

10 Social Stratification

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand that social stratification is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.



Apply sociology's major theoretical approaches to social stratification.



Analyze how and why systems of social inequality differ around the world and over time.



Evaluate ideology that is used to support social inequality.



Create the ability to envision changes in our system of social inequality.

Mercedes-Benz

Pure for Sure



Sanghi Motorcar



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces the central concept of social stratification, the focus of the next six chapters of the text. Social stratification is very important because our social standing affects almost everything about our lives. ■



On April 10, 1912, the ocean liner *Titanic* slipped away from the docks of Southampton, England, on its maiden voyage across the North Atlantic to New York. A proud symbol of the new industrial age, the towering ship carried 2,300 men, women, and children, some enjoying more luxury than most travelers today could imagine. Poor passengers crowded the lower decks, journeying to what they hoped would be a better life in the United States.

Two days out, the crew received radio warnings of icebergs in the area but paid little notice. Then, near midnight, as the ship steamed swiftly westward, a lookout was stunned to see a massive shape rising out of the dark ocean directly ahead. Moments later, the *Titanic* col-

lided with a huge iceberg, as tall as the ship itself, which split open its side as if the grand vessel were a giant tin can.

Seawater flooded into the ship's lower levels. Within twenty-five minutes of impact, people were rushing for the lifeboats. By 2:00 A.M., the bow was completely submerged, and the stern rose high above the water. Minutes later, all the lights went out. Clinging to the deck, quietly observed by those huddled in lifeboats, hundreds of helpless passengers and crew solemnly passed their final minutes before the ship disappeared into the frigid Atlantic (W. Lord, 1976).

The tragic loss of more than 1,600 lives when the *Titanic* sank made news around the world. Looking back at this terrible accident with a sociological eye, we note that some categories of passengers had much better odds of survival than others. Reflecting that era's traditional ideas about gender, women and children were allowed to board the lifeboats first, with the result that 80 percent of the people who died were men. Class, too, was at work. More than 60 percent of people holding first-class tickets were saved because they were on the upper decks, where warnings were sounded first and lifeboats were accessible. Only 36 percent of the second-class passengers survived, and of the third-class passengers on the lower decks, only 24 percent escaped drowning. On board the *Titanic*, class turned out to mean much more than the quality of accommodations—it was a matter of life or death.

The fate of the passengers on the *Titanic* dramatically illustrates how social inequality affects the way people live and sometimes whether they live at all. This chapter explains the meaning of social stratification and explores how patterns of inequality differ around the world and throughout human history. Chapter 11 continues the story by examining social inequality in the United States, and Chapter 12 takes a broader look at how our country fits into a global system of wealth and poverty.

What Is Social Stratification?

Understand

For tens of thousands of years, humans lived in small hunting and gathering societies. Although members of these bands might single out one person as swifter, stronger, or more skillful in collecting food, everyone had roughly the same social standing. As societies became more complex—a process detailed in Chapter 4 (“Society”)—a major change came about. Societies began to elevate specific categories of people above others, giving some parts of the population more wealth, power, and prestige than others.

Social stratification, a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy, is based on four important principles:

1. **Social stratification is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.** Many of us think of social standing in terms of personal talent and effort, and as a result, we often exaggerate the extent to which we control our own fate. Did a higher percentage of the first-class passengers on the *Titanic* survive because they were

 **Watch** the video “Opportunity and Social Class” on mysoclab.com

better swimmers than second- and third-class passengers? No. They did better because of their privileged position on the ship, which gave them first access to the lifeboats. Similarly, children born into wealthy families are more likely than children born into poverty to enjoy good health, do well in school, succeed in a career, and live a long life. Neither the rich nor the poor created social stratification, yet this system shapes the lives of us all.

- Social stratification carries over from generation to generation.** We have only to look at how parents pass their social position on to their children to see that stratification is a trait of societies rather than individuals. Some people, especially in high-income societies, do experience **social mobility**, a change in position within the social hierarchy. Social mobility may be upward or downward. We celebrate the achievements of rare individuals such as Christina Aguilera and Jay-Z, both of whom rose from modest beginnings to fame and fortune. Some people move downward because of business failures, unemployment, or illness. More often people move *horizontally*; they switch from one job to another at about the same social level. The social standing of most people remains much the same over their lifetime.
- Social stratification is universal but variable.** Social stratification is found everywhere. Yet *what* is unequal and *how* unequal it is varies from one society to another. In some societies, inequality is mostly a matter of prestige; in others, wealth or power is the key element of difference. In addition, some societies contain more inequality than others.
- Social stratification involves not just inequality but beliefs as well.** Any system of inequality not only gives some people more than others but also defines these arrangements as fair. Just as the details of inequality vary, the explanations of *why* people should be unequal differ from society to society.



The personal experience of poverty is clear in this photograph of mealtime in a homeless shelter. The main sociological insight is that although we feel the effects of social stratification personally, our social standing is largely the result of the way society (or a world of societies) structures opportunity and reward. To the core of our being, we are all products of social stratification.

Caste and Class Systems

Understand

Sociologists distinguish between *closed systems*, which allow for little change in social position, and *open systems*, which permit much more social mobility. Closed systems are called *caste systems*, and more open systems are called *class systems*.

The Caste System

A **caste system** is *social stratification based on ascription, or birth*. A pure caste system is closed because birth alone determines a person's entire future, allowing little or no social mobility based on individual effort. People live out their lives in the rigid categories assigned to them, without the possibility of change for the better or worse.

An Illustration: India

Many of the world's societies, most of them agrarian, are caste systems. In India, much of the population still lives in traditional villages where the caste system continues to be part of everyday life. The

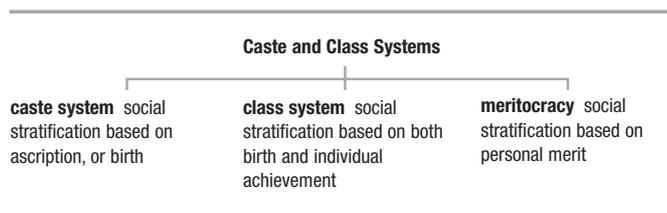
Indian system identifies four major castes (or *varnas*, from a Sanskrit word that means "color"): Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. On the local level, each of these is composed of hundreds of subcaste groups (*jatis*).

From birth, a caste system determines the direction of a person's life. First, with the exception of farming, which is open to everyone, families in each caste perform one type of work, as priests, soldiers, barbers, leather workers, street sweepers, and so on.

Second, a caste system demands that people marry others of the same ranking. If people were to enter into "mixed" marriages with members of other castes, what rank would their children hold? Sociologists call this pattern of marrying within a social category *endogamous* marriage (*endo-* stems from the Greek word for "within"). According to tradition—today, this practice is rare and is found only in remote rural areas—Indian parents select their children's future marriage partners, often before the children reach their teens.

Third, caste guides everyday life by keeping people in the company of "their own kind." Norms reinforce this practice by teaching, for example, that a "purer" person of a higher caste is "polluted" by contact with someone of lower standing.

Fourth, caste systems rest on powerful cultural beliefs. Indian culture is built on the Hindu tradition that doing the caste's life work and accepting an arranged marriage are moral duties.





In rural India, the traditional caste system still shapes people's lives. This girl is a member of the “untouchables,” a category below the four basic castes. She and her family are clothes washers, people who clean material “polluted” by blood or human waste. Such work is defined as unclean for people of higher caste position. In the cities, by contrast, caste has given way to a class system where achievement plays a greater part in social ranking and income and consumption are keys to social standing.

Caste and Agrarian Life

Caste systems are typical of agrarian societies because agriculture demands a lifelong routine of hard work. By teaching a sense of moral duty, a caste system ensures that people are disciplined for a lifetime of work and are willing to perform the same jobs as their parents. Thus the caste system has hung on in rural areas of India some seventy years after being formally outlawed. People living in the industrial cities of India have many more choices about work and marriage partners than people in rural areas.

Another country long dominated by caste is South Africa, although the system of *apartheid*, or separation of the races, is no longer legal and is now in decline. The Thinking Globally box takes a closer look.

The Class System

Because a modern economy must attract people to work in many occupations other than farming, it depends on developing people's talents in diverse fields. This gives rise to a **class system**, *social stratification based on both birth and individual achievement*.

Class systems are more open than caste systems, so people who gain schooling and skills may experience social mobility. As a result, class distinctions become blurred, and even blood relatives may have different social standings. Categorizing people according to their color, sex, or social background comes to be seen as wrong in modern societies as all people gain political rights and, in principle, equal standing before the law. In addition, work is no longer fixed at birth but involves some personal choice. Greater individuality also translates into more freedom in selecting a marriage partner.

Meritocracy

The concept of **meritocracy** refers to *social stratification based on personal merit*. Because industrial societies need to develop a broad range of abilities beyond farming, stratification is based not just on the accident of birth but also on *merit* (from a Latin word meaning “earned”),

which includes a person's knowledge, abilities, and effort. A rough measure of merit is the importance of a person's job and how well it is done. To increase the extent of meritocracy, industrial societies expand equality of opportunity and teach people to expect unequal rewards based on individual performance.

In a pure meritocracy, which has never existed, social position would depend entirely on a person's ability and effort. Such a system would have ongoing social mobility, blurring social categories as individuals continuously move up or down in the system, depending on their latest performance.

Caste societies define merit in different terms, emphasizing loyalty to the system—that is, dutifully performing whatever job a person has from birth. Because they assign jobs before anyone can know anything about a person's talents or interests, caste systems waste human potential. On the other hand, because caste systems clearly assign everyone a “place” in society and a specific type of work, they are very orderly. A need for some amount of order is one reason industrial and postindustrial societies keep some elements of caste—such as letting wealth pass from generation to generation—rather than becoming complete meritocracies. A pure meritocracy, with individuals moving up and down the social ranking all the time, would pull apart families and other social groupings. After all, economic performance is not everything: Would we want to evaluate our family members solely on how successful they are in their jobs outside the home? Probably not. Class systems in industrial societies develop some meritocracy to promote productivity and efficiency, but they keep caste elements, such as family, to maintain order and social unity.

Status Consistency

Status consistency is the degree of uniformity in a person's social standing across various dimensions of social inequality. A caste system has limited social mobility and high status consistency, so the typical person has the same relative ranking with regard to wealth, power, and



Jerome: Wow. I've been reading about racial caste in South Africa. I'm glad that's history.

Reggie: But racial inequality is far from over. . . .

At the southern tip of the African continent lies South Africa, a country about the size of Alaska with a population of about 50 million. For 300 years, the native Africans who lived there were ruled by white people, first by the Dutch traders and farmers who settled there in the mid-seventeenth century and then by the British, who colonized the area early in the nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, the British had taken over the entire country, naming it the Union of South Africa.

In 1961, the nation declared its independence from Britain, calling itself the Republic of South Africa, but freedom for the black majority was still decades away. To ensure their political control over the black population, whites instituted the policy of *apartheid*, or racial separation. Apartheid, written into law in 1948, denied blacks national citizenship, ownership of land, and any voice in the nation's government. As a lower caste, blacks received little schooling and performed menial, low-paying jobs. White people with even average wealth had at least one black household servant.

The members of the white minority claimed that apartheid protected their cultural traditions from the influence of people they considered inferior. When blacks resisted apartheid, whites used brutal military repression to maintain their power. Even so, steady resistance—especially from younger blacks, who demanded a political voice and economic opportunity—gradually forced the country to change.

Criticism from other industrial nations added to the pressure. By the mid-1980s, the tide began to turn as the South African government granted limited political rights to people of mixed race and Asian ancestry. Next came the right of all people to form labor unions, to enter occupations once limited to whites, and to own property. Officials also repealed apartheid laws that separated the races in public places.

The pace of change increased in 1990 with the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, who led the fight against apartheid. In 1994, the first national election open to all races made Mandela president, ending centuries of white minority rule.

Despite this dramatic political change—and strong economic growth during the last decade—social stratification in South Africa is still based on race. Even with the right to own property, one-fourth of black South Africans have no work, and one-fourth of the population lives below the poverty line.

The worst off are some 7 million *ukhuleleleka*, which means “marginal people” in the Xhosa language. Soweto-by-the-Sea may sound like a summer getaway, but it is a shantytown, home to thousands of people who live crammed into shacks made of packing crates, corrugated metal, cardboard, and other discarded materials. Recent years have seen some signs of prosperity, some shopping centers have been built, and most streets are now paved. But many families still live without electricity for lights or refrigeration. Some also lack plumbing, forcing people to use buckets to haul sewage. In some communities, women line up to take a turn at a single water tap that serves as many as 1,000 people. Jobs are hard to come by, and those who do find work are lucky to earn \$250 a month.

South Africa's current president, Jacob Zuma, who was elected in 2009, leads a nation still crippled by its history of racial caste. Tourism is up and holds the promise of an economic boom in years to come, but the country can break from the past only by providing real opportunity to all its people.



What Do You Think?

1. How has race been a form of caste in South Africa?
2. Although apartheid is no longer law, why does racial inequality continue to shape South African society?
3. Does race operate as an element of caste in the United States? Explain your answer.

Sources: Mabry & Masland (1999), Murphy (2002), and Perry (2009).

prestige. The greater mobility of class systems produces less status consistency, so people are ranked higher on some dimensions of social standing and lower on others. In the United States, for example, most college professors with advanced academic degrees enjoy high social prestige but earn only modest incomes. Low status consistency means that it is harder to define people's social position. Therefore, *classes* are much harder to define than *castes*.

Caste and Class: The United Kingdom

The mix of caste and meritocracy in class systems is well illustrated by the United Kingdom (Great Britain—consisting of England, Wales, and Scotland—and Northern Ireland), an industrial nation with a long agrarian history.

Aristocratic England

In the Middle Ages, England had an aristocratic society that resembled a caste system. At the top, the aristocrats included the leading members of the church, who were thought to speak with the authority of God. Some clergy were local priests who were not aristocrats and who lived simple lives. But the highest church officials lived in palaces and presided over an organization that owned much land, which was the major source of wealth. Church leaders, typically referred to as the *first estate* in France and other European countries, also had a great deal of power to shape the political events of the day.

The rest of the aristocracy, which in France and other European countries was known as the *second estate*, was a hereditary nobility that made up barely 5 percent of the population. The royal family—

the king and queen at the top of the power structure—as well as lesser nobles (including several hundred families headed by men titled as dukes, earls, and barons) together owned most of the nation's land. Most of the men and women within the aristocracy were wealthy due to their ownership of land, and they had many servants for their homes as well as ordinary farmers to work their fields. With all their work done for them by others, members of the aristocracy had no occupation and came to believe that engaging in a trade or any other work for income was beneath them. Aristocrats used their leisure time to develop skills in horseback riding and warfare and to cultivate refined tastes in art, music, and literature.

To prevent their vast landholdings from being divided by heirs after they died, aristocrats devised the law of *primogeniture* (from the Latin meaning “firstborn”), which required that all property pass to the oldest son or other male relation. Younger sons had to find other means of support. Some of these men became leaders in the church—where they would live as well as they were used to—and helped tie together the church and the state by having members of the same families running both. Other younger sons within the aristocracy became military officers or judges or took up other professions considered honorable for gentlemen. In an age when no woman could inherit her father's property and few women had the opportunity to earn a living on their own, a noble daughter depended for her security on marrying well.

Below the high clergy and the rest of the aristocracy, the vast majority of men and women were simply called *commoners* or, in France and other European countries, the *third estate*. Most commoners were serfs working land owned by nobles or the church. Unlike members of the aristocracy, most commoners had little schooling and were illiterate.

As the Industrial Revolution expanded England's economy, some commoners living in cities made enough money to challenge the nobility. More emphasis on meritocracy, the increasing importance of money, and the expansion of schooling and legal rights eventually blurred the difference between aristocrats and commoners and gave rise to a class system.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that these days, traditional titles are put up for sale by aristocrats who need money. In 1996, for example, Earl Spencer—the brother of the late Princess Diana—sold one of his titles, Lord of Wimbledon, to raise the \$300,000 he needed to redo the plumbing in one of his large homes (McKee, 1996).

In 2011, Prince William, second in line to the British throne, married commoner Catherine Middleton, who then took the title, “Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge.” They now take their place as part of a royal family that traces its ancestry back more than a thousand years—an element of caste that remains in the British class system.

The United Kingdom Today

The United Kingdom has a class system, but caste elements from England's aristocratic past are still evident. A small number of British families still hold considerable inherited wealth and enjoy high prestige, receive schooling at excellent universities, and are members of social networks in which people have substantial political influence. A traditional monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is the United Kingdom's head of state, and Parliament's House of Lords is composed of “peers,” about half of whom are aristocrats of noble birth. However, control of government has passed to the House of Commons, where the prime minister and other leaders reach their positions by achievement—winning an election—rather than by birth.

Lower in the class hierarchy, roughly one-fourth of the British people form the middle class. Many earn comfortable incomes from professions and business and are likely to have investments in the form of stocks and bonds. Below the middle class, perhaps half of all Britons consider themselves “working-class,” earning modest incomes through manual labor. The remaining one-fourth of the British people make up the lower class, the poor who lack steady work or who work full time but are paid too little to live comfortably. Most lower-class Britons live in the nation's northern and western regions, which have been further impoverished by the closings of mines and factories.

The British mix of caste elements and meritocracy has produced a highly stratified society with some opportunity to move upward or downward, much the same as exists in the United States (Long & Ferrie, 2007). Historically, British society has been somewhat more castelike than the United States, a fact reflected in the importance attached to linguistic accent. Distinctive patterns of speech develop in any society when people are set off from one another over several generations. People in the United States treat accent as a clue to where a person lives or grew up (we can easily identify a midwestern “twang” or a southern “drawl”). In the United Kingdom, however, accent is a mark of social class, with upper-class people speaking “the King's English” but most people speaking “like commoners.” So different are these two accents that the British seem to be, as the saying goes, “a single people divided by a common language.”

Another Example: Japan

Social stratification in Japan also mixes caste and meritocracy. Japan is both the world's oldest continuously operating monarchy and a modern society where wealth follows individual achievement.

Aristocratic Japan

By the fifth century C.E., Japan was an agrarian society with a rigid caste system, ruled by an imperial family, containing both aristocrats and commoners. The emperor ruled by divine right (meaning



that he claimed that God intended him to rule), and his military leader (*shogun*) enforced the emperor's rule with the help of regional nobles or warlords.

Below the nobility were the *samurai*, a warrior caste whose name means "to serve." This second rank of Japanese society was made up of soldiers who learned martial arts and who lived by a code of honor based on absolute loyalty to their leaders.

As in Great Britain, most people in Japan at this time in history were commoners who worked very hard to live from day to day. Unlike their European counterparts, however, Japanese commoners were not lowest in rank. At the bottom were the *burakumin*, or "outcasts," looked down on by both lord and commoner. Like the lowest-caste groups in India, these outcasts lived apart from others, performed the most distasteful work, and could not change their social standing.

Modern Japan

By the 1860s (the time of the Civil War in the United States), the nobles realized that Japan's traditional caste system would prevent the country from entering the modern industrial era. Besides, as in Britain, some nobles were happy to have their children marry wealthy commoners who had more money than they did. As Japan opened up to the larger world, the traditional caste system weakened. In 1871, the Japanese legally banned the social category of *burakumin*, although some people still looked down on those whose ancestors held this rank. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the nobles lost their privileges and, although the emperor remains as a symbol of Japan's traditions, he has little real power.

Social stratification in Japan is very different from the rigid caste system of centuries ago. Today, Japanese society consists of "upper," "upper-middle," "lower-middle," and "lower" classes. The exact lines between these classes are unclear to most Japanese, and many people do move between classes over time. But because Japanese culture tends to respect tradition, family background is never far from the surface when sizing up someone's social standing. Officially, everyone is equal before the law, but in reality, many people still look at one another through the centuries-old lens of caste.

Finally, traditional ideas about gender continue to shape Japanese society. Legally, the two sexes are equal, but men dominate women in many ways. Because Japanese parents are more likely to send sons than daughters to college, there is a significant gender gap in education. With the recent economic downturn in Japan, many more women have entered the labor force. But most working women fill lower-level support positions in the corporate world. In Japan, only about 10 percent of corporate and political leaders are women. In short, individual achievement in Japan's modern class system operates in the shadow of centuries of traditional male privilege (Norbeck, 1983; Brinton, 1988; H. W. French, 2002; OECD, 2009).

Classless Societies? The Former Soviet Union

Nowhere in the world do we find a society without some degree of social inequality. Yet some nations have claimed to be classless.



One of the major events of the twentieth century was the socialist revolution in Russia, which led to the creation of the Soviet Union. Following the ideas of Karl Marx, the popular uprising overthrew a feudal aristocracy, as depicted in the 1920 painting *Bolshevik* by Boris Mikhailovich Kustodiev.

The Second Russian Revolution

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which rivaled the United States as a military superpower in the mid- to late twentieth century, was born out of a revolution in Russia in 1917. The Russian Revolution ended the feudal aristocracy in which a nobility ruled the country and transferred farms, factories, and other productive property from private ownership to state control.

The Russian Revolution was guided by the ideas of Karl Marx, who believed that private ownership of productive property was the basis of social classes (see Chapter 4, "Society"). When the state took control of the economy, Soviet officials boasted that they had created the first modern classless society.

Critics, however, pointed out that based on their jobs, the Soviet people were actually stratified into four unequal categories. At the top were high government officials, known as *apparatchiks*. Next came the Soviet intelligentsia, including lower government officials, college professors, scientists, physicians, and engineers. Below them were manual workers and, at the lowest level, the rural peasantry.

In reality, the Soviet Union was not classless at all. But putting factories, farms, colleges, and hospitals under state control did create more economic equality (although with sharp differences in power) than in capitalist societies such as the United States.

The Modern Russian Federation

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union with a new economic program known as *perestroika* ("restructuring"). Gorbachev saw that although the Soviet system had reduced economic inequality, living standards lagged far behind those of other industrial nations. Gorbachev tried to generate economic growth by reducing the inefficient centralized control of the economy, which had proved to be inefficient.

Gorbachev's economic reforms turned into one of the most dramatic social movements in history. People in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries of Eastern Europe blamed their poverty and their lack of basic freedoms on the repressive ruling class of Communist party officials. Beginning in 1989, people throughout Eastern Europe toppled their socialist governments, and at the end of 1991, the Soviet Union itself collapsed, with its largest republic remaking itself as the Russian Federation.

The Soviet Union's story shows that social inequality involves more than economic resources. Soviet society did not have the extremes of wealth and poverty found in the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States. But an elite class existed all the same, based on political power rather than wealth.

What about social mobility in so-called classless societies? During the twentieth century, there was as much upward social mobility in the Soviet Union as in the United States. Rapidly expanding industry and government drew many poor rural peasants into factories and offices. This trend illustrates what sociologists call **structural social mobility**, a shift in the social position of large numbers of people due more to changes in society itself than to individual efforts.

November 24, Odessa, Ukraine. The first snow of our voyage flies over the decks as our ship docks at Odessa, the former Soviet Union's southernmost port on the Black Sea. We gaze up the Potemkin Steps, the steep stairway up to the city, where bloody violence that eventually led to the Russian Revolution took place. It has been several years since our last visit, and much has changed; in fact, the Soviet Union itself has collapsed. Has life improved? For some people, certainly: There are now chic boutiques where well-dressed shoppers buy fine wines, designer clothes, and imported perfumes. But for most people, life seems much worse. Flea markets line the curbs as families sell their home furnishings. When meat costs \$4 a pound and the average person earns about \$30 a month, people become desperate. Even the city has to save money by turning off streetlights after 8:00 p.m. The spirits of most people seem as dim as Odessa's streets.



China has the fastest-growing economy of all the major nations and currently manufactures more products than even the United States. With more and more money to spend, the Chinese are now a major consumer of automobiles—a fact that probably saved the Buick brand from extinction.

During the 1990s, the forces of structural social mobility in the new Russian Federation turned downward. One indicator is that the average life span for Russian men dropped by five years and for women by two years. Many factors are involved in this decline, including Russia's poor health care system, but the Russian people clearly have suffered in the turbulent period of economic change that began in 1991 (Gerber & Hout, 1998; Mason, 2004; World Bank, 2011).

The hope was that in the long run, closing inefficient state industries would improve the nation's economic performance. The economy has expanded, but for many Russians, living standards have fallen, and millions face hard times. The few people who made huge fortunes have seen much of their new wealth vanish in the recent recession. This fact, along with more government control over the Russian economy, has caused economic inequality to decline. At the same time, however, many people wonder what a return to a more socialist society will mean for their living standards and political freedoms (Zuckerman, 2006; Wendle, 2009).

China: Emerging Social Classes

Sweeping political and economic change has affected not just the former Soviet Union but also the People's Republic of China. After the Communist revolution in 1949, the state took control of all farms, factories, and other productive property. Communist party leader Mao Zedong declared all types of work to be equally important, so officially, social classes no longer existed.

The new program greatly reduced economic inequality. But as in the Soviet Union, social differences remained. The country was ruled by a political elite with enormous power and considerable privilege; below them were managers of large factories as well as skilled professionals; next came industrial workers; at the bottom were rural peasants, who were not even allowed to leave their villages and migrate to cities.

Further economic change came in 1978 when Mao died and Deng Xiaoping became China's leader. The state gradually loosened its hold on the economy, allowing a new class of business owners to emerge. Communist party leaders remain in control of the country, and some have prospered as they have joined the ranks of the small but wealthy elite who control new privately run industries. China's economy has experienced rapid growth—in economic output, the country is now second only to the United States—and China has joined the ranks of “middle-income nations.” But much of this new economic growth has been concentrated in cities, especially in coastal areas, where living standards have soared far above those in China's rural interior (United Nations, 2008).

Since the late 1990s, the booming cities along China's coast have become home to many thousands of people made rich by the expanding economy. In addition, these cities have attracted more than 100 million young migrants from rural areas in search of better jobs and a better life. Many more have wanted to move to the booming cities, but the government still restricts movement, which has the effect of slowing upward social mobility. For those who have

been able to move, the jobs that are available are generally better than the work that people knew before. But many of these new jobs are dangerous, and most pay wages that barely meet the higher costs of living in the city, so that the majority of the migrants remain poor. To make matters worse, the weakening global economy in recent years has

caused many Chinese factories to lay off workers or even to shut down their operations. As a result, beginning in 2008, some people began to migrate from cities back to the countryside—a case of downward social mobility (Atlas, 2007; Wu & Treiman, 2007; Chang, 2008; Powell, 2008).

A new category in China’s social hierarchy consists of the *hai gui*, a term derived from words meaning “returned from overseas” or “sea turtles.” The ranks of the “sea turtles” are increasing by tens of thousands each year as young women and men return from education in other countries, in many cases from college and university campuses in the United States. These young people, most of whom were from privileged families to begin with, typically return to China to find many opportunities and soon become very influential (Liu & Hewitt, 2008).

In China, a new class system is emerging, a mix of the old political hierarchy and a new business hierarchy. Economic inequality in China has increased as members of the new business elite have become millionaires and even billionaires. As Figure 10–1 shows, economic inequality in China is now about the same as it is in the United States. With so much change in China, that country’s social stratification is likely to remain dynamic for some time to come (Bian, 2002; Kuhn, 2007).

Ideology: Supporting Stratification

Analyze

How do societies persist without sharing resources more equally? The highly stratified British aristocracy and the caste system in Japan each survived for centuries, and for 2,000 years, people in India accepted the idea that they should be privileged or poor based on the accident of birth.

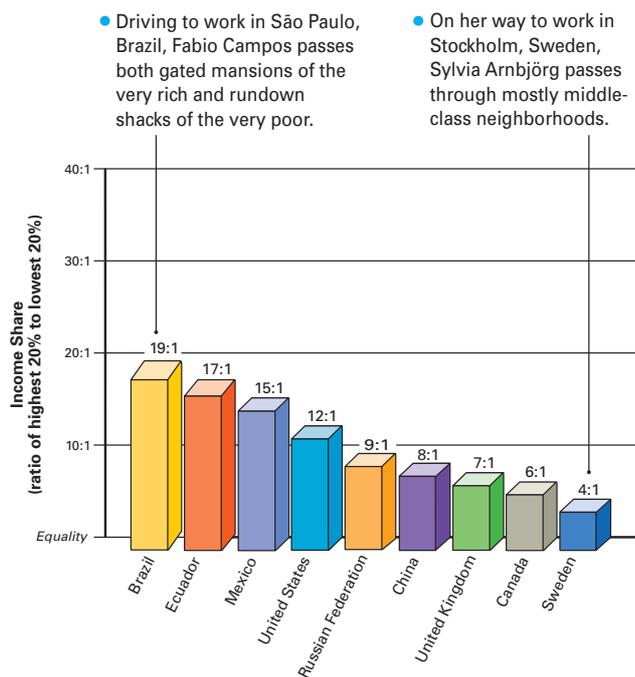
A major reason that social hierarchies endure is **ideology**, *cultural beliefs that justify particular social arrangements, including patterns of inequality*. A belief—for example, the idea that rich people are smart and poor people are lazy—is ideological to the extent that it supports inequality by defining it as fair.

Plato and Marx on Ideology

According to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 B.C.E.), every culture considers some type of inequality just. Although Karl Marx understood this, he was far more critical of inequality than Plato. Marx criticized capitalist societies for defending wealth and power in the hands of a few as “a law of the marketplace.” Capitalist law, he continued, defines the right to own property and ensures that money stays within the same families from one generation to the next. In short, Marx concluded, culture and institutions combine to support a society’s elite, which is why established hierarchies last such a long time.

Historical Patterns of Ideology

Ideology changes along with a society’s economy and technology. Because agrarian societies depend on most people’s lifelong labor, they develop caste systems that make carrying out the duties of a person’s social position or “station” a moral responsibility. With the rise of industrial capitalism, an ideology of meritocracy emerges, defining wealth and power as prizes to be won by the individuals who perform the best. This change means that the poor—often given charity under feudalism—come to be looked down on as personally undeserving. This harsh view is found in the ideas of the early sociologist Herbert Spencer, as explained in the Thinking About Diversity box on page 232.



Global Snapshot

FIGURE 10–1 Economic Inequality in Selected Countries, 2009

Many low- and middle-income countries have greater economic inequality than the United States. But the United States has more economic inequality than most high-income nations.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and World Bank (2010).

History shows how difficult it is to change social stratification. However, challenges to the status quo always arise. The traditional idea that “a woman’s place is in the home,” for example, has given way to increased economic opportunities for women in many societies today. The continuing progress toward racial equality in South Africa is another case of the widespread rejection of the ideology of apartheid. The popular uprisings against political dictatorships across the Middle East that began in 2011 show us that this process of challenging entrenched social stratification continues.

Functions of Social Stratification

Apply

Why does social stratification exist at all? One answer, consistent with the structural-functional approach, is that social inequality plays a vital part in the smooth operation of society. This argument was set forth more than sixty years ago by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945).

The Davis-Moore Thesis

The **Davis-Moore thesis** states that *social stratification has beneficial consequences for the operation of society*. How else, ask Davis and Moore can we explain the fact that some form of social stratification has been found in every society?

Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



The Meaning of Class: Is Getting Rich “the Survival of the Fittest”?

Jake: “My dad is amazing. He’s really smart!”

Frank: “You mean he’s rich. He owns I don’t know how many businesses.”

Jake: “Do you think people get rich without being smart?”

It’s a question we all wonder about. How much is our social position a matter of intelligence? What about hard work? Being born to the “right family”? Even “dumb luck”?

More than in most societies, in the United States we link social standing to personal abilities including intelligence. In 2010, *Time* magazine put Mark Zuckerberg on the cover and announced that he was “Person of the Year” for inventing Facebook. For this achievement, and amassing a fortune estimated at about \$7 billion, it is easy to imagine that this Harvard dropout is a pretty smart guy (Grossman, 2010).

But the idea that social standing is linked to intelligence goes back a long time. We have all heard the words “the survival of the fittest,” which describe our society as a competitive jungle in which the “best” survive and the rest fall behind. The phrase was coined by one of sociology’s pioneers,

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), whose ideas about social inequality are still widespread today.

Spencer, who lived in England, eagerly followed the work of the natural scientist Charles Darwin (1809–1882). Darwin’s theory of biological evolution held that a species changes physically over many generations as it adapts to the natural environment. Spencer incorrectly applied Darwin’s theory to the operation of society, which does not operate according to biological principles. In Spencer’s distorted view, society became the “jungle,” with the “fittest” people rising to wealth and the “failures” sinking into miserable poverty.

It is no surprise that Spencer’s views, wrong as they were, were popular among the rising U.S. industrialists of the day. John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), who made a vast fortune building the oil industry, recited Spencer’s “social gospel” to young children in Sunday school. As Rockefeller saw it, the growth of giant corporations—and the astounding wealth of their owners—was merely the result of the survival of the fittest, a basic fact of nature. Neither Spencer nor Rockefeller had much sympathy for the poor, seeing poverty as evidence of individuals’ failing to measure up in a competitive

world. Spencer opposed social welfare programs because he thought they penalized society’s “best” people (through taxes) and rewarded its “worst” members (through welfare benefits). By incorrectly using Darwin’s theory, the rich could turn their backs on everyone else, assuming that inequality was inevitable and somehow “natural.”

Today, sociologists point out that our society is far from a meritocracy, as Spencer claimed. And it is not the case that companies or individuals who generate lots of money necessarily benefit society. The people who made hundreds of millions of dollars selling subprime mortgages in recent years certainly ended up hurting just about everyone. But Spencer’s view that the “fittest” rise to the top remains widespread in our very unequal and individualistic culture.

What Do You Think?

1. How much do you think inequality in our society can correctly be described as “the survival of the fittest”? Why?
2. Why do you think Spencer’s ideas are still popular in the United States today?
3. Is how much you earn a good measure of your importance to society? Why or why not?

Davis and Moore note that modern societies have hundreds of occupational positions of varying importance. Certain jobs—say, washing windows or answering a telephone—are fairly easy and can be performed by almost anyone. Other jobs—such as designing new generations of computers or transplanting human organs—are difficult and demand the scarce talents of people with extensive and expensive training.

Therefore, Davis and Moore explain, the greater the functional importance of a position, the more rewards a society attaches to it. This strategy promotes productivity and efficiency because rewarding important work with income, prestige, power, and leisure encourages people to do these jobs and to work better, longer, and harder. In short, unequal rewards (which is what social stratification is) benefit society as a whole.

Davis and Moore claim that any society could be egalitarian, but only to the extent that people are willing to let *anyone* perform *any* job. Equality would also



demand that someone who carries out a job poorly be rewarded the same as someone who performs it well. Such a system would offer little incentive for people to try their best, thereby reducing the society’s productive efficiency.

The Davis-Moore thesis suggests the reason stratification exists; it does not state what rewards a society should give to any occupational position or how unequal the rewards should be. It merely points out that positions a society considers more important must offer enough rewards to draw talented people away from less important work.

Evaluate Although the Davis-Moore thesis is an important contribution to understanding social stratification, it has provoked criticism. Melvin Tumin (1953) wondered, first, how we assess the importance of a particular occupation. Perhaps the high rewards our society gives to physicians result partly from deliberate efforts by the medical profession to limit the supply of physicians and thereby increase the demand for their services.

Furthermore, do rewards actually reflect the contribution someone makes to society? With income of about \$315 million per year, Oprah Winfrey earns more in one day than President Obama earns all year.

Oprah Winfrey reported income of \$315 million in 2010. Guided by the Davis-Moore thesis, why would societies reward some people with so much more fame and fortune than others? How would Karl Marx answer this question?

 **Read** “Some Principles of Stratification” by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, and the response by Melvin Tumin, on mysoclab.com

Would anyone argue that hosting a talk show is more important than leading a country? What about members of the U.S. military serving in Iraq or Afghanistan? Facing the risks of combat, a private first-class in the U.S. Army earned only \$21,000 in 2011 (Pomerantz & Rose, 2010; Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2011). And what about the heads of the big Wall Street financial firms that collapsed in 2008? It seems reasonable to conclude that these corporate leaders made some bad decisions, yet their salaries were astronomical. Even after finishing its worst year ever, with losses of \$27 billion, Merrill Lynch paid bonuses of more than \$1 million to more than 700 employees. Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, paid himself a stock bonus worth \$12.6 million (an amount that it would take an army private more than 600 years to earn), despite his company’s falling profits during 2010, a year in which the salary and benefits in the financial industry hit an all-time high (Fox, 2009; *New York Times*, 2011; Roth, 2011).

Even top executives who lose their jobs do surprisingly well. During the recent financial industry meltdown, Chuck Prince was forced to resign as head at Citigroup, but not before receiving a “severance package” worth more than \$30 million. When insurance giant AIG failed, corporate leader Martin Sullivan left the company, receiving \$47 million on the way out (Beck & Simon, 2008; Scherer, 2008). Do corporate executives deserve such megasalaries for their contributions to society?

Second, Tumin claimed that Davis and Moore ignore how caste elements of social stratification can prevent the development of individual talent. Born to privilege, rich children have opportunities to develop their abilities that many gifted poor children never have.

Third, living in a society that places so much emphasis on money, we tend to overestimate the importance of high-paying work; what do stockbrokers or people who trade international currencies really contribute to society? For the same reason, it is difficult for us to see the value of work that is not oriented toward making money, such as parenting, creative writing, playing music in a symphony, or just being a good friend to someone in need (Packard, 2002).

Finally, the Davis-Moore thesis ignores how social inequality may promote conflict and even outright revolution. This criticism leads us to the social-conflict approach, which provides a very different explanation for social inequality.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING State the Davis-Moore thesis in your own words. What are Tumin’s criticisms of this thesis?

Stratification and Conflict

Apply

Social-conflict analysis argues that rather than benefiting society as a whole, social stratification benefits some people and disadvantages others. This analysis draws heavily on the ideas of Karl Marx, with contributions from Max Weber.



Back in the Great Depression of the 1930’s, “tent cities” that were home to desperately poor people could be found in much of the United States. The depression came to an end, but poverty persisted. The recent recession sparked a resurgence of tent cities, including this one in Fresno, California. How would structural-functional analysis explain such poverty? What about the social-conflict approach?

Karl Marx: Class Conflict

Karl Marx, whose ideas are discussed at length in Chapter 4 (“Society”), explained that most people have one of two basic relationships to the means of production: They either own productive property or labor for others. Different productive roles arise from different social classes. In medieval Europe, aristocratic families, including high church officials and titled nobles, owned the land on which peasants labored as farmers. In industrial class systems, the capitalists (or the bourgeoisie) own the factories, which use the labor of workers (the proletarians).

Marx lived during the nineteenth century, a time when a small number of industrialists in the United States were amassing great fortunes. Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and John Jacob Astor (one of the few very rich passengers to drown on the *Titanic*) lived in fabulous mansions staffed by dozens of servants. Even by today’s standards, their incomes were staggering. For example, Carnegie earned about \$20 million a year in 1900 (more than \$525 million in today’s dollars), when the average worker earned roughly \$500 a year (Baltzell, 1964; Williamson, 2010).

Marx explained that capitalist society *reproduces the class structure* in each new generation. This happens as families gain wealth and pass it down from generation to generation. But, he predicted, oppression and misery would eventually drive the working majority to come together to overthrow capitalism in favor of a socialist system that would end class differences.

 **Evaluate** Marx has had enormous influence on sociological thinking. But his revolutionary ideas, calling for the overthrow of capitalist society, also make his work highly controversial.

One of the strongest criticisms of Marxism is that it denies a central idea of the Davis-Moore thesis: that a system of unequal rewards is necessary to place talented people in the right jobs and to motivate them to work hard. Marx separated reward from performance;

his egalitarian ideal was based on the principle “from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs” (Marx & Engels, 1972:388, orig. 1848). However, failure to reward individual performance may be precisely what caused the low productivity of the former Soviet Union and other socialist economies around the world. Defenders of Marxism respond to such criticism by asking why we assume that humanity is inherently selfish rather than social, noting that individual rewards are not the only way to motivate people to perform their social roles (M. S. Clark, 1991).

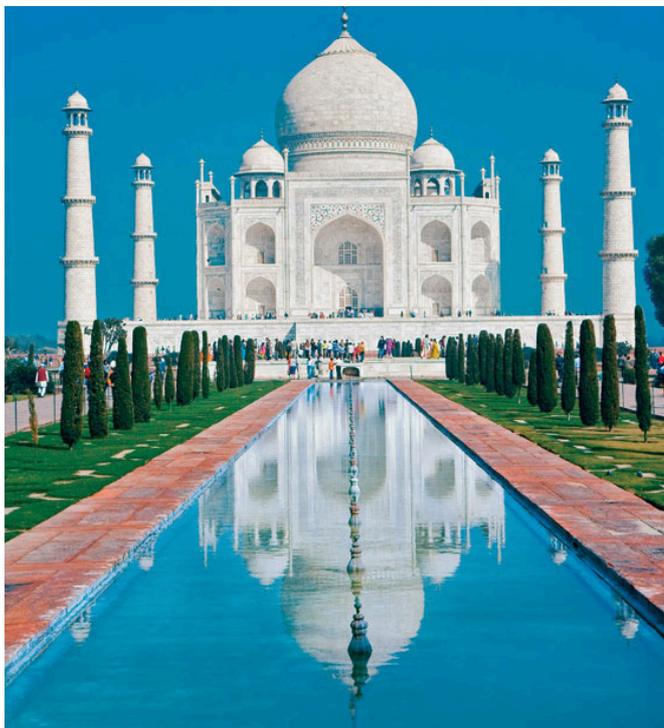
A second problem is that the revolutionary change Marx predicted has failed to happen, at least in advanced capitalist societies. The next section explains why.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How does Marx’s view of social stratification differ from the Davis-Moore thesis?

Why No Marxist Revolution?

Despite Marx’s prediction, capitalism is still thriving. Why have industrial workers not overthrown capitalism? Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) suggested four reasons:

1. **Fragmentation of the capitalist class.** Today, millions of stockholders, rather than single families, own most large companies. Day-to-day corporate operations are in the hands of a large class of managers, who may or may not be major stockholders. With stock widely held—about half of U.S. households own stocks—more and more people have a direct stake in the capitalist system (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).



The extent of social inequality in agrarian systems is greater than that found in industrial societies. One indication of the unchallenged power of rulers is the monumental structures built over years with the unpaid labor of common people. Although the Taj Mahal in India is among the world’s most beautiful buildings, it was built as a tomb for a single individual.

2. **A higher standard of living.** As Chapter 16 (“The Economy and Work”) explains, a century ago, most workers were in factories or on farms employed in **blue-collar occupations**, *lower-prestige jobs that involve mostly manual labor*. Today, most workers are engaged in **white-collar occupations**, *higher-prestige jobs that involve mostly mental activity*. These jobs are in sales, customer support, management, and other service fields. Most of today’s white-collar workers do not think of themselves as an “industrial proletariat.” Just as important, the average income in the United States rose almost tenfold over the course of the twentieth century, even allowing for inflation, and the number of hours in the workweek decreased. For that reason, even in tough economic times, most of today’s workers are better off than workers were a century ago, an example of structural social mobility. One result of this rising standard of living is that more people are content with the status quo and less likely to press for change.
3. **More worker organizations.** Workers today have the right to form labor unions, to make demands of management, and to back up their demands with threats of work slowdowns and strikes. As a result, labor disputes are settled without threatening the capitalist system.
4. **Greater legal protections.** Over the past century, the government passed laws to make workplaces safer. In addition, unemployment insurance, disability protection, and Social Security now provide workers with greater financial security.

