Chapter 9 – Social Stratification

Social Stratification

* The ranking of individuals or categories of people on the basis of unequal access.
  + Climbing the ladder whether individually or societal wise
  + Characteristics of ranking can vary
    - Most common: ancestry, race, rage, physical appearance, sex, money
    - Possibly talent and effort

Types of Stratification Systems:

* Access depends on how open or closed system is

1. Caste System – totally closed
   1. Based on ascribed status
   2. Laws must be extremely strict
      1. Interaction and marriage disallowed between castes
      2. Exogamy and endogamy
   3. Were once very common
   4. Indians
      1. Brahmans
      2. Kshatriyas
      3. Vaishyas
      4. Sudras
      5. Untouchables
      6. All have many internal castes
   5. Industrialization generally ends the caste system
2. Class System
   1. Resources and rewards based on achieved status
   2. Can move up or down
   3. As defined by Karl Marx
      1. Those who own the means of production
         1. Two classes: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. Those who own production and those who own labor.
      2. Cannot work in modern society
         1. Too much growth in professions, managerial, and service industry
      3. Power with stockholders
      4. As defined by Max Weber
         1. Based on wealth, prestige, and political power
         2. Ranking a person’s socioeconomic status
            1. Combines education, occupational prestige, place of residence and income

American Class System:

* Fairly open system
* Illegal to discriminate on the bases of race, religion, ancestry, sex
  + In principally everybody has equal access

Determining Social Class:

* Sociologists disagree whether there are 3, 5, or 6 class levels
* Three basic techniques to rank individuals
  + Reputational Method
    - Individuals in community asked to rank each other
    - Use their characters and life-styles
  + Subjective
    - Individuals asked to rank themselves
    - Most will put themselves in middle class
      * Good to use 5 or 6 class levels
  + Objective
    - Defined social class by income, occupation, and education
    - Least biased
    - Combination of factors can produce slightly different pictures

Social Classes:

Upper Class:

* Upper-Upper
* Old money
* Bulk of money comes from inheritance
* Best schools, famous people, exclusive places
* Politically conservative
* Lower-Upper
  + New money
  + Acquired through own efforts
  + Not as prestigious
  + Conspicuous consumption
  + Politically liberal

Upper-Middle

* High income business and professional people
* College educations and advanced degrees
* Membership based on income and not assets
  + - Career orientation
* Usually politically and socially active on community and state level
* Politically liberal

Lower-Middle

* White-collar jobs
* Less education and lower income
* Nursing, middle management and sales
* Comfortable but most work hard
* Politically conservative

Working Class

* Largest segment of population
* Manual laborers
* Blue-collar jobs, pink-collar jobs
* Few financial reserves
* Emergency can put them into lower class

Lower Class

* Lowest-paying jobs
* Unemployed
* Elderly, homeless, unskilled, public assistance
* Survive day-to-day
* Future prospects are often bleak

Social Mobility

* Ability to move between classes
* Types of mobility:
  + Vertical Mobility
    - Either upward or downward
    - Usually based on promotion or loss of job
  + Horizontal Mobility
    - Movement within a class
    - One job to another with same social ranking
  + Intergenerational Mobility
    - Different status’s between generations

Structural Causes of Upward Mobility:

* Advances in technology
  + Usually downward mobility for current generation – upward for future generations
* Changes in merchandising patterns
  + Explosion of credit, emphasis on insurance, real estate, personal services
* Increase general level of education
  + Huge increase in high school graduates and college attendees

Structural Causes of Downward Mobility

* Illness, divorce, widowhood, retirement
* Changes in the economy
  + Change in area of demand

Poverty

* Standard of living that is below the minimum level considered decent and reason
  + Is relative – poor in one nation could be rich in another nation
* 35 million people in the U.S. live below the poverty line
* Working poor
  + Incomes too low to meet basic needs – too high to qualify for public assistance

How Poverty Level is Determined

* Calculating the cost of providing adequate diet – determined by minimal nutritional standards
* Multiply this figure by 3; graph on page 219

American Poor

* Characteristics that affect poverty: Age, sex, race, and ethnicity
  + Age
    - Largest poverty population is children
    - Over 40% of all poverty level people
    - Retired people make up the 3rd largest amount
  + Sex
    - 60% of poor above age 18 are women
    - ½ of all poor families are headed by woman
      * Especially for African-American and Hispanic
  + Race and Ethnicity
    - Great percentage of African-Americans and Hispanics
      * More than twice the national average

Effects of Poverty

* Life changes
  + Likelihood individuals have of sharing equal opportunity and benefit
    - Health, length of life, housing, education
  + Higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, anemia, pneumonia
  + Infant mortality is twice as high among poor people
  + Why?
    - Often low quality, possibly unsafe housing – still large percentage of income
* Patterns of behavior
  + More likely to be divorced
  + More likely to be arrested and convicted for crimes

Government Responses

* Help the elderly
  + Boost in Social Security and introduction of Medicare
* Government subsidies
  + Food stamps, WIC, Head Start, school lunches