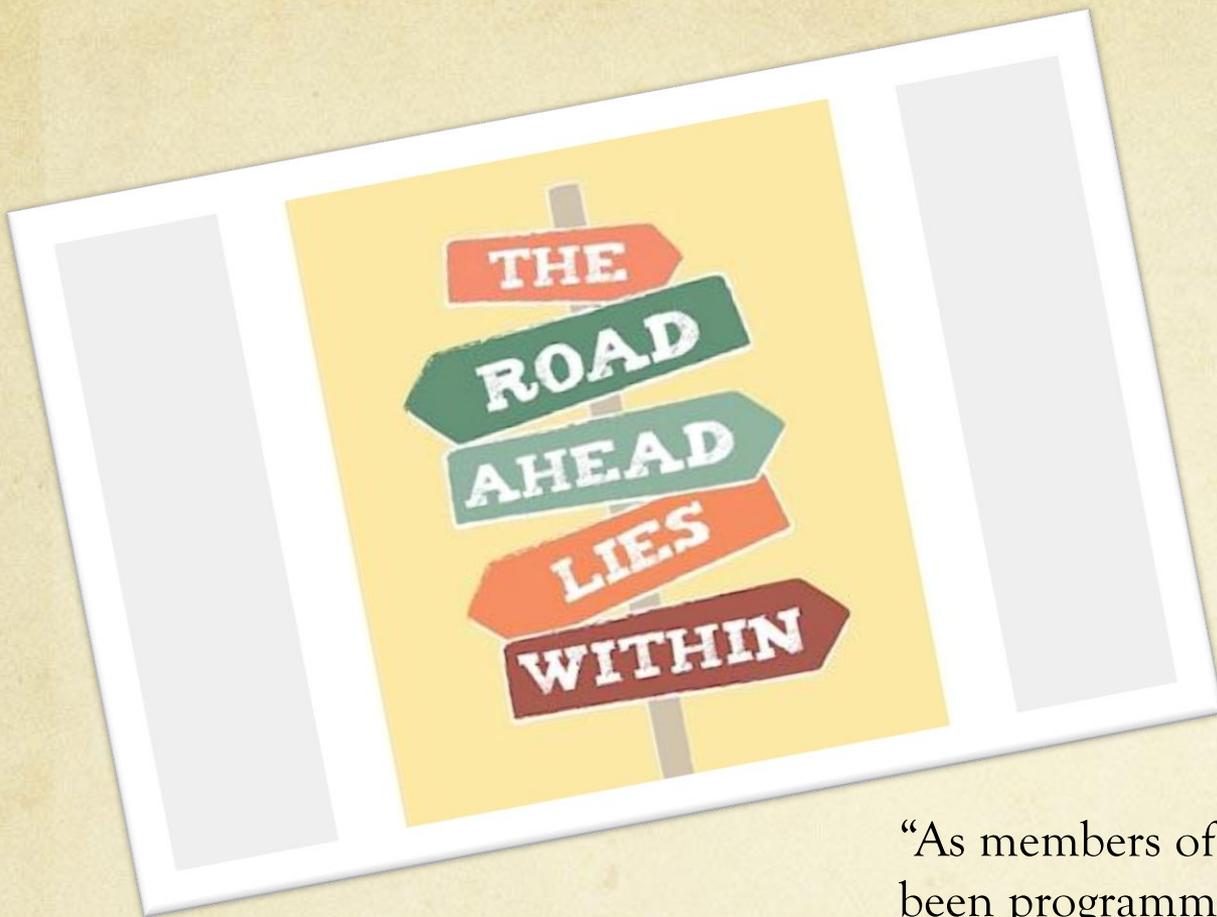
How Does Social Stratification Affect People's Lives?

Social stratification affects people's well-being, identity, values, and overall lifestyle, and can create dissatisfaction and unrest among the underprivileged

“It is impossible to understand people's behavior...without the concept of social stratification, because class position has a pervasive influence on almost everything...the clothes we wear...the television shows we watch...the colors we paint our homes in and the names we give our pets... Our position in the social hierarchy affects our health, happiness, and even how long we will live.”