A Counterpoint

These developments suggest that U.S. society has smoothed many of capitalism’s rough edges. Yet some observers claim that Marx’s analysis of capitalism is still largely valid (Domhoff, 1983; Hout, Brooks, & Manza, 1993; Foroohar, 2011). First, wealth remains highly concentrated, with 35 percent of all privately owned property in the hands of just 1 percent of the U.S. population (Keister, 2000; Wolff, 2010). Second, many of today’s white-collar jobs offer no more income, security, or satisfaction than factory work did a century ago. Third, many, if not most, of today’s workers feel squeezed by high unemployment, company downsizing, jobs moving overseas, and job benefits being cut to balance budgets. Fourth, the income and benefits that today’s workers do enjoy came about through exactly the class conflict Marx described. In addition, as the conflict between public worker labor unions and state government in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states in 2011 shows, workers still struggle to hold on to what they have. Fifth, although workers have gained some legal protections, ordinary people still face disadvantages that the law cannot overcome. Therefore, social-conflict theorists conclude, even without a socialist revolution in the United States, Marx was still mostly right about capitalism.

Max Weber: Class, Status, and Power

Max Weber, whose approach to social analysis is described in Chapter 4 (“Society”), agreed with Karl Marx that social stratification causes social conflict, but he viewed Marx’s economics-based model as simplistic. Instead, he claimed that social stratification involves three distinct dimensions of inequality.

The first dimension is economic inequality—the issue so important to Marx—which Weber termed *class position*. Weber did not think of classes as well-defined categories but as a continuum

 **Explore** dimensions of inequality in your local community and in counties across the United States on mysoclab.com

ranging from high to low. Weber’s second dimension is *status*, or social prestige, and the third is *power*.

Weber’s Socioeconomic Status Hierarchy

Marx viewed social prestige and power as simple reflections of economic position and did not treat them as distinct dimensions of inequality. But Weber noted that status consistency in modern societies is often quite low: A local official might exercise great power yet have little wealth or social prestige.

Weber, then, portrays social stratification in industrial societies as a multidimensional ranking rather than a hierarchy of clearly defined classes. In line with Weber’s thinking, sociologists use the term **socioeconomic status (SES)** to refer to *a composite ranking based on various dimensions of social inequality*.

Inequality in History

Weber claimed that each of his three dimensions of social inequality stands out at different points in the evolution of human societies. Status or social prestige is the main difference in agrarian societies, taking the form of honor. Members of these societies (whether nobles or servants) gain status by conforming to cultural norms that apply to their particular rank.

Industrialization and the development of capitalism eliminate traditional rankings based on birth but create striking financial inequality. Thus in an industrial society, the crucial difference between people is the economic dimension of class.

Over time, industrial societies witness the growth of a bureaucratic state. Bigger government and the spread of all sorts of other organizations make power more important in the stratification system. Especially in socialist societies, where government regulates many aspects of life, high-ranking officials become the new ruling elite.

This historical analysis points to a final difference between Weber and Marx. Marx thought societies could eliminate social stratification by abolishing the private ownership of productive property that is the basis of capitalism. Weber doubted that overthrowing capitalism would significantly lessen social stratification. It might reduce economic differences, he reasoned, but socialism would increase inequality by expanding government and concentrating power in the hands of a political elite. Popular uprisings against socialist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union show that discontent can be generated by socialist political elites, a fact that supports Weber’s position.

 **Evaluate** Max Weber’s multidimensional view of social stratification has greatly influenced sociological thinking. But critics (particularly those who favor Marx’s ideas) argue that although social class boundaries may have blurred, industrial and postindustrial societies still show striking patterns of social inequality.

As you will see in Chapter 11 (“Social Class in the United States”), income inequality has been increasing in the United States. Although some people still favor Weber’s multidimensional hierarchy, in light of this trend, others think that Marx’s view of the rich versus the poor is closer to the truth.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING What are Weber’s three dimensions of social inequality? According to Weber, which of them would you expect to be most important in the United States? Why?

Stratification and Interaction

Apply

Because social stratification has to do with the way an entire society is organized, sociologists (Marx and Weber included) typically treat it as a macro-level issue. But a micro-level analysis of social stratification is also important because people’s social standing affects their everyday interactions. The Applying Theory table summarizes the contributions of the three approaches to an understanding of social stratification.

APPLYING THEORY

Social Stratification

	Structural-Functional Approach	Social-Conflict Approach	Symbolic-Interaction Approach
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Macro-level	Micro-level
What is social stratification?	Stratification is a system of unequal rewards that benefits society as a whole.	Stratification is a division of a society’s resources that benefits some people and harms others.	Stratification is a factor that guides people’s interactions in everyday life.
What is the reason for our social position?	Social position reflects personal talents and abilities in a competitive economy.	Social position reflects the way society divides resources.	The products we consume all say something about social position.
Are unequal rewards fair?	Yes. Unequal rewards boost economic production by encouraging people to work harder and try new ideas. Linking greater rewards to more important work is widely accepted.	No. Unequal rewards only serve to divide society, creating “haves” and “have-nots.” There is widespread opposition to social inequality.	Maybe. People may or may not define inequality as fair. People may view their social position as a measure of self-worth, justifying inequality in terms of personal differences.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



When Class Gets Personal: Picking (with) Your Friends

The sound of banjo music drifted across the field late one summer afternoon. I lay down my brush, climbed over the fence I had been painting, and walked toward the sound of the music to see what was going on. That's how I met my neighbor Max, a retired factory worker who lived just up the road. Max was a pretty good "picker," and within an hour, I was back on his porch with my guitar. I called Howard, a friend who teaches at the college, and he showed up a little while later, six-string in hand. The three of us jammed for a couple of hours, smiling all the while.

The next morning, I was mowing the grass in front of the house when Max came walking down the road. I turned off the mower as he got closer. "Hi, Max," I said. "Thanks for having us over last night. I really had fun."

"Don't mention it," Max responded with a wave. Then he stopped and shook his head a little and added, "Ya know, I was thinkin' after you guys

left. I mean, it was really somethin' how you guys were having a great time. With somebody like *me!*"



"Well, yeah," I replied, a bit awkwardly, not sure exactly what he meant. "You sure played better than we did."

Max looked down at the ground, embarrassed by the compliment. Then he added, "What I mean is that you guys were having a good time with somebody like *me*. You're both professors, right? *Doctors*, even. . ."

What Do You Think?

1. Why did Max assume that two college teachers would not enjoy spending time with him?
2. How does his reaction suggest that people take social position personally?
3. Can you think of a similar experience you have had with someone of a different social position (higher or lower) than you have?

In most communities, people interact primarily with others of about the same social standing. To some extent, this is because people tend to live with others like themselves. In larger public spaces, such as a shopping mall, we see couples or groups made up of individuals whose appearance and shopping habits are similar. People with very different social standing commonly keep their distance from one another. Well-dressed people walking down the street on their way to an expensive restaurant, for example, might move across the sidewalk or even cross the street to avoid getting close to others they think are homeless people. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box gives another example of how differences in social class position can affect interaction.

Finally, just about everyone realizes that the way we dress, the car we drive (or the bus we ride), and even the food and drink we order at the campus snack bar say something about our budget and personal tastes. Sociologists use the term **conspicuous consumption** to refer to *buying and using products because of the "statement" they make about social position*. Ignoring the water fountain in favor of paying for bottled water tells people you have extra money to spend. And no one needs a \$100,000 automobile to get around, of course, but driving up in such a vehicle says "I have arrived" in more ways than one.

Stratification and Technology: A Global Perspective

Apply

We can weave together a number of observations made in this chapter to show that a society's technology affects its type of social strat-

ification. This analysis draws on Gerhard Lenski's model of sociocultural evolution, detailed in Chapter 4 ("Society").

Hunting and Gathering Societies

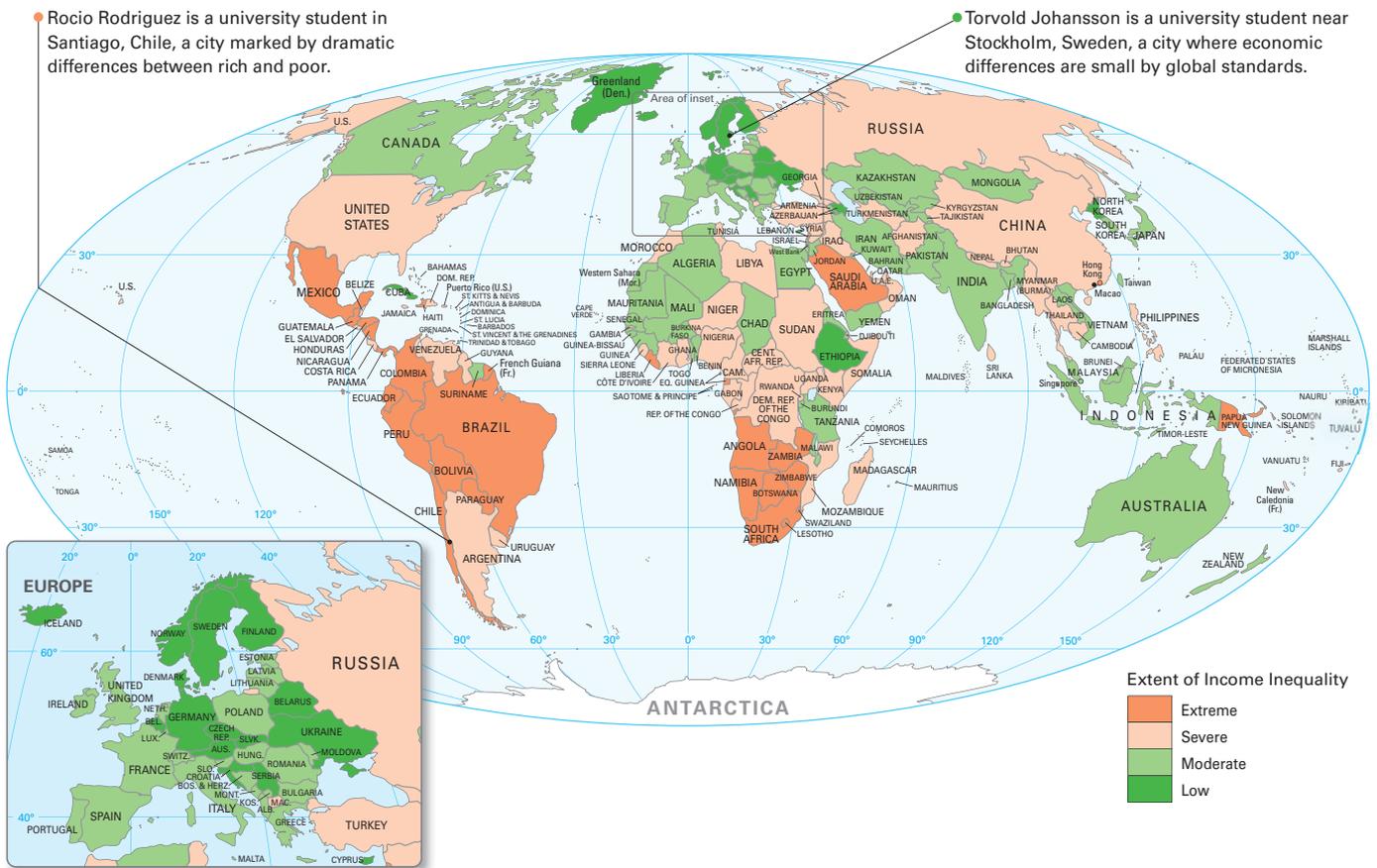
With simple technology, members of hunting and gathering societies produce only what is necessary for day-to-day living. Some people may produce more than others, but the group's survival depends on all sharing what they have. Thus no categories of people are better off than others.

Horticultural, Pastoral, and Agrarian Societies

As technological advances create a surplus, social inequality increases. In horticultural and pastoral societies, a small elite controls most of the surplus. Large-scale agriculture is more productive still, and striking inequality—as great as at any time in history—places the nobility in an almost godlike position over the masses.

Industrial Societies

Industrialization turns the tide, pushing inequality downward. Prompted by the need to develop individual talents, meritocracy takes hold and weakens the power of traditional aristocracy. Industrial productivity also raises the living standards of the historically poor majority. Specialized work demands schooling for all, sharply reducing illiteracy. A literate population, in turn, presses for a greater voice in political decision making, reducing social inequality and lessening men's domination of women.



Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 10–1 Income Inequality in Global Perspective

Societies throughout the world differ in the rigidity and extent of their social stratification and their overall standard of living. This map highlights income inequality. Generally speaking, the United States stands out among high-income nations, such as Great Britain, Sweden, Japan, and Australia, as having greater income inequality. The less economically developed countries of Latin America and Africa, including Colombia, Brazil, and the Central African Republic, as well as much of the Arab world, exhibit the most pronounced inequality of income. Is this pattern consistent with the Kuznets curve?

Source: Based on Gini coefficients obtained from Central Intelligence Agency (2010) and World Bank (2010).

Over time, even wealth becomes somewhat less concentrated (contradicting Marx's prediction). In the 1920s, the richest 1 percent of the U.S. population owned about 40 percent of all wealth, a figure that fell to 30 percent by the 1980s as taxes—which have higher rates for people with higher incomes—paid for new government programs benefiting the poor (Williamson & Lindert, 1980; Beeghly, 1989; U.S. House of Representatives, 1991). Such trends help explain why Marxist revolutions occurred in *agrarian* societies—such as Russia (1917), Cuba (1959), and Nicaragua (1979)—where social inequality is most pronounced, rather than in industrial societies as Marx had predicted. However, wealth inequality in the United States turned upward again after 1990 and is once again at about the same level that it was in the 1920s (Keister, 2000; Wolff, 2010). With the goal of reducing this trend,

the Obama administration has agreed to extend current tax rates to help stimulate economic recovery but has also expressed its intention to raise federal tax rates on high-income individuals.

The Kuznets Curve

In human history, then, technological advances first increase but then moderate the extent of social stratification. Greater inequality is functional for agrarian societies, but industrial societies benefit from a more equal system. This historical trend, recognized by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Simon Kuznets (1955, 1966), is illustrated by the Kuznets curve, shown in Figure 10–2 on page 238.

Social inequality around the world generally supports the Kuznets curve. Global Map 10–1 shows that high-income nations

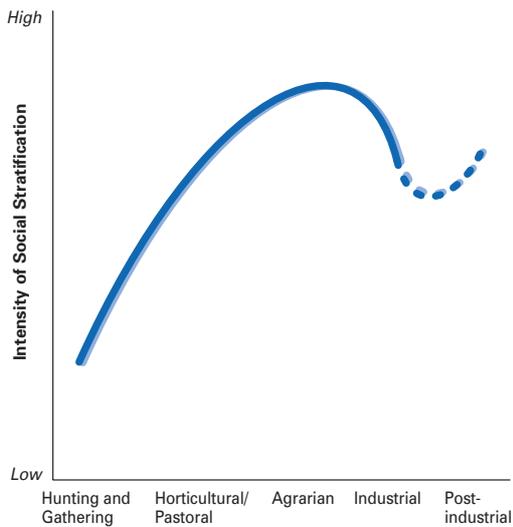


FIGURE 10-2 Social Stratification and Technological Development: The Kuznets Curve

The Kuznets curve shows that greater technological sophistication is generally accompanied by more pronounced social stratification. The trend reverses itself as industrial societies relax rigid, castelike distinctions in favor of greater opportunity and equality under the law. Political rights are more widely extended, and there is even some leveling of economic differences. However, the emergence of postindustrial society has brought an upturn in economic inequality, as indicated by the broken line added by the author.

Sources: Based on Kuznets (1955) and Lenski (1966).

that have passed through the industrial era (including the United States, Canada, and the nations of Western Europe) have somewhat less income inequality than nations in which a larger share of the labor force remains in farming (as is common in Latin America and Africa). At the same time, it is important to remember that income inequality reflects not just technological development but also the political and economic priorities of a country. Income disparity in the United States may have declined during much of the last century, but this country still has more economic inequality than Canada, European nations, and Japan (although less than some other high-income nations, including Chile and South Africa).

Another criticism of the Kuznets curve is that it was developed by comparing societies at different levels of economic development (what sociologists call “cross-sectional data”). Such data do not let us predict the future of any one society. In the United States, recent trends showing increases in economic inequality suggest that the Kuznets curve may require serious revision—represented by the broken line in Figure 10-2. The fact that U.S. society is experiencing greater economic inequality as the Information Revolution moves forward (see Chapter 11) suggests that the long-term trend may differ from what Kuznets projected half a century ago.

Social Stratification: Facts and Values

Evaluate

The year was 2081 and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution and the unceasing vigilance of agents of the Handicapper General.

With these words, the novelist Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1968:7) begins the story of Harrison Bergeron, an imaginary account of a future United States in which all social inequality has been abolished. Vonnegut warns that although attractive in principle, equality can be a dangerous concept in practice. His story describes a nightmare of social engineering in which every individual talent that makes one person different from another is systematically neutralized by the government.

To eliminate differences that make one person “better” than another, Vonnegut’s state requires that physically attractive people wear masks that make them average-looking, that intelligent people wear earphones that generate distracting noise, and that the best athletes and dancers be fitted with weights to make them as clumsy as everyone else. In short, although we may imagine that social equality would liberate people to make the most of their talents, Vonnegut concludes that an egalitarian society could exist only if everyone is reduced to the lowest common denominator. In Vonnegut’s view, this would amount not to liberation but to oppression.

Like Vonnegut’s story, all of this chapter’s explanations of social stratification involve value judgments. The Davis-Moore thesis states not only that social stratification is universal but also that it is necessary to make society highly productive. Class differences in U.S. society, from this point of view, reflect both variation in human abilities and the relatively unequal importance of different jobs. Taken together, these facts lead us to see complete equality as undesirable because it could be achieved only in a rigid and inefficient society that cared little for developing individual talent and rewarding excellence.

Social-conflict analysis, advocated by Karl Marx, takes a much more positive view of equality. Marx thought that inequality is harmful because it causes both human suffering and conflict between haves and have-nots. As he saw it, social stratification springs from injustice and greed. As a result, Marx wanted people to share resources equally.

The Sociology in Focus box addresses the connection between intelligence and social class. This issue is among the most troublesome in social science, partly because of the difficulty in defining and measuring “intelligence” but also because the idea that elites are somehow “better” than others challenges our democratic culture.

The next chapter (“Social Class in the United States”) examines inequality in our own nation, highlighting recent economic polarization. Then Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”) surveys social inequality throughout the world, explaining why some nations have so much more wealth than others. As you will learn, at all levels, the study of social stratification involves a mix of facts and values about the shape of a just society.



The Bell Curve Debate: Are Rich People Really Smarter?

Elena: (*with a smile*) So what do you think? Is going out with me giving you upward social mobility?

Joe: Give me a break. Your family is richer than mine. But that doesn't mean you're any better or smarter. . . .

Are rich people smarter than the rest of us? Few books in sociology have taken on this question as directly as *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994), by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. The book ignited a firestorm of controversy over why social stratification divides our society and, just as important, what should be done about it.

The Bell Curve is a long book that addresses many complex issues, but it makes eight major claims:

1. Something we can describe as “general intelligence” exists; people with more of it tend to be more successful in their careers than those with less.
2. At least half the variation in human intelligence is transmitted genetically from parents to children; the remaining variability is due to environmental factors that involve socialization.
3. During the past century—and especially since the Information Revolution began several decades ago—intelligence has become more necessary to perform our society's most important jobs.
4. At the same time, the most selective U.S. colleges and universities have shifted their admissions policies away from favoring children of inherited wealth to admitting young people with high grades and the highest scores on standardized tests such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the American College Testing Program (ACT), and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).
5. As a result of these changes in the workplace and on campus, our society is now dominated by a “cognitive elite,” people who are not only better educated but also actually more intelligent.
6. As very intelligent people interact with others similar to themselves, both on

the campus and in the workplace, the odds are high that they will pair up, get married, and have intelligent children, extending the “cognitive elite” into another generation.

7. A similar process is at work at the other end of the social ladder: Poor people who, on average, have lower intelligence have become socially segregated and tend to marry others like themselves, thus passing along their more modest abilities to their children.
8. Herrnstein and Murray therefore conclude that because membership in the affluent elite or the impoverished underclass is at least partly rooted in genetically inherited intelligence, we should not be surprised that the poor are more likely to have higher rates of crime and drug abuse. Further, we should expect that programs such as Head Start and affirmative action will have limited effectiveness in helping the poor.

Evaluating the claims made in *The Bell Curve* must begin with a hard look at the concept of intel-

ligence. Critics of the book argue that most of what we call “intelligence” is the result not of genetic inheritance but of socialization. In other words, so-called intelligence tests do not measure cognitive *ability* as much as they measure cognitive *performance*. Average intelligence quotient (IQ) scores have been rising as the U.S. population becomes more educated. If schooling is so important to intelligence, then educational advantages alone would explain why rich children perform better on such tests.

Most researchers who study intelligence agree that genetics does play a part in children's intelligence, but most conclude that only 25 to 40 percent of intelligence is inherited—less than Herrnstein and Murray claim. *The Bell Curve* therefore misleads readers when it states that social stratification is a natural product of differences in inherited intelligence. Critics claim that this book echoes the social Darwinism popular a century ago, which justified the great wealth of industrial tycoons as “the survival of the fittest.”

Could it be that the more today's competitive society seems like a jungle, the more people think of stratification as a matter of nature rather than nurture? But even if it is flawed, *The Bell Curve* raises important issues. If some people are smarter than others, shouldn't we expect them to end up in higher social positions? Shouldn't we expect the people who rise to the top in most fields to be at least a little smarter than the rest of us? If this is true, is it fair? Finally, what can our society do to ensure that all people will have the opportunity to develop their abilities as fully as possible?

Join the Blog!

Do you think there is such a thing as “general intelligence”? Do you think that well-off people are, on average, more intelligent than people of low social position? If so, how do you know which factor—intelligence or social position—is the cause and which is the effect? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Herrnstein & Murray (1994), Jacoby & Glauber (1995), Kohn (1996), and Arrow, Bowles, & Durlauf (2000).



No one doubts that some rich people including Warren Buffett (*left*), one of the most successful investors in the world, and Bill Gates (*right*), who after dropping out of college became one of the founders of Microsoft, are very smart. But is intelligence the foundation of social inequality?

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 10 Social Stratification

Can you find elements of caste and meritocracy in U.S. society?

This chapter explains that modern societies are class systems that combine elements of caste and meritocracy. Using the sociological perspective, you can see both caste and meritocracy in operation in many everyday situations. Here are three examples to get you started. Look at the photos below and then start your own list.

Hint The fact that parenting is not paid work means that people should not raise children for money but out of moral duty. “Fathering a child” may suggest only biological paternity; “mothering a child” implies deep involvement in a child’s life, indicating how gender has long been a caste element linking women to nurturing. Judge Sotomayor is the first Hispanic and just the third woman (along with Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg) to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. There have been just two African American justices (Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas). Careers that emphasize merit are typically those jobs that are regarded as especially important and that require rare talents; even so, most successful musical performers have been male.

One of the most demanding jobs you can ever have is being a parent. And traditionally at least, most parenting is performed by women, with gender operating as a caste element. Why do you think our society does not pay parents for their work? What difference in meaning can you see between the phrases “fathering a child” and “mothering a child”?



In 2009, Judge Sonia Sotomayor became the first Hispanic woman to join the U.S. Supreme Court. Her record of achievement began at Cardinal Spellman High School in the Bronx (New York), where she was valedictorian. Of more than 100 justices who have served on the Supreme Court, how many do you think have been Hispanic? How many have been women?

Justin Bieber is a Canadian singer who was born to a single teen mother who raised her son in low-income housing. After his first record went platinum in the United States, he became one of the highest paid entertainers—an example of a “rags to riches” move upward in social standing.



Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. The “seven deadly sins,” the human failings recognized by the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, were pride, greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Why are these traits dangerous to an agrarian caste system? Are they a threat to today’s capitalist class system? Why or why not?
2. Sit down with parents, grandparents, or other relatives, and talk about how your family’s social position has changed over the last three generations. Has social mobility taken place? If so, describe the change. Was it caused by the effort of individuals or changes in society itself?
3. Identify three ways in which social stratification is evident in the everyday lives of students on your campus. In each case, explain exactly what is unequal and what difference it makes. Do you think individual talent or family background is more important in creating these social differences? Go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about the interplay of caste and class and why members of our society tend to see social class standing as simply the result of personal abilities and effort.

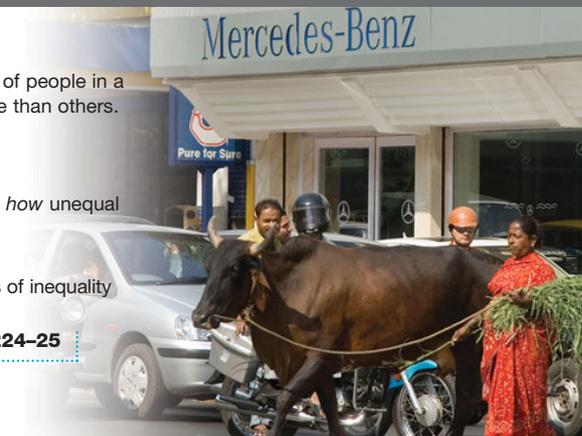
What Is Social Stratification?

Social stratification is a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy, so that some people have more money, power, and prestige than others.

Social stratification

- is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences
- is found in all societies but varies according to *what* is unequal and *how* unequal it is
- carries over from one generation to the next
- is supported by a system of cultural beliefs that defines certain kinds of inequality as just
- takes two general forms: caste systems and class systems **pp. 224–25**

👁️ Watch the Video on mysoclab.com



social stratification (p. 224) a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy

social mobility (p. 225) a change in position within the social hierarchy

Caste and Class Systems

Caste Systems

- are based on birth (ascription)
- permit little or no social mobility
- shape a person's entire life, including occupation and marriage
- are common in traditional, agrarian societies **p. 225**

An Illustration: India

Although the caste system is formally outlawed in India, it is still observed in rural areas, where agriculture demands a lifetime of hard work and discipline.

- In traditional villages, people's caste determines the type of work they perform.
- People must interact with and marry others of the same ranking.
- Powerful cultural beliefs make observing caste rules a moral duty. **pp. 225–26**

Class Systems

- are based on both birth (ascription) and **meritocracy** (individual achievement)
- permit some social mobility based on individual achievement
- are common in modern industrial and postindustrial societies
- Class systems include elements of both caste and meritocracy.
- Class systems advance meritocracy to promote specialization, productivity, and efficiency.
- Class systems keep caste elements, such as family, to maintain order and social unity.
- **Status consistency** in class systems is low due to increased social mobility. **pp. 226–27**

Caste and Class: The United Kingdom

- In the Middle Ages, England had a castelike aristocracy, including the leading clergy and a hereditary nobility. The vast majority of people were commoners.
- Today's British class system mixes caste and meritocracy, producing a highly stratified society with some social mobility. **pp. 227–28**

Caste and Class: Japan

- In the Middle Ages, Japan had a rigid caste system in which an imperial family ruled over nobles and commoners.
- Today's Japanese class system still places great importance on family background and traditional gender roles. **pp. 228–29**



caste system (p. 225) social stratification based on ascription, or birth

class system (p. 226) social stratification based on both birth and individual achievement

meritocracy (p. 226) social stratification based on personal merit

status consistency (p. 226) the degree of uniformity in a person's social standing across various dimensions of social inequality

structural social mobility (p. 230) a shift in the social position of large numbers of people due more to changes in society itself than to individual efforts

ideology (p. 231) cultural beliefs that justify particular social arrangements, including patterns of inequality

Classless Societies? The Former Soviet Union

- Although the Russian Revolution in 1917 attempted to abolish social classes, the new Soviet Union was still stratified based on unequal job categories and the concentration of power in the new political elite. Economic development created new types of jobs, which resulted in **structural social mobility**.
- Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the forces of structural social mobility have turned downward and the gap between rich and poor has increased. **pp. 229–30**

China: Emerging Social Classes

- Economic reforms introduced after the Communist revolution in 1949—including state control of factories and productive property—greatly reduced economic inequality, although social differences remained.
- In the last thirty years, China’s government has loosened control of the economy, causing the emergence of a new class of business owners and an increase in economic inequality. **pp. 230–31**



Theories of Social Stratification

The **structural-functional approach** points to ways social stratification helps society operate.

- The Davis-Moore thesis states that social stratification is universal because of its functional consequences.
- In caste systems, people are rewarded for performing the duties of their position at birth.
- In class systems, unequal rewards attract the ablest people to the most important jobs and encourage effort. **pp. 231–33**

 [Read the Document](#) on [mysoclab.com](#)

The **social-conflict approach** claims that stratification divides societies in classes, benefiting some categories of people at the expense of others and causing social conflict.

- Karl Marx claimed that capitalism places economic production under the ownership of capitalists, who exploit the proletarians who sell their labor for wages.
- Max Weber identified three distinct dimensions of social stratification: economic class, social status or prestige, and power. Conflict exists between people at various positions on a multidimensional hierarchy of **socioeconomic status (SES)**. **pp. 233–35**

 [Explore the Map](#) on [mysoclab.com](#)

The **symbolic-interaction approach**, a micro-level analysis, explains that we size up people by looking for clues to their social standing. **Conspicuous consumption** refers to buying and displaying products that make a “statement” about social class. Most people tend to socialize with others whose social standing is similar to their own. **pp. 235–36**

Davis-Moore thesis (p. 231) the functional analysis claiming that social stratification has beneficial consequences for the operation of society

blue-collar occupations (p. 234) lower-prestige jobs that involve mostly manual labor

white-collar occupations (p. 234) higher-prestige jobs that involve mostly mental activity

socioeconomic status (SES) (p. 235) a composite ranking based on various dimensions of social inequality

conspicuous consumption (p. 236) buying and using products because of the “statement” they make about social position

Social Stratification and Technology: A Global Perspective



- Gerhard Lenski explains that advancing technology initially increases social stratification, which is most intense in agrarian societies.
- Industrialization reverses the trend, reducing social stratification.
- In postindustrial societies, social stratification again increases.

pp. 236–38

Stratification: Facts and Values

People’s beliefs about social inequality reflect not just facts but also politics and values concerning how a society should be organized. **p. 238**

11 Social Class in the United States

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand that social stratification involves many dimensions of inequality.



Apply different points of view to understand the causes of poverty and homelessness.



Analyze evidence to reach conclusions about how common social mobility in the United States really is.



Evaluate the common claim that the United States is a “middle-class society.”



Create a more precise vision of social class differences in the United States including what is unequal and how unequal it is.



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

How much social inequality is there in the United States? This chapter will help you to understand the meaning and the extent of social inequality in this country. The chapter begins with a close-up look at important measures of inequality. You will discover that there are numerous dimensions of inequality in our society, and the degree of inequality is greater than many people imagine. ■



Rosa Urias leans forward, pushing and pulling the vacuum cleaner across the hardwood floors, a motion she has repeated thousands of times to the point that her right wrist and elbow are sore. It is now almost five o'clock in the afternoon, and this forty-five-year-old single mother of two is on her third cleaning job of the day. She works with her cousin Melitsa Sermiento, thirty-six, cleaning nine apartments and five houses each week. The two women, who both came to the United States from El Salvador, divide the money they earn, giving each one an annual income of about \$28,000, barely enough to pay the bills in New York City.

But there is no shortage of work cleaning homes. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers make more than enough money to hire people like Rosa and Melitsa to dust their tables, mop their floors, and scrub their sinks and toilets while they are out doing their high-paying jobs, working out at the health club, or having lunch with friends.

Rosa reaches up over the bathroom sink to turn on a light. She pulls the silver chain, but it breaks and she stands there with part of the chain hanging from her hand. She looks over at Melitsa, and both do their best to laugh it off. Then Rosa turns serious and says softly, in Spanish, “My daughter tells me I need some new dreams” (Eisenstadt, 2004).

New York may be a single large city, but the social world in which Rosa and Melitsa live is not the same as the social world of the people who hire these women. How different are the lives of the richest people in the United States and the lives of those who work hard all day just to get by? What about the lives of those who do not even have the security of work? This chapter answers all these questions, explaining some of the different “worlds” found in U.S. society, how different we are, and why the differences are getting bigger.

Dimensions of Social Inequality

Understand

The United States differs from most European nations and Japan in never having had a titled nobility. With the significant exception of our racial history, we have never known a caste system that rigidly ranks categories of people.

Even so, U.S. society is highly stratified. Not only do the rich have most of the money, but they also receive the most schooling, enjoy the

best health, and consume the most goods and services. Such privilege contrasts sharply with the poverty of millions of women and men who worry about money for next month’s rent or to pay a doctor’s bill when a child becomes ill. Many people think of the United States as a middle-class society, but is this really the case?

Income

One important dimension of inequality is **income**, *earnings from work or investments*. The Census Bureau reports that the median U.S. family income in 2009 was \$60,088. The pie chart in the middle of Figure 11–1 illustrates the distribution of income among all U.S. families.¹ The richest 20 percent of families (earning at least \$112,500 annually, with a mean of about \$189,500) received 48.2 percent of all

¹The Census Bureau reports both mean and median incomes for families (“two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption”) and households (“two or more persons sharing a living unit”). In 2009, mean family income was \$78,538, higher than the median (\$60,088) because high-income families pull up the mean but not the median. For households, these figures are somewhat lower—a mean of \$67,976 and a median of \$49,777—largely because families average 3.16 people and households average 2.59.

Read “Media Magic” by Gregory Mantsios on mysoclab.com

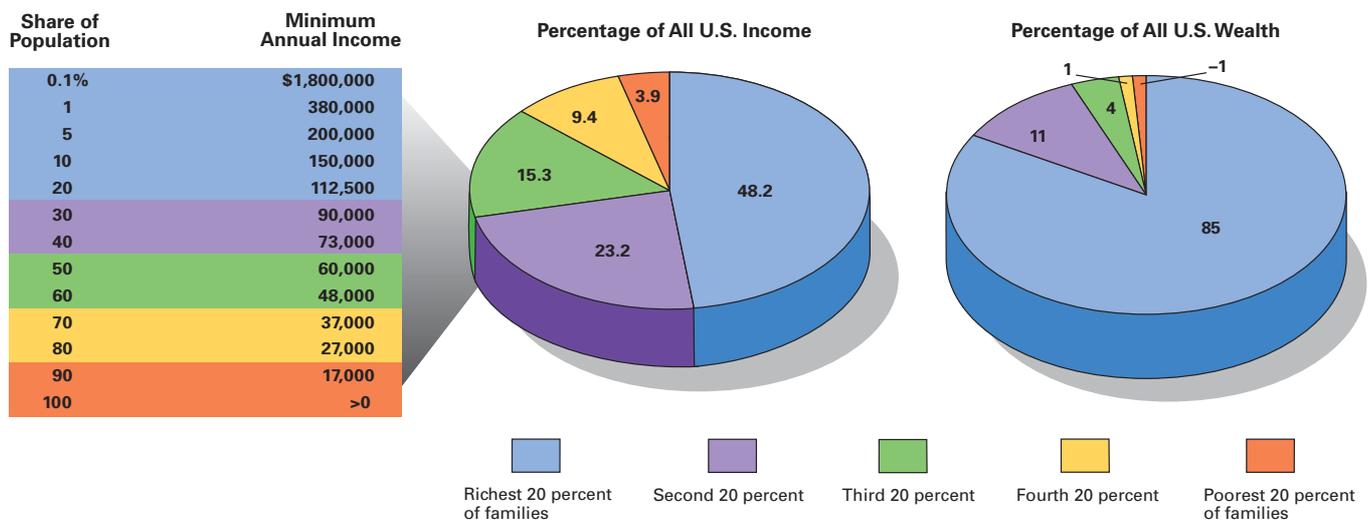


FIGURE 11–1 Distribution of Income and Wealth in the United States, 2009

Income, and especially wealth, are divided unequally in U.S. society.

Sources: Income data from U.S. Census Bureau (2010); wealth data based on Keister (2000), Bucks et al. (2009), Wolff (2010), and author estimates.

income, while the bottom 20 percent (earning less than \$27,000, with a mean of about \$15,000) received only 3.9 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The table at the left in Figure 11–1 provides a closer look at income distribution. In 2009, the highest-paid 5 percent of U.S. families earned at least \$200,000 (averaging \$325,000), or 20.7 percent of all income, more than the total earnings of the lowest-paid 40 percent. At the very top of the income pyramid, the richest one-tenth of 1 percent earned at least \$1.8 million.

During recent decades, income inequality has increased. One part of this trend is that the very richest people now receive a much larger share of all income. For example, in 1978, the highest-paid 0.1 percent of all earners received 2.7 percent of all income. By 2008, this elite category (people making \$1.8 million or more a year) took home a share that is four times larger, equaling 10 percent of all income (Fox, 2009; Internal Revenue Service, 2010).

Wealth

Income is only a part of a person’s or family’s **wealth**, *the total value of money and other assets, minus outstanding debts*. Wealth—including stocks, bonds, and real estate—is distributed more unequally than income. Recent reductions in taxes on income earned by individuals and on wealth passed from one generation to the next are likely to make this inequality even greater (Wahl, 2003).

The pie chart on the right in Figure 11–1 shows the distribution of wealth. The richest 20 percent of U.S. families own roughly 85 per-

cent of the country’s wealth. High up in this privileged category are the wealthiest 5 percent of families—the “very rich,” who own 62 percent of all private property. Richer still, with wealth in the tens of millions of dollars, are the 1 percent of families that qualify as “super-rich” and possess about 35 percent of this nation’s privately held resources (Bucks, Kennickell, & Moore, 2006; Davies et al., 2006; Wolff, 2010). At the top of the wealth pyramid, the ten richest U.S. families have a combined net worth of more than \$270 billion (Kroll, 2010). This amount equals the total property of 2.2 million average families, including enough people to fill the cities of Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami.

The wealth of the average U.S. family is currently about \$120,000 (Bucks et al., 2009). Family wealth reflects the value of homes, cars, investments, insurance policies, retirement pensions, furniture, clothing, and all other personal property, minus a home mortgage and other debts. The wealth of average people is not only less than that of the rich, however, but also different in kind. Most people’s wealth centers on a home and a car—that is, property that generates no income—but the wealth of the rich is mostly in the form of stocks and other income-producing investments.

When financial assets are balanced against debts, the lowest-ranking 40 percent of U.S. families have virtually no wealth at all. The negative percentage shown in Figure 11–1 for the poorest 20 percent of the population means that these families actually live in debt.

Power

In the United States, wealth is an important source of power. The small proportion of families that controls most of the nation’s wealth also shapes the agenda of the entire society. As explained in Chapter 17 (“Politics and Government”), some sociologists argue that such concentrated wealth weakens democracy because the political system serves the interests of the super-rich.

income earnings from work or investments **wealth** the total value of money and other assets, minus outstanding debts

TABLE 11-1 The Relative Social Prestige of Selected Occupations in the United States

White-Collar Occupations	Prestige Score	Blue-Collar Occupations
Physician	82	
College or university professor	78	
Lawyer	76	
Dentist	74	
Physicist, astronomer	74	
Architect	71	
Psychologist	71	
Airline pilot	70	
Electrical engineer	69	
Member of the clergy	69	
Sociologist	66	
Secondary school teacher	63	
Optometrist	62	
Registered nurse	62	
Dental hygienist	61	
Pharmacist	61	
Elementary school teacher	60	
Veterinarian	60	
Actor	58	
Accountant	57	
Economist	57	
Painter, sculptor	56	
Librarian	55	
	53	Aircraft mechanic
	53	Firefighter
Social worker	52	
Athlete	51	
Computer programmer	51	
Editor, reporter	51	
Radio or TV announcer	51	
	49	Electrician
Real estate agent	49	
Bookkeeper	48	
	48	Machinist
	48	Police officer
	46	
	46	Secretary
Real estate agent or broker	44	
	42	Mail carrier
Photographer	41	
	41	Tailor
	40	Carpenter
	37	Auto body repairer
	36	Bricklayer, stonemason
	33	Baker
	33	Bulldozer operator
	33	Hairdresser
	32	Truck driver
Cashier	31	
File clerk	30	
Retail salesperson	29	
	28	Waiter, waitress
	25	Bartender
	25	Child care worker
	23	Farm laborer
	23	Household laborer
	22	Door-to-door salesperson
	22	Janitor
	22	Taxi driver
	17	Garbage collector
	14	Bellhop
	9	Shoe shiner

Source: Adapted from *General Social Surveys, 1972–2010: Cumulative Codebook* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2011).

Occupational Prestige

In addition to generating income, work is also an important source of social prestige. We commonly evaluate each other according to the kind of work we do, giving greater respect to those who do what we consider important work and less respect to others with more modest jobs. Sociologists measure the relative prestige of various occupations (NORC, 2011). Table 11–1 shows that people give high prestige to occupations such as physician, lawyer, and engineer that require extensive training and generate high income. By contrast, less prestigious work—as a waitress or janitor, for example—pays less and requires less schooling. Occupational prestige rankings are much the same in all high-income nations (Lin & Xie, 1988).

In any society, high-prestige occupations go to privileged categories of people. In Table 11–1, for example, the highest-ranking occupations are dominated by men. We have to go more than a dozen jobs down the list to find “secondary school teacher” and “registered nurse,” careers chosen mostly by women. Similarly, many of the lowest-prestige jobs are commonly performed by people of color.

Schooling

Industrial societies have expanded opportunities for schooling, but some people still receive much more education than others. More than 85 percent of women and men aged twenty-five and older have completed high school. But just 29 percent of men and 30 percent of women have completed a four-year college degree.

Schooling affects both occupation and income, since most (but not all) of the better-paying white-collar jobs shown in Table 11–1 require a college degree or other advanced study. Most blue-collar jobs, which bring lower income and social prestige, require less schooling.

U.S. Stratification: Merit and Caste

Understand

As we discussed in Chapter 10 (“Social Stratification”), the U.S. class system is partly a meritocracy in that social position reflects individual talent and effort. But it also has caste elements, because birth—which socially locates each person in a particular family, as well as assigning traits such as race, ethnicity, and gender—plays a part in what we become later in life.

Ancestry

Nothing affects social standing in the United States as much as being born into a particular family, which has a strong bearing on schooling, occupation, and income. Research suggests that more than one-third of our country’s richest individuals—those with hundreds of millions of dollars in wealth—acquired some of their fortunes from inheritance (Miller & Newcomb, 2005; Harford, 2007). Inherited poverty shapes the future of tens of millions of others.

Race and Ethnicity

Race is closely linked to social position in the United States. On average, whites have a higher occupational position than African Americans and also receive more schooling. The median African American

family's income was \$38,409 in 2009, just 57 percent of the \$67,341 earned by non-Hispanic white families. This inequality in income makes a real difference in people's lives. For example, non-Hispanic white families are more likely to own their homes (75 percent do) than black families (46 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Families that include married couples earn more than families with a single parent. With this fact in mind, some of the racial difference in income results from the larger share of single-parent families among African Americans. Comparing only families headed by married couples, African Americans earned 81 percent as much as non-Hispanic white families.

Over time, the income difference builds into a huge wealth gap (Altonji, Doraszelski, & Segal, 2000). A recent survey of families by the Federal Reserve found that median wealth for minority families, including African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans (\$27,800), is just 16 percent of the median (\$170,400) for non-Hispanic white families (Bucks et al., 2009).

Social ranking involves ethnicity as well. People of English ancestry have always enjoyed the most wealth and the greatest power in U.S. society. The Latino population—the largest U.S. racial or ethnic minority—has long been disadvantaged. In 2009, the median income among Hispanic families was \$39,730, which is 59 percent of the median income for non-Hispanic white families. A detailed examination of how race and ethnicity affect social standing is presented in Chapter 14 (“Race and Ethnicity”).

Gender

Of course, both men and women are found in families at every class level. Yet on average, women have less income, wealth, and occupational prestige than men. Among single-parent families, those headed by a woman are almost twice as likely to be poor than those headed by a man. Chapter 13 (“Gender Stratification”) examines the link between gender and social stratification.

Social Classes in the United States

Analyze

As Chapter 10 (“Social Stratification”) explained, rankings in a caste system are rigid and obvious to all. Defining social categories in a more fluid class system such as ours, however, is not so easy.

These women have appeared on the television program *Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Using the categories discussed in the pages that follow, within which social class category do you think they fall? Why?



There is an old joke about two guys who order a pizza, asking that it be cut into six slices because they aren't hungry enough to eat eight. Sociologists do the same thing with social class: Some slice the population into more classes than others. At one extreme, people find as many as six or even seven social classes; at the other, some follow Karl Marx and see two major classes: capitalists and proletarians. Still others side with Max Weber, claiming that stratification creates not clear-cut classes but a multidimensional status hierarchy.

Defining classes in U.S. society is difficult because of our relatively low level of status consistency. Especially toward the middle of the hierarchy, people's standing in one dimension may not be the same as their standing in another. For example, a government official may have the power to administer a multimillion-dollar budget yet may earn only a modest personal income. Similarly, many members of the clergy enjoy ample prestige but only moderate power and low pay. Or consider a “card shark,” a skillful gambler who hustles other people, winning little public respect but lots of money.

Finally, the social mobility characteristic of class systems—again, most pronounced around the middle—means that social position may change during a person's lifetime, further blurring class boundaries. With these issues in mind, we will examine four general rankings: the upper class, the middle class, the working class, and the lower class.

The Upper Class

Families in the upper class—5 percent of the U.S. population—earn at least \$200,000 a year, and some earn ten times that much or more. As a general rule, the more a family's income comes from inherited wealth in the form of stocks and bonds, real estate, and other investments, the stronger a family's claim to being upper class.

In 2010, *Forbes* magazine profiled the richest 400 people in the country, who were worth at least \$1 billion (and as much as \$54 billion) (Kroll, 2010). These people are the core of the upper class, or Karl Marx's “capitalists”—the owners of the means of production or most of the nation's private wealth. Many upper-class people are business owners, executives in large corporations, or senior government officials. Historically, the upper class has been composed mostly of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, but this is less true today (Pyle & Koch, 2001).

Upper-Uppers

The *upper-upper class*, sometimes called “blue bloods” or simply “society,” includes less than 1 percent of the U.S. population (Coleman & Neugarten, 1971; Baltzell, 1995). Membership is almost always the result of birth, as suggested by the joke that the easiest way to become an upper-upper is to be born one. Most of these families possess enormous wealth, which is primarily inherited. For this



People often distinguish between the “new rich” and families with “old money.” Men and women who suddenly begin to earn high incomes tend to spend their money on status symbols because they enjoy the new thrill of high-roller living and they want others to know of their success. Those who grow up surrounded by wealth, by contrast, are used to a privileged way of life and are more quiet about it. Thus the conspicuous consumption of the lower-upper class (*left*) can differ dramatically from the more private pursuits and understatement of the upper-upper class (*right*).

reason, members of the upper-upper class are said to have “old money.”

Set apart by their wealth, upper-uppers live in old, exclusive neighborhoods, such as Beacon Hill in Boston, Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, the Gold Coast of Chicago, and Nob Hill in San Francisco. Their children typically attend private schools with others of similar background and complete their schooling at high-prestige colleges and universities. In the tradition of European aristocrats, they study liberal arts rather than vocational skills.

Women of the upper-upper class do volunteer work for charitable organizations. Such activities serve a dual purpose: They help the larger community, and they build networks that broaden this elite’s power (Ostrander, 1980, 1984).

Lower-Uppers

Most upper-class people actually fall into the *lower-upper class*. The queen of England is in the upper-upper class based not on her fortune of \$650 million but on her family tree. J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, is probably worth twice as much—more than \$1 billion—but this woman (who was once on welfare) stands at the top of the lower-upper class. The major difference, in other words, is that members of the lower-upper class are the “working rich” who get their money mostly by earning it rather than from inheritance. These well-to-do families—who make up 3 or 4 percent of the U.S. population—generally live in large homes in expensive neighborhoods, own vacation homes near the water or in the mountains, and send their children to private schools and good colleges. Yet most of the “new rich” do not gain entry into the clubs and associations of “old money” families.

In the United States, what we often call the American dream has been to earn enough to join the ranks of the lower-upper class. The athlete who signs a multimillion-dollar contract, the actress who lands a starring role in a Hollywood film, the computer whiz who creates

the latest Internet site to capture the public’s attention, and even the person who hits it big by winning a huge lottery jackpot are the talented achievers and lucky people who reach the lower-upper class.

The Middle Class

Made up of 40 to 45 percent of the U.S. population, the large middle class has a tremendous influence on our culture. Television programs and movies usually show middle-class people, and most commercial advertising is directed at these average consumers. The middle class contains far more racial and ethnic diversity than the upper class.

Upper-Middles

People in the top half of this category are called the *upper-middle class*, based on above-average income in the range of \$112,500 to \$200,000 a year. Such income allows upper-middle-class families to live in comfortable homes in fairly expensive areas, own several automobiles, and build investments. Two-thirds of upper-middle-class children graduate from college, and postgraduate degrees are common. Many go on to high-prestige careers as physicians, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and business executives. Lacking the power of the richest people to influence national or international events, upper-middles often play an important role in local political affairs.

Average-Middles

The rest of the middle class falls close to the center of the U.S. class structure. *Average-middles* typically work at less prestigious white-collar jobs as bank branch managers, high school teachers, and gov-

²In some parts of the United States where the cost of living is very high (say, New York City or San Francisco), a family might need \$150,000 or more in annual income to reach the middle class.

ernment office workers or in highly skilled blue-collar jobs such as electrical work and carpentry. Family income is between \$48,000 and \$112,500 a year, which is roughly the national average.²

Middle-class people typically build up a small amount of wealth over the course of their working lives, mostly in the form of a house and a retirement account. Middle-class men and women are likely to be high school graduates, but the odds are just fifty-fifty that they will complete a four-year college degree, usually at a less expensive, state-supported school.

The Working Class

About one-third of the population falls within the working class (sometimes called the *lower-middle class*). In Marxist terms, the working class forms the core of the industrial proletariat. The blue-collar jobs held by members of the working class yield a family income of between \$27,000 and \$48,000 a year, somewhat below the national average. Working-class families have little or no wealth and are vulnerable to financial problems caused by unemployment or illness.

Many working-class jobs provide little personal satisfaction—requiring discipline but rarely imagination—and subject workers to continual supervision. These jobs also offer fewer benefits, such as medical insurance and pension plans. About two-thirds of working-class families own their own homes, usually in lower-cost neighborhoods. College becomes a reality for only about one-third of working-class children.

The Lower Class

The remaining 20 percent of our population make up the lower class. Low income makes their lives insecure and difficult. In 2009, the federal government classified 43.6 million people (14.3 percent of the population) as poor. Millions more—called the “working poor”—are slightly better off, holding low-prestige jobs that provide little satisfaction and minimal income. Two-thirds of working-class children manage to complete high school, but only one in three ever reaches college.

Society segregates the lower class, especially when the poor are racial or ethnic minorities. About 45 percent of lower-class families own their own homes, typically in the least desirable neighborhoods. Although poor neighborhoods are usually found in our inner cities, lower-class families also live in rural communities, especially in the South.

The recent recession has increased the size of the lower class all over the United States. El Centro, California, recently recorded the highest official unemployment rate for all U.S. cities (about 23 percent) and average income for residents has fallen to about \$15,000 a year. But many cities in the industrial Midwest, such as Flint, Michigan, also now have average income of barely \$20,000 a year, which is well below the national average. The same can be said for Macon, Georgia, and many urban cities across the South (Zumbun, 2009). National Map 11–1 on page 252 shows an important measure of social class—median household income—for all the counties in the United States.

The Difference Class Makes

Apply

Social stratification affects nearly every dimension of our lives. We will briefly examine some of the ways social standing is linked to our health, values, politics, and family life.

Health

Health is closely related to social standing. Children born into poor families are twice as likely to die from disease, neglect, accidents, or violence during their first years of life than children born into privileged families. Among adults, people with above-average incomes are almost twice as likely as low-income people to describe their health as excellent. In addition, richer people live, on average, five years longer because they eat more nutritious food, live in safer and less stressful environments, and receive better medical care (Adams, Lucas, & Barnes, 2008; National Center for Health Statistics, 2010; Singh, 2010).

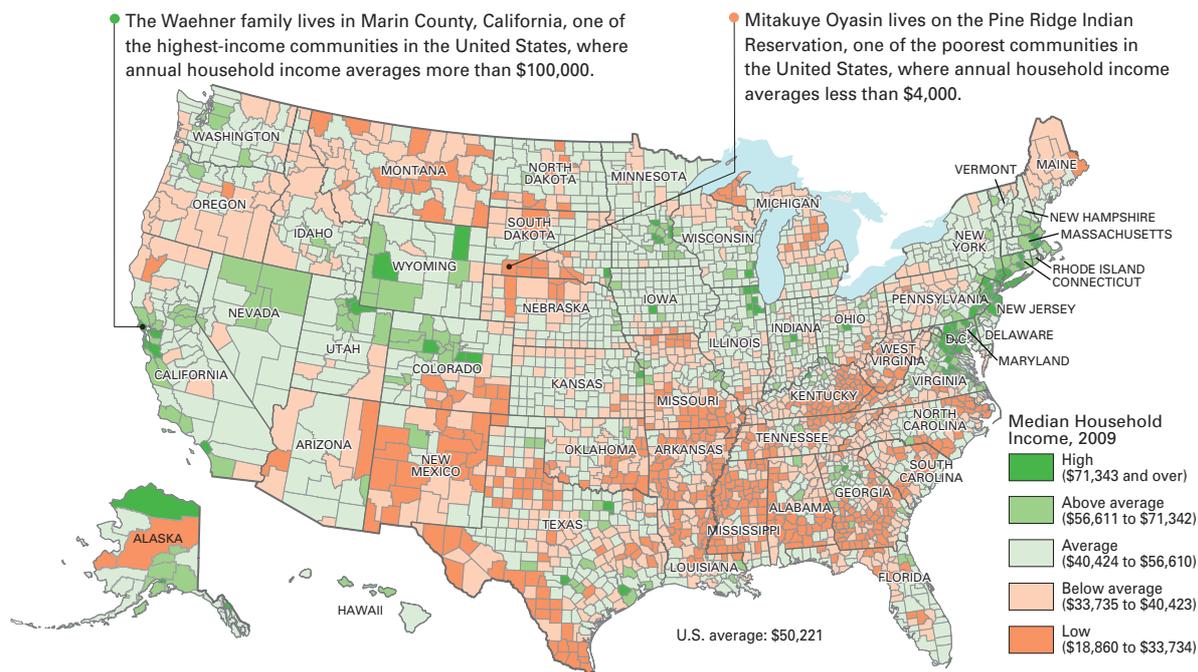
Values and Attitudes

Some cultural values vary from class to class. The “old rich” have an unusually strong sense of family history because their social position is based on wealth passed down from generation to generation. Secure in their birthright privileges, upper-uppers also favor understated manners and tastes; many “new rich” engage in conspicuous consumption, using homes, cars, and even airplanes as status symbols to make a statement about their social position.

Affluent people with greater education and financial security are also more tolerant of controversial behavior such as homosexuality. Working-class people, who grow up in an atmosphere of greater supervision and discipline and are less likely to attend college, tend to be less tolerant (Lareau, 2002; NORC, 2009).



The 2010 film *The Fighter* is set in 1990s Lowell, Massachusetts, a city in economic decline. Mark Wahlberg plays fighter “Irish” Micky Ward, who represents the dreams of working-class people to make it in a world that is fraught with challenges. Despite the odds, Micky achieves some success, but the story makes clear the larger struggle by the working class to gain even a modest level of security.



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 11-1 Household Income across the United States, 2009

This map shows the median household income (that is, how much money, on average, a household earned) in the more than 3,000 counties that make up the United States for the year 2009. The richest counties, shown in the darker shades of green, are not spread randomly across the country. Nor are the poorest U.S. counties, which are shown in the darkest orange. Looking at the map, what patterns do you see in the distribution of wealth and poverty across the United States? What can you say about wealth and poverty in urban and rural areas?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

Social class has a great deal to do with self-concept. People with higher social standing experience more confidence in everyday interaction for the simple reason that others tend to view them as having greater importance. The Thinking About Diversity box describes the challenges faced by one young woman from a poor family attending a college where most students are from elite families.

Politics

Do political attitudes follow class lines? The answer is yes, but the pattern is complex. A desire to protect their wealth prompts well-off people to be more conservative on *economic* issues, favoring, for example, lower taxes. But on *social* issues such as abortion and gay rights, highly educated, more affluent people are more liberal. People of lower social standing, by contrast, tend to be economic liberals, favoring government social programs that benefit them, but typically hold more conservative views on social issues (NORC, 2009).

A simple pattern emerges when it comes to political involvement. Higher-income people, who are better served by the system, are more likely to vote and to join political organizations than people with low incomes. In the 2008 presidential election, 80 percent of

adults with family incomes of \$100,000 voted, compared to 57 percent of those with family incomes of less than \$40,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Family and Gender

Social class also shapes family life. Generally, lower-class families are somewhat larger than middle-class families because of earlier marriage and less use of birth control. Another family pattern is that working-class parents encourage children to conform to conventional norms and to respect authority figures. Parents of higher social standing pass on different “cultural capital” to their children, teaching them to express their individuality and use their imagination more freely. In both cases, parents are looking to the future: The odds are that less privileged children will have jobs that require them to follow rules and that more privileged children will have careers that require more creativity (Kohn, 1977; McLeod, 1995; Lareau, 2002).

The more money a family has, the more parents can develop their children’s talents and abilities. Affluent families with typical earnings of \$171,710 a year will spend \$369,360 raising a child born in 2009 to the age of eighteen. Middle-class people, with an average annual

Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



The Power of Class: A Low-Income Student Asks, “Am I as Good as You?”

Marcella grew up without the privileges that most other students on the campus of this private, liberal arts college take for granted. During her senior year, she and I talked at length about her college experiences and why social class presented a huge challenge to her. Marcella is not her real name; she wishes to remain anonymous. I have summarized what she has said about her college life in the story that follows.

When I came here, I entered a new world. I found myself in a place that seemed strange and sometimes dangerous. All around me were people with habits and ideas I did not understand. A thousand times, I thought to myself, I hope all of you will realize that there are other worlds out there and that I am from one of them. Will you accept me?

I am a child of poverty, a young woman raised in a world of want and violence. I am now on the campus of an elite college. I may have a new identity as a college student. But my old life is still going on in my head. I have not been able to change how I think of myself.

Do you want to find out more about me? Learn more about the power of social class to shape how we feel about ourselves? Here is what I want to say to you.

When I was growing up, I envied most of you. You lived in a middle-class bubble, a world that held you, protected you, and comforted you. Not me. While your parents were discussing current events, planning family trips, and looking out for you, my father and mother were screaming at each other. I will never be able to forget summer nights when I lay in my bed, sticky with sweat, biting my fingernails as a telephone crashed against the wall that separated my room from theirs. My father was drunk and out of control; my mother ducked just in time.

Your fathers and mothers work in office buildings. They have good jobs, as doctors, lawyers, and archi-

tecs; they are corporate managers; they run small businesses. Your mothers and fathers are people who matter. My mom takes the bus to a hospital where she works for \$10 an hour cleaning up after people. She spends her shift doing what she is told. My dad? Who knows. He was a deadbeat, a drunk, a drug addict. I don't know if he still is or not. I haven't heard from him in eight years.

You grew up in a neighborhood and probably lived for many years in one house. My family lived in low-cost rental housing. We moved a lot. When there was no money for rent, we packed up our stuff and moved to a new place. It seemed like we were always running away from something.

You grew up with books, with trips to the library, with parents who read to you. You learned how to speak well and have an impressive vocabulary. I never heard a bedtime story, and I had maybe one inspiring teacher. Most of what I know I had to learn on my own. Maybe that's why I always feel like I am trying to catch up to you.

You know how to use forks, knives, and spoons the right way. You know how to eat Chinese food and what to order at a Thai restaurant. You have favorite Italian dishes. You know how to order wine. You know about German

beers, Danish cheeses, and French sauces. Me? I grew up having Thanksgiving dinner on paper plates, eating turkey served by social service volunteers. When you ask me to go with you to some special restaurant, I make some excuse and stay home. I can't afford it. More than that, I am afraid you will find out how little I know about things you take for granted.

How did I ever get to this college? I remember one of my teachers telling me “You have promise.” The college admission office accepted me. But I am not sure why. I was given a scholarship that covers most of my tuition. That solved one big problem, and now I am here. But sometimes I am not sure I will stay. I have to study more than many of you to learn things you already know. I have to work two part-time jobs to make the money I needed to buy a used computer, clothes, and the occasional pizza at the corner place where many of you spend so much time.

It's amazing to me that I am here. I realize how lucky I am. But now that I am here, I realize that the road is so much longer than I thought it would be. Getting to this college was only part of the answer. The biggest challenge for me is what goes on every day—the thousands of ways in which you live a life that I still don't really understand, the thousands of things that I won't know or that I will do wrong that will blow my cover, and show me up for the fraud I am.

What Do You Think?

1. How does this story show that social class involves much more than how much money a person has?
2. Why does Marcella worry that other people will think she is a “fraud”? If you could speak to her about this fear, what would you say?
3. Have you ever had similar feelings about being less important than—or better than—someone else based on social class position? Explain.



income of \$76,250, will spend \$222,360, and a lower-income family, earning less than \$56,670, will spend \$160,410 (Lino, 2010). Privilege leads to privilege as family life reproduces the class structure in each generation.

Class also shapes our world of relationships. In a classic study of married life, Elizabeth Bott (1971, orig. 1957) found that most

working-class couples divide their responsibilities according to gender roles; middle-class couples, by contrast, are more egalitarian, sharing more activities and expressing greater intimacy. More recently, Karen Walker (1995) discovered that working-class friendships typically serve as sources of material assistance; middle-class friendships are likely to involve shared interests and leisure pursuits.

Social Mobility

Evaluate

Ours is a dynamic society marked by quite a bit of social movement. Earning a college degree, landing a higher-paying job, or marrying someone who earns a good income contributes to *upward social mobility*; dropping out of school, losing a job, or becoming divorced (especially for women) may result in *downward social mobility*.

Over the long term, social mobility is not so much a matter of changes in individuals as changes in society itself. In the first half of the twentieth century, for example, industrialization expanded the U.S. economy, pushing up living standards. Even people who were not good swimmers rode the rising tide of prosperity. In recent decades, the closing of U.S. factories has pushed *structural social mobility* in a downward direction, dealing economic setbacks to many people. The economic downturn that hit hard at the end of 2007 and continues several years later reduced the income and economic opportunities of millions of people.

Sociologists distinguish between shorter- and longer-term changes in social position. **Intragenerational social mobility** is a change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime (*intra* is Latin for "within"). **Intergenerational social mobility**, upward or downward social mobility of children in relation to their parents, is important because it usually reveals long-term changes in society, such as industrialization, that affect everyone (*inter* is Latin for "between").



Compared to high-income people, low-income people are half as likely to report good health and, on average, live about five fewer years. The toll of low income—played out in inadequate nutrition, little medical care, and high stress—is easy to see on the faces of the poor, who look old before their time.

intragenerational social mobility a change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime

intergenerational social mobility upward or downward social mobility of children in relation to their parents

Research on Mobility

In few societies do people think about “getting ahead” as much as in the United States. Lady Gaga claims her parents both grew up in lower-class families; last year, she earned more than \$60 million. Johnny Depp was born in Kentucky to a father who was an engineer and a mother who was a waitress; last year, he earned \$100 million. Moving up—even to the point of becoming a super star—is the American dream. But does everyone move up, even a little? Is there as much social mobility as we like to think?

One recent study of intergenerational mobility shows that about 32 percent of U.S. men have the same type of work as their fathers, 37 percent have been upwardly mobile (for example, a son born to a father with a blue-collar job now does white-collar work), and 32 percent have been downwardly mobile (for example, the father has a white-collar job and the son does blue-collar work). Among women, 27 percent showed no change in relation to their fathers, 46 percent were upwardly mobile, and 28 percent were downwardly mobile (Beller & Hout, 2006). The Sociology in Focus box provides the results of another study of long-term social mobility.

Horizontal social mobility—changing jobs at the same class level—is even more common; overall, about 80 percent of children show at least some type of change in occupational work in relation to their fathers (Hout, 1998; Beller & Hout, 2006).

Research points to four general conclusions about social mobility in the United States:

- 1. Social mobility over the past century has been fairly high.** A high level of mobility is what we would expect in an industrial class system. Most men and women show some mobility in relation to their parents.
- 2. Within a single generation, social mobility is usually small.** Most young families increase their income over time as they gain education and skills—some social mobility occurs as people move through the life course. For example, a typical family headed by a thirty-year-old earned about \$54,000 in 2009; a typical family headed by a fifty-year-old earned \$77,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet only a few people move “from rags to riches” (the way J. K. Rowling did) or lose a lot of money (a number of rock stars who made it big had little money a few years later). Most social mobility involves limited movement within one class level rather than striking moves between classes.
- 3. The long-term trend in social mobility has been upward.** Industrialization, which greatly expanded the U.S. economy, and the growth of white-collar work over the course of the twentieth century have raised living standards. In recent decades, however, mobility has been downward about as often as it has been upward (Keister, 2005).
- 4. Since the 1970s, social mobility has been uneven.** Real income (adjusted for inflation) rose steadily during the twentieth century until the 1970s. Since then, as shown in Figure 11–2 on



Is Social Mobility the Exception or the Rule?

How likely is it to move up in U.S. society? What about the odds of moving down? What share of people, as adults, ends up staying right where they started as children? To answer these questions, Lisa A. Keister used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a long-term study of 9,500 men and women. These people were first studied in 1979 during their youth—when they were between fourteen and twenty-two years old and living at home with one or both parents. The same people were studied again as adults in 2000, when they ranged in age from thirty-five to forty-three years old. About 80 percent of the subjects were married and all had households of their own.

What Keister wanted to know was how the economic standing of the subjects may have changed over their lifetimes, which she measured by estimating (from NLSY data) their amount of wealth at two different times. In 1979, because the subjects were young and living at home, she measured the family wealth of the subjects' parents. Keister placed each subject's family in one of five wealth quintiles—from the richest 20 percent down to the poorest 20 percent—and these quintiles are shown in the vertical axis of the accompanying table. In 2000, she measured the wealth of the same people, who were now living in households of their own. Wealth rankings in 2000 are shown in the horizontal axis of the table.

So what did Keister learn? How much social mobility, in terms of household wealth, took place over the course of twenty-one years? Looking at the table, we can learn a great deal. The cell in the upper left corner shows us that, of the richest 20 percent of subjects

in 1979, 55 percent of these young people went on to remain in the top wealth category in 2000. Obviously, because these people were starting out in the top category, there could be no upward movement (although some of the subjects were richer as adults than they were when they were young). Twenty-five percent of the richest subjects in 1979 had dropped one level to the second quintile. That means that 80 percent of the richest people in 1979 were still quite well off in 2000; only 20 percent of the richest people were downwardly mobile across two or more categories (9 percent who fell two levels, 6 percent who fell three levels, and 5 percent who fell to the lowest wealth level).

A similar pattern is seen as we begin with the poorest subjects—those who were in the lowest wealth quintile in 1979. Obviously, again, because these people started out in the lowest category, they had nowhere to go but up. But 45 percent of these men and women remained in the lowest wealth category as adults (the bottom-right box), and 27 percent moved up one quintile. Another 28 percent of the poorest people moved up two or more quintiles as adults (11 percent who rose two levels, 9 percent who rose three levels, and 8 percent who rose to the richest level).

For subjects in the middle ranges, the data show that mobility was somewhat more pro-

nounced. For those who started in the second richest quintile, just 33 percent ended up in the same place. The remaining 67 percent moved up or down at least one level, although the most common move was rising or falling one level. Of those in the third (or middle) quintile, 35 percent ended up in the same rank as adults, and 65 percent moved up or down at least one level. Again, most of those who moved shifted just one level. Similarly, of those who started out in the fourth quintile, 35 percent ended up in the same ranking as adults, and 65 percent moved in most cases one level up or down.

So what can we conclude about patterns of wealth mobility over a generation between 1979 and 2000? The first conclusion is that a majority of people did experience some mobility, moving up or down one or more levels. So mobility was the rule rather than the exception. Second, movement downward was about as common as movement upward. Third, movement was somewhat more common among people closer to the middle of the wealth hierarchy—the largest share of people who “stayed put” (55 percent among those who started out at the top and 45 percent of those who started out at the bottom) were at one or the other extreme.

Join the Blog!

What about the results presented here surprises you? Overall, how well do the results presented here square with what you imagine most people in this country think about mobility? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Childhood Standing, 1979	Adult Standing, 2000				
	Richest 20%	Second 20%	Third 20%	Fourth 20%	Poorest 20%
Richest 20% →	55	25	9	6	5
Second 20% →	25	33	23	11	8
Third 20% →	13	21	35	20	11
Fourth 20% →	7	14	20	35	24
Poorest 20% →	8	9	11	27	45

page 256, real income has risen and fallen with overall smaller gains than was the case before 1970. Most recently, the economic recession that began in 2007 has resulted in several years of declining incomes for most people. With downward social mobility widespread, it is not surprising that the share of people who say they believe that their family can achieve the American dream has declined—from 76 percent in 2001 to 57 percent in 2010 (Zogby, 2010).

Mobility by Income Level

The experience of social mobility depends on where in the social class system you happen to be. Figure 11–3 on page 257 shows how

U.S. families at different income levels made out between 1980 and 2009. Well-to-do families (the highest 20 percent, but not all the same families over the entire period) saw their incomes jump 55 percent, from an average of \$122,054 in 1980 to \$189,486 in 2009. People in the middle of the population also had gains, but more modest ones. The lowest-income 20 percent saw a 3.8 percent decrease in earnings.

For families at the top of the income scale (the highest 5 percent), recent decades have brought a windfall. These families, with average income of more than \$173,000 in 1980, were making \$325,000 in 2009—almost twice as much as twenty years earlier (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

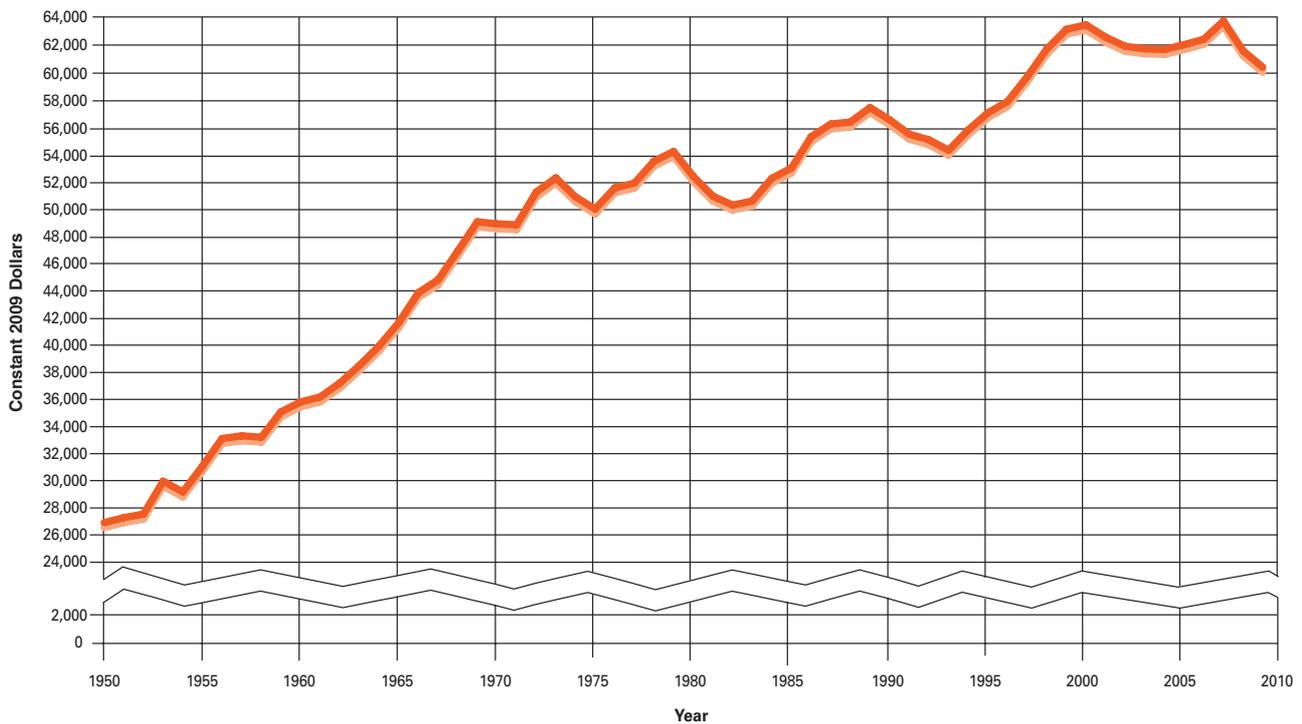


FIGURE 11–2 Median Annual Income, U.S. Families, 1950–2009

Average family income in the United States grew rapidly between 1950 and 1970. Since then, however, the increase has been smaller.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

Mobility: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

White people in the United States have always been in a more privileged position than people of African or Hispanic descent. Through the economic expansion of the 1980s and 1990s, many more African Americans entered the ranks of the wealthy. But overall, the real income of African Americans has changed little in three decades. African American family income as a percentage of white family income has fallen slightly to 57 percent in 2009 from 61 percent in 1975. Compared with white families, Latino families in the United States lost even more ground, earning 66 percent as much as white families in 1975 and just 59 percent as much in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Feminists point out that historically women in U.S. society have had limited opportunity for upward mobility because the clerical jobs (such as secretary) and service positions (such as food server) widely held by women offer few opportunities for advancement.

Over time, however, the earnings gap between women and men has been narrowing. Women working full time in 1980 earned 60 percent as much as men working full time; by 2009, women were earning 77 percent as much (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Mobility and Marriage

Research points to the conclusion that marriage has an important effect on social standing. In a study of women and men in their forties,

Jay Zagorsky (2006) found that people who marry and stay married accumulate about twice as much wealth as people who remain single or who divorce. Reasons for this difference include the fact that couples who live together typically enjoy double incomes and also pay only half the bills they would have if they were single and living in separate households.

It is also likely that compared to single people, married men and women work harder in their jobs and save more money. Why? The main reason is that they are working not just for themselves but also to support others who are counting on them (Popenoe, 2006).

Just as marriage pushes social standing upward, divorce usually makes social position go down. Couples who divorce take on the financial burden of supporting two households. After divorce, women are hurt more than men because it is typically the man who earns more. Many women who divorce lose not only most of their income but also benefits such as health care and insurance coverage (Weitzman, 1996).

The American Dream: Still a Reality?

The expectation of upward social mobility is deeply rooted in U.S. culture. Through most of our history, the economy has grown steadily, raising living standards. Even today, for some people at least, the American dream is alive and well. In 2010, about one in four U.S. families earned \$100,000 or more, compared with just one in fifteen back in 1967 (in dollars controlled for inflation). There are now more

than 8 million millionaire households in the United States, twice the number in 1995 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Smith, 2010; Wolff, 2010).

Yet not all indicators are positive. Note these disturbing trends:

1. **For many workers, earnings have stalled.** The annual income of a fifty-year-old man working full time climbed by about 65 percent between 1958 and 1974 (from \$29,233 to \$48,184 in constant 2009 dollars). Between 1974 and 2009, however, this worker's income *decreased* by 7 percent, even as the number of hours worked increased and the cost of necessities like housing, education, and medical care went way up (Russell, 1995a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
2. **More jobs offer little income.** The expanding global economy has moved many industrial jobs overseas, reducing the number of high-paying factory jobs here in the United States. At the same time, the expansion of our service economy means that more of today's jobs—in fast-food restaurants or large discount stores—offer relatively low wages.
3. **Young people are remaining at home.** Currently, more than half of young people aged eighteen to twenty-four (53 percent of men and 49 percent of women) are living with their parents. Since 1975, the average age at marriage has moved upward five years (to 26.1 years for women and 28.2 years for men).

Over the past generation, more people have become rich, and the rich have become richer. At the very top of the pile, as the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page 258 explains, the highest-paid corporate executives have enjoyed a runaway rise in their earnings. Yet the increasing share of low-paying jobs has also brought downward mobility for millions of families, feeding the fear that the chance to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle is slipping away. As a glance back at Figure 11–2 shows, although median family income doubled in the generation between 1950 and 1973, it has grown by only 15 percent over almost two generations since then (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

The Global Economy and the U.S. Class Structure

Underlying the shifts in U.S. class structure is global economic change. Much of the industrial production that gave U.S. workers high-paying jobs a generation ago has moved overseas. With less industry at home, the United States now serves as a vast market for industrial goods such as cars and popular items like stereos, cameras, and computers made in China, Japan, South Korea, and elsewhere.

High-paying jobs in manufacturing, held by 28 percent of the U.S. labor force in 1960, support only 9 percent of workers today (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). In their place, the economy now offers service work, which often pays far less. A traditionally high-paying corporation like USX (formerly United States Steel) now employs fewer people than the expanding McDonald's chain, and fast-food clerks make only a fraction of what steelworkers earn.

The global reorganization of work has not been bad news for everyone. On the contrary, the global economy is driving upward social mobility for educated people who specialize in law, finance, marketing, and computer technology. Even allowing for the economic downturn that began in 2008, the global economic expansion helped push up the stock market about twelvefold between 1980 and 2011, increasing the wealth of families with money to invest over this period.

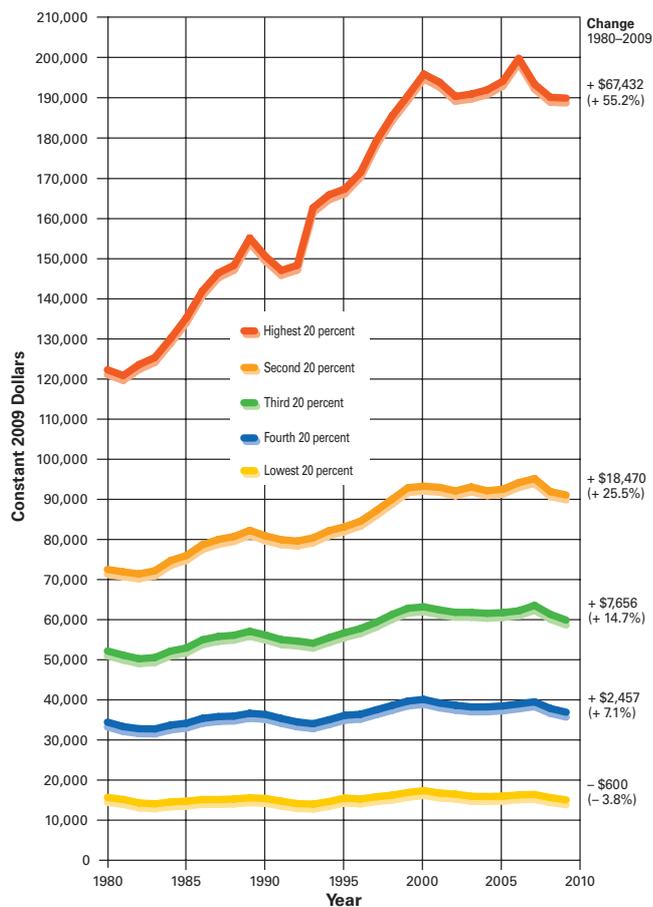


FIGURE 11–3 Mean Annual Income, U.S. Families, 1980–2009 (in 2009 dollars, adjusted for inflation)

The gap between high-income and low-income families is wider today than it was in 1980.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

But the same trend has hurt many average workers, who have lost their factory jobs and now perform low-wage service work. In addition, many companies (General Motors and Ford are recent examples) have downsized, cutting the ranks of their workforce in their efforts to stay competitive in world markets. As a result, even though 54 percent of all families contain two or more workers—more than twice the share in 1950—many families are working harder simply to hold on to what they have (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Poverty in the United States

Analyze

Social stratification creates both “haves” and “have-nots.” All systems of social inequality create poverty, or at least **relative poverty**, the lack of resources of some people in relation to those who have more. A more serious but preventable problem is **absolute poverty**, a lack of resources that is life-threatening.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



As CEOs Get Richer, the Great Mansions Return

I grew up in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, an older suburban community just north of Philadelphia. Elkins Park was at that time and still is a largely middle-class community, although, like most of suburbia, some neighborhoods boast bigger houses than others. What made Elkins Park special was that scattered over the area were a handful of great mansions, built a century ago by early Philadelphia industrialists. Back then, just about all there was to the town was these great “estates,” along with fields and meadows. By about 1940, however, most of the land was split off into lots for the homes of newer middle-class suburbanites. The great mansions suddenly seemed out of place, with heirs trying to figure out how to pay the rising property taxes. As a result, many of the great mansions were sold, the buildings taken down, and the land subdivided.

In the 1960s, when I was a teenager, a short ride on my bicycle could take me past the Breyer estate (built by the founder of the ice-cream company, now the township police building), the Curtis estate (built by a magazine publisher and later transformed into a community park), and the Wanamaker estate (built by the founder of a large Philadelphia department store, now the site of high-rise apartments). Probably the grandest of them all was Lynnewood Hall, a 110-room mansion completed in 1900 by industrialist Peter A. B. Weidner (whose son George and grandson Harry were among the first-class passengers to perish with the *Titanic* in 1912). Weidner’s huge home was modeled after a French chateau, complete with doorknobs and window

pulls covered in gold; owned by a church group, it now stands empty.

In their day, these structures were not just homes to families with many servants; they also served as monuments to a time when the rich were, well, *really* rich. By contrast, the community that emerged on the grounds once owned by these wealthy families is middle class, with modest homes on small lots.

But did the so-called Gilded Age of great wealth disappear forever? Hardly. By the 1980s, a new wave of great mansions was being built in the United States. Take the architect Thierry Despont, who designs huge houses for the super-rich. One of Despont’s smaller homes might be 20,000 square feet (about ten times the size of the average U.S. house), and the larger ones go all the way up to 60,000 square feet (as big as any of the Elkins Park mansions built a century ago and almost the size of the White House). These megahomes have kitchens as large as college classrooms, exercise

rooms, indoor swimming pools, and even indoor tennis courts (Krugman, 2002).

Most of these megahouses have been built by newly rich chief executive officers (CEOs) of large corporations. CEOs have always made more money than most people, but recent years have seen executive pay soar. Between 1970 and 2009, the average U.S. family saw only a modest increase in income (about 24 percent after inflation is taken into account). Yet according to a new study, during the same period, the average annual compensation for the 100 highest-paid CEOs skyrocketed from \$1.3 million (about 40 times the earnings of an average worker of that time) to \$23.4 million (roughly 372 times as much as the earnings of today’s average worker). Richer still, the twenty-five highest-earning investment fund managers in 2009 had, on average, \$1 billion *each* in income, earning more in seventeen minutes than the average worker made all year (Schwartz & Story, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; The Corporate Library, 2011).



What Do You Think?

1. To what extent do you consider increasing economic inequality a problem? Explain.
2. How many times more than an average worker should a CEO earn? Explain your answer.
3. Several years after the economic recession that began in 2008, Wall Street earnings and CEO bonuses are setting new records. Do you think this pattern reflects a free and fair economy, or should government control the compensation of the richest people? Explain your answer.

As Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”) explains, about 1.4 billion human beings—one person in five—are at risk of absolute poverty. Even in the affluent United States, families go hungry, live in inadequate housing, and suffer poor health because of a serious lack of resources.

The Extent of Poverty

In 2009, the government classified 37 million men, women, and children—14.3 percent of the population—as poor. This count of relative poverty refers to families with incomes below an official poverty line, which for a family of four in that year was set at \$21,954. The poverty line is about three times what the government estimates peo-

ple must spend for food. But the income of the average poor family was just 59 percent of this amount. This means that the typical poor family had to get by on less than \$13,000 in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Figure 11–4 shows that the official poverty rate fell during the 1960s, and then rose and fell within a narrow range in the decades since, rising with the recent recession.

absolute poverty a lack of resources that is life-threatening

relative poverty the lack of resources of some people in relation to those who have more

Who Are the Poor?

Although no single description fits all poor people, poverty is pronounced among certain categories of our population. Where these categories overlap, the problem is especially serious.

Age

A generation ago, the elderly were at greatest risk for poverty. But thanks to better retirement programs offered today by private employers and the government, the poverty rate for people over age sixty-five fell from 30 percent in 1967 to 8.9 percent—well below the national average—in 2009. Looking at it from another angle, about 7.9 percent (3.4 million) of the poor are elderly (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Today the burden of poverty falls more heavily on children. In 2009, 20.7 percent of people under age eighteen (15.5 million children) and 20.7 percent of people age eighteen to twenty-four (6.1 million young adults) were poor. Put another way, 49 percent of the U.S. poor are young people no older than twenty-four.

Race and Ethnicity

Seventy-one percent of all poor people are white; 23 percent are African Americans. But in relation to their overall numbers, African Americans are almost three times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be poor. In 2009, 25.8 percent of African Americans (9.9 million people) lived in poverty, compared to 25.3 percent of Hispanics (12.4 million), 12.5 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders (1.75 million), and 9.2 percent of non-Hispanic whites (18.5 million). The poverty gap between whites and minorities has changed little since 1975.

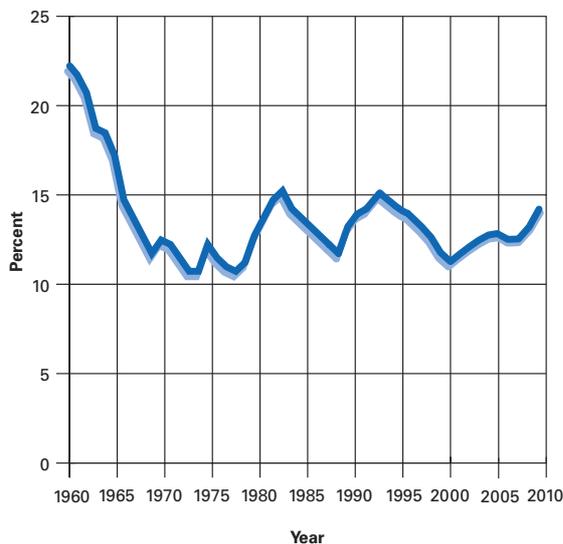


FIGURE 11-4 The Poverty Rate in the United States, 1960–2009

The share of our population in poverty fell dramatically between 1960 and 1970. Since then, the poverty rate has remained between 10 and 15 percent of the population.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).



Henry Ossawa Tanner captured the humility and humanity of impoverished people in his painting *The Thankful Poor*. This insight is important in a society that tends to define poor people as morally unworthy and deserving of their bitter plight.

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), *The Thankful Poor*. Private collection. Art Resource, New York.

People of color have especially high rates of child poverty. Among African American children, 35.7 percent are poor; the comparable figures are 33.1 percent among Hispanic children and 11.9 percent among non-Hispanic white children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Gender and Family Patterns

Of all poor people age eighteen or older, 56 percent are women and 44 percent are men. This difference reflects the fact that women who head households are at high risk of poverty. Of all poor families, 48 percent are headed by women with no husband present; just 8 percent of poor families are headed by single men.