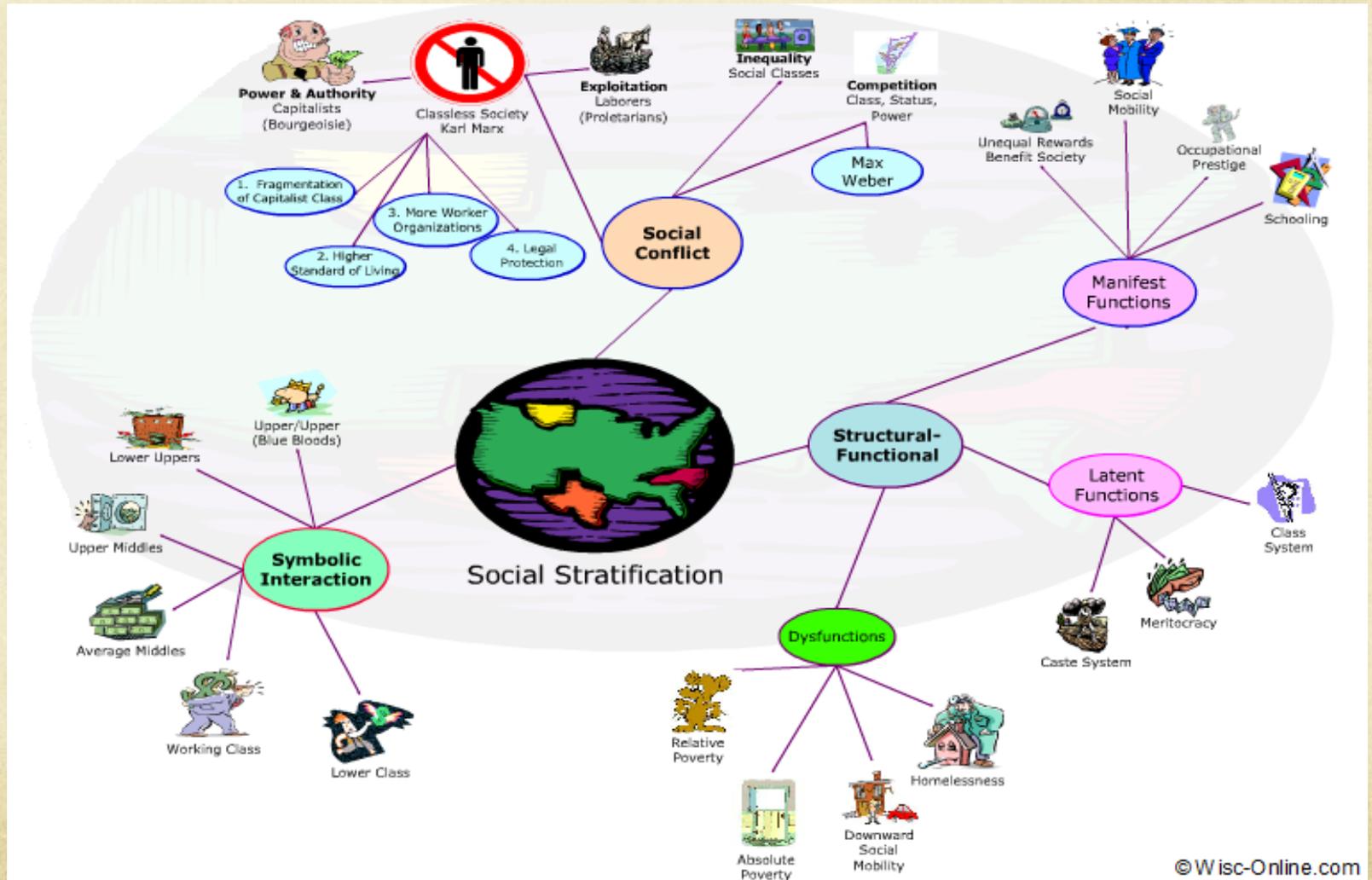
—William Thompson, Joseph Hickey, *Society in Focus*, 2005





“As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals.” (The Matrix Reader, 2009, p.154).

Overview of Social Stratification



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