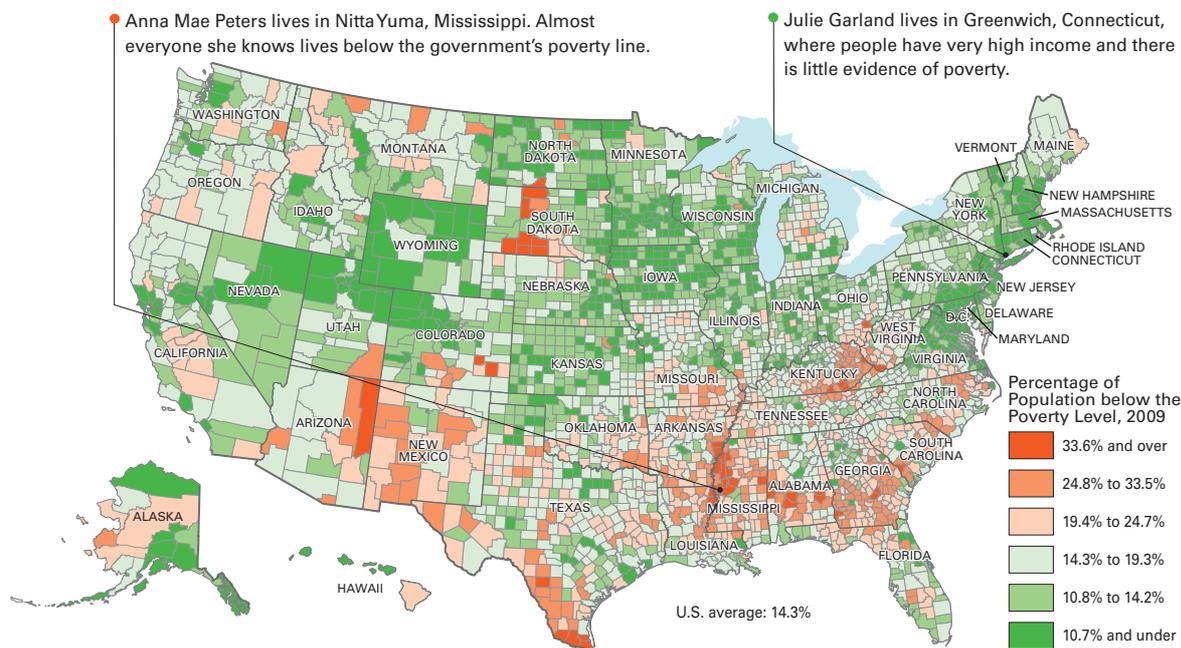
The United States has thus experienced a **feminization of poverty**, the trend of women making up an increasing proportion of the poor. In 1960, only 25 percent of all poor households were headed by women; the majority of poor families had both wives and husbands in the home. By 2009, however, the share of poor households headed by a single woman had almost doubled to 48 percent.

The feminization of poverty is one result of a larger trend: the rapidly increasing number of households at all class levels headed by single women. This trend, coupled with the fact that households headed by women are at high risk of poverty, helps explain why women and their children make up an increasing share of the U.S. poor.

Urban and Rural Poverty

In the United States, the greatest concentration of poverty is found in central cities, where the 2009 poverty rate stood at 18.7 percent. The poverty rate in suburbs is 11.0 percent. Thus the poverty rate for urban areas as a whole is 12.9 percent—somewhat lower than the 15.1 percent found in rural areas. National Map 11-2 on page 260

 [Watch](#) the video “Consequences of Poverty” on [mysoclab.com](#)



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 11–2 Poverty across the United States, 2009

This map shows that the poorest counties in the United States—where the poverty rate is more than twice the national average—are in Appalachia, across the Deep South, along the border with Mexico, near the Four Corners region of the Southwest, and in the Dakotas. Can you suggest some reasons for this pattern?

Explore the percentage of people living in poverty in your local community and in counties across the United States on mysoclab.com

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

shows that most of the counties with the highest poverty rate in the United States are rural.

Explaining Poverty

The richest nation on Earth contains tens of millions of poor people, a fact that raises serious questions. It is true, as some analysts remind us, that most poor people in the United States are far better off than the poor in other countries: 33 percent of U.S. poor families own a home, 70 percent own a car, and only about 81 percent say they usually have enough food (U.S. Bureau of Agriculture, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). But there is little doubt that poverty harms the overall well-being of millions of people in this country.

Why is there poverty in the first place? We will examine two opposing explanations for poverty that lead to a lively and important political debate.

One View: Blame the Poor

One approach holds that *the poor are mostly responsible for their own poverty*. Throughout this nation's history, people have placed a high cultural value on self-reliance, convinced that social standing is mostly a matter of individual talent and effort. According to this view, society offers plenty of opportunities to anyone who is able and willing

to take advantage of them, and the poor are those people who cannot or will not work due to a lack of skills, schooling, or motivation.

In his study of poverty in Latin American cities, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1961) noted that many poor become trapped in a *culture of poverty*, a lower-class subculture that can destroy people's ambition to improve their lives. Raised in poor families, children become resigned to their situation, producing a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty.

In 1996, hoping to break the cycle of poverty in the United States, Congress changed the welfare system, which had provided federal funds to assist poor people since 1935. The federal government continues to send money to the states to distribute to needy people, but benefits carry strict time limits—in most cases, no more than two years at a stretch and a lifetime total of five years as an individual moves in and out of the welfare system. The stated purpose of this reform was to force people to be self-supporting and move them away from dependency on government.

Another View: Blame Society

A different position, argued by William Julius Wilson (1996a, 1996b; Mouw, 2000), holds that *society is mostly responsible for poverty*. Wilson points to the loss of jobs in the inner cities as the main cause of poverty, claiming that there is simply not enough work to support families. Wilson sees any apparent lack of trying on the part of poor people as a

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



When Work Disappears, the Result Is Poverty

The U.S. economy has created tens of millions of new jobs in recent decades. Yet African Americans who live in inner cities have faced a catastrophic loss of work. Unemployment rates were sky high even before the recent recession, which has only made the problem worse. William Julius Wilson points out that although people continue to talk about welfare reform, few Democratic or Republican leaders have said anything about the lack of work in central cities.

With the loss of inner-city jobs, Wilson continues, for the first time in U.S. history a large majority of the adults in our inner cities are not working. Studying the Washington Park area of Chicago, Wilson found a troubling trend. Back in 1950, most adults in this African American community had jobs, but by the mid-1990s, two-thirds did not. As one elderly woman who moved to the neighborhood in 1953 explained:

When I moved in, the neighborhood was intact. It was intact with homes, beautiful homes, mini-mansions, with stores, laundromats, with Chinese cleaners. We had drugstores. We had hotels. We had doctors over on 39th Street. We had doctors' offices in the neighborhood. We had the middle class and the upper-middle class. It has gone from affluent to where it is today. (W.J. Wilson, 1996b:28)

Why has this neighborhood declined? Wilson's eight years of research point to one answer: There are barely any jobs. It is the loss of work that has pushed people into desperate poverty, weakened families, and made people turn to welfare. In nearby Woodlawn, Wilson identified

more than 800 businesses that had operated in 1950; today, just 100 remain. In addition, a number of major employers in the past—including Western Electric and International Harvester—closed their plant doors in the late 1960s. The inner cities have fallen victim to economic change, including downsizing and the loss of industrial jobs that have moved overseas.

Wilson paints a grim picture. But he also believes we have the power to create new jobs. Wilson proposes attacking the problem in stages. First, the government could hire people to do all kinds of work, from clearing slums to putting up new housing. Such a program, modeled on the Works Progress Administration (WPA) created in 1935 during the Great Depression, would move people from welfare to work and in the process create much-needed hope. In addition, federal and

state governments must improve schools by enacting performance standards and providing more funding. Of special importance is teaching children language skills and computer skills to prepare them for the jobs being created by the Information Revolution. Improved regional public transportation would connect cities (where people need work) and suburbs (where most jobs now are). In addition, more affordable child care would help single mothers and fathers balance the responsibilities of employment and parenting.

Wilson claims that his proposals are well grounded in research. But he knows that politics revolves around other considerations as well. For one thing, if the public *thinks* there are jobs available, it is hard to change the perception that the poor are simply avoiding work. He also concedes that his proposals, at least in the short term, are more expensive than continuing to funnel welfare assistance to jobless communities.

But what are the long-term costs of allowing our cities to decay while suburbs prosper? On the other hand, what would be the benefits of giving everyone the hope and satisfaction that are supposed to define our way of life?

What Do You Think?

1. If Wilson were running for public office, do you think he would be elected? Why or why not?
2. In your opinion, why are people so reluctant to see inner-city poverty as a problem?
3. Where do you agree with Wilson's analysis of poverty? Where do you disagree?



William Julius Wilson spent years studying neighborhoods like this one in Chicago. He now teaches at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

result of little opportunity rather than a cause of poverty. From Wilson's point of view, Lewis's analysis amounts to blaming the victims for their own suffering. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box provides a closer look at Wilson's argument and how it would shape public policy.

Evaluate The U.S. public is evenly divided over whether the government or people themselves should take responsibility for reducing poverty (NORC, 2011:499). And here's what we know about poverty and work: Government statistics show that 54 percent of the heads of poor households did not work at all during 2009, and an additional 32 percent worked only part time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Such facts seem to support the "blame the poor" side of the argument, because one major cause of poverty is not holding a job.

But the *reasons* that people do not work seem more in step with the "blame society" position. Middle-class women may be able to combine working and child rearing, but this is much harder for poor women who cannot afford child care, and few employers provide child care programs. As Wilson explains, many people are idle not because they are avoiding work but because there are not enough jobs to go around. In short, the most effective way to reduce poverty is to ensure a greater supply of jobs as well as child care for parents who work (W. J. Wilson, 1996a; Bainbridge, Meyers, & Waldfoegel, 2003).

CHECK YOUR LEARNING Explain the view that the poor should take responsibility for poverty and the view that society is responsible for poverty. Which is closer to your own view?



The Welfare Dilemma

Marco: (*rushing in the door*) Sorry I'm late. I stopped at the store and got stuck behind some welfare mother in the checkout line.

Sergi: (*looking back with a confused grin*) Exactly what does a person on welfare look like?

What is *your* image of a “welfare recipient”? If you are like many people in the United States, you might think of a middle-aged African American woman. But you would be wrong. In truth, the typical person receiving welfare in this country is a child who is white.

There is a lot of confusion about welfare. There is also disagreement about whether this type of assistance is a good or bad idea. In 1996, Congress debated the issue and enacted new law that ended the federal government's role in providing income assistance to poor households. In place of this federal program, new state-run programs now offer limited help to the poor, but they require people who receive aid to get job training or find work—or have their benefits cut off.

To understand how we got to where we are, let's begin by explaining what, exactly, welfare is. The term “welfare” refers to an assortment of policies and programs designed to improve the well-being of some low-income people. Until the welfare reform of 1996, most people used the term to refer to just one part of the overall system, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a federal pro-

gram of monthly financial support for parents (mostly single women) to care for themselves and their children. In 1996, about 5 million households received AFDC for some part of the year.

Conservatives opposed AFDC, claiming that rather than reducing child poverty, AFDC made the problem worse, in two ways. First, they claimed that AFDC weakened families, because for years after the program began, it paid benefits to poor mothers only if no husband lived in the home. As a result, the government was actually providing an economic incentive to women to have children outside of marriage, and critics blame this policy for the rapid rise of out-of-wedlock births among poor people. To conservatives, marriage is one key to reducing poverty: Only one in twenty married-couple families is poor; more than nine in ten AFDC families were headed by an unmarried woman.

Second, conservatives believe that welfare encourages poor people to become dependent on government handouts, the main reason that eight out of



Is society responsible for poverty or are individuals themselves to blame? When it comes to homeless families, most people think society should do more.

The Working Poor

Not all poor people are jobless. The *working poor* command the sympathy and support of people on both sides of the poverty debate. In 2009, some 15 percent of heads of poor families (1.3 million women and men) worked at least fifty weeks of the year and yet could not escape poverty. Another 32 percent of these heads of families (2.8 million people) remained poor despite part-time employment. Put differently, 3.3 percent of full-time workers earn so little that they remain poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Congress set the minimum wage at \$6.55 per hour in 2008, raising it to \$7.25 per hour in July 2009. But even this increase cannot end working poverty—even at \$8.00 an hour, a full-time worker still cannot lift an urban family of four above the poverty line. Currently, it would take an hourly wage of about \$10.50 to do that.

Individual ability and personal effort do play a part in shaping social position. So do decisions like dropping out of school and deciding to have a child without enough family income to support everyone. However, the weight of sociological evidence points to society, not individual character traits, as the primary cause of poverty because

more and more of the jobs that are available offer only low wages. In addition, the poor are *categories* of people—female heads of families, people of color, people isolated from the larger society in inner-city areas—who face special barriers and limited opportunities.

The Controversy & Debate box takes a closer look at current welfare policy. Understanding this important social issue can help us decide how our society should respond to the problem of poverty, as well as the problem of homelessness, discussed next.

Homelessness

In 2009, the government's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) conducted a national survey of cities and towns to find out how many people in the United States were homeless at some time during that year. The answer was about 643,000, including people living in shelters, in transitional housing, and on the street (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010). As with earlier estimates of the homeless population, critics claimed that the HUD survey undercounted the homeless, who may well number several million people. In addition, they add, evidence suggests that the number

ten poor heads of households did not have full-time jobs. Furthermore, only 5 percent of single mothers receiving AFDC worked full time, compared to more than half of nonpoor single mothers. Conservatives say that welfare gradually moved well beyond its original purpose of short-term help to nonworking women with children (say, after divorce or death of a husband) and gradually became a way of life. Once trapped in dependency, poor women would raise children who were themselves likely to be poor as adults.

Liberals have a different view. Why, they ask, do people object to government money going to poor mothers and children when most “welfare” actually goes to richer people? The cost of AFDC was as high as \$25 billion annually—no small sum, to be sure, but much less than the \$564 billion in annual Social Security benefits Uncle Sam provides to 42.8 million senior citizens, most of whom are not poor. And it is just a small fraction of the more than \$1 trillion “bailout money” Congress voted in 2008 and 2009 to assist the struggling financial industry.

Liberals insist that most poor families who turn to public assistance are truly needy. Most of the people who are helped in this way are children. And they don’t get very much. The typical household receives only about \$512 per month in assistance, hardly enough to attract people to a life of welfare dependency. Even with some additional money in

the form of food stamps, households assisted by welfare still struggle well below the poverty line everywhere in the country. Therefore, liberals see public assistance as a “Band-Aid approach” to the serious social problems of too few jobs and too much income inequality in the United States. As for the charge that public assistance weakens families, liberals agree that the share of families with one parent has gone up, but they see single parenting as a broad trend found at all class levels in many countries.

Back in 1996, the conservative arguments carried the day, ending the AFDC program. Our society’s individualistic culture has always encouraged us to blame people themselves (rather than society) for poverty, which becomes a sign not of need but of laziness and personal failure. This view of the poor is probably the biggest reason that led Congress to replace the federal AFDC program with state-run programs called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), requiring poor adults to get job training and limiting income assistance to two consecutive years with a lifetime limit of five years.

By 2008, the new TANF policy had reduced the number of households receiving income assistance by about 60 percent. This means that many single parents who were once on welfare have taken jobs or are receiving job training. In addition, the rate of out-of-wedlock births has fallen. With these facts in

mind, conservatives who supported welfare reform see the new program as a huge success. The welfare rolls have been cut by more than half, and more people have moved from receiving a check to working in order to support themselves. But liberals claim that the reform is far from successful. They point out that many of the people who are now working earn so little pay that they are hardly better off than before. In addition, half of these workers have no health insurance. In other words, the reform has greatly reduced the number of people receiving welfare but has done little to reduce the extent of poverty.

What Do You Think?

1. How does our cultural emphasis on self-reliance help explain the controversy surrounding public assistance? Why do people not criticize benefits (such as home mortgage interest deductions) for people who are better off?
2. Do you approve of the time limits on benefits built into the TANF program? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the Obama administration will reduce poverty? Explain your answer.

Sources: Lichter & Crowley (2002), Lichter & Jayakody (2002), Von Drehle (2008); U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

of homeless people in the United States is increasing (L. Kaufman, 2004; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

The familiar stereotypes of homeless people—men sleeping in doorways and women carrying everything they own in a shopping bag—have been replaced by the “new homeless”: people thrown out of work because of plant closings, women who take their children and leave home to escape domestic violence, women and men forced out of apartments by rent increases, and others unable to meet mortgage or rent payments because of low wages or no work at all. Today, no stereotype paints a complete picture of the homeless.

The large majority of homeless people report that they do not work, although about 19 percent have at least a part-time job (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2010). Working or not, all homeless people have one thing in common: *poverty*. For that reason, the explanations of poverty just presented also apply to homelessness. Some (more conservative) people blame the *personal traits* of the homeless themselves. One-third of homeless people are substance abusers, and one-fourth are mentally ill. More broadly, a fraction of 1 percent of our population, for one reason or another, seems unable to cope with our

complex and highly competitive society (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007).

Other (more liberal) people see homelessness as resulting from *social factors*, including low wages and a lack of low-income housing (Kozol, 1988; Bohannon, 1991; L. Kaufman, 2004). Supporters of this position note that one-third of the homeless consists of entire families, and they point to children as the fastest-growing category of the homeless.

No one disputes that a large proportion of homeless people are personally impaired to some degree, but untangling what is cause and what is effect is not so easy. Long-term, structural changes in the U.S. economy, cutbacks in social service budgets, and the recent economic downturn have all contributed to the problem of homelessness.

Finally, social stratification extends far beyond the borders of the United States. In fact, the most striking social inequality is found not within any one nation but in the different living standards from nation to nation around the world. In Chapter 12 (“Global Stratification”), we broaden our investigation of social stratification by looking at global inequality.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 11 Social Class in the United States

How do we understand inequality in our society?

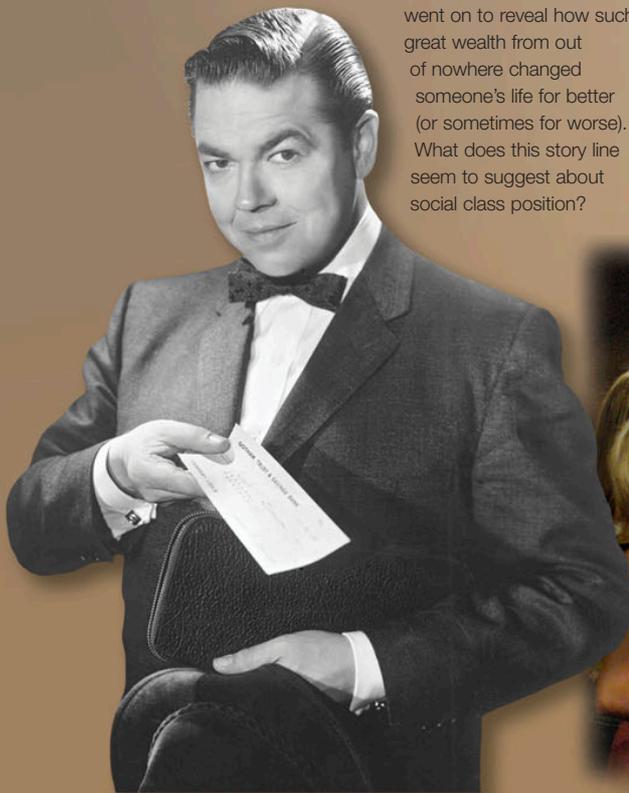
This chapter sketches the class structure of the United States and how people end up in their position in our system of social inequality. How accurately do you think the mass media reflect the reality of inequality in our society? Look at the three photos of television shows, one from back in the 1950s and the other two from today. What messages about social standing, and how we get there, does each show convey?

Hint In general, the mass media present social standing as a reflection of an individual's personal traits and sometimes sheer luck. In *The Millionaire*, wealth was visited on some people for no apparent reason at all. In *The Bachelor*, women try to gain the approval of a man. In *America's Next Top Model*, the key to success is good looks and personal style. But social structure is also involved in ways that we easily overlook. Is there any significance to the fact that (as of 2011) all the bachelors on that show have been white? Does "good looks" matter as much to men as it does to women? Is becoming a millionaire really a matter of luck? Does social standing result from personal competition as much as television shows suggest?

In *The Millionaire*, a popular television show that ran from 1955 until 1960, a very rich man (who was never fully shown on camera) had the curious hobby of giving away \$1 million to other people he had never even met. Each week, he gave his personal assistant, Michael Anthony, a check to pass along to "the next millionaire." Anthony tracked down the person and handed over the money, and the story

went on to reveal how such great wealth from out of nowhere changed someone's life for better (or sometimes for worse). What does this story line seem to suggest about social class position?

In the TV show *The Bachelor*, first aired in 2002, a young bachelor works his way through a collection of twenty-five attractive young women, beginning with group dates, moving on to overnight visits with three "finalists," and (in most cases) proposing to his "final selection." Much of the interaction takes place in a lavish, 7,500-square-foot home somewhere in southern California. What does this show suggest is the key to social position? What message does this show promote about the importance of marriage for women?



In 2003, Tyra Banks created *America's Next Top Model*, and she also stars in the show. Each season, up to thirteen young women demonstrate their talents as models to a panel of judges, including Banks; one contestant is eliminated each week until only one remains as the “winner.” What messages about social position and achieving success does this show present to young women?



Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. During an evening of television viewing, assess the social class level of the characters you see on various shows. In each case, explain why you assign someone a particular social position. Do you find many clearly upper-class people? Middle-class people? Working-class people? Poor people? Describe the patterns you find.
2. Develop several questions that together will let you measure social class position. The trick is to decide what you think social class really means. Then try your questions on several adults, refining the questions as you proceed.
3. Social stratification involves how a society distributes resources. It also has a relational dimension—social inequality guides *with whom* we do and do not interact and also *how* we interact with people. Can you give examples of how social class differences guide social interaction in your everyday life? Go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on mysoclab.com for additional discussion of the relational aspects of social stratification, including suggestions for how to relate to people whose social backgrounds differ from your own.

Social Dimensions of Social Inequality

Social stratification involves many dimensions:

- **Income**—Earnings from work and investments are unequal, with the richest 20% of families earning twelve times as much as the poorest 20% of families.
- **Wealth**—The total value of all assets minus debts, wealth is distributed more unequally than income, with the richest 20% of families holding 85% of all wealth.
- **Power**—Income and wealth are important sources of power.
- **Occupational prestige**—Work generates not only income but also prestige. White-collar jobs generally offer more income and prestige than blue-collar jobs. Many lower-prestige jobs are performed by women and people of color.
- **Schooling**—Schooling affects both occupation and income. Some categories of people have greater opportunities for schooling than others. **pp. 246–48**

Read the Document on mysoclab.com



income (p. 246) earnings from work or investments
wealth (p. 247) the total value of money and other assets, minus outstanding debts

U.S. Stratification: Merit and Caste

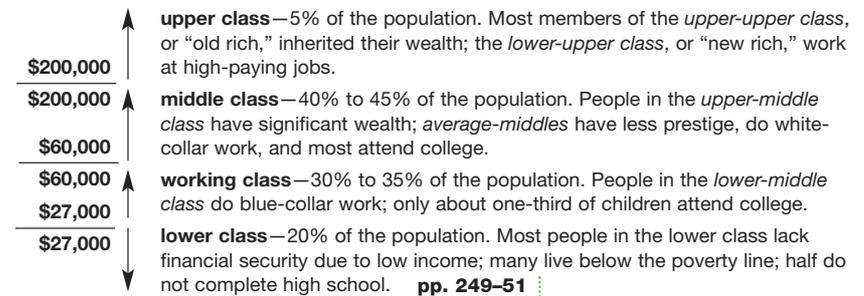
Although the United States is a meritocracy, social position in this country involves some caste elements:

- **Ancestry**—Being born into a particular family affects a person's opportunities for schooling, occupation, and income.
- **Race and Ethnicity**—Non-Hispanic white families enjoy high social standing based on income and wealth. By contrast, African American and Hispanic families remain disadvantaged.
- **Gender**—On average, women have less income, wealth, and occupational prestige than men. **pp. 248–49**

Social Classes in the United States

Defining **social classes** in the United States is difficult because of low status consistency and relatively high social mobility. But we can describe four general rankings:

- the upper class
- the middle class
- the working class
- the lower class



The Difference Class Makes

Health

- Rich people, on average, live longer and receive better health care than poor people. **p. 251**

Values and Attitudes

- Affluent people, with greater education and financial security, display greater tolerance than working-class people. **pp. 251–52**

Politics

- Affluent people tend to be more conservative on economic issues and more liberal on social issues than poor people.
- Affluent people, who are better served by the political system, are more likely to vote than poor people.

Family and Gender

- Affluent families pass on advantages in the form of “cultural capital” to their children.
- Class also shapes the division of family responsibilities, with lower-class people maintaining more traditional gender roles. **pp. 252–53**



Social Mobility

- Social mobility is common in the United States, as it is in other high-income countries, but typically only small changes occur from one generation to the next.
- Between 1980 and 2009, the richest 20% of U.S. families enjoyed a 55% jump in annual income, while the 20% of families with the lowest income experienced a 3.8% decrease.
- Historically, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and women have had less opportunity for upward mobility in U.S. society than white men.
- The American dream—the expectation of upward social mobility—is deeply rooted in our culture. Although high-income families are earning more and more, many average families are struggling to hold on to what they have.
- Marriage encourages upward social mobility. Divorce lowers social standing.
- The global reorganization of work has created upward social mobility for educated people in the United States but has hurt average workers, whose factory jobs have moved overseas and who are forced to take low-wage service work.

pp. 254–57

intragenerational social mobility

(p. 254) a change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime

intergenerational social mobility

(p. 254) upward or downward social mobility of children in relation to their parents

Poverty in the United States

Poverty Profile

- The government classifies 43.6 million people, 14.3% of the population, as poor.
- About 49% of the poor are under age twenty-four.
- Seventy-one percent of the poor are white, but in relation to their population, African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to be poor.
- The **feminization of poverty** means that more poor families are headed by women.
- About 46% of the heads of poor families are among the “working poor” who work at least part time but do not earn enough to lift a family of four above the poverty line.
- An estimated 643,000 people are homeless at some time during the course of a year. **pp. 257–60**

 **Explore the Map** on [mysoclab.com](#)

 **Watch the Video** on [mysoclab.com](#)

Explanations of Poverty

- Blame individuals:** The *culture of poverty* thesis states that poverty is caused by shortcomings in the poor themselves (Oscar Lewis).
- Blame society:** Poverty is caused by society's unequal distribution of wealth and lack of good jobs (William Julius Wilson).

pp. 260–61

relative poverty (p. 257) the lack of resources of some people in relation to those who have more

absolute poverty (p. 257) a lack of resources that is life-threatening

feminization of poverty (p. 259) the trend of women making up an increasing proportion of the poor



12 Global Stratification

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand that social stratification involves not just people within our society but inequality among the nations of the world.



Apply two different theoretical approaches to gain insights about the causes of global stratification.



Analyze the social standing of women in global perspective.



Evaluate the common claim that slavery has been abolished in the modern world.



Create an appreciation for the extent of social inequality in our world, which is far greater than what is commonly observed in the United States.



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Social stratification involves not just people within a single country; it is also a worldwide pattern with some nations far more economically productive than others. This chapter shifts the focus from inequality within the United States to inequality in the world as a whole. The chapter begins by describing global inequality and then provides two theoretical models that explain global stratification. ■



More than 1,000 workers were busily sewing together polo shirts on the fourth floor of the garment factory in Narsingdi, a small town about 30 miles northeast of Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka. The thumping of hundreds of sewing machines produced a steady roar throughout the long working day.

But in an instant everything changed when an electric gun used to shoot spot remover onto stained fabric gave off a spark. Suddenly, the worktable burst into flames. People rushed to smother the fire with shirts, but there was no stopping the blaze: In a room filled with combustible materials, the flames spread quickly.

The workers scrambled toward the narrow staircase that led to the street. At the bottom, however, the human wave pouring down the steep steps collided with a folding metal gate across the doorway that was kept locked to prevent workers from leaving during working hours. Panicked, the people turned, only to be pushed back by the hundreds behind them. In a single terrifying minute of screaming voices, thrusting legs, and pounding hearts, dozens were crushed and trampled. By the time the gates were opened and the fire put out, fifty-two garment workers lay dead.

Garment factories like this one are big business in Bangladesh, where clothing accounts for 77 percent of the country's total economic exports. One-third of these garments end up in stores in the United States. The reason so much of the clothing we buy is made in poor countries like Bangladesh is simple economics: Bangladeshi garment workers, 77 percent of whom are women, labor for close to twelve hours a day, typically seven days a week, and yet earn only about \$500 a year, which is just a few percent of what a garment worker makes in the United States.

Tanveer Chowdhury manages the garment factory owned by his family. Speaking to reporters, he complained bitterly about the tragedy. "This fire has cost me \$586,373, and that does not include \$70,000 for machinery and \$20,000 for furniture. I made commitments to meet deadlines, and I still have the deadlines. I am now paying for air freight at \$10 a dozen when I should be shipping by sea at 87 cents a dozen."

There was one other cost Chowdhury did not mention. To compensate families for the loss of their loved ones in the fire, he eventually agreed to pay \$1,952 per person. In Bangladesh, life—like labor—is cheap (based on Bearak, 2001; Bajaj, 2010; World Bank, 2010).

Garment workers in Bangladesh are among the roughly 1.4 billion of the world's people who work hard every day and yet remain poor (Chen & Ravallion, 2008). As this chapter explains, although poverty is a reality in the United States and other nations, the greatest social inequality is not *within* nations but *between* them (Goesling, 2001). We can understand the full dimensions of poverty only by exploring **global stratification**, *patterns of social inequality in the world as a whole*.

Global Stratification: An Overview

Understand

Chapter 11 ("Social Class in the United States") described social inequality in the United States. In global perspective, however, social stratification is far greater. The pie chart at the left in Figure 12–1 divides the world's total income by fifths of the population. Recall

from Chapter 11 that the richest 20 percent of the U.S. population earn about 48 percent of the national income (see Figure 11–1 on page 247). The richest 20 percent of global population, however, receive about 77 percent of world income. At the other extreme, the poorest 20 percent of the U.S. population earn slightly less than 4 percent of our national income; the poorest fifth of the world’s people struggles to survive on just 2 percent of global income.

In terms of wealth, as the pie chart at the right in Figure 12–1 shows, global inequality is even greater. Although global wealth has been slightly reduced by the recent recession, a rough estimate is that the richest 20 percent of the world’s adults still own about 84 percent of all wealth. About half of all wealth is owned by less than 5 percent of the world’s adult population; about 30 percent of all wealth is owned by the richest 1 percent. On the other hand, the poorest half of the world’s adults own barely 3 percent of all global wealth. In terms of dollars, about half the world’s families have less than \$8,600 in total wealth, far less than the \$120,000 in wealth for the typical family in the United States (Porter, 2006; Bucks et al., 2009; Davies et al., 2009).

Because the United States is among the world’s richest countries, even people in the United States with income well below the government’s poverty line live far better than the majority of people on the planet (Milanovic, 2010). The average person living in a rich nation such as the United States is extremely well off by world standards. Any one of the world’s richest people (in 2010, the world’s three richest *people*—Carlos Slim Helú in Mexico, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett in the United States—were *each* worth more than \$47 billion) has personal wealth that exceeds the total economic output of more than 100 of the world’s *countries* (Kroll & Miller, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

A Word about Terminology

Classifying the 195 independent nations on Earth into categories ignores many striking differences. These nations have rich and varied histories, speak different languages, and take pride in distinctive cul-

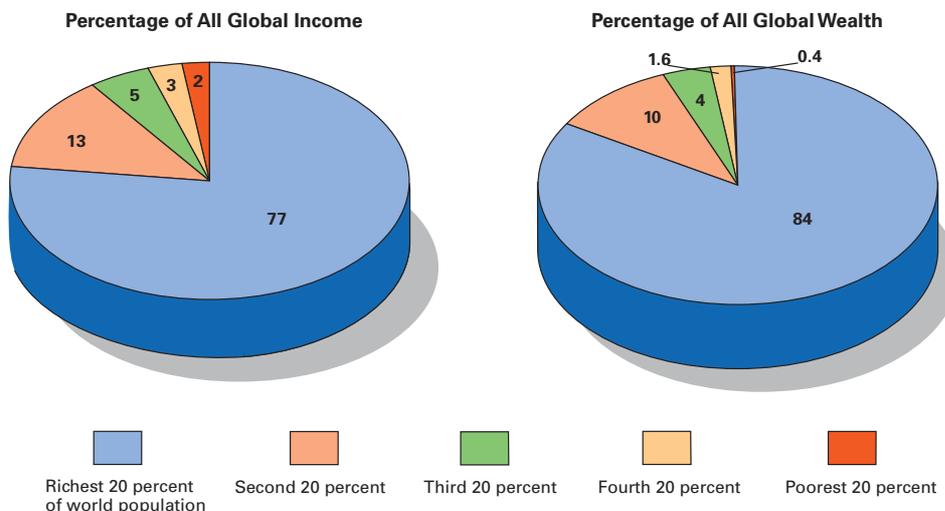


FIGURE 12–1 Distribution of Global Income and Wealth

Global income is very unequal, with the richest 20 percent of the world’s people earning almost forty times as much as the poorest 20 percent. Global wealth is also very unequally divided, with the richest 20 percent owning 84 percent of private wealth and the poorest half of the world’s people having barely anything at all.

Sources: Based on Davies et al. (2009) and Milanovic (2009, 2010).

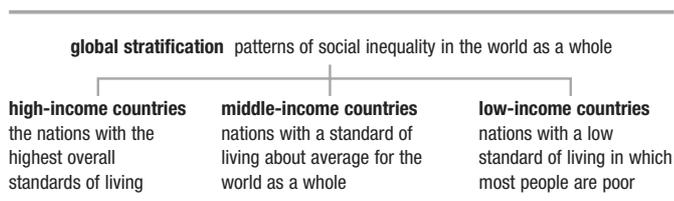
tures. However, various models have been developed that help distinguish countries on the basis of global stratification.

One global model, developed after World War II, labeled the rich, industrial countries the “First World”; the less industrialized, socialist countries the “Second World”; and the nonindustrialized, poor countries the “Third World.” But the “three worlds” model is less useful today. For one thing, it was a product of Cold War politics by which the capitalist West (the First World) faced off against the socialist East (the Second World) while other nations (the Third World) remained more or less on the sidelines. But the sweeping changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s mean that a distinctive Second World no longer exists.

Another problem is that the “three worlds” model lumped together more than 100 countries as the Third World. In reality, some relatively better-off nations of the Third World (such as Chile in South America) have fifteen times the per-person productivity of the poorest countries of the world (such as Ethiopia in East Africa).

These facts call for a modestly revised system of classification. The seventy-two **high-income countries** are defined as *the nations with the highest overall standards of living*. These nations have a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) greater than \$12,000. The world’s seventy **middle-income countries** are not as rich; they are *nations with a standard of living about average for the world as a whole*. Their per capita GDP is less than \$12,000 but greater than \$2,500. The remaining fifty-three **low-income countries** are *nations with a low standard of living in which most people are poor*. In these nations, per capita GDP is less than \$2,500 (United Nations Development Programme, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

Watch the video “Globalization” on mysoclab.com





The United States is among the world's high-income countries, in which industrial technology and economic expansion have produced material prosperity. The presence of market forces is evident in this view of New York City (*above, left*). India has recently become one of the world's middle-income countries (*above, right*). An increasing number of motor vehicles fill city streets. Afghanistan (*left*) is among the world's low-income countries. As the photograph suggests, these nations have limited economic development and rapidly increasing populations. The result is widespread poverty.

This model has two advantages over the older “three worlds” system. First, it focuses on economic development rather than political structure (capitalist or socialist). Second, it gives a better picture of the relative economic development of various countries because it does not lump together all less developed nations into a single “Third World.”

When envisioning global stratification, keep in mind that there is social stratification within every nation. In Bangladesh, for example, members of the Chowdhury family, who own the garment factory described in the chapter-opening story, earn as much as \$1 million per year, which is several thousand times more than their workers earn. The full extent of global inequality is even greater, because the wealthiest people in rich countries such as the United States live worlds apart from the poorest people in low-income nations such as Bangladesh, Haiti, and Sudan.

High-Income Countries

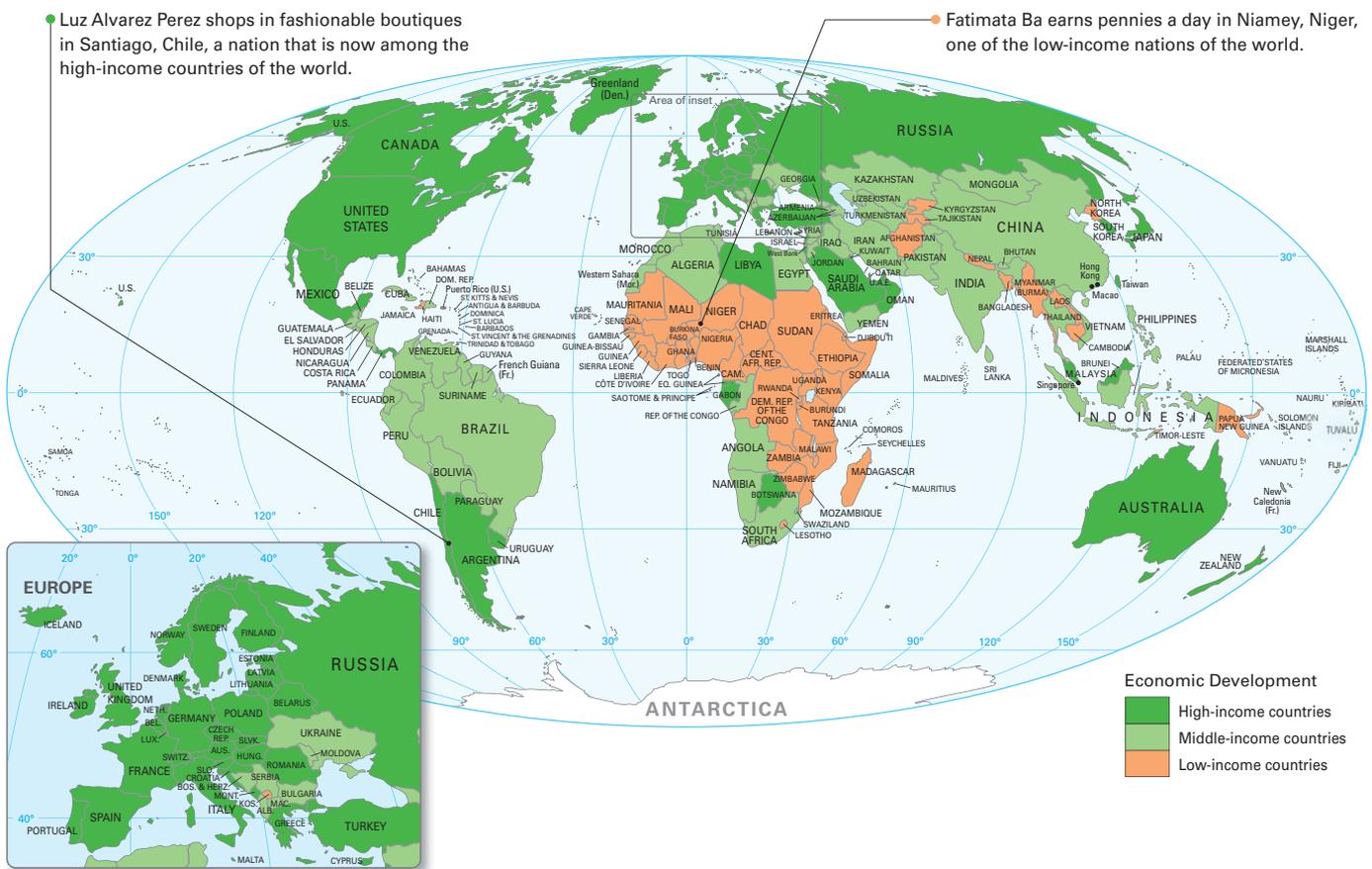
In nations where the Industrial Revolution first took place more than two centuries ago, productivity increased more than 100-fold. To understand the power of industrial and computer technology, consider that the Netherlands—a small European nation slightly bigger than the state of Vermont—is as economically productive as the whole continent of Africa south of the Sahara.

Global Map 12–1 shows that the high-income nations of the world include the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, the nations of Western Europe, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Hong Kong (part of the People's Republic of China), Japan, South Korea, the Russian Federation, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand.

These countries cover roughly 47 percent of Earth's land area, including parts of five continents, and they lie mostly in the Northern Hemisphere. In 2010, the total population of these nations was about 1.6 billion, or about 23 percent of the world's people. About three-fourths of the people in high-income countries live in or near cities (Population Reference Bureau, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

Significant cultural differences exist among high-income countries; for example, the nations of Europe recognize more than thirty official languages. But these societies all produce enough economic goods and services to enable their people to lead comfortable lives. Per capita income (that is, average income per person per year) ranges from about \$12,000 annually (in Romania, Turkey, and Botswana) to more than \$45,000 annually (in the United States, Singapore, and Norway). In fact, people in high-income countries enjoy 78 percent of the world's total income.

Keep in mind that high-income countries have many low-income people. The residents of the poorest communities in the United States are still better off than about half the world's people, but they represent a striking contrast to what most living in high-income nations take for



Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 12-1 Economic Development in Global Perspective

In high-income countries—including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, the nations of Western Europe, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Australia, the Russian Federation, Japan, and New Zealand—a highly productive economy provides people, on average, with material plenty. Middle-income countries—including most of Latin America and Asia—are less economically productive, with a standard of living about average for the world as a whole but far below that of the United States. These nations also have a significant share of poor people who are barely able to feed and house themselves. In the low-income countries of the world, poverty is severe and widespread. Although small numbers of elites live very well in the poorest nations, most people struggle to survive on a small fraction of the income common in the United States.

Note: Data for this map are provided by the United Nations. Each country's economic productivity is measured in terms of its gross domestic product (GDP), which is the total value of all the goods and services produced by a country's economy within its borders in a given year. Dividing each country's GDP by the country's population gives us the per capita (per-person) GDP and allows us to compare the economic performance of countries of different population sizes. High-income countries have a per capita GDP of more than \$12,000. Many are far richer than this, however; the figure for the United States exceeds \$45,000. Middle-income countries have a per capita GDP ranging from \$2,500 to \$12,000. Low-income countries have a per capita GDP of less than \$2,500. Figures used here reflect the United Nations' "purchasing power parities" system, which is an estimate of what people can buy using their income in the local economy.

Source: Data from United Nations Development Programme (2010).

granted. The Sociology in Focus box on page 274 profiles the striking poverty that exists in *las colonias* along our country's southern border.

Production in rich nations is capital-intensive; it is based on factories, big machinery, and advanced technology. Most of the largest corporations that design and market computers, as well as most computer users, are located in high-income countries. High-income countries control the world's financial markets, so daily events in the financial exchanges of New York, London, and Tokyo affect people

throughout the world. In short, rich nations are very productive because of their advanced technology and because they control the global economy.

Middle-Income Countries

Middle-income countries have a per capita income of between \$2,500 and \$12,000, close to the median (about \$8,000) for the world's



Las Colonias: “America’s Third World”

“We wanted to have something for ourselves,” explains Olga Ruiz, who has lived in the border community of College Park, Texas, for eleven years. There is no college in College Park, nor does this dusty stretch of rural land have sewer lines or even running water. Yet this town is one of some 2,300 settlements that have sprouted up in southern Texas along the 1,200-mile border with Mexico that runs from El Paso to Brownsville. Together, they are home to roughly 500,000 people.

Many people speak of *las colonias* (Spanish for “the colonies”) as “America’s Third World” because these desperately poor communities look much like their counterparts in Mexico or many other middle- or low-income nations. But this is the United States, and almost all of the people living in the *colonias* are Mexican Americans, 85 percent of them legal residents and more than half U.S. citizens.

Anastacia Ledsema, now seventy-two years old, moved to a *colonia* called Sparks more than forty years ago. Born in Mexico, Ledsema married a Texas man, and together they paid \$200 for a quarter-acre lot in a new border community. For months, they camped out on their land. Step by

step, they invested their labor and their money to build a modest house. Not until 1995 did their small community get running water—a service that had been promised by developers years before. When the water line finally did arrive, however, things changed more than they expected. “When we got water,” recalls Ledsema, “that’s when so many people came in.” The population of Sparks quickly doubled to about 3,000, overwhelming the water supply so that sometimes the faucet does not run at all.



The residents of all the *colonias* know that they are poor, and with annual per capita income of about \$6000, they are. The Census Bureau has declared the county surrounding one border community to be the poorest in the United States. Concerned over the lack of basic services in so many of these communities, Texas officials have banned new settlements. But most of the people who move here—even those who start off sleeping in their cars or trucks—see these communities as the first step on the path to the American dream. Oscar Solis, a neighborhood leader in Panorama Village, a community with a population of about 150, is proud to show visitors around the small but growing town. “All of this work we have done ourselves,” he says with a smile, “to make our dream come true.”

Join the Blog!

Are you surprised that such intense poverty exists in a rich country like the United States? Why or why not? Go to the Sociology in Focus blog at MySocLab to see what others think and to share your opinions.

Source: Based on Schaffer (2002) and *The Economist* (2011).

nations. About 52 percent of the people in middle-income countries live in or near cities, and industrial jobs are common. The remaining 48 percent of people live in rural areas, where most are poor and lack access to schools, medical care, adequate housing, and even safe drinking water.

Looking at Global Map 12–1, we see that seventy of the world’s nations fall into the middle-income category. At the high end are Venezuela (Latin America), Bulgaria (Europe), and Kazakhstan (Asia), where annual income is about \$11,000. At the low end are Nicaragua (Latin America), Cape Verde (Africa), and Vietnam (Asia), with roughly \$3,000 annually in per capita income.

One cluster of middle-income countries used to be part of the Second World. These countries, found in Eastern Europe and Western Asia, had mostly socialist economies until popular revolts between 1989 and 1991 swept their governments aside. Since then, these nations have introduced more free-market systems. These middle-income countries include Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Turkmenistan.

Other middle-income nations include Peru and Brazil in South America and Namibia and South Africa in Africa. Both India and the People’s Republic of China have entered the middle-income category, which now includes most of Asia.

Taken together, middle-income countries span roughly 36 percent of Earth’s land area and are home to about 4.2 billion people, or about 61 percent of humanity. Some very large countries (such as China) are far less crowded than other smaller nations (such as El Salvador), but compared to high-income countries, these societies are densely populated.

Low-Income Countries

Low-income countries, where most people are very poor, are mostly agrarian societies with some industry. Fifty-three low-income countries, identified in Global Map 12–1, are spread across Central and East Africa and Asia. Low-income countries cover 17 percent of the planet’s land area and are home to about 1 billion people, or 17 percent of humanity. Population density is generally high, although it is greater in Asian countries (such as Bangladesh) than in Central African nations (such as Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

In poor countries, one-third of the people live in cities; most inhabit villages and farms as their ancestors have done for centuries. In fact, half the world’s people are farmers, most of whom follow cultural traditions. With limited industrial technology, they cannot be very productive, one reason that many suffer severe poverty. Hunger, disease, and unsafe housing shape the lives of the world’s poorest people.



In general, when natural disasters strike high-income nations, property damage is great, but loss of life is low. The triple disaster that struck Japan in 2011 (*left*)—a massive earthquake followed by a major tsunami and then the spread of radiation from a damaged nuclear power plant—was certainly an economic calamity but it also left more than 20,000 people dead or missing. Even so, the less powerful earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010 (*right*) killed three times that number of people.

Those of us who live in rich nations such as the United States find it hard to understand the scope of human need in much of the world. From time to time, televised pictures of famine in very poor countries such as Ethiopia and Bangladesh give us shocking glimpses of the poverty that makes every day a life-and-death struggle for many people in low-income nations. Behind these images lie cultural, historical, and economic forces that we shall explore in the remainder of this chapter.

more rutted streets; now we glide quietly along wide boulevards lined with trees and filled with expensive Japanese cars. We pass shopping plazas, upscale hotels, and high-rise office buildings. Every block or so we see the gated entrance to yet another exclusive residential community with security guards standing watch. Here, in large, air-conditioned homes, the rich of Manila live—and many of the poor work.

Low-income nations are home to some rich and many poor people. The fact that most people live with incomes of just a few hun-

Global Wealth and Poverty

Analyze

October 14, Manila, Philippines. What caught my eye was how clean she was—a girl no more than seven or eight years old. She was wearing a freshly laundered dress, and her hair was carefully combed. She stopped to watch us, following us with her eyes: Camera-toting Americans stand out here, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the world.

Fed by methane from decomposing garbage, the fires never go out on Smokey Mountain, the vast garbage dump on the north side of Manila. Smoke covers the hills of refuse like a thick fog. But Smokey Mountain is more than a dump; it is a neighborhood that is home to thousands of people. It is hard to imagine a setting more hostile to human life. Amid the smoke and the squalor, men and women do what they can to survive. They pick plastic bags from the garbage and wash them in the river, and they collect cardboard boxes or anything else they can sell. What chance do their children have, coming from families that earn only a few hundred dollars a year, with hardly any opportunity for schooling, year after year breathing this foul air? Against this backdrop of human tragedy, one lovely little girl has put on a fresh dress and gone out to play.

Now our taxi driver threads his way through heavy traffic as we head for the other side of Manila. The change is amazing: The smoke and smell of the dump give way to neighborhoods that could be in Miami or Los Angeles. A cluster of yachts floats on the bay in the distance. No

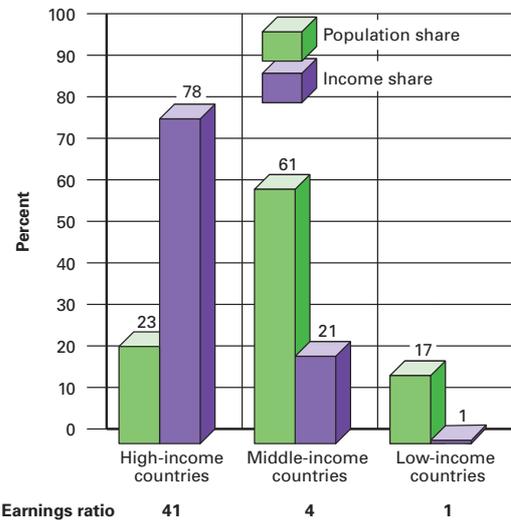


FIGURE 12-2 The Relative Share of Income and Population by Level of Economic Development

For every dollar earned by people in low-income countries, people in high-income countries earn \$41.

Source: Based on Population Reference Bureau (2010) and United Nations Development Programme (2010).

TABLE 12-1 Wealth and Well-Being in Global Perspective, 2009

Country	Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions)	GDP per Capita (PPP US\$)*	Quality of Life Index
High-Income			
Norway	382	58,278	.938
Australia	925	40,286	.937
United States	14,119	46,653	.902
Canada	1,336	39,035	.888
Sweden	406	36,139	.885
Japan	5,069	33,649	.884
South Korea	833	29,326	.877
United Kingdom	2,175	34,342	.849
Middle-Income			
<i>Eastern Europe</i>			
Bulgaria	49	11,547	.743
Albania	12	7,737	.719
Ukraine	114	6,591	.710
<i>Latin America</i>			
Costa Rica	29	11,143	.725
Brazil	1,573	10,847	.699
Ecuador	57	8,170	.695
<i>Asia</i>			
People's Republic of China	4,986	7,206	.663
Thailand	264	8,328	.654
India	1,310	3,354	.519
<i>Middle East</i>			
Iran	331	11,891	.702
Syria	52	4,857	.589
<i>Africa</i>			
Algeria	141	8,477	.677
Namibia	9	6,474	.606
Low-Income			
<i>Latin America</i>			
Haiti	6	1,040	.404
<i>Asia</i>			
Laos	6	2,404	.497
Cambodia	10	1,952	.494
Bangladesh	89	1,458	.469
<i>Africa</i>			
Kenya	29	1,622	.470
Guinea	4	1,037	.340
Ethiopia	29	991	.328
Mali	9	1,207	.309
Niger	3	781	.374

*These data are the United Nations' Purchasing power parity (PPP) calculations, which avoid currency rate distortion by showing the local purchasing power of each domestic currency.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2010).

dred dollars a year means that the burden of poverty is far greater than among the poor of the United States. This is not to suggest that U.S. poverty is a minor problem. In so rich a country, too little food, substandard housing, and no medical care for tens of millions of people—almost half of them children—amount to a national tragedy.

 **Read** "The Global Economy and the Privileged Class" by Robert Perrucci and Earl Wysong on mysoclab.com

The Severity of Poverty

Poverty in poor countries is more severe than it is in rich countries. A key reason that the quality of life differs so much around the world is that economic productivity is lowest in precisely the regions where population growth is highest. Figure 12-2 on page 275 shows the proportion of world population and global income for countries at each level of economic development. High-income countries are by far the most advantaged, with 78 percent of global income supporting just 23 percent of humanity. In middle-income nations, 61 percent of the world's people earn 21 percent of global income. This leaves 17 percent of the planet's population with just 1 percent of global income. In short, for every dollar received by individuals in a low-income country, someone in a high-income country takes home \$41.

Table 12-1 shows the extent of wealth and well-being in specific countries around the world. The first column of figures gives gross domestic product (GDP) for a number of high-, middle-, and low-income countries.¹ The United States, a large and highly productive nation, had a 2009 GDP of more than \$14 trillion; Japan's GDP was more than \$5 trillion. A comparison of GDP figures shows that the world's richest nations are thousands of times more productive than the poorest countries.

The second column of figures in Table 12-1 divides GDP by the entire population size to give an estimate of what people can buy with their income in the local economy. The per capita GDP for rich countries like the United States, Sweden, and Canada is very high, exceeding \$35,000. For middle-income countries, the figures range from about \$3,000 in India to more than \$11,000 in Costa Rica. In the world's low-income countries, per capita GDP is just one or two thousand dollars. In Niger or in Ethiopia, for example, a typical person labors all year to make what the average worker in the United States earns in a week.

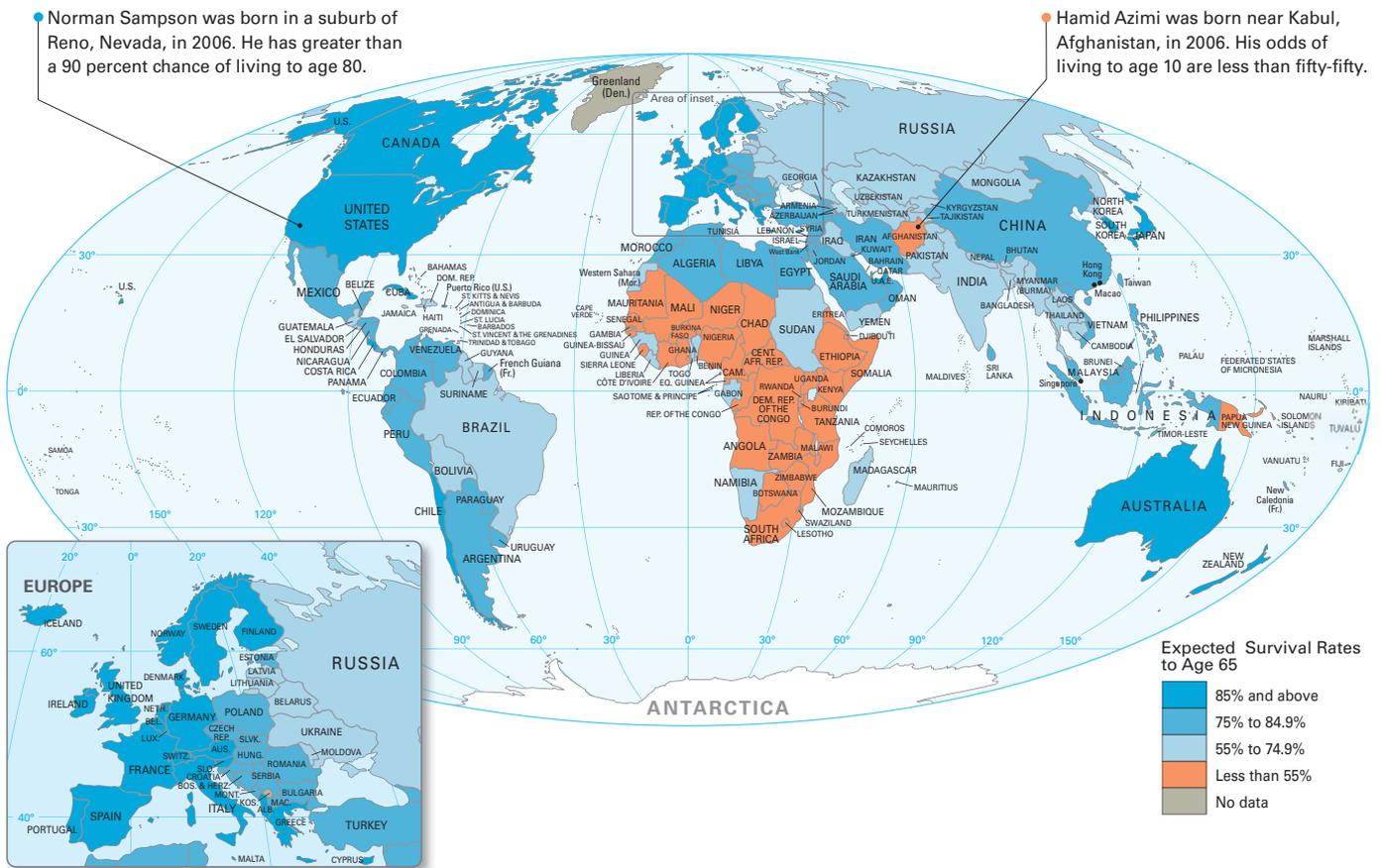
The last column of Table 12-1 is a measure of the quality of life in the various nations. This index, calculated by the United Nations (2010), is based on income, education (extent of adult literacy and average years of schooling), and longevity (how long people typically live). Index values are decimals that fall between extremes of 1 (highest) and 0 (lowest). By this calculation, Norwegians enjoy the highest quality of life (.938), with residents of the United States close behind (.902). At the other extreme, people in the African nation of Niger have the lowest quality of life (.374).

Relative versus Absolute Poverty

The distinction between relative and absolute poverty, made in Chapter 11 ("Social Class in the United States"), has an important application to global inequality. People living in rich countries generally focus on *relative poverty*, meaning that some people lack resources that are taken for granted by others. By definition, relative poverty exists in every society, rich or poor.

More important in global perspective, however, is *absolute poverty*, a lack of resources that is life-threatening. Human beings in absolute poverty lack the nutrition necessary for health and long-term survival. To be sure, some absolute poverty exists in the United States. But such immediately life-threatening poverty strikes only a very small propor-

¹Gross domestic product is the value of all the goods and services produced by a country's economy within its borders in a given year.



Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 12–2 The Odds of Surviving to the Age of Sixty-Five in Global Perspective

This map identifies expected survival rates to the age of sixty-five for nations around the world. In high-income countries, including the United States, more than 85 percent of people live to this age. But in low-income nations, death often comes early, with just one-third of people reaching the age of sixty-five.

Source: United Nations (2009).

tion of the U.S. population; in low-income countries, by contrast, one-third or more of the people are in desperate need.

Because absolute poverty is deadly, people in low-income nations face an elevated risk of dying young. Global Map 12–2 lets us explore this pattern by presenting the odds of living to the age of sixty-five that are typical for the nations of the world. In rich societies, more than 85 percent of people reach this age. In the world poorest countries, however, the odds of living to age sixty-five are less than one in three and two in ten children do not survive to the age of five (World Health Organization, 2008; United Nations, 2010).

The Extent of Poverty

Poverty in poor countries is more widespread than it is in rich nations such as the United States. Chapter 11 (“Social Class in the United States”) noted that the U.S. government officially classifies 14.3 per-

cent of the population as poor. In low-income countries, however, most people live no better than the poor in the United States, and many are far worse off. As Global Map 12–2 shows, the low odds of living to the age of sixty-five in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa indicate that absolute poverty is greatest there, where more than one-fourth of the population is malnourished. In the world as a whole, at any given time, 13 percent of the people—about 1 billion—suffer from chronic hunger, which leaves them less able to work and puts them at high risk of disease (Chen & Ravallion, 2008; United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011).

The typical adult in a rich nation such as the United States consumes about 3,500 calories a day, an excess that contributes to widespread obesity and related health problems. The typical adult in a low-income country not only consumes just 2,100 calories a day but also does more physical labor. Together, these factors result in under-

nourishment: too little food or not enough of the right kinds of food (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2010).

In the ten minutes it takes to read this section of the chapter, about 100 people in the world who are sick and weakened from hunger will die. This number amounts to about 25,000 people a day, or 9 million people each year. Clearly, easing world hunger is one of the most serious responsibilities facing humanity today (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

Poverty and Children

Death comes early in poor societies, where families lack adequate food, safe water, secure housing, and access to medical care. In the world's low- and middle-income nations, one-quarter of all children do not receive enough nutrition to be healthy (World Bank, 2008).

Poor children live in poor families, and many share in the struggle to get through each day. Organizations fighting child poverty estimate that as many as 100 million children living in cities in poor countries beg, steal, sell sex, or work for drug gangs to provide income for their families. Such a life almost always means dropping out of school and puts children at high risk of disease and violence. Many girls, with little or no access to medical assistance, become pregnant, a case of children who cannot support themselves having children of their own.

Analysts estimate that tens of millions of the world's children are orphaned or have left their families altogether, sleeping and living on the streets as best they can or perhaps trying to migrate to the United States. Roughly half of all street children are found in Latin American cities such as Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro, where half of all children grow up in poverty. Many people in the United States know these cities as exotic travel destinations, but they are also home to thousands of street children living in makeshift huts, under bridges, or in alleyways (Leopold, 2007; Levinson & Bassett, 2007; Consortium for Street Children, 2011).



Poverty and Women

In rich societies, much of the work women do is undervalued, underpaid, or overlooked entirely. In poor societies, women face even greater disadvantages. Most of the people who work in sweatshops like the one described in the opening to this chapter are women.

To make matters worse, tradition keeps women out of many jobs in low-income nations; in Bangladesh, for example, women work in garment factories because that society's conservative Muslim religious norms bar them from most other paid work and limit their opportunity for advanced schooling (Bearak, 2001). At the same time, traditional norms in poor societies give women primary responsibility for child rearing and maintaining the household. Analysts estimate that in poor countries, although women produce about 70 percent of the food, men own 90 percent of the land. This is a far greater gender disparity in wealth than is found in high-income nations. It is likely, then, that about 70 percent of the world's 1 billion people living at or near absolute poverty are women (Moghadam, 2005; Center for Women's Land Rights, 2011; Hockenberry, 2011).

Finally, most women in poor countries receive little or no reproductive health care. Limited access to birth control keeps women at home with their children, keeps the birth rate high, and limits the economic production of the country. In addition, the world's poorest women typically give birth without help from trained health care personnel. Figure 12-3 on page 280 illustrates a stark difference between low- and high-income countries in this regard.

Slavery

Poor societies have many problems in addition to hunger, including illiteracy, warfare, and even slavery. The British Empire banned slavery in 1833, followed by the United States in 1865. But slavery is a reality for at least 12 million men, women, and children, and as many as 200 million people (about 3 percent of humanity) live in conditions that come close to slavery (Anti-Slavery International, 2008; U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

Anti-Slavery International describes five types of slavery. The first is *chattel slavery*, in which one person owns another. In spite of the fact that this practice is against the law almost everywhere in the world, several million people fall into this category. The buying and selling of slaves—generally people of one ethnic or caste group enslaving members of another—still takes place in many countries throughout Asia, the Middle East, and especially Africa. The Thinking Globally box describes the reality of one slave's life in the African nation of Mauritania.

A second type of bondage is *slavery imposed by the state*. In this case, a government imposes forced labor on people for criminal violations or simply because the

Tens of millions of children fend for themselves every day on the streets of poor cities where many fall victim to disease, drug abuse, and violence. What do you think should be done to ensure that children like these in Bangalore, India, receive adequate nutrition and a quality education?



“God Made Me to Be a Slave”

Fatma Mint Mamadou is a young woman living in North Africa’s Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Asked her age, she pauses, smiles, and shakes her head. She has no idea when she was born. Nor can she read or write. What she knows is tending camels, herding sheep, hauling bags of water, sweeping, and serving tea to her owners. This young woman is one of perhaps 90,000 slaves in Mauritania.

In the central region of this nation, having dark brown skin almost always means being a slave to an Arab owner. Fatma accepts her situation; she has known nothing else. She explains in a matter-of-fact voice that she is a slave like her mother before her and her grandmother before that. “Just as God created a camel to be a camel,” she shrugs, “he created me to be a slave.”

Fatma, her mother, and her brothers and sisters live in a squatter settlement on the edge of Nouakchott, Mauritania’s capital city. Their home is a 9-by-12-foot hut that they built from wood scraps and other materials found at construction sites. The roof is nothing more than a piece of cloth; there is no plumbing or furniture.

The nearest water comes from a well a mile down the road.

In this region, slavery began more than 500 years ago, about the time Columbus sailed west toward the Americas. As Arab and Berber tribes raided local villages, they made slaves of the people, and so it has been for dozens of generations ever since. In 1905, the French colonial rulers of Mauritania banned slavery. After the nation gained independence in

1961, the new government reaffirmed the ban. However, slavery was not officially abolished until 1981, and even then, it was not made a crime. In 2007, the nation passed legislation making the practice of slavery an offense punishable by up to ten years in prison, and the government now provides monetary compensation to victims of slavery. But the new laws have done little to change strong traditions. The sad truth is that people like Fatma still have no conception of “freedom to choose.”

The next question is more personal: “Are you and other girls ever raped?” Again, Fatma hesitates. With no hint of emotion, she responds, “Of course, in the night the men come to breed us. Is that what you mean by rape?”

What Do You Think?

1. How does tradition play a part in keeping people in slavery?
2. What might explain the fact that the world still tolerates slavery?
3. Explain the connection between slavery and poverty.



Human slavery continues to exist in the twenty-first century.

Source: Based on Burkett (1997).

government needs their labor. In China, for example, people who are addicted to drugs or who engage in prostitution or other crimes are subject to forced labor. In North Korea, the government can force people to work for almost any reason at all.

A third and common form of bondage is *child slavery*, in which desperately poor families send their children out into the streets to beg or steal or do whatever they can to survive. Probably tens of millions of children—many in the poorest countries of Latin America and Africa—fall into this category. In addition, an estimated 10 million children are forced to labor daily in the production of tobacco, sugarcane, cotton, and coffee in more than seventy nations.

Fourth, *debt bondage* is the practice by which an employer pays wages to workers that are less than what the employer charges the workers for company-provided food and housing. Under such an arrangement, workers can never pay their debts so, for practical purposes, workers are enslaved. Many sweatshop workers in low-income nations fall into this category.

Fifth, *servile forms of marriage* may also amount to slavery. In India, Thailand, and some African nations, families marry off women against their will. Many end up as slaves working for their husband’s family; some are forced into prostitution.

An additional form of slavery is *human trafficking*, the moving of men, women, and children from one place to another for the purpose of performing forced labor. Women or men are brought to a new country with the promise of a job and then forced to become

prostitutes or farm laborers, or “parents” adopt children from another country and then force them to work in sweatshops. Such activity is big business: Next to trading in guns and drugs, trading in people brings the greatest profit to organized crime around the world (Orhant, 2002; International Labor Organization, 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, 2010; Anti-Slavery International, 2011).

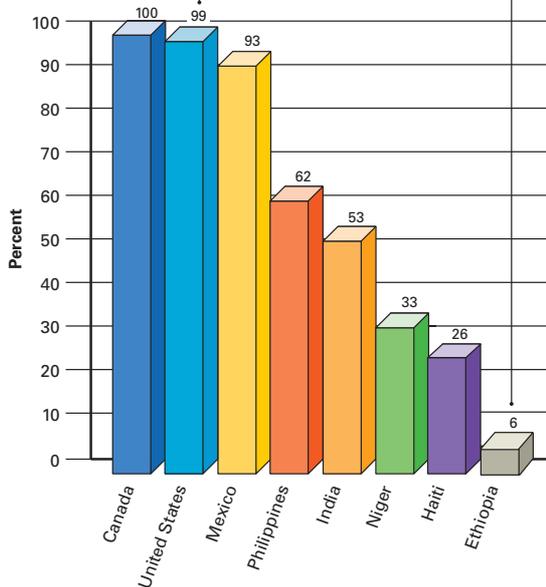
In 1948, the United Nations issued its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Unfortunately, more than six decades later, this social evil still exists.

Explanations of Global Poverty

What accounts for severe and extensive poverty in so much of the world? The rest of this chapter provides answers using the following facts about poor societies:

1. **Technology.** About one-quarter of people in low-income countries farm the land using human muscle or animal power. With limited energy sources, economic production is modest.
2. **Population growth.** As Chapter 22 (“Population, Urbanization, and Environment”) explains, the poorest countries have the world’s highest birth rates. Despite the death toll from poverty, the populations of poor countries in Africa double every twenty-five years. In sub-Saharan Africa, 43 percent of the people are

- Compared to a woman in the United States, an Ethiopian woman is far less likely to give birth with the help of medical professionals and is much more likely to die in childbirth.



Global Snapshot

FIGURE 12-3 Percentage of Births Attended by Skilled Health Staff

In the United States, most women give birth with the help of medical professionals, but this is usually not the case in low-income nations.

Source: World Bank (2010).

under the age of fifteen. With so many people entering their childbearing years, the wave of population growth will roll into the future. For example, the population of Uganda has swelled by more than 5 percent annually in recent years, so even with economic development, living standards there have fallen.

3. **Cultural patterns.** Poor societies are usually traditional. Holding on to long-established ways of life means resisting change—even change that promises a richer material life. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box explains why traditional people in India respond to their poverty differently than poor people in the United States.
4. **Social stratification.** Low-income societies distribute their wealth very unequally. Chapter 10 (“Social Stratification”) explained that social inequality is greater in agrarian societies

colonialism the process by which some nations enrich themselves through political and economic control of other nations

neocolonialism a new form of global power relationships that involves not direct political control but economic exploitation by multinational corporations

than in industrial societies. In Brazil, for example, 75 percent of all farmland is owned by just 4 percent of the people (Galano, 1998; IBGE, 2006; Frayssinet, 2009).

5. **Gender inequality.** Gender inequality in poor societies keeps women from holding jobs, which typically means they have many children. An expanding population, in turn, slows economic development. Many analysts conclude that raising living standards in much of the world depends on improving the social standing of women.
6. **Global power relationships.** A final cause of global poverty lies in the relationships between the nations of the world. Historically, wealth flowed from poor societies to rich nations through **colonialism**, the process by which some nations enrich themselves through political and economic control of other nations. The countries of Western Europe colonized much of Latin America beginning just over five centuries ago. Such global exploitation allowed some nations to develop economically at the expense of other nations.

Although 130 former colonies gained their independence over the course of the twentieth century, exploitation continues today through **neocolonialism** (*neo* is Greek for “new”), a new form of global power relationships that involves not direct political control but economic exploitation by multinational corporations. A **multinational corporation** is a large business that operates in many countries. Corporate leaders often impose their will on countries in which they do business to create favorable economic conditions for the operation of their corporations, just as colonizers did in the past (Bonanno, Constance, & Lorenz, 2000).

Global Stratification: Applying Theory

Apply

There are two major explanations for the unequal distribution of the world’s wealth and power: *modernization theory* and *dependency theory*. Each theory suggests a different solution to the suffering of hungry people in much of the world.

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of technological and cultural differences between nations. Modernization theory, which follows the structural-functional approach, emerged in the 1950s, a time when U.S. society was fascinated by new developments in technology. To showcase the power of productive technology and also to counter the growing influence of the Soviet Union, U.S. policymakers drafted a market-based foreign policy that has been with us ever since (Rostow, 1960, 1978; Bauer, 1981; Berger, 1986; Firebaugh, 1996; Firebaugh & Sandhu, 1998).

Historical Perspective

Until a few centuries ago, the entire world was poor. Because poverty is the norm throughout human history, modernization theory claims that it is *affluence* that demands an explanation.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



“Happy Poverty” in India: Making Sense of a Strange Idea

Although India has become a middle-income nation, its per capita GDP is just \$3,354, about 7 percent as large as that in the United States. With such low economic productivity and 1.2 billion people, India is home to 28 percent of the world’s hungry people.

But most North Americans do not readily understand the reality of poverty in India. Many of the country’s people live in conditions far worse than those our society labels “poor.” A traveler’s first experience of Indian life can be shocking. Chennai (formerly known as Madras), for example, one of India’s largest cities with 7 million inhabitants, seems chaotic to an outsider—streets choked with motorbikes, trucks, carts pulled by oxen, and waves of people. Along the roadway, vendors sit on burlap cloths selling fruits, vegetables, and cooked food while people nearby talk, bathe, and sleep.

Although some people live well, Chennai is dotted with more than 1,000 shanty settlements, home to half a million people from rural villages who have come in search of a better life. Shantytowns are clusters of huts built with branches, leaves, and pieces of discarded cardboard and tin. These dwellings offer little privacy and have no refrigeration, running water, or bathrooms. A visitor from the United States may feel uneasy in such an area, knowing

that the poorest sections of our own inner cities seethe with frustration and sometimes explode with violence.

But India’s people understand poverty differently than we do. No restless young men hang out at the corner, no drug dealers work the streets, and there is little danger of violence. In the United States, poverty often means anger and isolation; in India, even shantytowns are organized around strong families—children, parents, and often grandparents—who offer a smile of welcome to a stranger.

For traditional people in India, life is shaped by *dharma*, the Hindu concept of duty and destiny that

teaches people to accept their fate, whatever it may be. Mother Teresa, who worked among the poorest of India’s people, went to the heart of the cultural differences: “Americans have angry poverty,” she explained. “In India, there is worse poverty, but it is a happy poverty.”

Perhaps we should not describe anyone who clings to the edge of survival as happy. But poverty in India is eased by the strength and support of families and communities, a sense that life has a purpose, and a worldview that encourages each person to accept whatever life offers. As a result, a visitor may well come away from a first encounter with Indian poverty in confusion: “How can people be so poor and yet apparently content, active, and joyful?”



What Do You Think?

1. What did Mother Teresa mean when she said that in India there is “happy poverty”?
2. How might an experience like this in a very poor community change the way you think of being “rich”?
3. Do you know of any poor people in the United States who have attitudes toward poverty that are similar to these people in India? What would make people seem to accept their poverty?

Affluence came within reach of a growing share of people in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages as world exploration and trade expanded. Soon after, the Industrial Revolution transformed first Western Europe and then North America. Industrial technology and the spirit of capitalism created new wealth as never before. At first, this wealth benefited only a few individuals. But industrial technology was so productive that gradually the living standards of even the poorest people began to improve. Absolute poverty, which had plagued humanity throughout history, was finally in decline.

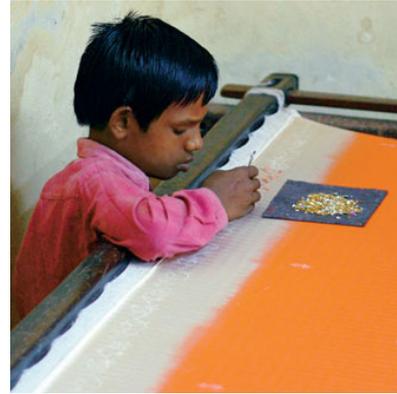
In high-income countries, where the Industrial Revolution began in the late 1700s or early 1800s, the standard of living jumped at least fourfold during the twentieth century. As middle-income nations in Asia and Latin America have industrialized, they too have become richer. But with limited industrial technology, low-income countries have changed much less.

The Importance of Culture

Why didn’t the Industrial Revolution sweep away poverty throughout the world? Modernization theory points out that not every soci-

ety wants to adopt new technology. Doing so requires a cultural environment that emphasizes the benefits of material wealth and new ideas.

Modernization theory identifies *tradition* as the greatest barrier to economic development. In some societies, strong family systems and a reverence for the past discourage people from adopting new technologies that would raise their living standards. Even today, many traditional people—from the Amish in North America to Islamic people in the Middle East to the Semai of Malaysia—oppose new technology as a threat to their families, customs, and religious beliefs. Max Weber (1958, orig. 1904–05) found that at the end of the Middle Ages, Western Europe’s cultural environment favored change. As discussed in Chapter 4 (“Society”), the Protestant Reformation reshaped traditional Christian beliefs to generate a progress-oriented way of life. Wealth—looked on with suspicion by the Catholic church—became a sign of personal virtue, and the growing importance of individualism steadily replaced the traditional emphasis on family and community. Taken together, these new cultural patterns nurtured the Industrial Revolution.



In rich nations such as the United States, most parents expect their children to enjoy years of childhood, largely free from the responsibilities of adult life. This is not the case in poor nations across Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Poor families depend on whatever income their children can earn, and many children as young as six or seven work full days weaving or performing other kinds of manual labor. Child labor lies behind the low prices of many products imported for sale in this country.

Rostow's Stages of Modernization

Modernization theory holds that the door to affluence is open to all. As technological advances spread around the world, all societies should gradually industrialize. According to Walt Rostow (1960, 1978), modernization occurs in four stages:

1. **Traditional stage.** Socialized to honor the past, people in traditional societies cannot easily imagine that life could or should be any different. They therefore build their lives around families and local communities, following well-worn paths that allow little individual freedom or change. Life is often spiritually rich but lacking in material goods.

A century ago, much of the world was in this initial stage of economic development. Nations such as Bangladesh, Niger, and Somalia are still at the traditional stage and remain poor. Even in countries, such as India, that have recently joined the ranks of middle-income nations, certain elements of the population have remained highly traditional.

2. **Take-off stage.** As a society shakes off the grip of tradition, people start to use their talents and imagination, sparking economic growth. A market emerges as people produce goods not just for their own use but also to trade with others for profit. Greater individualism, a willingness to take risks, and a desire for material goods also take hold, often at the expense of family ties and time-honored norms and values.

Great Britain reached take-off by about 1800, the United States by 1820. Thailand, a middle-income country in eastern Asia, is now in this stage. Such development is typically speeded by help from rich nations, including foreign aid, the availability of advanced technology and investment capital, and opportunities for schooling abroad.

3. **Drive to technological maturity.** As this stage begins, "growth" is a widely accepted idea that fuels a society's pursuit of higher living standards. A diversified economy drives a population eager to enjoy the benefits of industrial technology. At the same time, however, people begin to realize (and sometimes regret) that industri-

alization is eroding traditional family and local community life. Great Britain reached this point by about 1840, the United States by 1860. Today, Mexico, the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, and Poland are among the nations driving to technological maturity.

At this stage of development, absolute poverty is greatly reduced. Cities swell with people who leave rural villages in search of economic opportunity. Specialization creates the wide range of jobs that we find in our economy today. An increasing focus on work makes relationships less personal. Growing individualism generates social movements demanding greater political rights. Societies approaching technological maturity also provide basic schooling for all their people and advanced training for some. The newly educated consider tradition "backward" and push for further change. The social position of women steadily approaches that of men.

4. **High mass consumption.** Economic development steadily raises living standards as mass production stimulates mass consumption. Simply put, people soon learn to "need" the expanding array of goods that their society produces. The United States, Japan, and other rich nations moved into this stage by 1900. Now entering this level of economic development are two former British colonies that are prosperous small societies of eastern Asia: Hong Kong (part of the People's Republic of China since 1997) and Singapore (independent since 1965).  **Explore** which areas of the United States have attracted large numbers of immigrants seeking the high standard of living available in a country at this stage of modernization on mysoclab.com

The Role of Rich Nations

Modernization theory claims that high-income countries play four important roles in global economic development:

1. **Controlling population.** Because population growth is greatest in the poorest societies, rising population can overtake economic advances. Rich nations can help limit population growth by exporting birth control technology and promoting its use. Once

economic development is under way, birth rates should decline, as they have in industrialized nations, because children are no longer an economic asset.

- 2. Increasing food production.** Rich nations can export high-tech farming methods to poor nations to increase agricultural yields. Such techniques, collectively referred to as the Green Revolution, include new hybrid seeds, modern irrigation methods, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides for insect control.
- 3. Introducing industrial technology.** Rich nations can encourage economic growth in poor societies by introducing machinery and information technology, which raise productivity. Industrialization also shifts the labor force from farming to skilled industrial and service jobs.
- 4. Providing foreign aid.** Investment capital from rich nations can boost the prospects of poor societies trying to reach Rostow's take-off stage. Foreign aid can raise farm output by helping poor countries buy more fertilizer and build irrigation projects. In the same way, financial and technical assistance can help build power plants and factories to improve industrial output. Each year, the United States provides more than \$30 billion in foreign aid to developing countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

● **Evaluate** Modernization theory has many influential supporters among social scientists (Parsons, 1966; W. E. Moore, 1977, 1979; Bauer, 1981; Berger, 1986; Firebaugh & Beck, 1994; Firebaugh, 1996, 1999; Firebaugh & Sandu, 1998). For decades, it has shaped the foreign policy of the United States and other rich nations. Supporters point to rapid economic development in Asia—especially in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong—as proof that the affluence achieved in Western Europe and North America is within the reach of all countries.

But modernization theory comes under fire from socialists (and left-leaning analysts in the West) as little more than a defense of capitalism. Its most serious flaw, according to critics, is that modernization simply has not occurred in many poor countries. Economic indicators reported by the United Nations show that living standards in a number of nations, including Haiti and Nicaragua in Latin America and Sudan, Ghana, and Rwanda in Africa, are little changed—and are in some cases worse—than in 1960 (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

A second criticism of modernization theory is that it fails to recognize how rich nations, which benefit from the status quo, often block the path to development for poor countries. Centuries ago, critics charge, rich countries industrialized from a position of global strength. Can we expect poor countries today to do so from a position of global weakness?

Third, modernization theory treats rich and poor societies as separate worlds, ignoring the ways in which international relations have affected all nations. Many countries in Latin America and Asia are still struggling to overcome the harm caused by colonialism, which boosted the fortunes of Europe.

Fourth, modernization theory holds up the world's most developed countries as the standard for judging the rest of humanity, revealing an ethnocentric bias. We should

modernization theory a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of technological and cultural differences between nations

dependency theory a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor nations by rich ones

remember that our Western idea of “progress” has caused us to rush headlong into a competitive, materialistic way of life, which uses up the world's scarce resources and pollutes the natural environment.

Fifth and finally, modernization theory suggests that the causes of global poverty lie almost entirely in the poor societies themselves. Critics see this analysis as little more than blaming the victims for their own problems. Instead, they argue, an analysis of global inequality should focus just as much on the behavior of rich nations as it does on the behavior of poor ones and also on the global economic system.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING State the important ideas of modernization theory, including Rostow's four stages of economic development. Point to several strengths and weaknesses of this theory.

Concerns such as these reflect a second major approach to understanding global inequality, dependency theory.

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory is a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor nations by rich ones. This analysis, which follows the social-conflict approach, puts the main responsibility for global poverty on rich



Modernization theory claims that corporations that build factories in low-income nations help people by providing them with jobs and higher wages than they had before; dependency theory views these factories as “sweatshops” that exploit workers. In response to the Olympic Games selling sports clothing produced by sweatshops, these women staged a protest in Athens, Greece; they are wearing white masks to symbolize the “faceless” workers who make much of what we wear. Is any of the clothing you wear made in sweatshop factories?

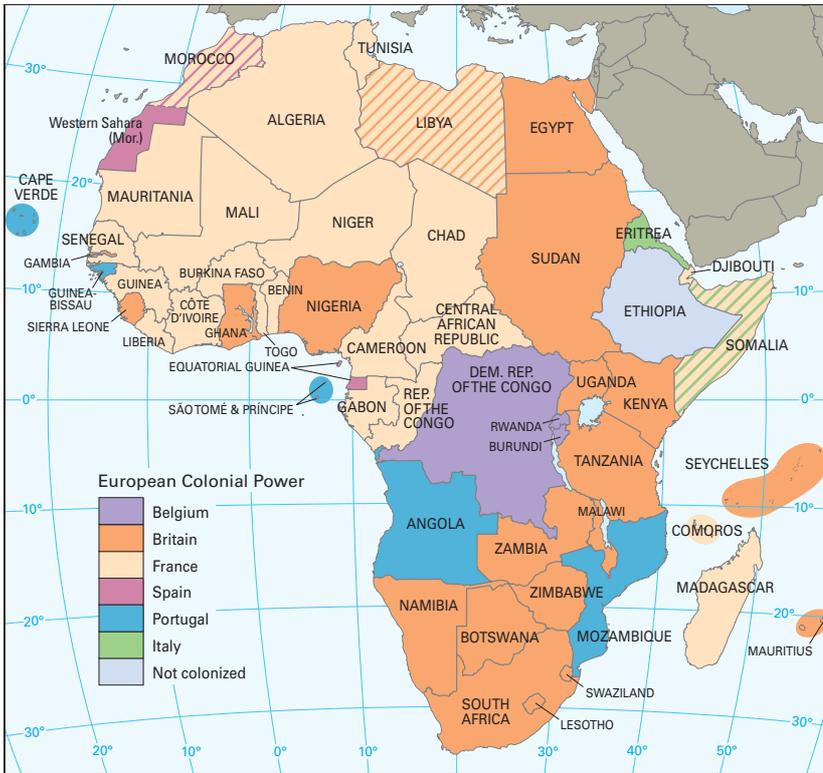


FIGURE 12-4 Africa's Colonial History

For more than a century, most of Africa was colonized by European nations, with France dominating in the northwest region of the continent and Great Britain dominating in the east and south.

nations, which for centuries have systematically impoverished low-income countries and made them dependent on the rich ones—a destructive process that continues today.

Historical Perspective

Everyone agrees that before the Industrial Revolution, there was little affluence in the world. Dependency theory asserts, however, that people living in poor countries were actually better off economically in the past than their descendants are now. André Gunder Frank (1975), a noted supporter of this theory, argues that the colonial process that helped develop rich nations also *underdeveloped* poor societies.

Dependency theory is based on the idea that the economic positions of rich and poor nations of the world are linked and cannot be understood apart from each other. Poor nations are not simply lagging behind rich ones on the “path of progress”; rather, the prosperity of the most developed countries came largely at the expense of less developed ones. In short, some nations became rich only because others became poor. Both are products of the global commerce that began five centuries ago.

The Importance of Colonialism

Late in the fifteenth century, Europeans began exploring the Americas to the west, Africa to the south, and Asia to the east in order to estab-

lish colonies. They were so successful that a century ago, Great Britain controlled about one-fourth of the world's land, boasting that “the sun never sets on the British Empire.” The United States, itself originally a collection of small British colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America, soon pushed across the continent, purchased Alaska, and gained control of Haiti, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, the Hawaiian Islands, part of Panama, and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

As colonialism spread, there emerged a brutal form of human exploitation—the international slave trade—beginning about 1500 and continuing until 1850. Even as the world was turning away from slavery, Europeans took control of most of the African continent, as Figure 12-4 shows, and dominated most of the continent until the early 1960s.

Formal colonialism has almost disappeared from the world. However, according to dependency theory, political liberation has not translated into economic independence. Far from it—the economic relationship between poor and rich nations continues the colonial pattern of domination. This neocolonialism is the heart of the capitalist world economy.

Wallerstein's Capitalist World Economy

Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979, 1983, 1984) explains global stratification using a model of the “capitalist world economy.” Wallerstein's term *world economy* suggests that the prosperity of some nations and the poverty and dependency of other countries result from a global economic system. He traces the roots of the global economy to the beginning of colonization

more than 500 years ago, when Europeans began gathering wealth from the rest of the world. Because the world economy is based in the high-income countries, it is capitalist in character²

Wallerstein calls the rich nations the *core* of the world economy. Colonialism enriched this core by funneling raw materials from around the world to Western Europe, where they fueled the Industrial Revolution. Today, multinational corporations operate profitably worldwide, channeling wealth to North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan.

Low-income countries represent the *periphery* of the world economy. Drawn into the world economy by colonial exploitation, poor nations continue to support rich ones by providing inexpensive labor and a vast market for industrial products. The remaining countries are considered the *semiperiphery* of the world economy. They include middle-income countries like India and Brazil that have closer ties to the global economic core.

According to Wallerstein, the world economy benefits rich societies (by generating profits) and harms the rest of the world (by caus-

²This discussion also draws on A. G. Frank (1980, 1981), Delacroix & Ragin (1981), Bergesen (1983), Dixon & Boswell (1996), and Kentor (1998).

ing poverty). The world economy thus makes poor nations dependent on rich ones. This dependency involves three factors:

1. **Narrow, export-oriented economies.** Poor nations produce only a few crops for export to rich countries. Examples include coffee and fruit from Latin American nations, oil from Nigeria, hardwoods from the Philippines, and palm oil from Malaysia. Today's multinational corporations purchase raw materials cheaply in poor societies and transport them to core nations, where factories process them for profitable sale. Thus poor nations develop few industries of their own.
2. **Lack of industrial capacity.** Without an industrial base, poor societies face a double bind: They count on rich nations to buy their inexpensive raw materials, and they must then try to buy from the rich nations the few expensive manufactured goods they can afford. In a classic example of this dependency, British colonialists encouraged the people of India to raise cotton but prevented them from weaving their own cloth. Instead, the British shipped Indian cotton to their own textile mills in Birmingham and Manchester, manufactured the cloth, and shipped finished goods back to India, where the very people who harvested the cotton bought the garments.
Dependency theorists claim that the Green Revolution—widely praised by modernization theorists—works the same way. Poor countries sell cheap raw materials to rich nations and then must buy expensive fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery in return. Typically, rich countries profit from this exchange far more than poor nations.
3. **Foreign debt.** Unequal trade patterns have plunged poor countries into debt. Collectively, the poor nations of the world owe rich countries some \$3.5 trillion; hundreds of billions of dollars are owed to the United States. Such staggering debt paralyzes a country, causing high unemployment and rampant inflation (World Bank, 2011).

The Role of Rich Nations

Modernization theory and dependency theory assign very different roles to rich nations. Modernization theory holds that rich countries *produce wealth* through capital investment and new technology. Dependency theory views global inequality in terms of how countries *distribute wealth*, arguing that rich nations have *overdeveloped* themselves as they have *underdeveloped* the rest of the world.

Dependency theorists dismiss the idea that programs developed by rich countries to control population and boost agricultural and industrial output raise living standards in poor countries. Instead, they claim, such programs actually benefit rich nations and the

Although the world continues to grow richer, billions of people are being left behind. This shantytown of Cité Soleil, Haiti, is typical of many cities in low-income countries. What can you say about the quality of life in such a place?

ruling elites, not the poor majority, in low-income countries (Kentor, 2001).

The hunger activists Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins (1986; Lappé, Collins, & Rosset, 1998) maintain that the capitalist culture of the United States encourages people to think of poverty as somehow inevitable. In this line of reasoning, poverty results from “natural” processes, including having too many children, and natural disasters such as droughts. But global poverty is far from inevitable; in their view, it results from deliberate policies. Lappé and Collins point out that the world already produces enough food to allow every person on the planet to become quite fat. Moreover, India and most of Africa actually *export* food, even though many people in African nations go hungry.

According to Lappé and Collins, the contradiction of poverty amid plenty stems from the rich-nation policy of producing food for profit, not people. That is, corporations in rich nations cooperate with elites in poor countries to grow and export profitable crops such as coffee, which means using land that could otherwise produce basics such as beans and corn for local families. Governments of poor countries support the practice of growing for export because they need food profits to repay foreign debt. According to Lappé and Collins, the capitalist corporate structure of the global economy is at the core of this vicious cycle.

● **Evaluate** The main idea of dependency theory is that no nation becomes rich or poor in isolation because a single global economy shapes the destiny of all nations. Pointing to continuing poverty in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, dependency theorists claim that development simply cannot proceed under the constraints now imposed by rich countries. Rather, they call for radical reform of the entire world economy so that it operates in the interests of the majority of people.

Critics charge that dependency theory wrongly treats wealth as if no one gets richer without someone else getting poorer. Corporations, small business owners, and farmers can and do create new wealth through hard work and imaginative use of new technology. After all, they point out, the entire world's wealth has increased tenfold since 1950.



APPLYING THEORY

Global Poverty

	Modernization Theory	Dependency Theory
Which theoretical approach is applied?	Structural-functional approach	Social-conflict approach
How did global poverty come about?	The whole world was poor until some countries developed industrial technology, which allowed mass production and created affluence.	Colonialism moved wealth from some countries to others, making some nations poor as it made other nations rich.
What are the main causes of global poverty today?	Traditional culture and a lack of productive technology.	Neocolonialism—the operation of multinational corporations in the global, capitalist economy.
Are rich countries part of the problem or part of the solution?	Rich countries are part of the solution, contributing new technology, advanced schooling, and foreign aid.	Rich countries are part of the problem, making poor countries economically dependent and in debt.

Second, dependency theory is wrong in blaming rich nations for global poverty because many of the world's poorest countries (like Ethiopia) have had little contact with rich nations. On the contrary, a long history of trade with rich countries has dramatically improved the economies of many nations, including Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Hong Kong (all former British colonies), as well as South Korea and Japan. In short, say the critics, most evidence shows that foreign investment by rich nations encourages economic growth, as modernization theory claims, and not economic decline, as dependency theory holds (E. F. Vogel, 1991; Firebaugh, 1992).

Third, critics call dependency theory simplistic for pointing the finger at a single factor—the capitalist market system—as the cause of global inequality (Worsley, 1990). Dependency theory views poor societies as passive victims and ignores factors inside these countries that contribute to their economic problems. Sociologists have long recognized the vital role of culture in shaping people's willingness to embrace or resist change. Under the rule of the ultratraditional Muslim Taliban, for example, Afghanistan became economically isolated, and its living standards sank to among the lowest in the world. Is it reasonable to blame capitalist nations for that country's stagnation?

Nor can rich societies be held responsible for the reckless behavior of foreign leaders whose corruption and militarism impoverish their countries. Examples include the regimes of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, François Duvalier in Haiti, Manuel Noriega in Panama, Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo), Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya. Some leaders even use food supplies as weapons in internal political struggles, leaving the masses starving, as in the African nations of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia. Likewise, many countries throughout the world have done little to improve the status of women or control population growth.

Fourth, critics say that dependency theory is wrong to claim that global trade always makes rich nations richer and poor nations poorer. For example, in 2010, the United States had a trade deficit of \$647 billion, meaning that this nation imports nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars' more goods than it sells abroad. The single great-

est debt (\$273 billion) was owed to China, whose profitable trade has now pushed that country into the ranks of the world's middle-income nations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Fifth, critics fault dependency theory for offering only vague solutions to global poverty. Most dependency theorists urge poor nations to end all contact with rich countries, and some call for nationalizing foreign-owned industries. In other words, dependency theory is really an argument for some type of world socialism. In light of the difficulties that socialist societies (even better-off socialist countries such as Russia) have had in meeting the needs of their own people, critics ask, should we really expect such a system to rescue the entire world from poverty?

CHECK YOUR LEARNING State the main ideas of dependency theory. What are several of its strengths and weaknesses?

The Applying Theory table summarizes the main arguments of modernization theory and dependency theory.

Global Stratification: Looking Ahead

Evaluate

Among the most important trends in recent decades is the development of a global economy. In the United States, rising production and sales abroad bring profits to many corporations and their stockholders, especially those who already have substantial wealth. At the same time, the global economy has moved manufacturing jobs abroad, closing factories in this country and hurting many average workers. The net result: greater economic inequality in the United States.

People who support the global economy claim that the expansion of trade results in benefits for all countries involved. For this reason, they endorse policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Critics

of expanding globalization make other claims: Manufacturing jobs are being lost in the United States, and more manufacturing now takes place abroad in factories where workers are paid little and few laws ensure workplace safety. In addition, other critics of expanding globalization point to the ever-greater stresses that our economy places on the natural environment.

But perhaps the greatest concern is the vast economic inequality that exists between the world's countries. The concentration of wealth in high-income countries, coupled with the grinding poverty in low-income nations, may well be the biggest problem facing humanity in the twenty-first century.

Both modernization theory and dependency theory offer some understanding of this urgent problem. In evaluating these theories, we must consider empirical evidence. Over the course of the twentieth century, living standards rose in most of the world. Even the economic output of the poorest 25 percent of the world's people almost tripled during those 100 years. As a result, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day fell from about 1.9 billion in 1981 to about 1.4 billion in 2005 (Chen & Ravallion, 2008). In short, most people around the world are better off than ever before in *absolute* terms.

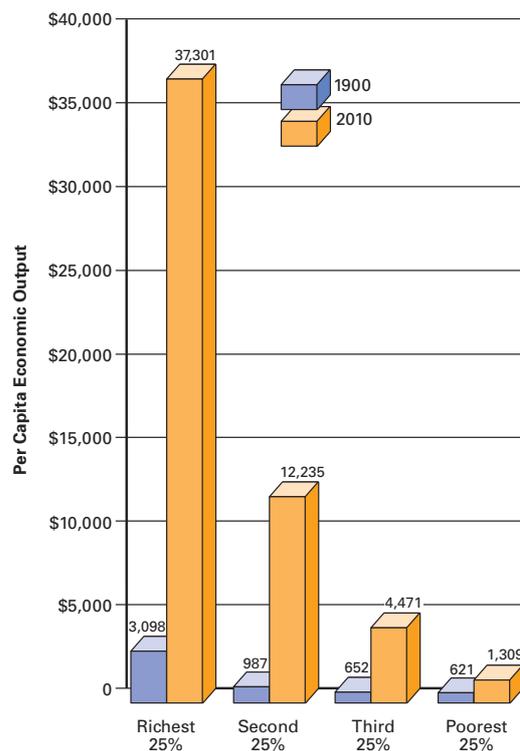
The greatest reduction in poverty has taken place in Asia, a region generally regarded as an economic success story. Back in 1981, almost 80 percent of global \$1.25-per-day poverty was found in Asia; by 2005, that figure had fallen to 17 percent. Since then, two very large Asian countries—India and China—have joined the ranks of the middle-income nations. The economic growth in India and China has been so great that in the last two decades, global economic inequality has actually decreased as wealth has spread from Europe and North America to Asia (Sala-i-Martin, 2002; Bussollo et al., 2007; Chen & Ravallion, 2008; Davies et al., 2008).

Latin America represents a mixed case. During the 1970s, this region enjoyed significant economic growth; during the 1980s and 1990s, however, there was little overall improvement. The share of the global \$1.25-per-day poverty was slightly higher in 2005 (3 percent) as it was in 1981 (2 percent) (Chen & Ravallion, 2008).

In Africa, about half of the nations are showing increasing economic growth. In many countries, however, especially those south of the Sahara, extreme poverty is getting worse. In 1981, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 11 percent of \$1.25-per-day poverty; by 2005, this share had risen to 28 percent (Sala-i-Martin, 2002; Chen & Ravallion, 2008).

Over the course of the last century, economic output has increased for both rich and poor nations but not at the same rate. As a result, in 2010, the gap between the rich and the poor in the world was six times bigger than it was in 1900. Figure 12–5 shows that the poorest people in the world are being left behind.

Recent trends suggest the need to look critically at both modernization and dependency theories. The fact that governments have played a large role in the economic growth that has occurred in Asia and elsewhere challenges modernization theory and its free-market approach to development. On the other hand, since the upheavals in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a global reevaluation of socialism has been taking place. Because socialist nations have a record of decades of poor economic performance and political repression, many low-income nations are unwilling to follow the advice of dependency theory and place economic development entirely under government control.



Global Snapshot

FIGURE 12–5 The World's Increasing Economic Inequality

The gap between the richest and poorest people in the world in 2010 was nearly six times bigger than it was in 1900.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2010).

Although the world's future is uncertain, we have learned a great deal about global stratification. One insight offered by modernization theory is that poverty is partly a *problem of technology*. A higher standard of living for a surging world population depends on the ability of poor nations to raise their agricultural and industrial productivity. A second insight, derived from dependency theory, is that global inequality is also a *political issue*. Even with higher productivity, the human community must address crucial questions concerning how resources are distributed, both within societies and around the globe.

Although economic development raises living standards, it also places greater strains on the natural environment. As nations such as India and China—with a combined population of 2.5 billion—become more affluent, their people will consume more energy and other resources (China has recently passed Japan to become the second-largest consumer of oil, behind the United States, which is one reason that oil prices and supplies have been under pressure). Richer nations also produce more solid waste and create more pollution.

Finally, the vast gulf that separates the world's richest and poorest people puts everyone at greater risk of war and terrorism as the poorest people challenge the social arrangements that threaten their existence (Lindauer & Weerapana, 2002). In the long run, we can achieve peace on this planet only by ensuring that all people enjoy a significant measure of dignity and security.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 12 Global Stratification

How much social inequality can we find if we look around the world?

This chapter explains that a global perspective reveals even more social stratification than we find here in the United States. Around the world, an increasing number of people in lower-income countries are traveling to higher-income nations in search of jobs. As “guest workers,” they perform low-wage work that the country’s own more well-off citizens do not wish to do. In such cases, the rich and poor truly live “worlds apart.”

Hint Dubai’s recent building boom has been accomplished using the labor of about 1 million guest workers, who actually make up about 85 percent of the population of the United Arab Emirates. Recent years have seen a rising level of social unrest, including labor strikes, which has led to some improvements in working and living conditions and better health care. But guest workers have no legal rights to form labor unions, nor do they have any chance to gain citizenship.

Many guest workers come to Dubai from India to take jobs building this country’s new high-rise hotels and business towers. With very little income, they often sleep six to a small room. How do you think living in a strange country, with few legal rights, affects these workers’ ability to improve their working conditions?



Oil wealth has made some of the people of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, among the richest in the world. Dubai's wealthiest people can afford to ski on snow—in one of the hottest regions of the world—on enormous indoor ski slopes like this one. Is there anything about this picture that makes you uncomfortable? Explain your reaction.



Guest workers in Dubai labor about twelve hours a day but earn only between \$50 and \$175 a month. Do you think the chance to take a job like this in a foreign country is an opportunity (income is typically twice what people can earn at home), or is it a form of exploitation?

Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. What comparisons can you make between the pattern of guest workers coming to places like Dubai in the Middle East and workers coming to the United States from Mexico and other countries in Latin America?
2. Page through several issues of any current newsmagazine or travel magazine to find any stories or advertising mentioning lower-income countries (selling, say, coffee from Colombia or exotic vacations to India). What picture of life in low-income countries does the advertising present? In light of what you have learned in this chapter, how accurate does this image seem to you?
3. Have you ever traveled in a low-income nation? Do you think people from a high-income nation such as the United States should feel guilty when seeing the daily struggles of the world's poorest people? Why or why not? Go to the "Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about global stratification and also to read some suggestions for travelers who have the chance to interact with people in low-income nations.

Global Stratification: An Overview

High-Income Countries

- contain 23% of the world's people
- receive 78% of global income
- have a high standard of living based on advanced technology
- produce enough economic goods to enable their people to lead comfortable lives
- include 72 nations, among them the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, the nations of Western Europe, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Australia

pp. 272–73

Middle-Income Countries

- contain 61% of the world's people
- receive 21% of global income
- have a standard of living about average for the world as a whole
- include 70 nations, among them the nations of Eastern Europe, Peru, Brazil, Namibia, Egypt, Indonesia, India, and the People's Republic of China

pp. 273–74

Low-Income Countries

- contain 17% of the world's people
- receive 1% of global income
- have a low standard of living due to limited industrial technology
- include 53 nations, generally in Central and East Africa and Asia, among them Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh.

pp. 274–75



global stratification (p. 270) patterns of social inequality in the world as a whole

high-income countries (p. 271) the nations with the highest overall standards of living

middle-income countries (p. 271) nations with a standard of living about average for the world as a whole

low-income countries (p. 271) nations with a low standard of living in which most people are poor

Watch the Video on mysoclab.com

Global Wealth and Poverty

All societies contain **relative poverty**, but low-income nations face widespread **absolute poverty** that is life-threatening.

- Worldwide, about 1 billion people are at risk due to poor nutrition.
- About 9 million people each year die each year from diseases caused by poverty.
- Throughout the world, women are more likely than men to be poor. Gender bias is strongest in poor societies.
- As many as 200 million men, women, and children (about 3% of humanity) live in conditions that can be described as slavery.

pp. 275–79

Read the Document on mysoclab.com

Factors Causing Poverty

- Lack of technology limits production.
- High birth rates produce rapid population increase.
- Traditional cultural patterns make people resist change.
- Extreme social inequality distributes wealth very unequally.
- Extreme gender inequality limits the opportunities of women.
- Colonialism allowed some nations to exploit other nations; neocolonialism continues today.

pp. 279–80



colonialism (p. 280) the process by which some nations enrich themselves through political and economic control of other nations

neocolonialism (p. 280) a new form of global power relationships that involves not direct political control but economic exploitation by multinational corporations

multinational corporation (p. 280) a large business that operates in many countries

Global Stratification: Applying Theory

Modernization theory maintains that nations achieve affluence by developing advanced technology. This process depends on a culture that encourages innovation and change toward higher living standards.

Walt Rostow identified four stages of development:

- *Traditional stage*—People’s lives are built around families and local communities. (Example: Bangladesh)
- *Take-off stage*—A market emerges as people produce goods not just for their own use but also to trade with others for profit. (Example: Thailand)
- *Drive to technological maturity*—The ideas of economic growth and higher living standards gain widespread support; schooling is widely available; the social standing of women improves. (Example: Mexico)
- *High mass consumption*—Advanced technology fuels mass production and mass consumption as people now “need” countless goods. (Example: the United States)

✦ **Explore the Map on mysoclab.com**

pp. 280–83

Modernization theory claims . . .

- Rich nations can help poor nations by providing technology to control population size, increase food production, and expand industrial and information economy output and by providing foreign aid to pay for new economic development.
- Rapid economic development in Asia shows that affluence is within reach of other nations of the world. **pp. 282–83**

Critics claim . . .

- Rich nations do little to help poor countries and benefit from the status quo. Low living standards in much of Africa and South America result from the policies of rich nations.
- Because rich nations, including the United States, control the global economy, many poor nations struggle to support their people and cannot follow the path to development taken by rich countries centuries ago. **p. 283**

Dependency theory maintains that global wealth and poverty were created by the colonial process beginning 500 years ago that developed rich nations and underdeveloped poor nations. This capitalist process continues today in the form of neocolonialism—economic exploitation of poor nations by multinational corporations.

Immanuel Wallerstein’s model of the capitalist world economy identified three categories of nations:

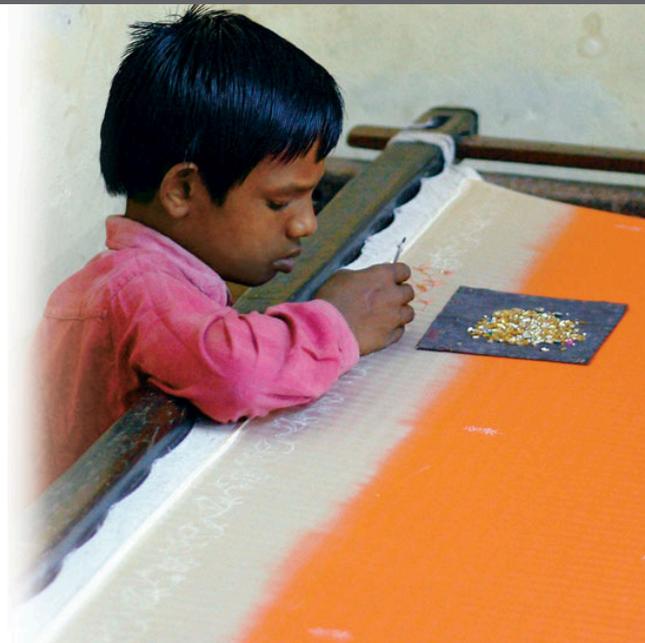
- *Core*—the world’s high-income countries, which are home to multinational corporations
- *Semiperiphery*—the world’s middle-income countries, with ties to core nations
- *Periphery*—the world’s low-income countries, which provide low-cost labor and a vast market for industrial products **pp. 283–85**

Dependency theory claims . . .

- Three key factors—export-oriented economies, a lack of industrial capacity, and foreign debt—make poor countries dependent on rich nations and prevent their economic development.
- Radical reform of the entire world economy is needed so that it operates in the interests of the majority of people. **pp. 284–85**

Critics claim . . .

- Dependency theory overlooks the tenfold increase in global wealth since 1950 and the fact that the world’s poorest countries have had weak, not strong, ties to rich countries.
- Rich nations are not responsible for cultural patterns and political corruption that block economic development in many poor nations. **p. 285**



modernization theory (p. 280) a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of technological and cultural differences between nations

dependency theory (p. 283) a model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor nations by rich ones

13 Gender Stratification

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand that gender is not a simple matter of biology but an idea created by society.



Apply different theoretical approaches to the concept of gender.



Analyze the ways in which gender is a dimension of social stratification.



Evaluate today's society using various feminist approaches.



Create a vision of a society in which women and men would have the same overall social standing.



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

We live in a world organized around not only differences of social class but also around the concepts of feminine and masculine, which sociologists call “gender.” This chapter examines gender, explores the meaning societies attach to being female or male, and explains how gender is an important dimension of social stratification. ■



At first we traveled quite alone . . . but before we had gone many miles, we came on other wagon-loads of women, bound in the same direction. As we reached different cross-roads, we saw wagons coming from every part of the country and, long before we reached Seneca Falls, we were a procession.

So wrote Charlotte Woodward in her journal as she made her way along the rutted dirt roads leading to Seneca Falls, a small town in upstate New York. The year was 1848, a time when slavery was legal in much of the United States and the social standing of all women, regardless of color, was far below that of men. Back

then, in much of the country, women could not own property, keep their wages if they were married, draft a will, file lawsuits in a court (including lawsuits seeking custody of their children), or attend college, and husbands were widely viewed as having unquestioned authority over their wives and children.

Some 300 women gathered at Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls to challenge this second-class citizenship. They listened as their leader, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, called for expanding women’s rights and opportunities, including the right to vote. At that time, most people considered such a proposal absurd and outrageous. Even many attending the conference were shocked by the idea: Stanton’s husband, Henry, rode out of town in protest (Gurnett, 1998).

Much has changed since the Seneca Falls convention, and many of Stanton’s proposals are now widely accepted as matters of basic fairness. But as this chapter explains, women and men still lead different lives in the United States and elsewhere in the world; in most respects, men are still in charge. This chapter explores the importance of gender and explains that gender, like class position, is a major dimension of social stratification.

Gender and Inequality

Remember

Chapter 8 (“Sexuality and Society”) explained that biological differences divide the human population into categories of female and male. **Gender** refers to the *personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male*. Gender, then, is a dimension of social organization, shaping how we interact with others and how we think about ourselves. More important, gender also involves *hierarchy*, ranking men and women differently in terms of power, wealth, and other resources. This is why sociologists speak of **gender**

stratification, the *unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between men and women*. In short, gender affects the opportunities and challenges we face throughout our lives.

Male-Female Differences

Many people think there is something “natural” about gender distinctions because biology does make one sex different from the other. But we must be careful not to think of social differences in biological terms. In 1848, for example, women were denied the vote because many people assumed that women did not have enough intelligence or interest in politics. Such attitudes had nothing to do with biology; they reflected the *cultural* patterns of that time and place.

Another example is athletic performance. In 1925, most people—women and men—believed that the best women runners could never compete with men in a marathon. Today, as Figure 13–1 shows, the gender gap has greatly narrowed, and the fastest women routinely post better times than the fastest men of decades past. Here, again, most of the differences between men and women turn out to be socially created.

There are some differences in physical ability between the sexes. On average, males are 10 percent taller, 20 percent heavier, and 30 percent stronger, especially in the upper body. On the other hand, women outperform men in the ultimate game of life itself: Life expectancy for men in the United States is 75.7 years, and women can expect to live 80.6 years (Ehrenreich, 1999; McDowell et al., 2008; Kochanek et al., 2011).

In adolescence, males do a bit better in the mathematics and reading parts of the SAT while females do better in writing, differences that reflect both biology and socialization. However, research does not point to any difference in overall intelligence between males and females (Lewin, 2008; College Board, 2010).

Biologically, then, men and women differ in limited ways; neither one is naturally superior. But culture can define the two sexes very differently, as the global study of gender described in the next section shows.

Gender in Global Perspective

The best way to see the cultural foundation of gender is by comparing one society to another. Three important studies highlight just how different “masculine” and “feminine” can be.

The Israeli Kibbutz

In Israel, collective settlements are called *kibbutzim*. The *kibbutz* (the singular form of the word) has been an important setting for research because gender equality is one of its stated goals; men and women share in both work and decision making.

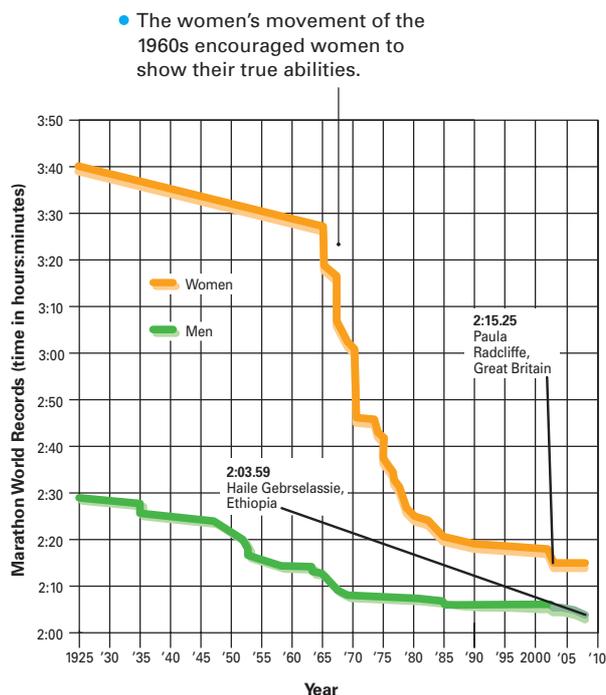
In recent decades, kibbutzim have become less collective and thus less distinctive organizations. But through much of their history, both sexes shared most everyday jobs. Many men joined women in taking care of children, and women joined men in repairing buildings and providing armed security. Both sexes made everyday decisions for the group. Girls and boys were raised in the same way; in many cases, young children were raised together in dormitories away from parents. Women and men in the kibbutzim have achieved remarkable (although not complete) social equality, evidence that cultures define what is feminine and what is masculine.

Margaret Mead's Research

The anthropologist Margaret Mead carried out groundbreaking research on gender. If gender is based on the biological differences between men and women, she reasoned, people everywhere should define “feminine” and “masculine” in the same way; if gender is cultural, these concepts should vary.

Mead (1963, orig. 1935) studied three societies in New Guinea. In the mountainous home of the Arapesh, Mead observed men and women with remarkably similar attitudes and behavior. Both sexes, she reported, were cooperative and sensitive to others—in short, what our culture would label “feminine.”

Moving south, Mead then studied the Mundugumor, whose headhunting and cannibalism stood in striking contrast to the gen-



Diversity Snapshot

FIGURE 13–1 Men's and Women's Athletic Performance

Do men naturally outperform women in athletic competition? The answer is not obvious. Early in the twentieth century, men outpaced women by more than an hour in marathon races. But as opportunities for women in athletics have increased, women have been closing the performance gap. Only eleven minutes separate the current world marathon records for women (set in 2003) and for men (set in 2008).

Source: Marathonguide.com (2011).

tle ways of the Arapesh. In this culture, both sexes were typically self-ish and aggressive, traits we define as “masculine.”

Finally, traveling west to the Tchambuli, Mead discovered a culture that, like our own, defined females and males differently. But the Tchambuli *reversed* many of our notions of gender: Females were dominant and rational, and males were submissive, emotional, and nurturing toward children. Based on her observations, Mead concluded that culture is the key to gender differences, because what one society defines as masculine another may see as feminine.

Some critics view Mead's findings as “too neat,” as if she saw in these three societies just the patterns she was looking for. Deborah Gewertz (1981) challenged what she called Mead's “reversal hypothesis,” pointing out that Tchambuli males are really the more aggressive sex. Gewertz explains that Mead visited the Tchambuli (who themselves spell their name Chambri) during the 1930s, after they had lost much of their property in tribal wars, and observed men rebuilding their homes, a temporary role for Chambri men.

👁️ **Watch** the video “Similarities and Differences between Men and Women” on mysoclab.com

gender the personal traits and social positions that member of a society attach to being female or male

gender stratification the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between men and women

George Murdock's Research

In a broader review of research on more than 200 preindustrial societies, George Murdock (1937) found some global agreement about which tasks are feminine and which are masculine. Hunting and warfare, Murdock concluded, generally fall to men, and home-centered tasks such as cooking and child care tend to be women's work. With their simple technology, preindustrial societies apparently assign roles reflecting men's and women's physical characteristics. With their greater size and strength, men hunt game and protect the group; because women bear children, they do most of the work in the home.

But beyond this general pattern, Murdock found much variety. Consider agriculture: Women did the farming in about the same number of societies as men; in most, the two sexes shared this work. When it came to many other tasks, from building shelters to tattooing the body, Murdock found that societies of the world were as likely to turn to one sex as the other.

Evaluate Global comparisons show that overall, societies do not consistently define tasks as either feminine or masculine. With industrialization, the importance of muscle power declines, further reducing gender differences (Nolan & Lenski, 2010). In sum, gender is too variable across cultures to be a simple expression of biology; what it means to be female and male is mostly a creation of society.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING By comparing many cultures, what do we learn about the origin of gender differences?

Patriarchy and Sexism

Conceptions of gender vary, and there is evidence of societies in which women have greater power than men. One example is the Musuo, a very small society in China's Yunnan province, in which women control most property, select their sexual partners, and make most decisions about everyday life. The Musuo appear to be a case of **matriarchy** ("rule of mothers"), a form of social organization in which females dominate males, which has only rarely been documented in human history.

The pattern found almost everywhere in the world is **patriarchy** ("rule of fathers"), a form of social organiza-



patriarchy a form of social organization in which males dominate females

matriarchy a form of social organization in which females dominate males

sexism the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other

tion in which males dominate females. Global Map 13–1 shows the great variation in the relative power and privilege of women that exists from country to country. According to the United Nations, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden give women the highest social standing; by contrast, women in the nations of Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Yemen have the lowest social standing in comparison to men. Of all the world's 195 nations, the United States ranks forty-fourth in terms of gender equality (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

The justification for patriarchy is **sexism**, the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other. Sexism is not just a matter of individual attitudes; it is built into the institutions of society. *Institutional sexism* is found throughout the economy, with women concentrated in low-paying jobs. Similarly, the legal system has long excused violence against women, especially on the part of boyfriends, husbands, and fathers.

The Costs of Sexism

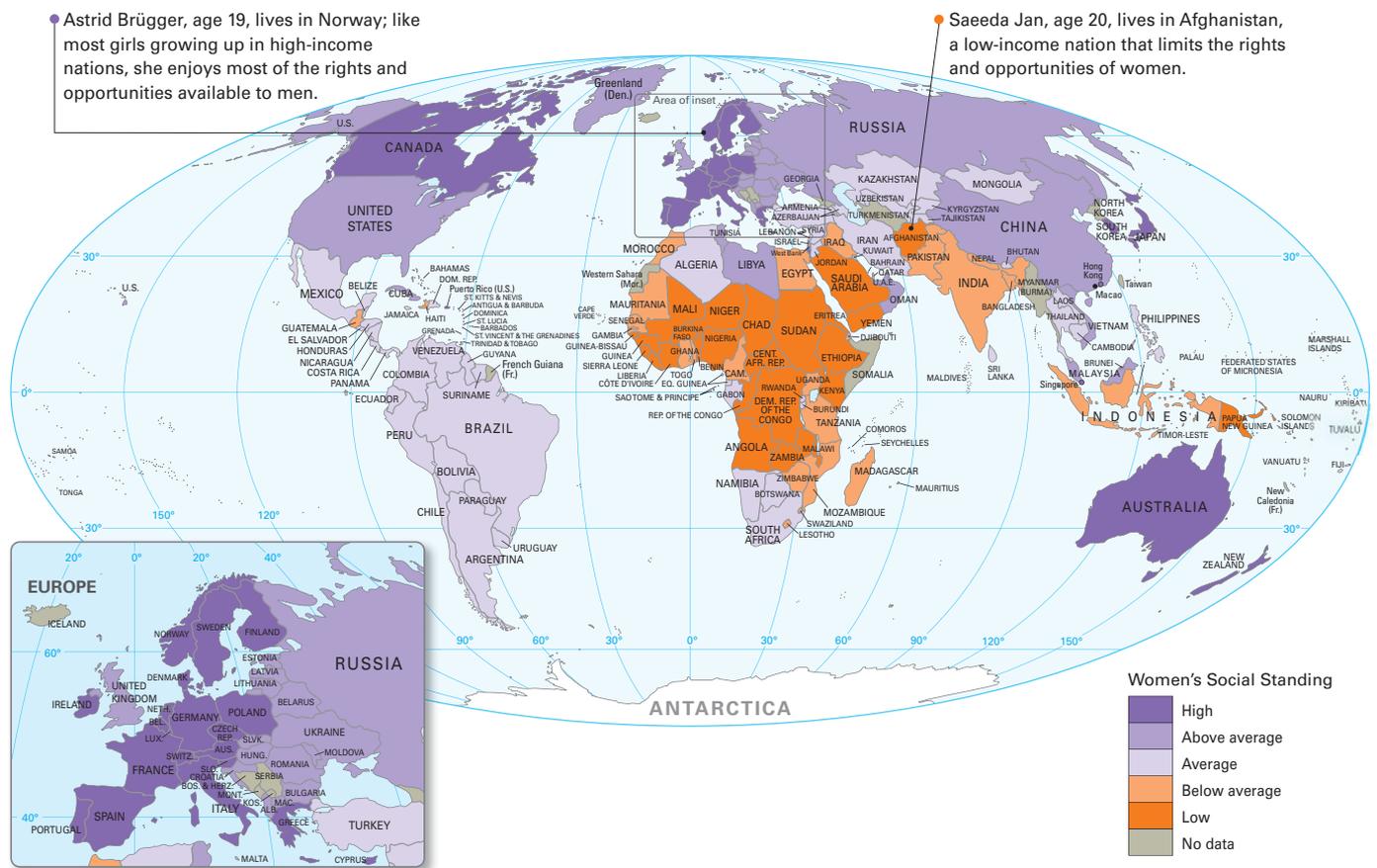
Sexism limits the talents and ambitions of the half of the human population who are women. Although men benefit in some respects from sexism, their privilege comes at a high price. Masculinity in our culture encourages men to engage in many high-risk behaviors: using tobacco and alcohol, playing dangerous sports, and even driving recklessly. As Marilyn French (1985) argues, patriarchy drives men to seek control, not only of women but also of themselves and their world. This is why masculinity is closely linked not only to accidents but also to violence, stress-related diseases, and suicide. The *Type A personality*—marked by chronic impatience, driving ambition, competitiveness, and free-floating hostility—is a recipe for heart disease and almost perfectly matches the behavior that our culture considers masculine (Ehrenreich, 1983).

Finally, as men seek control over others, they lose opportunities for intimacy and trust. As one analyst put it, competition is supposed to "separate the men from the boys." In practice, however, it separates men from men and everyone else (Raphael, 1988).

Must Patriarchy Go On?

In preindustrial societies, women have little control over pregnancy and childbirth, which limits the scope of their lives. In those same societies, men's greater size and physical strength are valued resources that give them power. But industrialization, including birth

In every society, people assume that certain jobs, patterns of behavior, and ways of dressing are "naturally" feminine while others are just as obviously masculine. But in global perspective, we see remarkable variety in such social definitions. These men, Wodaabe pastoral nomads who live in the African nation of Niger, are proud to engage in a display of beauty most people in our society would consider feminine.



Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 13-1 Women's Power in Global Perspective

Women's social standing in relation to men's varies around the world. In general, women live better in rich countries than in poor countries. Even so, some nations stand out: In the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, women come closest to social equality with men.

Source: Data from United Nations Development Programme (2010).

control technology, increases people's choices about how to live. In societies like our own, biological differences offer little justification for patriarchy.

But males are dominant in the United States and elsewhere. Does this mean that patriarchy is inevitable? Some researchers claim that biological factors such as differences in hormones and slight differences in brain structure "wire" the two sexes with different motivations and behaviors—especially aggressiveness in males—making patriarchy difficult or perhaps even impossible to change (S. Goldberg, 1974; Rossi, 1985; Popenoe, 1993b; Udry, 2000). However, most sociologists believe that gender is socially constructed and *can* be changed. Just because no society has yet eliminated patriarchy does not mean that we must remain prisoners of the past.

To understand why patriarchy continues today, we must examine how gender is rooted and reproduced in society, a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout our lives.

Gender and Socialization

Understand

From birth until death, gender shapes human feelings, thoughts, and actions. Children quickly learn that their society considers females and males different kinds of people; by about age three, they begin to think of themselves in these terms.

In the past, many people in the United States traditionally described women using terms such as "emotional," "passive," and "cooperative." By contrast, men were described as "rational," "active," and "competitive." It is curious that we were taught for so long to think of gender in terms of one sex being opposite to the other, especially because women and men have so much in common and also because research suggests that most young people develop personalities that are some mix of these feminine and masculine traits (Bem, 1993).

Just as gender affects how we think of ourselves, so it teaches us how to behave. **Gender roles** (an older term is **sex roles**) are *attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex*. A culture that defines males as ambitious and competitive encourages them to seek out positions of leadership and play team sports. To the extent that females are defined as deferential and emotional, they are expected to be supportive helpers and quick to show their feelings.

Gender and the Family

The first question people usually ask about a newborn—“Is it a boy or a girl?”—has great importance because the answer involves not just sex but also the direction the child’s life will likely take. In fact, gender is at work even before the birth of a child, especially in lower-income nations, because parents hope that their firstborn will be a boy rather than a girl.

Soon after birth, family members welcome infants into the “pink world” of girls or the “blue world” of boys (Bernard, 1981). Parents even send gender messages in the way they handle infants. One researcher at an English university presented an infant dressed as either a boy or a girl to a number of women; her subjects handled the “female” child tenderly, with frequent hugs and caresses, and treated the “male” child more roughly, often lifting him up high in the air or bouncing him on a knee (Bonner, 1984; Tavris & Wade, 2001). The lesson is clear: The female world revolves around cooperation and emotion, and the male world puts a premium on independence and action.

Gender and the Peer Group

About the time they enter school, children begin to move outside the family and make friends with others of the same age. Considerable research shows that young children tend to form single-sex play groups (Martin & Fabes, 2001).

Peer groups teach additional lessons about gender. After spending a year observing children at play, Janet Lever (1978) concluded that boys favor team sports that have complex rules and clear objectives such as scoring runs or making touchdowns. Such games nearly always have winners and losers, reinforcing masculine traits of aggression and control.

Girls, too, play team sports. But, Lever explains, girls also play hopscotch, jump rope, or simply talk, sing, or dance. These activities have few rules, and rarely is victory the ultimate goal. Instead of teaching girls to be competitive, Lever explains, female peer groups promote the

interpersonal skills of communication and cooperation, presumably the basis for girls’ future roles as wives and mothers.

The games we play offer important lessons for our later lives. Lever’s observations recall Carol Gilligan’s gender-based theory of moral reasoning, discussed in Chapter 5 (“Socialization”). Boys, Gilligan (1982) claims, reason according to abstract principles. For them, “rightness” amounts to “playing by the rules.” By contrast, girls consider morality a matter of responsibility to others.

Gender and Schooling

Gender shapes our interests and beliefs about our own abilities, guiding areas of study and, eventually, career choices (Correll, 2001). In high school, for instance, more girls than boys learn secretarial skills and take vocational classes such as cosmetology and food services. Classes in woodworking and auto mechanics attract mostly young men.

Women have now become a majority (57 percent) of the students on college campuses across the United States. As their numbers have increased, women have become well represented in many fields of study that once excluded them, including mathematics, chemistry, and biology. But men still predominate in many fields, including business, engineering, physics, and philosophy, and women cluster in the visual and performing arts (including music, dance, and drama), English, foreign languages, and the social sciences (including psychology, anthropology, and sociology). Newer areas of study are also gender-typed: More men than women take computer science, and courses in gender studies enroll mostly women (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

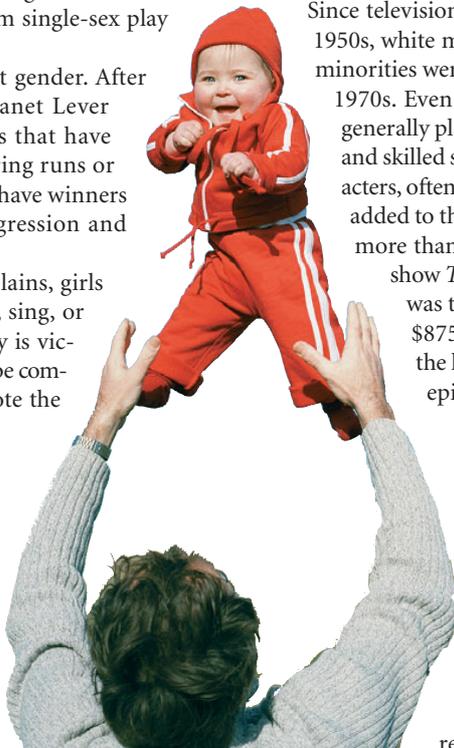
Gender and the Mass Media

Since television first captured the public imagination in the 1950s, white males have held center stage; racial and ethnic minorities were all but absent from television until the early 1970s. Even when both sexes appeared on camera, men generally played the brilliant detectives, fearless explorers, and skilled surgeons. Women played the less capable characters, often unnecessary except for the sexual interest they added to the story. In recent years, male stars have earned more than their female counterparts. Before he left the show *Two and a Half Men*, for example, Charlie Sheen was the highest-paid male television actor, earning \$875,000 an episode. Mariska Hargitay has been the highest-paid female actor, earning \$400,000 an episode for *Law & Order: SVU*.

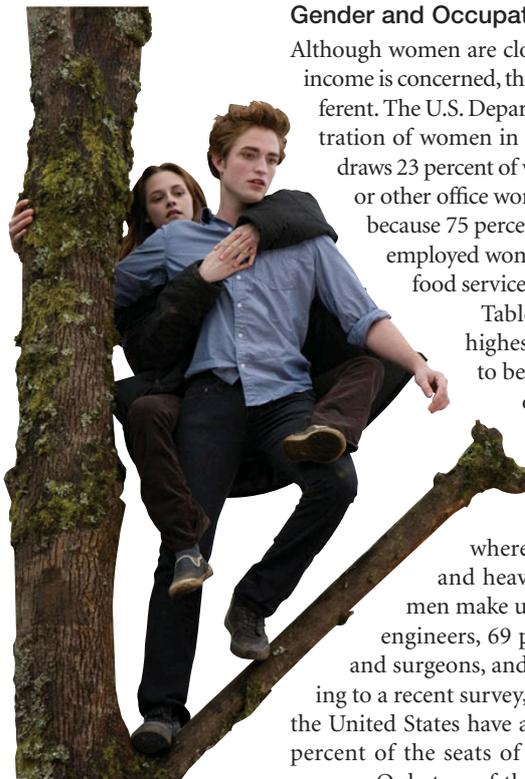
Historically, advertisements have shown women in the home, cheerfully using cleaning products, serving food, and modeling clothes. Men predominate in ads for cars, travel, banking services, and alcoholic beverages. The authoritative voiceover—the faceless voice that describes a product on television and radio—is almost always male (D. M. Davis, 1993; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Messineo, 2008).

A careful study of gender in advertising reveals that men usually appear taller than

Sex is a biological distinction that develops prior to birth. Gender is the meaning that a society attaches to being female or male. Gender differences are a matter of power, because what is defined as masculine typically has more importance than what is defined as feminine. Infants begin to learn the importance of gender by the way parents treat them. Do you think this child is a girl or a boy? Why?



In our society, the mass media have enormous influence on our attitudes and behavior, and what we see shapes our views of gender. In the 2009 film *Twilight*, we see a strong, “take charge” male playing against a more passive female. Do you think the mass media create these gender patterns? Or it is more correct to say that they reproduce them? Is there another option?



women, implying male superiority. Women are more frequently presented lying down (on sofas and beds) or, like children, seated on the floor. Men’s facial expressions and behavior give off an air of competence and imply dominance; women often appear childlike, submissive, and sexual. Men focus on the products being advertised; women often focus on the men (Goffman, 1979; Cortese, 1999).

Advertising also actively perpetuates what Naomi Wolf calls the “beauty myth.” The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page 300 takes a closer look.

Gender and Social Stratification

Apply

Gender affects more than how people think and act. It is also about social hierarchy. The reality of gender stratification can be seen, first, in the world of working women and men.

Working Women and Men

Back in 1900, just 20 percent of U.S. women were in the labor force. Today, the figure has tripled to almost 60 percent, and 67 percent of these working women work full time (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). The once common view that earning income is a man’s role no longer holds true.

Factors that have changed the U.S. labor force include the decline of farming, the growth of cities, shrinking family size, and a rising divorce rate. The United States, along with most other nations, considers women working for income the rule rather than the exception. Women make up almost half the U.S. paid labor force, and 54 percent of U.S. married couples depend on two incomes.

In the past, many women in the U.S. labor force were childless. But today, 59 percent of married women with children under age six are in the labor force, as are 72 percent of married women with children between six and seventeen years of age. For widowed, divorced, or separated women with children, the comparable figures are 61 percent of women with younger children and 73 percent of women with older children (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

Gender and Occupations

Although women are closing the gap with men as far as working for income is concerned, the work done by the two sexes remains very different. The U.S. Department of Labor (2010) reports a high concentration of women in two job types. Administrative support work draws 23 percent of working women, most of whom are secretaries or other office workers. These are often called “pink-collar jobs” because 75 percent are filled by women. Another 16 percent of employed women do service work. Most of these jobs are in food service industries, child care, and health care.

Table 13–1 shows the ten occupations with the highest concentrations of women. These jobs tend to be at the low end of the pay scale, with limited opportunities for advancement and with men as supervisors (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

Men dominate most other job categories, including the building trades, where 99 percent of brickmasons, stonemasons, and heavy equipment operators are men. Likewise, men make up 87 percent of police officers, 87 percent of engineers, 69 percent of lawyers, 68 percent of physicians and surgeons, and 57 percent of corporate managers. According to a recent survey, just twelve of the *Fortune* 500 companies in the United States have a woman chief executive officer, and just 16 percent of the seats of corporate boards of directors are held by women. Only two of the twenty-five highest-paid executives in the United States are women. Even so, increasing the leadership role of women in the business world is not just a matter of fairness; research into the earnings of this country’s 500 largest corporations showed that the companies with more women on the board are also the most profitable (Graybow, 2007; *Fortune*, 2010; Catalyst, 2011; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011).

Gender stratification in everyday life is easy to see: Female nurses assist male physicians, female secretaries serve male executives, and female flight attendants are under the command of male airplane

TABLE 13–1 Jobs with the Highest Concentrations of Women, 2010

Occupation	Number of Women Employed	Percentage in Occupation Who Are Women
1. Dental assistant	289,000	97.5
2. Preschool or kindergarten teacher	691,000	97.0
3. Speech-language pathologist	127,000	96.3
4. Secretary or administrative assistant	2,962,000	96.1
5. Dental hygienists	134,000	95.1
6. Child care worker	1,181,000	94.7
7. Receptionist or information clerk	1,188,000	92.7
8. Word processors and typists	133,000	92.5
9. Teacher assistants	893,000	92.4
10. Dietitians and nutritionists	97,000	92.3

Source: U.S. Department of Labor (2011).



The Beauty Myth

Beth: “I can’t eat lunch. I need to be sure I can get into that black dress for tonight.”

Sarah: “Maybe eating is more important than looking thin for Tom.”

Beth: “That’s easy for you to say. You’re a size 2 and Jake adores you!”

The Duchess of Windsor once remarked, “A woman cannot be too rich or too thin.” The first half of her observation might apply to men as well, but certainly not the second. The answer lies in the fact that the vast majority of ads placed by the \$10-billion-a-year cosmetics industry and the \$35-billion diet industry target women.

According to Naomi Wolf (1990), certain cultural patterns create a “beauty myth” that is damaging to women. The beauty myth arises, first, because society teaches women to measure their worth in terms of physical appearance. Yet the standards of beauty embodied in the *Playboy* centerfold or the 100-pound New York fashion model are out of reach for most women.

The way society teaches women to prize relationships with men, whom they presumably attract with their beauty, also contributes to the beauty myth. Striving for beauty drives women to be extremely disciplined but also forces them to be highly attentive to and responsive to men. In short, beauty-minded women try to please men and avoid challenging male power.

Belief in the beauty myth is one reason that so many young women are focused on body image,



One way our culture supports the beauty myth is through beauty pageants for women; over the years, contestants have become thinner and thinner.

particularly being as thin as possible, often to the point of endangering their health. During the past several decades, the share of young women who develop an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa (dieting to the point of starvation) or bulimia (binge eating followed by vomiting) has risen dramatically.

The beauty myth affects males as well: Men are told repeatedly that they should want to possess beautiful women. Such ideas about beauty reduce women to objects and motivate thinking about women as if they were dolls or pets rather than human beings.

There can be little doubt that the idea of beauty is important in everyday life. The question, according to Wolf, is whether beauty is about how we look or how we act.

What Do You Think?

1. Is there a “money myth” that states that people’s income is a reflection of their talent? Does it apply more to one sex than to the other?
2. Can you see a connection between the beauty myth and the rise of eating disorders in young women in the United States? Explain the link.
3. Among people with physical disabilities, do you think that issues of “looking different” are more serious for women or for men? Why?

pilots. In any field, the greater the income and prestige associated with a job, the more likely it is to be held by a man. For example, women represent 97 percent of kindergarten teachers, 82 percent of elementary school teachers, 57 percent of secondary school educators, 46 percent of professors in colleges and universities, and 23 percent of college and university presidents (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011).

How are women excluded from certain jobs? By defining some kinds of work as “men’s work,” companies define women as less competent than men. In a study of coal mining in southern West Virginia, Suzanne Tallichet (2000) found that most men considered it “unnatural” for women to work in the mines. Women who did so were defined as deviant and were subject to labeling as “sexually loose” or as lesbians. Such labeling made these women outcasts, presented a

challenge to their holding the job, and made advancement all but impossible.

In the corporate world, too, the higher in the company we look, the fewer women we find. You hardly ever hear anyone say out loud that women don’t belong at the top levels of a company. But many people seem to feel this way, and this pervasive feeling can prevent women from being promoted. Sociologists describe this barrier as a *glass ceiling* that is not easy to see but blocks women’s careers all the same.

One challenge to male domination in the workplace comes from women who are entrepreneurs. In 2008, there were more than 10 million women-owned businesses in the United States, double the number of a decade ago; they employed more than 13 million people and generated \$2 trillion in sales. Through starting their own businesses, women have shown that they can make opportunities for themselves apart from large, male-dominated companies (Center for Women’s Business Research, 2009).

 **Read** “Maid to Order: The Politics of Other Women’s Work” by Barbara Ehrenreich on mysoclab.com

Gender, Income, and Wealth

In 2009, the median earnings of women working full time were \$36,278, and men working full time earned \$47,127. This means that for every dollar earned by men, women earned about 77 cents. This difference is greater among older workers because older working women typically have less education and seniority than older working men. Earning differences are smaller among younger workers because younger men and women tend to have similar schooling and work experience.

Among all full-time workers of all ages, 24 percent of women earned less than \$25,000 in 2009, compared with 15 percent of men. At the upper end of the income scale, men were more than twice as likely as women (23 percent versus 11 percent) to earn more than \$75,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

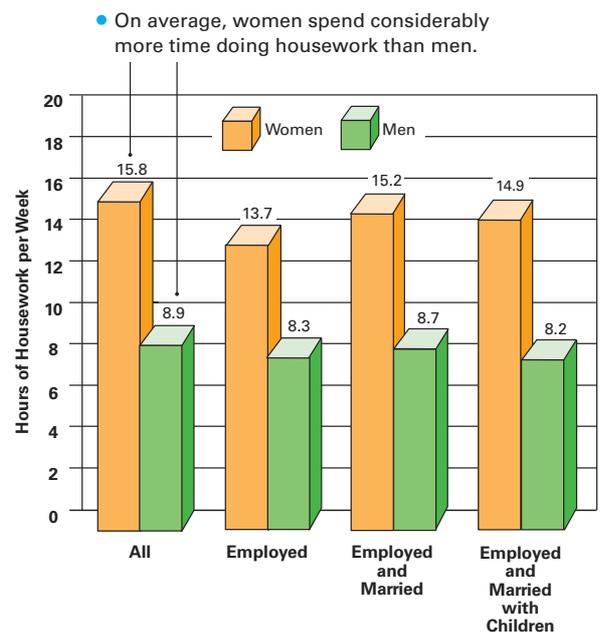
The main reason women earn less is the *type* of work they do, largely clerical and service jobs. In effect, jobs and gender interact. People still perceive jobs with less clout as “women’s work,” just as people devalue certain work simply because it is performed by women (England, Hermsen, & Cotter, 2000; Cohen & Huffman, 2003).

In recent decades, supporters of gender equality have proposed a policy of “comparable worth,” paying people not according to the historical double standard but according to the level of skill and responsibility involved in the work. Several nations, including Great Britain and Australia, have adopted comparable worth policies, but such policies have found limited acceptance in the United States. As a result, women in this country lose as much as \$1 billion in income annually.

A second cause of gender-based income disparity has to do with the family. Both men and women have children, of course, but our culture gives more responsibility for parenting to women. Pregnancy and raising small children keep many young women out of the labor force at a time when their male peers are making significant career advancements. When women workers return to the labor force, they have less job seniority than their male counterparts (Stier, 1996; Waldfogel, 1997).

In addition, women who choose to have children may be unable or unwilling to take on demanding jobs that tie up their evenings and weekends. To avoid role strain, they may take jobs that offer shorter commuting distances, more flexible hours, and employer-provided child care services. Women pursuing both a career and a family are often torn between their dual responsibilities in ways that men are not. One study found that almost half of women in competitive jobs took time off to have children, compared to about 12 percent of comparable men. Similarly, later in life, women are more likely than men to take time off from work to care for aging parents (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, 2009). Role conflict is also experienced by women on campus: Several studies confirm that young female professors with at least one child are less likely to have tenure than male professors in the same field (Shea, 2002; Ceci & Williams, 2011).

The two factors noted so far—type of work and family responsibilities—account for about two-thirds of the earnings difference between women and men. A third factor—discrimination against women—accounts for most of the remainder (Fuller & Schoenberger, 1991). Because overt discrimination is illegal, it is practiced in subtle ways. Women on their way up the corporate ladder often run into the



Diversity Snapshot

FIGURE 13–2 Housework: Who Does How Much?

Regardless of employment or family status, women do more housework than men. What effect do you think the added burden of housework has on women’s ability to advance in the workplace?

Source: Adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011).

glass ceiling described earlier; company officials may deny its existence, but it effectively prevents many women from rising above middle management.

For all these reasons, women earn less than men in all major occupational categories. Even so, many people think that women own most of this country’s wealth, perhaps because women typically outlive men. Government statistics tell a different story: Fifty-seven percent of individuals with \$1.5 million or more in assets are men, although widows are highly represented in this elite club (Johnson & Raub, 2006; Internal Revenue Service, 2008). Just 11 percent of the individuals identified in 2010 by *Forbes* magazine as the 400 richest people in the United States were women (Goudreau, 2010).

Housework: Women’s “Second Shift”

In the United States, we have always been of two minds about housework: We say that it is important to family life, but people get little reward for doing it (Bernard, 1981). Here, as around the world, taking care of the home and children has always been considered “women’s work” (see Global Map 6–1 on page 130). As women have entered the labor force, the amount of housework women do has gone down, but the *share* done by women has stayed the same. Figure 13–2 shows that overall, women average 15.8 hours a week of housework, compared to 8.9 hours for men. As the figure shows, women in all



Looking around the college campus, it would be easy to think that gender stratification favors females. The latest data show that 59 percent of the associate and bachelor degrees are being earned by women. In addition, on most campuses, when it comes to academic awards, women are overly represented among the winners.

As many analysts see it, the pattern of women outperforming men is not limited to college. In the early grades, boys are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with a learning disability, receive prescribed medication, or be placed in a special education class. Most disciplinary problems in the school involve boys; just about all the school shootings and other acts of serious violence are carried out by boys. Boys earn grades that fall below those earned by girls. Later on, a smaller share of boys

will graduate from high school. Even the suicide rate for young men is almost five times higher than that for young women. Taken together, such data have led some people to charge that our society has launched a war on boys.

So what's happening to the men? One argument is that the rise of feminism has directed a great deal of support and attention to girls and women, ignoring the needs of males. Others claim that too many boys suffer from the absence of a father in their lives; girls can use their mothers as role models but what are fatherless boys to do? Still others suggest that our industrial way of life (which favored masculine strength and skills manipulating objects) has given way to an information-age culture that is far more verbal, favoring females.

Not everyone is convinced that boys and men are so bad off. It is true that most violent crime involves males, but for the last fifteen years crime rates have fallen. Girls may be outperforming boys in the classroom and on some standardized tests, but the scores boys earn have never been higher. And, when all is said and done, don't men still run the country? And the whole world?

Join the Blog!

Are males being left behind? What do *you* think? Go to MySocLab.com and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Sommers (2000), von Drehle (2007), Lamm (2010), and Paton (2010).

categories do significantly more housework than men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Men do support the idea of women entering the paid labor force, and most husbands count on the money their wives earn. But many men resist taking on a more equal share of household duties (Heath & Bourne, 1995; Harpster & Monk-Turner, 1998; Stratton, 2001).

Gender and Education

In the past, our society considered schooling more necessary for men, who worked outside the home, than for women, who worked in the home. But times have changed. By 1980, women earned a majority of all associate's and bachelor's degrees; in 2008, that share has risen to 59 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

In recent decades, college doors have opened wider to women, and the differences in men's and women's majors are becoming smaller. In 1970, for example, women earned just 17 percent of bachelor's degrees in the natural sciences, computer science, and engineering; by 2008, their proportion had doubled to 34 percent.

In 1992, for the first time, women earned a majority of postgraduate degrees, which often serve as a springboard to high-prestige jobs. In all areas of study in 2008, women earned 61 percent of master's degrees and 51 percent of doctorates (including 61 percent of all Ph.D. degrees in sociology). Women have also broken into many graduate fields that used to be almost all male. For example, in 1970, only a few hundred women earned a master's of business administration (M.B.A.) degree, compared to more than 69,000 in 2008 (45 percent of all such degrees) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Despite these advances for women, men still predominate in some professional fields. In 2008, men received 51 percent of medical

(M.D.) degrees, 53 percent of law (LL.B. and J.D.) degrees, and 56 percent of dental (D.D.S. and D.M.D.) degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Our society once defined high-paying professions (and the drive and competitiveness needed to succeed in them) as masculine. But the share of women in all these professions has risen and is now close to half. When will parity be reached? It may not be in the next few years. For example, the American Bar Association (2010) reports that men still account for 53 percent of law school students across the United States.

Based on the educational gains women have made, some analysts suggest that education is the one social institution where women rather than men predominate. More broadly, women's relative advantages in school performance have prompted a national debate about whether men are in danger of being left behind. The Sociology in Focus box takes a closer look.

Gender and Politics

A century ago, almost no women held elected office in the United States. In fact, women were legally barred from voting in national elections until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920. However, a few women were candidates for political office even before they could vote. The Equal Rights party supported Victoria Woodhull for the U.S. presidency in 1872; perhaps it was a sign of the times that she spent Election Day in a New York City jail. Table 13–2 identifies milestones in women's gradual movement into U.S. political life.

Today, thousands of women serve as mayors of cities and towns across the United States, and tens of thousands hold responsible administrative posts in the federal government. At the state level, 23 percent of state legislators in 2011 were women (although this

share fell by 1 percentage point in the 2010 elections, it is up from just 6 percent back in 1970). National Map 13–1 on page 304 shows where in the United States women have made the greatest political gains.

Change is coming more slowly at the highest levels of politics, although a majority of U.S. adults claim they would support a qualified woman for any office. In 2008, Hillary Clinton came close to gaining the presidential nomination of the Democratic party, losing out to Barack Obama, who became the nation’s first African American president. In 2011, six of fifty state governors were women (12 percent), and in Congress, women held 72 of 435 seats in the House of Representatives (16.6 percent) and 17 of 100 seats in the Senate (17 percent) (Center for American Women and Politics, 2011).

Women make up half the world’s population, but they hold just 19 percent of seats in the world’s 188 parliaments. Although this percentage represents a rise from 3 percent fifty years ago, in only sixteen countries, among them Sweden and Norway, do women represent more than one-third of the members of parliament (Paxton, Hughes, & Green, 2006; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011).

Gender and the Military

Since colonial times, women have served in the U.S. armed forces. Yet in 1940, at the outset of World War II, just 2 percent of armed forces personnel were women. In the fall of 2010, women represented about 15 percent of all U.S. military personnel, including deployed troops.

Clearly, women make up a growing share of the U.S. military, and almost all military assignments are now open to both women and men. But law prevents women from engaging in offensive warfare. Even so, the line between troop support and outright combat is easily crossed, as the women serving in Iraq have learned. In fact, between March 2003 and March 2011, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan claimed the lives of 136 women soldiers.

The debate on women’s role in the military has been going on for centuries. Some people object to opening doors in this way, claiming that women lack the physical strength of men. Others reply that military women are better educated and score higher on intelligence tests than military men. But the heart of the issue is our society’s deeply held view of women as *nurturers*—people who give life and help others—which clashes with the image of women trained to kill.

Whatever our views of women and men, the reality is that military women are in harm’s way. In part, this fact reflects the strains experienced by a military short of personnel. In addition, the type of insurgency that surrounds our troops in Iraq can bring violent combat to any soldier at any time. Finally, our modern warfare technology blurs the distinction between combat and noncombat personnel. A combat pilot can fire missiles by radar at a target miles away; by contrast, noncombat medical evacuation teams routinely travel

¹Sociologists use the term “minority” instead of “minority group” because, as explained in Chapter 7 (“Groups and Organizations”), women make up a *category*, not a group. People in a category share a status or identity but generally do not know one another or interact.

TABLE 13–2 Significant “Firsts” for Women in U.S. Politics

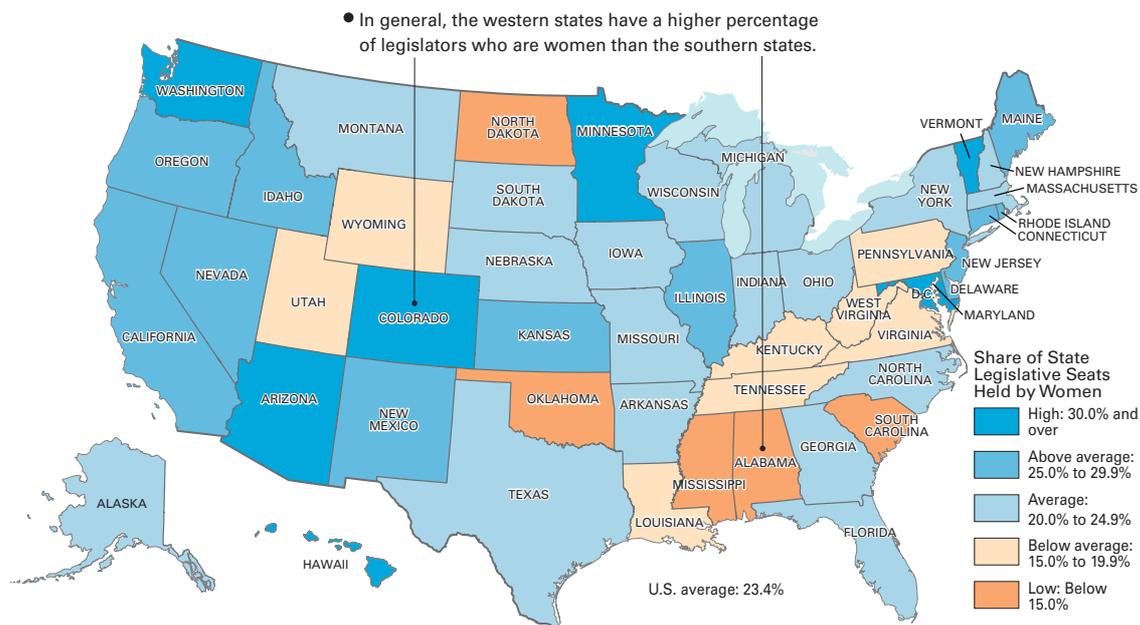
1869	Law allows women to vote in Wyoming territory.
1872	First woman to run for the presidency (Victoria Woodhull) represents the Equal Rights party.
1917	First woman elected to the House of Representatives (Jeannette Rankin of Montana).
1924	First women elected state governors (Nellie Taylor Ross of Wyoming and Miriam “Ma” Ferguson of Texas); both followed their husbands into office. First woman to have her name placed in nomination for the vice-presidency at the convention of a major political party (Lena Jones Springs, a Democrat).
1931	First woman to serve in the Senate (Hattie Caraway of Arkansas); completed the term of her husband upon his death and won reelection in 1932.
1932	First woman appointed to the presidential cabinet (Frances Perkins, secretary of labor in the cabinet of President Franklin D. Roosevelt).
1964	First woman to have her name placed in nomination for the presidency at the convention of a major political party (Margaret Chase Smith, a Republican).
1972	First African American woman to have her name placed in nomination for the presidency at the convention of a major political party (Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat).
1981	First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court (Sandra Day O’Connor).
1984	First woman to be successfully nominated for the vice-presidency (Geraldine Ferraro, a Democrat).
1988	First woman chief executive to be elected to a consecutive third term (Madeleine Kunin, governor of Vermont).
1992	Political “Year of the Woman” yields record number of women in the Senate (six) and the House (forty-eight), as well as (1) first African American woman to win election to the U.S. Senate (Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois), (2) first state (California) to be served by two women senators (Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein), and (3) first woman of Puerto Rican descent elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (Nydia Velazquez of New York).
1996	First woman appointed secretary of state (Madeleine Albright).
2000	First “First Lady” to win elected political office (Hillary Rodham Clinton, senator from New York).
2001	First woman to serve as national security adviser (Condoleezza Rice); first Asian American woman to serve in a presidential cabinet (Elaine Chao, secretary of labor).
2005	First African American woman appointed secretary of state (Condoleezza Rice).
2007	First woman elected as Speaker of the House (Nancy Pelosi).
2008	For the first time, women make up a majority of a state legislature (New Hampshire).
2009	Record number of women in the Senate (seventeen) and the House (seventy-three).

directly into the line of fire (Segal & Hansen, 1992; Kaminer, 1997; McGirk, 2006).

Are Women a Minority?

A **minority** is any category of people distinguished by physical or cultural difference that a society sets apart and subordinates. Given the economic disadvantage of being a woman in our society, it seems reasonable to say that U.S. women are a minority even though they outnumber men.¹

Even so, most white women do not think of themselves in this way (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985). This is partly because, unlike racial minorities (including African Americans) and ethnic minori-



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 13–1 Women in State Government across the United States

Although women make up half of U.S. adults, just 23 percent of the seats in state legislatures are held by women. Look at the state-by-state variations in the map. In which regions of the country have women gained the greatest political power? What do you think accounts for this pattern?

✳️ **Explore** the percentage of women in management, business, and finance in your local community and in counties across the United States on mysoclab.com

Source: Center for American Women and Politics (2011).

ties (say, Hispanics), white women are well represented at all levels of the class structure, including the very top.

Bear in mind, however, that at every class level, women typically have less income, wealth, education, and power than men. Patriarchy makes women dependent on men—first their fathers and later their husbands—for their social standing (Bernard, 1981).

Minority Women: Intersection Theory

If women are defined as a minority, what about minority women? Are they doubly disadvantaged? This question lies at the heart of **intersection theory**, *analysis of the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage*. Research shows that disadvantages linked to gender and race often combine to produce especially low social standing (Ovadia, 2001).

Income data illustrate the validity of this theory. Looking first at race and ethnicity, the median income in 2009 for African American women working full time was \$31,933, which is 82 percent as much as the \$39,010 earned by non-Hispanic white women working full time; Hispanic women earned \$27,268—just 70 percent as much as their white counterparts. Looking at gender, African American women earned only 85 percent as much as African American men, and Hispanic women earned only 86 percent as much as Hispanic men.

Combining these disadvantages, African American women earned 62 percent as much as non-Hispanic white men, and Hispanic women earned 53 percent as much (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These differences reflect minority women’s lower positions in the occupational and educational hierarchies. These data confirm that although gender has a powerful effect on our lives, it does not operate alone. Class position, race and ethnicity, and gender form a multilayered system of disadvantage for some and privilege for others (Saint Jean & Feagin, 1998).

Violence against Women

In the nineteenth century, men claimed the right to rule their households, even to the point of using physical discipline against their wives, and a great deal of “manly” violence is still directed at women. A government report estimates that 294,000 aggravated assaults against women occur annually. To this number can be added 106,000 rapes or sexual assaults and perhaps 1.5 million simple assaults (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

Gender violence is also an issue on college and university campuses. According to research carried out by the U.S. Department of Justice, in a given academic year, about 3 percent of female college students become victims of rape (either attempted or completed).

In recent decades, our society has recognized sexual harassment as an important problem. At least officially, unwelcome sexual attention is no longer tolerated in the workplace. The television show *Mad Men*, which gives us a window back to the early 1960s, shows us our society before the more recent wave of feminism began.



Projecting these figures over a typical five-year college career, about 20 percent of college women experience rape. In 85 to 90 percent of all cases, the victim knew the offender, and most of the assaults took place in the man's or woman's living quarters while having a party or being on a date (National Institute of Justice, 2011).

Off campus as well, most gender-linked violence also occurs where most interaction between women and men takes place: in the home. Richard Gelles (cited in Roesch, 1984) argues that with the exception of the police and the military, the family is the most violent organization in the United States, and women suffer most of the injuries. The risk of violence is especially great for low-income women living in families that face a great deal of stress; low-income women also have fewer options to get out of a dangerous home (Smolowe, 1994; Frias & Angel, 2007).

Violence against women also occurs in casual relationships. As noted in Chapter 9 ("Deviance"), most rapes involve men known, and often trusted, by the victims. Dianne Herman (2001) claims that abuse of women is built into our way of life. All forms of violence against women—from the catcalls that intimidate women on city streets to a pinch in a crowded subway to physical assaults that occur at home—express what she calls a "rape culture" of men trying to dominate women. Sexual violence is fundamentally about *power*, not sex, and therefore should be understood as a dimension of gender stratification.

In global perspective, violence against women is built into different cultures in different ways. One case in point is the practice of female genital mutilation, a painful and often dangerous surgical procedure performed in more than forty countries and known to occur in the United States, as shown in Global Map 13–2 on page 306. The Thinking About Diversity box on page 307 highlights a case of genital

mutilation that took place in California and asks whether this practice, which some people defend as promoting "morality," amounts to a case of violence against women.

Violence against Men

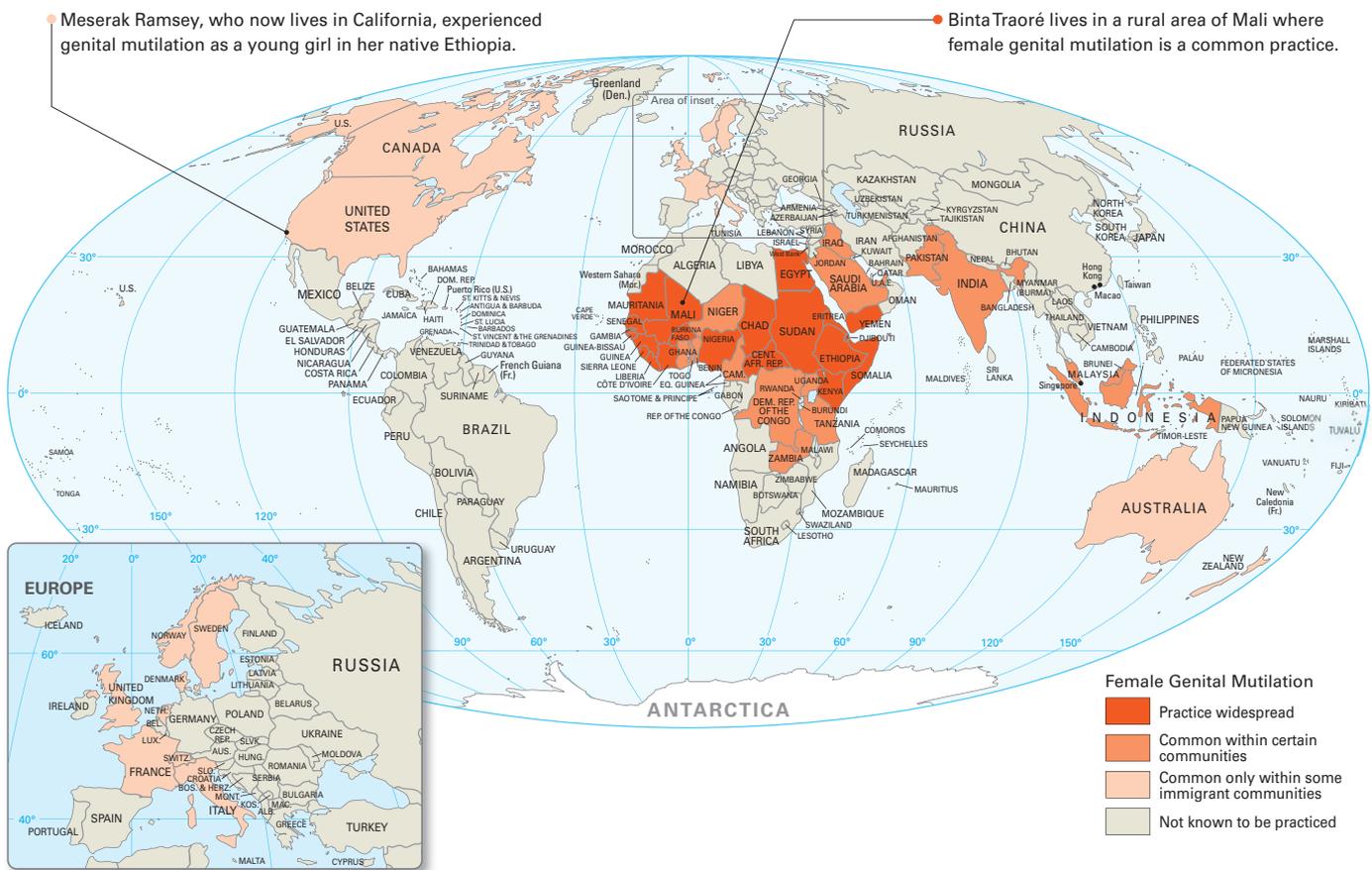
If our way of life encourages violence against women, it may encourage even more violence against men. As noted earlier in Chapter 9 ("Deviance"), in more than 80 percent of cases in which police make an arrest for a violent crime, including murder, robbery, and physical assault, the person arrested is a male. In addition, 53 percent of all victims of violent crime are also men (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

Our culture tends to define masculinity in terms of aggression and play hard. "Real men" work and play hard, speed on the highways, and let nothing stand in their way. A higher crime rate is one result. But even when no laws are broken, men's lives involve more stress and social isolation than women's lives, which is one reason that the suicide rate for men is four times higher than for women. In addition, as noted earlier, men live, on average, about five fewer years than women.

Violence is not simply a matter of choices made by individuals. It is built into our way of life, with resulting harm to both men and women. In short, the way any culture constructs gender plays an important part in how violent or peaceful a society will be.



The basic insight of intersection theory is that various dimensions of social stratification—including race and gender—can add up to great disadvantages for some categories of people. Just as African Americans earn less than whites, women earn less than men. Thus African American women confront a "double disadvantage," earning just 62 cents for every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men. How would you explain the fact that some categories of people are much more likely to end up in low-paying jobs like this one?



Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 13–2 Female Genital Mutilation in Global Perspective

Female genital mutilation is known to be performed in more than forty countries around the world. Across Africa, the practice is common and affects a majority of girls in the eastern African nations of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. In several Asian nations, including India, the practice is limited to a few ethnic minorities. In the United States, Canada, several European nations, and Australia, there are reports of the practice among some immigrants.

Sources: Data from Seager (2003), World Health Organization (2008), UNICEF (2009), and Population Reference Bureau (2010).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment refers to *comments, gestures, or physical contacts of a sexual nature that are deliberate, repeated, and unwelcome*. During the 1990s, sexual harassment became an issue of national importance that rewrote the rules for workplace interaction between women and men.

Most (but not all) victims of sexual harassment are women. The reason is that, first, our culture encourages men to be sexually assertive and to see women in sexual terms. As a result, social interaction in the workplace, on campus, and elsewhere can easily take on sexual overtones. Second, most people in positions of power—including business executives, doctors, bureau chiefs, assembly-line supervisors, professors, and military officers—are men who oversee the work of women. Surveys carried out in widely different work settings show

that 3 percent of women claim that they have been harassed on the job during the past year and about half of women say they receive unwanted sexual attention (NORC, 2011:1508).

Sexual harassment is sometimes obvious and direct: A supervisor may ask for sexual favors from an employee and make threats if the advances are refused. Courts have declared such *quid pro quo* sexual harassment (the Latin phrase means “one thing in return for another”) to be a violation of civil rights.

More often, however, sexual harassment is a matter of subtle behavior—suggestive teasing, off-color jokes, comments about someone’s looks—that may not even be intended to harass anyone. But based on the *effect* standard favored by many feminists, such actions add up to creating a *hostile environment*. Incidents of this kind are far more complex because they involve different percep-



Meserak Ramsey, a woman born in Ethiopia and now working as a nurse in California, paid a visit to an old friend's home. Soon after arriving, she noticed her friend's eighteen-month-old daughter huddled in the corner of a room in obvious distress. "What's wrong with her?" she asked.

Ramsey was shocked when the woman said her daughter had recently had a clitoridectomy, the surgical removal of the clitoris. This type of female genital mutilation—performed by a midwife, a tribal practitioner, or a doctor, and typically without anesthesia—is common in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Sudan, Egypt, and especially in Ethiopia and Somalia. The practice is known to exist in certain cultural groups in other nations around the world. It is illegal in the United States.

Among members of highly patriarchal societies, husbands demand that their wives be virgins at marriage and remain sexually faithful thereafter. The point of female genital mutilation is to eliminate sexual feeling, which, people assume, makes the girl less likely to violate sexual norms and thus be more desirable to men. In about one-fifth of all cases, an even more severe procedure, called infibulation, is performed, in which the entire external genital area is removed and the surfaces are stitched together, leaving only a small hole for urination and menstruation. Before marriage, a husband retains the right to open the wound and ensure himself of his bride's virginity.

How many women have undergone genital mutilation? Worldwide, estimates

place the number at more than 100 million (World Health Organization, 2010). In the United States, hundreds or even thousands of such procedures are performed every year. In most cases, immigrant mothers and grandmothers who have themselves been mutilated insist that young girls in their family follow their example. Indeed, many immigrant women demand the procedure *because* their daughters now live in the United States, where sexual mores are more lax. "I don't have to worry about her now," the girl's mother explained to Meserak Ramsey. "She'll be a good girl."

Medically, the consequences of genital mutilation include more than the loss of sexual pleasure. Pain is intense and can persist for years. There is also danger of infection, infertility, and even death. Ramsey knows this all too well: She herself underwent genital mutilation as a young girl. She is one



These young women have just undergone female genital mutilation. What do you think should be done about this practice?

of the lucky ones who has had few medical problems since. But the extent of her suffering is suggested by this story: She invited a young U.S. couple to stay at her home. Late at night, she heard the woman cry out and burst into their room to investigate, only to learn that the couple was making love and the woman had just had an orgasm. "I didn't understand," Ramsey recalls. "I thought that there must be something wrong with American girls. But now I know that there is something wrong with me." Or with a system that inflicts such injury in the name of traditional morality.

What Do You Think?

1. Is female genital mutilation a medical procedure or a means of social control? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think should be done about female genital mutilation in places where it is widespread? Do you think respect for human rights should override respect for cultural differences in this case? Explain your answer.
3. The city of San Francisco proposed putting to voters a measure banning the infant circumcision of males, a practice that some critics call "male genital mutilation." Would you support a debate on this practice? Explain.

Sources: Crossette (1995), Boyle, Songora, & Foss (2001), Population Reference Bureau (2010), and Sabatini (2011).

tions of the same behavior. For example, a man may think that repeatedly complimenting a co-worker on her appearance is simply being friendly. The co-worker may believe that the man is thinking of her in sexual terms and is not taking her work seriously, an attitude that could harm her job performance and prospects for advancement.

Pornography

Chapter 8 ("Sexuality and Society") defined *pornography* as sexually explicit material that causes sexual arousal. Keep in mind, however, that people take different views of what is and what is not pornographic. The law gives local communities the power to define what

sexually explicit materials violate "community standards of decency" and "lack any redeeming social value."

Traditionally, people have raised concerns about pornography as a *moral* issue. But pornography also plays a part in gender stratification. From this point of view, pornography is really a *power* issue because most pornography dehumanizes women, depicting them as the playthings of men.

In addition, there is widespread concern that pornography promotes violence against women by portraying them as weak and underserving of respect. Men may show contempt for women defined this way by striking out against them. Surveys show that about half of U.S. adults think that pornography encourages men to commit rape (NORC, 2011:413).

APPLYING THEORY

Gender

	Structural-Functional Approach	Symbolic-Interaction Approach	Social-Conflict Approach
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Micro-level	Macro-level
What does gender mean?	Parsons described gender in terms of two complementary patterns of behavior: masculine and feminine.	Numerous sociologists have shown that gender is part of the reality that guides social interaction in everyday situations.	Engels described gender in terms of the power of one sex over the other.
Is gender helpful or harmful?	Helpful. Gender gives men and women distinctive roles and responsibilities that help society operate smoothly. Gender builds social unity as men and women come together to form families.	Hard to say; gender is both helpful and harmful. In everyday life, gender is one of the factors that help us relate to one another. At the same time, gender shapes human behavior, placing men in control of social situations. Men tend to initiate most interactions, while women typically act in a more deferential manner.	Harmful. Gender limits people's personal development. Gender divides society by giving power to men to control the lives of women. Capitalism makes patriarchy stronger.

Like sexual harassment, pornography raises complex and conflicting issues. Despite the fact that some material may offend just about everybody, many people defend the rights of free speech and artistic expression. Pressure to restrict pornography has increased in recent decades, reflecting both the long-standing concern that pornography weakens morality and more recent concerns that it is demeaning and threatening to women.

Theories of Gender

Apply

Why does gender exist in the first place? Sociology's three main approaches offer insights about the importance of gender in social organization. The Applying Theory table summarizes the important insights offered by these approaches.

Structural-Functional Theory

The structural-functional approach views society as a complex system of many separate but integrated parts. From this point of view, gender serves as a means to organize social life.

As Chapter 4 ("Society") explained, members of hunting and gathering societies had little power over the forces of biology. Lacking effective birth control, women were frequently pregnant, and the responsibilities of child care kept them close to home. At the same time, men's greater strength made them more suited for warfare and hunting game. Over the centuries, this sexual division of labor became institutionalized and largely taken for granted (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985; Freedman, 2002).

Industrial technology opens up a much greater range of cultural possibilities. With human muscles no longer the main energy source, the physical strength of men becomes less important. In addition, the

ability to control reproduction gives women greater choices about how to live. Modern societies relax traditional gender roles as they become more meritocratic because such rigid roles waste an enormous amount of human talent. Yet change comes slowly because gender is deeply rooted in culture.

Gender and Social Integration

As Talcott Parsons (1942, 1951, 1954) observed, gender helps integrate society, at least in its traditional form. Gender establishes a *complementary* set of roles that links men and women into family units and gives each sex responsibility for carrying out important tasks. Women take the lead in managing the household and raising children. Men connect the family to the larger world as they participate in the labor force.

Thus gender plays an important part in socialization. Society teaches boys—presumably destined for the labor force—to be rational, self-assured, and competitive. Parsons called this complex of traits *instrumental* qualities. To prepare girls for child rearing, their socialization stresses *expressive* qualities, such as emotional responsiveness and sensitivity to others.

Society encourages gender conformity by instilling in men and women a fear that straying too far from accepted standards of masculinity or femininity will cause rejection by the other sex. In simple terms, women learn to reject nonmasculine men as sexually unattractive, and men learn to reject unfeminine women. In sum, gender integrates society both structurally (in terms of what we do) and morally (in terms of what we believe).

Evaluate Influential in the 1950s, this approach has lost much of its standing today. First, functionalism assumes a singular vision of society that is not shared by everyone. Historically, many women have worked outside the home because of economic need, a fact

not reflected in Parsons's conventional, middle-class view of family life. Second, Parsons's analysis ignores the personal strains and social costs of rigid, traditional gender roles. Third, in the eyes of those seeking sexual equality, Parsons's gender "complementarity" amounts to little more than women submitting to male domination.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING In Parsons's analysis, what functions does gender perform for society?

Symbolic-Interaction Theory

The symbolic-interaction approach takes a micro-level view of society, focusing on face-to-face interaction in everyday life. As suggested in Chapter 6 ("Social Interaction in Everyday Life"), gender affects everyday interaction in a number of ways.

Gender and Everyday Life

If you watch women and men interacting, you will probably notice that women typically engage in more eye contact than men do. Why? Holding eye contact is a way of encouraging the conversation to continue; in addition, looking directly at someone clearly shows the other person that you are paying attention.

This pattern is an example of sex roles, defined earlier as the way a society defines how women and men should think and behave. To understand such patterns, consider the fact that people with more power tend to take charge of social encounters. When men and women engage one another, as they do in families and in the workplace, it is men who typically initiate the interaction. That is, men speak first, set the topics of discussion, and control the outcomes. With less power, women are expected to be more *deferential*, meaning that they show respect for others of higher social position. In many cases, this means that women (just like children or others with less power) spend more time being silent and also encouraging men (or others with more power) not just with eye contact but also by smiling or nodding in agreement. As a technique to control a conversation, men often interrupt others, just as they typically feel less need to ask the opinions of other people, especially those with less power (Tannen, 1990, 1994; Henley, Hamilton, & Thorne, 1992; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999).

Evaluate The strength of the symbolic-interaction approach is helping us see how gender plays a part in shaping almost all our everyday experiences. Because our society defines men (and everything we consider to be masculine) as having more value than women (and what is viewed as feminine), just about every familiar social encounter is "gendered," so that men and women interact in distinctive and unequal ways.

The symbolic-interaction approach suggests that individuals socially construct the reality they experience as they interact, using gender as one element of their personal "performances." Gender can be a useful guide to how we behave. Yet gender, as a structural dimension of society, is beyond the immediate control of any of us as individuals and also gives some people power over others. There-



In the 1950s, Talcott Parsons proposed that sociologists interpret gender as a matter of *differences*. As he saw it, masculine men and feminine women formed strong families and made for an orderly society. In recent decades, however, social-conflict theory has reinterpreted gender as a matter of *inequality*. From this point of view, U.S. society places men in a position of dominance over women.

fore, patterns of everyday social interaction reflect our society's gender stratification. Everyday interaction also helps reinforce this inequality. For example, to the extent that fathers take the lead in family discussions, the entire family learns to expect men to "display leadership" and "show their wisdom."

A limitation of the symbolic-interaction approach is that by focusing on situational social experience, it says little about the broad patterns of inequality that set the rules for our everyday lives. To understand the roots of gender stratification, we have to "look up" to see more closely how society makes men and women unequal. We will do this using the social-conflict approach.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING Point to ways that gender shapes the everyday face-to-face interactions of individuals.

Social-Conflict Theory

From a social-conflict point of view, gender involves differences not just in behavior but in power as well. Consider the striking similarity between the way ideas about gender benefit men and the way oppression of racial and ethnic minorities benefits white people. Conventional ideas about gender do not make society operate smoothly; they create division and tension, with men seeking to protect their privileges as women challenge the status quo.

As earlier chapters noted, the social-conflict approach draws heavily on the ideas of Karl Marx. Yet as far as gender is concerned, Marx was a product of his time, and his writings focused almost

entirely on men. However, his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels did develop a theory of gender stratification.

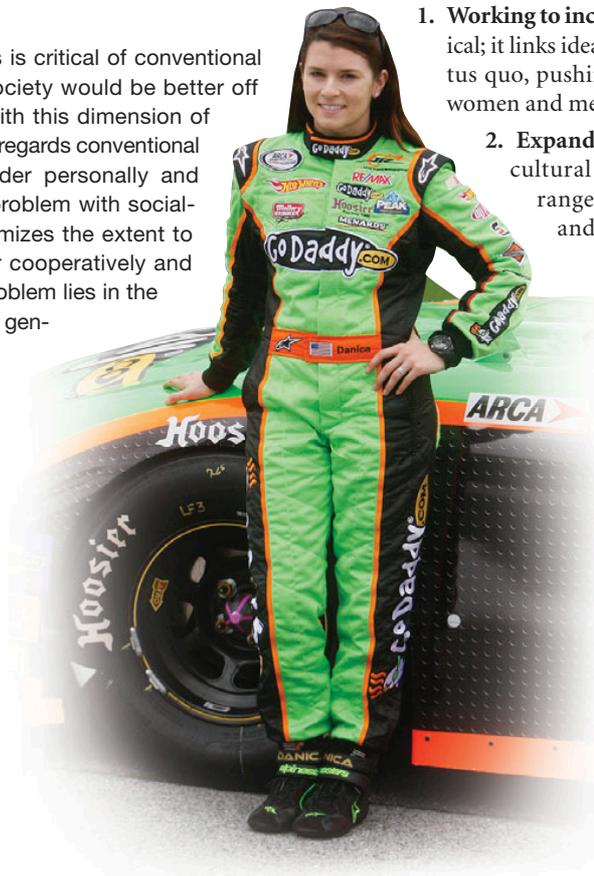
Gender and Class Inequality

Looking back through history, Engels saw that in hunting and gathering societies, the activities of women and men, although different, had equal importance. A successful hunt brought men great prestige, but the vegetation gathered by women provided most of a group's food supply. As technological advances led to a productive surplus, however, social equality and communal sharing gave way to private property and ultimately a class hierarchy, and men gained significant power over women. With surplus wealth to pass on to heirs, upper-class men needed to be sure their sons were their own, which led them to control the sexuality of women. The desire to control property brought about monogamous marriage and the family. Women were taught to remain virgins until marriage, to remain faithful to their husbands thereafter, and to build their lives around bearing and raising one man's children.

According to Engels (1902, orig. 1884), capitalism makes male domination even stronger. First, capitalism creates more wealth, which gives greater power to men as income earners and owners of property. Second, an expanding capitalist economy depends on turning people, especially women, into consumers who seek personal fulfillment through buying and using products. Third, society assigns women the task of maintaining the home to free men to work in factories. The double exploitation of capitalism, as Engels saw it, lies in paying men low wages for their labor and paying women no wages at all.

Evaluate Social-conflict analysis is critical of conventional ideas about gender, claiming that society would be better off if we minimized or even did away with this dimension of social structure. That is, this approach regards conventional families, which traditionalists consider personally and socially positive, as a social evil. A problem with social-conflict analysis, then, is that it minimizes the extent to which women and men live together cooperatively and often happily in families. A second problem lies in the assertion that capitalism is the basis of gender stratification. In fact, agrarian societies are typically more patriarchal than industrial-capitalist societies. Although socialist nations, including the People's Republic of China and the former Soviet Union, did move women into the work-

NASCAR racing has always been a masculine world. But Danica Patrick has made a name for herself as an outstanding driver. At the same time, she has made much of her income from trading on her good looks, including the 2009 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. Are men as likely to do the same? Why or why not?



force, by and large they provided women with very low pay in sex-segregated jobs (Rosendahl, 1997; Haney, 2002).

CHECK YOUR LEARNING According to Friedrich Engels, how does gender support social inequality in a capitalist class system?

Feminism

Evaluate

Feminism is support of social equality for women and men, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. The first wave of feminism in the United States began in the 1840s as women who were opposed to slavery, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, drew parallels between the oppression of African Americans and the oppression of women. Their main objective was obtaining the right to vote, which was finally achieved in 1920. But other disadvantages persisted, causing a second wave of feminism to arise in the 1960s that continues today.

Basic Feminist Ideas

Feminism views the personal experiences of women and men through the lens of gender. How we think of ourselves (gender identity), how we act (gender roles), and our sex's social standing (gender stratification) are all rooted in the operation of society.

Although feminists disagree about many things, most support five general principles:

- 1. Working to increase equality.** Feminist thinking is political; it links ideas to action. Feminism is critical of the status quo, pushing for change toward social equality for women and men.
- 2. Expanding human choice.** Feminists argue that cultural conceptions of gender divide the full range of human qualities into two opposing and limiting spheres: the female world of emotions and cooperation and the male world of rationality and competition. As an alternative, feminists propose a "reintegration of humanity" by which all individuals can develop all human traits (M. French, 1985).
- 3. Eliminating gender stratification.** Feminism opposes laws and cultural norms that limit the education, income, and job opportunities of women. For this reason, feminists have long supported passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution, which states, in its entirety, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." The

ERA was first proposed in Congress in 1923. Although it has widespread support, it has yet to become law.

4. **Ending sexual violence.** Today's women's movement seeks to eliminate sexual violence. Feminists argue that patriarchy distorts the relationships between women and men, encouraging violence against women in the form of rape, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and pornography (A. Dworkin, 1987; Freedman, 2002).
5. **Promoting sexual freedom.** Finally, feminism supports women's control over their sexuality and reproduction. Feminists support the free availability of birth control information. As Figure 13-3 shows, 73 percent of married women of childbearing age in the United States use contraception; the use of contraceptives is far less common in many lower-income nations. Most feminists also support a woman's right to choose whether to bear children or end a pregnancy, rather than allowing men—husbands, physicians, and legislators—to control their reproduction. Many feminists also support gay people's efforts to end prejudice and discrimination in a largely heterosexual culture (Ferree & Hess, 1995; Armstrong, 2002).

Types of Feminism

Although feminists agree on the importance of gender equality, they disagree on how to achieve it: through liberal feminism, socialist feminism, or radical feminism (Stacey, 1983; L. Vogel, 1983; Ferree & Hess, 1995; Armstrong, 2002; Freedman, 2002). The Applying Theory table on page 312 highlights the key arguments made by each type of feminist thinking.

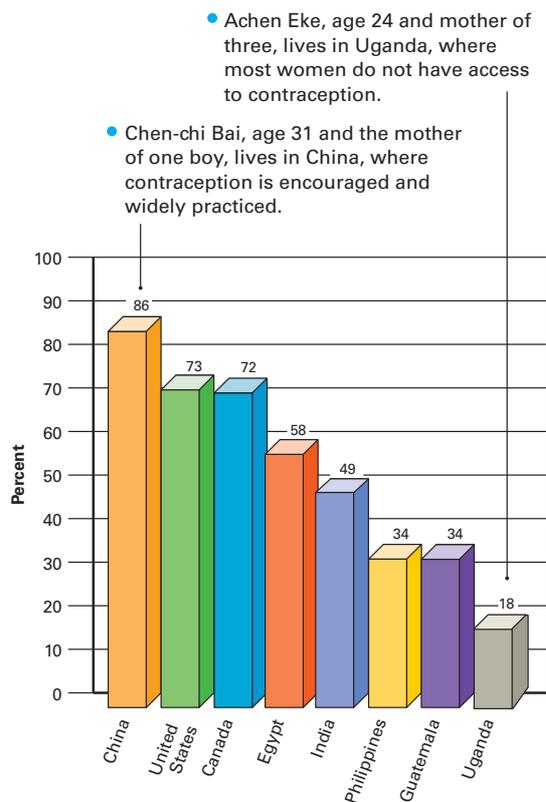
Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in the classic liberal thinking that individuals should be free to develop their own talents and pursue their own interests. Liberal feminism accepts the basic organization of our society but seeks to expand the rights and opportunities of women, in part through passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Liberal feminists also support reproductive freedom for all women. They respect the family as a social institution but seek changes, including more widely available maternity and paternity leave and child care for parents who work.

Given their belief in the rights of individuals, liberal feminists think that women should advance according to their own efforts, rather than by working collectively for change. They believe that both women and men, through their individual achievement, are capable of improving their lives, as long as society removes legal and cultural barriers.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism evolved from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. From this point of view, capitalism strengthens patriarchy by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. Socialist feminists do not think the reforms supported by liberal feminism go far enough. The family form created by capitalism must change if we are to replace "domestic slavery" with some collective means of carrying out housework and child care. Replac-



Global Snapshot

FIGURE 13-3 Use of Contraception by Married Women of Childbearing Age

In the United States, most married women of childbearing age use contraception. In many lower-income countries, however, most women do not have the opportunity to make this choice.

Source: Population Reference Bureau (2010).

ing the traditional family can come about only through a socialist revolution that creates a state-centered economy to meet the needs of all.

Radical Feminism

Like socialist feminism, *radical feminism* finds liberal feminism inadequate. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is so deeply rooted in society that even a socialist revolution would not end it. Instead, reaching the goal of gender equality means that society must eliminate gender itself.

One possible way to achieve this goal is to use new reproductive technology (see Chapter 18, "Families") to separate women's bodies from the process of childbearing. With an end to motherhood, radical feminists reason, society could leave behind the entire family system, liberating women, men, and children from the oppression of family, gender, and sex itself (A. Dworkin, 1987). Radical feminism

APPLYING THEORY

Feminism

	Liberal Feminism	Socialist Feminism	Radical Feminism
Does it accept the basic order of society?	Yes. Liberal feminism seeks change only to ensure equality of opportunity.	No. Socialist feminism supports an end to social classes and to family gender roles that encourage “domestic slavery.”	No. Radical feminism supports an end to the family system.
How do women improve their social standing?	Individually, according to personal ability and effort.	Collectively, through socialist revolution.	Collectively, by working to eliminate gender itself.

seeks an egalitarian and gender-free society, a revolution more sweeping than that sought by Marx.

Opposition to Feminism

Because feminism calls for significant change, it has always been controversial. But today, just 20 percent of U.S. adults say they oppose

feminism, a share that has declined over time (NORC, 2009). Figure 13–4 shows a similar downward trend in opposition to feminism among college students after 1970. Note, however, that there has been little change in attitudes in recent years and that more men than women express antifeminist attitudes. In addition, surveys show that only 20 percent of women say they are willing to call themselves “feminist” (“The Barrier that Didn’t Fall,” 2008).

Feminism provokes criticism and resistance from both men and women who hold conventional ideas about gender. Some men oppose sexual equality for the same reason that many white people have historically opposed social equality for people of color: They do not want to give up their privileges. Other men and women, including those who are neither rich nor powerful, distrust a social movement (especially its radical expressions) that attacks the traditional family and rejects patterns that have guided male-female relations for centuries.

Men who have been socialized to value strength and dominance may feel uneasy about the feminist ideal of men as gentle and warm (Doyle, 1983). Similarly, some women whose lives center on their husbands and children may think that feminism does not value the social roles that give meaning to their lives. In general, resistance to feminism is strongest among women who have the least education and those who do not work outside the home (Marshall, 1985; Ferree & Hess, 1995; CBS News, 2005).



How much do you think conceptions of gender will change over your lifetime? Will there be more change in the lives of women or men? Why?

Race and ethnicity play some part in shaping people's attitudes toward feminism. In general, African Americans (especially African American women) express the greatest support of feminist goals, followed by whites, with Hispanic Americans holding somewhat more traditional attitudes when it comes to gender (Kane, 2000).

Criticism of feminism is also found in academic circles. Some sociologists charge that feminism ignores a growing body of evidence that men and women do think and act in somewhat different ways, which may make complete gender equality impossible. Furthermore, say critics, with its drive to increase women's presence in the workplace, feminism undervalues the crucial and unique contribution women make to the development of children, especially in the first years of life (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Popenoe, 1993b; Gibbs, 2001).

Finally, there is the question of *how* women should go about improving their social standing. A large majority of U.S. adults believe that women should have equal rights, but 70 percent also say that women should advance individually, according to their abilities; only 10 percent favor women's rights groups or collective action (NORC, 2007: 430).

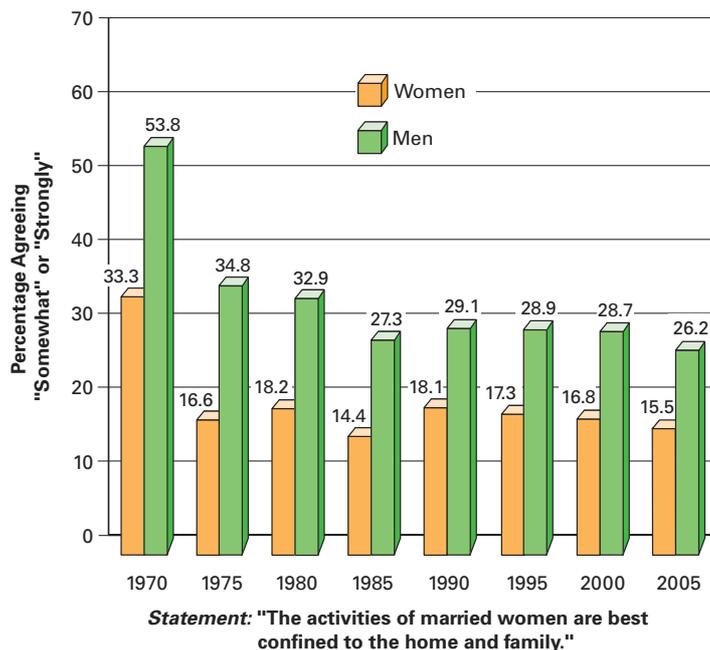
For these reasons, most opposition to feminism is directed toward its socialist and radical forms, while support for liberal feminism is widespread. In addition, there is an unmistakable trend toward greater gender equality. In 1977, some 65 percent of all adults endorsed the statement "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." By 2010, the share supporting this statement had dropped sharply, to 36 percent (NORC, 2011:438).

Gender: Looking Ahead

Evaluate

Predictions about the future are no more than educated guesses. Just as economists disagree about what the employment rate will be a year from now, sociologists can offer only general observations about the likely future of gender and society.

Change so far has been remarkable. A century ago, women were second-class citizens, without access to many jobs, barred from political office, and with no right to vote. Although women remain socially disadvantaged, the movement toward equality has surged ahead. Two-thirds of people entering the workforce during the 1990s were women, and in 2000, for the first time, a majority of U.S. families had both husband and wife in the paid labor force. Today's economy depends a great deal on the earnings of women. In addition, more than one in five married men have wives who earn more than they do (Fry & Cohn, 2010).



Student Snapshot

FIGURE 13-4 Opposition to Feminism among First-Year College Students, 1970–2005

The share of college students expressing antifeminist views declined after 1970. Men are still more likely than women to hold such attitudes.

Sources: Astin et al. (2002) and Pryor et al. (2006).

Many factors have contributed to this transformation. Perhaps most important, industrialization and recent advances in computer technology have shifted the nature of work from physically demanding tasks that favor male strength to jobs that require thought and imagination. This change puts women and men on an even footing. Also, because birth control technology has given us greater control over reproduction, women's lives are less constrained by unwanted pregnancies.

Many women and men have also deliberately pursued social equality. For example, complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace are now taken much more seriously than they were a generation ago. As more women assume positions of power in the corporate and political worlds, social changes in the twenty-first century may be as great as those that have already taken place.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 13 Gender Stratification

Can you spot “gender messages” in the world around you?

As this chapter makes clear, gender is one of the basic organizing principles of everyday life. Most of the places we go and most of the activities we engage in as part of our daily routines are “gendered,” meaning that they are defined as either more masculine or more feminine. Understanding this fact, corporations keep gender in mind when they market products to the public. Take a look at the ads below. In each case, can you explain how gender is at work in selling these products?

Hint Looking for “gender messages” in ads is a process that involves several levels of analysis. Start on the surface by noting everything obvious in the ad, including the setting, the background, and especially the people. Then notice how the people are shown—what they are doing, how they are situated, their facial expressions, how they are dressed, and how they appear to relate to each other. Finally, state what you think is the message of the ad, based on both the ad itself and also what you know about the surrounding society.

There are a lot of gender dynamics going on in this ad. What do you see?





Generally, our society defines cosmetics as feminine because most cosmetics are marketed toward women. How and why is this ad different?

What gender messages do you see in this ad?



Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Look through some recent magazines and select three advertisements that involve gender. In each case, provide analysis of how gender is used in the ad.
2. Watch several hours of children's television programming on a Saturday morning. Notice the advertising, which mostly sells

- toys and breakfast cereal. Keep track of what share of toys are "gendered," that is, aimed at one sex or the other. What traits do you associate with toys intended for boys and those intended for girls?
3. Do some research on the history of women's issues in your state. When was the first woman sent to

Congress? What laws once existed that restricted the work women could do? Do any such laws exist today? Go to the "Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com to read more about how gender can be changed and learn some of the personal benefits that come from recognizing this fact.

Gender and Inequality

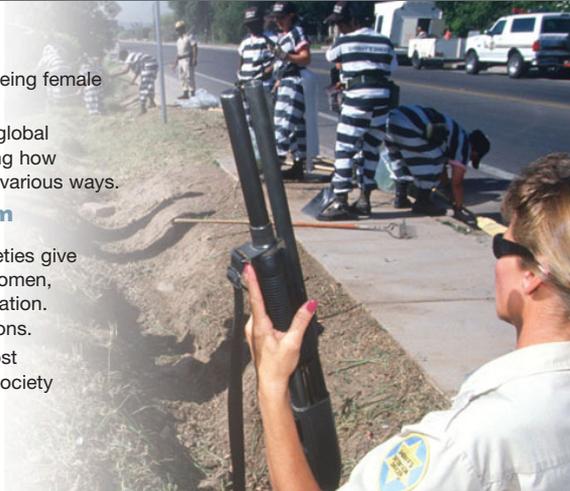
Gender refers to the meaning a culture attaches to being female or male.

- Evidence that gender is rooted in culture includes global comparisons by Margaret Mead and others showing how societies define what is feminine and masculine in various ways.

 **Read the Document** on [mysoclab.com](#)

- Gender is not only about difference: Because societies give more power and other resources to men than to women, gender is an important dimension of social stratification. **Sexism** is built into the operation of social institutions.
- Although some degree of **patriarchy** is found almost everywhere, it varies throughout history and from society to society. **pp. 294–97**

 **Watch the Video** on [mysoclab.com](#)



gender (p. 294) the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male

gender stratification (p. 294) the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between men and women

matriarchy (p. 296) a form of social organization in which females dominate males

patriarchy (p. 296) a form of social organization in which males dominate females

sexism (p. 298) the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other

Gender and Socialization

Through the socialization process, gender becomes part of our personalities (**gender identity**) and our actions (**gender roles**). All the major agents of socialization—family, peer groups, schools, and the mass media—reinforce cultural definitions of what is feminine and masculine

pp. 297–99

gender roles (sex roles) (p. 298) attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex



Gender and Social Stratification

Gender stratification shapes **the workplace**:

- A majority of women are now in the paid labor force, but 39% hold clerical or service jobs.
- Comparing full-time U.S. workers, women earn 77% as much as men.
- This gender difference in earnings results from differences in jobs, differences in family responsibilities, and discrimination. **pp. 299–301**

Gender stratification shapes **family life**:

- Most unpaid housework is performed by women, whether or not they hold jobs outside the home.
- Pregnancy and raising small children keep many women out of the labor force at a time when their male peers are making important career gains. **pp. 301–2**

Gender stratification shapes **education**:

- Women now earn 59% of all associate's and bachelor's degrees.
- Women make up 47% of law school students and are an increasing share of graduates in professions traditionally dominated by men, including medicine and business administration. **p. 302**

Gender stratification shapes **politics**:

- Until a century ago, almost no women held any elected office in the United States.
- In recent decades, the number of women in politics has increased significantly.
- Even so, the vast majority of elected officials, especially at the national level, are men.
- Women make up only about 15% of U.S. military personnel. **pp. 302–3**

 **Explore the Map** on [mysoclab.com](#)

Intersection theory investigates the factors of race, class, and gender, which combine to cause special disadvantages for some categories of people.

- Women of color encounter greater social disadvantages than white women and earn much less than white men.
- Because all women have a distinctive social identity and are disadvantaged, they are a minority, although most white women do not think of themselves this way. **p. 304**



minority (p. 303) any category of people distinguished by physical or cultural difference that a society sets apart and subordinates

intersection theory (p. 304) analysis of the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage

Violence against women and men is a widespread problem that is linked to how a society defines gender. Related issues include

- **sexual harassment**, which mostly victimizes women because our culture encourages men to be assertive and to see women in sexual terms.
- **pornography**, which portrays women as sexual objects. Many see pornography as a moral issue; because pornography dehumanizes women, it is also a power issue. **pp. 304–8**

sexual harassment (p. 306) comments, gestures, or physical contacts of a sexual nature that are deliberate, repeated, and unwelcome

Theories of Gender

The **structural-functional approach** suggests that

- in preindustrial societies, distinctive roles for males and females reflect biological differences between the sexes.
- in industrial societies, marked gender inequality becomes dysfunctional and gradually decreases.

Talcott Parsons described gender differences in terms of complementary roles that promote the social integration of families and society as a whole. **pp. 308–9**

The **symbolic-interaction approach** suggests that

- individuals use gender as one element of their personal performances as they socially construct reality through everyday interactions.
- gender plays a part in shaping almost all our everyday experiences.

Because our society defines men as having more value than women, the sex roles that define how women and men should behave place men in control of social situations; women play a more deferential role. **p. 309**

The **social-conflict approach** suggests that

- gender is an important dimension of social inequality and social conflict.
- gender inequality benefits men and disadvantages women.

Friedrich Engels tied gender stratification to the rise of private property and a class hierarchy. Marriage and the family are strategies by which men control their property through control of the sexuality of women. Capitalism exploits everyone by paying men low wages and assigning women the task of maintaining the home. **pp. 309–10**



Feminism

Feminism

- endorses the social equality of women and men and opposes patriarchy and sexism.
- seeks to eliminate violence against women.
- advocates giving women control over their reproduction. **pp. 310–11**

There are three types of feminism:

- Liberal feminism seeks equal opportunity for both sexes within the existing society.
- Socialist feminism claims that gender equality will come about by replacing capitalism with socialism.
- Radical feminism seeks to eliminate the concept of gender itself and to create an egalitarian and gender-free society.

Today, although only about 20% of U.S. adults say they oppose feminism, only 20% of U.S. women say they call themselves “feminist.” Most opposition to feminism is directed toward socialist and radical feminism. Support for liberal feminism is widespread. **pp. 311–13**

feminism (p. 310) support of social equality for women and men, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism



14 Race and Ethnicity

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand that both race and ethnicity are socially constructed ideas that are important dimensions of social stratification.



Apply various sociological theories to the concept of prejudice.



Analyze the social standing of various racial and ethnic categories of the U.S. population.



Evaluate recent trends involving prejudice and discrimination.



Create a deeper appreciation for the racial and ethnic diversity of U.S. society, past, present, and future.





CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explains how race and ethnicity are created by society. The United States is a country that is as racially and ethnically diverse as any in the world. Here and elsewhere, both race and ethnicity are not only matters of difference but also dimensions of social inequality. ■



On a cool November morning in New York City, the instructor of a sociology class at Bronx Community College is leading a small-group discussion of race and ethnicity. He explains that the meaning of both concepts is far less clear than most people think. Then he asks, “How do you describe yourself?”

Eva Rodriguez leans forward in her chair and is quick to respond. “Who am I? Or should I say what am I? This is hard for me to answer. Most people think of race as black and white. But it’s not. I have both black and white ancestry in me, but you know what? I don’t think of

myself in that way. I don’t think of myself in terms of race at all. It would be better to call me Puerto Rican or Hispanic. Personally, I prefer the term ‘Latina.’ Calling myself Latina says I have a mixed racial heritage, and that’s what I am. I wish more people understood that race is not clear-cut.”

This chapter examines the meaning of race and ethnicity. There are now millions of people in the United States who, like Eva Rodriguez, do not think of themselves in terms of a single category but as having a mix of ancestry.

The Social Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

Understand

As the opening to this chapter suggests, people frequently confuse race and ethnicity. For this reason, we begin with some definitions.

Race

A **race** is a socially constructed category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of a society consider important. People may classify one another racially based on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, hair texture, and body shape.

Racial diversity appeared among our human ancestors as the result of living in different geographic regions of the world. In regions of intense heat, for example, humans developed darker skin (from the natural pigment melanin) as protection from the sun; in regions with moderate climates, people have lighter skin. Such differences are

literally only skin deep because human beings the world over are members of a single biological species.

The striking variety of physical traits found today is also the product of migration; genetic characteristics once common to a single place (such as light skin or curly hair) are now found in many lands. Especially pronounced is the racial mix in the Middle East (that is, western Asia), historically a crossroads of migration. Greater physical uniformity characterizes more isolated people, such as the island-dwelling Japanese. But every population has some genetic mixture, and increasing contact among the world’s people ensures even more blending of physical characteristics in the future.

Although we think of race in terms of biological elements, race is a socially constructed concept. It is true that human beings differ in any number of ways involving physical traits, but a “race” comes into being only when the members of a society decide that some physical trait (such as skin color or eye shape) actually *matters*.

Because race involves social definitions, it is a highly variable concept. For example, the members of U.S. society consider racial differences more important than people of many other countries. We also tend to “see” three racial categories—typically, black, white, and Asian—while people in other societies identify many more categories. People in Brazil, for example, distinguish between *branca* (white),

race a socially constructed category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of a society consider important

ethnicity a shared cultural heritage

Read “The Souls of Black Folk” by W.E.B. Du Bois on mysoclab.com



The range of biological variation in human beings is far greater than any system of racial classification allows. This fact is made obvious by trying to place all of the people pictured here into simple racial categories.

parda (brown), *morena* (brunette), *mulata* (mulatto), *preta* (black), and *amarela* (yellow) (Inciardi, Surratt, & Telles, 2000).

In addition, race may be defined differently by various categories of people within a society. In the United States, for example, research shows that white people “see” black people as having darker skin than black people do (Hill, 2002).

The meanings and importance of race not only differ from place to place but also change over time. Back in 1900, for example, it was common in the United States to consider people of Irish, Italian, or Jewish ancestry as “nonwhite.” By 1950, however, this was no longer the case, and such people today are considered part of the “white” category (Loveman, 1999; Brodtkin, 2007).

Today, the Census Bureau allows people to describe themselves using more than one racial category (offering six single-race options and fifty-seven multiracial options). Our society officially recognizes a wide range of multiracial people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Racial Types

Scientists invented the concept of race more than a century ago as they tried to organize the world’s physical diversity into three racial types. They called people with lighter skin and fine hair *Caucasoid*, people with darker skin and coarse hair *Negroid*, and people with yellow or brown skin and distinctive folds on the eyelids *Mongoloid*.

Sociologists consider such terms misleading at best and harmful at worst. For one thing, no society contains biologically “pure” people. The skin color of people we might call “Caucasoid” (or

“Indo-European,” “Caucasian,” or more commonly “white”) ranges from very light (typical in Scandinavia) to very dark (in southern India). The same variation exists among so-called “Negroids” (“Africans” or more commonly “black” people) and “Mongoloids” (“Asians”). In fact, many “white” people (say, in southern India) actually have darker skin than many “black” people (the Aborigines of Australia). Overall, the three racial categories differ in just 6 percent of their genes, and there is actually more genetic variation *within* each category than *between* categories. This means that two people in the European nation of Sweden, randomly selected, are likely to have at least as much genetic difference as a Swede and a person in the African nation of Senegal (Harris & Sim, 2002; American Sociological Association, 2003; California Newsreel, 2003).

So how important is race? From a biological point of view, the only significance of knowing people’s racial category is assessing the risk factors for a few diseases. Why, then, do societies make so much of race? Such categories allow societies to rank people in a hierarchy, giving some people more money, power, and prestige than others and allowing some people to feel that they are inherently “better” than others. Because race may matter so much, societies may construct racial categories in extreme ways. Throughout much of the twentieth century, for example, many southern states labeled as “colored” anyone with as little as one thirty-second African ancestry (that is, one

 [Watch](#) the video “Multiracial Identity, clip 2” on [mysoclab.com](#)

African American great-great-grandparent). Today, the law allows parents to declare the race of a child (or not) as they wish. Even so, most members of U.S. society are still very sensitive to people's racial backgrounds.

A Trend toward Mixture

Over many generations and throughout the Americas, the genetic traits from around the world have become mixed. Many “black” people have a significant Caucasoid ancestry, just as many “white” people have some Negroid genes. Whatever people may think, race is not a black-and-white issue.

Today, people are more willing to define themselves as multiracial. On the most recent U.S. Census survey for 2009, 7.5 million people described themselves by checking two or more racial categories.

TABLE 14–1 Racial and Ethnic Categories in the United States, 2009

Racial or Ethnic Classification*	Approximate U.S. Population	Share of Total Population
Hispanic descent	48,419,324	15.8%
Mexican	31,689,879	10.3
Puerto Rican	4,426,738	1.4
Cuban	1,696,141	0.6
Other Hispanic	10,606,566	3.5
African descent	39,641,060	12.9
Nigerian	254,794	0.1
Ethiopian	186,679	0.1
Somalian	103,117	<
Other African	39,096,470	12.7
Native American descent	2,457,552	0.8
American Indian	1,998,949	0.7
Alaska Native Tribes	108,763	<
Other Native American	349,840	0.1
Asian or Pacific Island descent	14,592,307	4.8
Chinese	3,204,379	1.0
Asian Indian	2,602,676	0.8
Filipino	2,475,794	0.8
Vietnamese	1,481,513	0.5
Korean	1,335,973	0.4
Japanese	766,875	0.2
Cambodian	241,520	0.1
Other Asian or Pacific Islander	2,483,577	0.8
West Indian descent	2,572,415	0.8
Arab descent	1,706,629	0.6
Non-Hispanic European descent	199,851,240	65.1
German	50,709,194	16.5
Irish	36,915,325	12.0
English	27,658,720	9.0
Italian	18,086,617	5.9
Polish	10,091,056	3.3
French	9,411,910	3.1
Scottish	5,847,063	1.9
Dutch	5,024,309	1.6
Norwegian	4,642,526	1.5
Other non-Hispanic European	31,464,520	10.2
Two or more races	7,505,173	2.4

*People of Hispanic descent may be of any race. Many people also identify with more than one ethnic category. Therefore, figures total more than 100 percent.

< indicates less than 1/10 of 1 percent.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

In 2009, 4 percent of children under the age of five were multiracial compared to less than 1 percent of people age 65 and older.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a *shared cultural heritage*. People define themselves—or others—as members of an *ethnic category* based on common ancestry, language, or religion that gives them a distinctive social identity. The United States is a multiethnic society. Even though we favor the English language, more than 57 million people (20 percent of the U.S. population) speak Spanish, Italian, German, French, Chinese, or some other language in their homes. In California, about 43 percent of the population does so (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

With regard to religion, the United States is a predominantly Protestant nation, but most people of Spanish, Italian, and Polish descent are Roman Catholic, and many of Greek, Ukrainian, and Russian descent belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. More than 6.5 million Jewish Americans have ancestral ties to various nations around the world. The population of Muslim men and women is generally estimated at between 2 and 3 million and is rapidly increasing due to both immigration and a high birthrate (Sheshkin & Dashevsky, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2011).

Like race, the concept of “ethnicity” is socially constructed, becoming important only because society defines it that way. For example, U.S. society defines people of Spanish descent as “Latin,” even though Italy has a more “Latin” culture than Spain. People of Italian descent are not viewed as Latin but as “European” and therefore less different from the point of view of the European majority (Camara, 2000; Brodtkin, 2007). Like racial differences, the importance of ethnic differences can change over time. A century ago, Catholics and Jews were considered “different” in the mostly Protestant United States. This is much less true today.

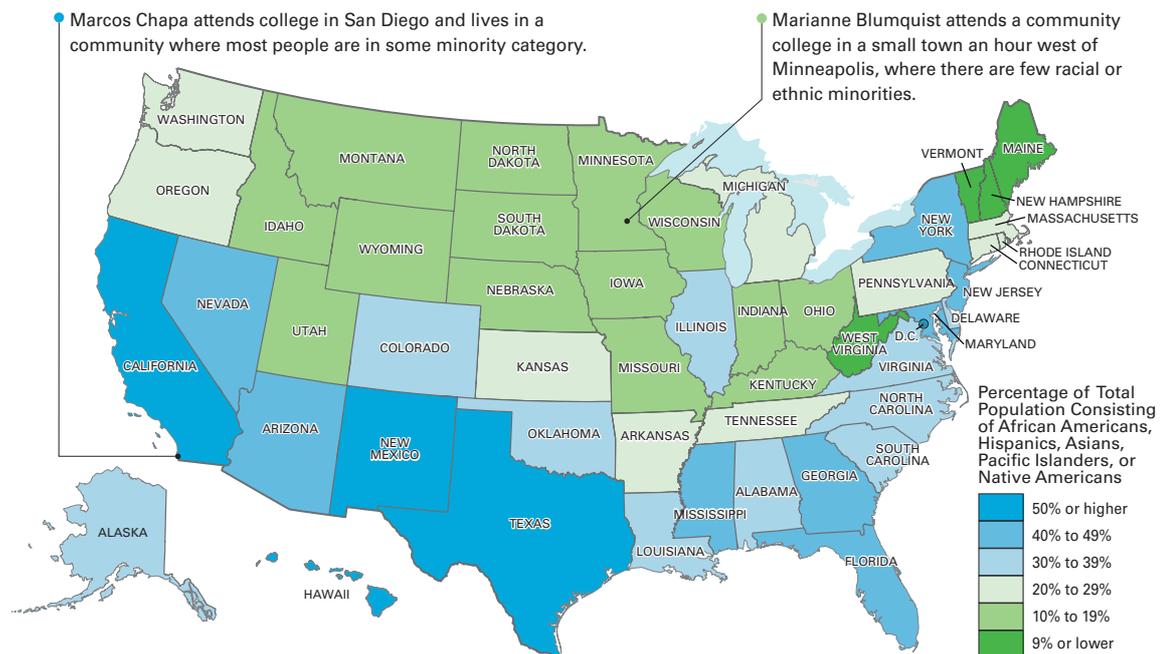
Keep in mind that race is constructed from *biological* traits and ethnicity is constructed from *cultural* traits. However, the two often go hand in hand. For example, Japanese Americans have distinctive physical traits and, for those who hold to a traditional way of life, a distinctive culture as well. Table 14–1 presents the most recent data on the racial and ethnic diversity of the United States.

On an individual level, people play up or play down cultural traits, depending on whether they want to fit in or stand apart from the surrounding society. Immigrants may drop their cultural traditions or, like many people of Native American descent in recent years, try to revive their heritage. For most people, ethnicity is more complex than race because they identify with several ethnic backgrounds. Rock and roll legend Jimi Hendrix was African American, white, and Cherokee; news anchor Soledad O’Brian considers herself both white and black, both Australian and Irish, and both Anglo and Hispanic.

Minorities

March 3, Dallas, Texas. The lobby of just about any hotel in a major U.S. city presents a lesson in contrasts: The majority of the guests checking in are white; the majority of hotel employees who carry luggage, serve food, and clean the rooms are racial or ethnic minorities.

As defined in Chapter 13 (“Gender Stratification”), a **minority** is *any category of people distinguished by physical or cultural difference that a society sets apart and subordinates*. Minority standing can be



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 14-1 Where the Minority Majority Already Exists

Minorities are now in the majority in four states—Hawaii, California, New Mexico, and Texas—and the District of Columbia. At the other extreme, Vermont and Maine have the lowest share of racial and ethnic minorities (about 6 percent each). Why do you think states with high minority populations are located in the South and Southwest?

Explore the percentage of minority people in your local community and in counties across the United States on mysoclab.com

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2011).

based on race, ethnicity, or both. As shown in Table 14-1, non-Hispanic white people (65 percent of the total) are still a majority of the U.S. population. But the share of minorities is increasing. Today, minorities are a majority in four states (California, New Mexico, Texas, and Hawaii) and in more than half of the country's 100 largest cities. By about 2042, minorities are likely to form a majority of the entire U.S. population. National Map 14-1 shows where a minority majority already exists.

Minorities have two important characteristics. First, they share a *distinctive identity*, which may be based on physical or cultural traits. Second, minorities experience *subordination*. As the rest of this chapter shows, U.S. minorities typically have lower income, lower occupational prestige, and limited schooling. These facts mean that class, race, and ethnicity, as well as gender, are overlapping and reinforcing dimensions of social stratification. The Thinking About Diversity box on page 324 profiles the struggles of recent Latin American immigrants.

Of course, not all members of any minority category are disadvantaged. Some Latinos are quite wealthy, certain Chinese Americans are celebrated business leaders, and African Americans are among our nation's political leaders. But even job success rarely allows individuals to escape their minority standing. As described in Chapter 6 ("Social Interaction in Everyday Life"), race or ethnicity often serves as a *master status* that overshadows personal accomplishments.

Minorities usually make up a small proportion of a society's population, but this is not always the case. Black South Africans are disadvantaged even though they are a numerical majority in their country. In the United States, women represent slightly more than half the population but are still struggling for all the opportunities and privileges enjoyed by men.

Prejudice and Stereotypes

Apply

November 19, Jerusalem, Israel. We are driving along the outskirts of this historical city—a holy place to Jews, Christians, and Muslims—when Razi, our taxi driver, spots a small group of Falasha—Ethiopian Jews—on a street corner. "Those people over there," he points as he speaks, "they are different. They don't drive cars. They don't want to improve themselves. Even when our country offers them schooling, they don't take it." He shakes his head at the Ethiopians and drives on.

Prejudice is a rigid and unfair generalization about an entire category of people. Prejudice is unfair because all people in some category are described as the same, based on little or no direct evidence. Prejudice may target people of a particular social class, sex, sexual orientation, age, political affiliation, physical disability, race, or ethnicity.

Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



Hard Work: The Immigrant Life in the United States

Early in the morning, it is already hot on the streets of Houston as a line of pickup trucks snakes slowly into a dusty yard, where 200 laborers have been gathering since dawn, each hoping for a day's work. The driver of the first truck opens his window and tells the foreman that he is looking for a crew to spread boiling tar on a roof. Abdonel Cespedes, the foreman, turns to the crowd, and after a few minutes, three workers step forward and climb into the back of the truck. The next driver is looking for two experienced housepainters. The scene is repeated over and over as men and a few women leave to dig ditches, spread cement, hang drywall, open clogged septic tanks, or crawl under houses to poison rats.

As each driver pulls into the yard, the foreman asks, "How much?" Most offer \$5 an hour. Cespedes automatically responds, "\$7.25; the going rate is \$7.25 for an hour's hard work." Sometimes he convinces them to pay that much, but usually not. The workers, who come from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala, know that dozens of them will end up with no work at all this day. Most accept \$5 or \$6 an hour because they know that when the day is over, \$50 is better than nothing.

Labor markets like this one are common in large cities, especially across the southwestern United States. The surge in immigration in recent years has brought millions of people to this country in search of work, and most have little schooling and speak little English.

Manuel Barrera has taken a day's work moving the entire contents of a store to a storage site. He arrives at the boarded-up building and gazes at the mountains of heavy furniture that he must carry out to a moving van, drive across town, and then carry again. He sighs when he thinks about how hot it is outside and realizes that it is even hotter inside the building. He will have no break for lunch. No one says anything about toilets. Barrera shakes his head: "I will do this kind of work because it puts food on the table. But I did not foresee it would turn out like this."



These immigrants gather on a New York City street corner every morning hoping to be hired for construction work that pays about \$60 a day with no benefits.

The hard truth is that immigrants to the United States do the jobs that no one else wants. At the bottom level of the national economy, they perform low-skill jobs in restaurants and hotels and on construction crews, and they work in private homes cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Across the United States, about half of all housekeepers, household cooks, tailors, and restaurant waiters are men or women born abroad. Few immigrants make much more than the official minimum wage (\$7.25 in 2011), and rarely do immigrant workers receive any health or pension benefits. Many well-off families take the labor of immigrants as much for granted as their air-conditioned cars and comfortable homes.

What Do You Think?

1. In what ways do you or members of your family depend on the low-paid labor of immigrants?
2. Do you favor allowing the 11 million people who entered this country illegally to earn citizenship? What should be done?
3. Should the U.S. government act to reduce the number of immigrants entering this country in the future? Why or why not?

Sources: Booth (1998), Turnulty (2006), U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2011), and U.S. Department of Labor (2011).

Prejudices are *prejudgments* that can be either positive or negative. Our positive prejudices tend to exaggerate the virtues of people like ourselves, and our negative prejudices condemn those who differ from us. Negative prejudice can be expressed as anything from mild dislike to outright hostility. Because such attitudes are rooted in culture, everyone has at least some prejudice.

Prejudice often takes the form of a **stereotype** (*stereo* is derived from a Greek word meaning "solid"), a *simplified description applied to every person in some category*. Many white people hold stereotypical views of minorities. Stereotyping is especially harmful to minori-

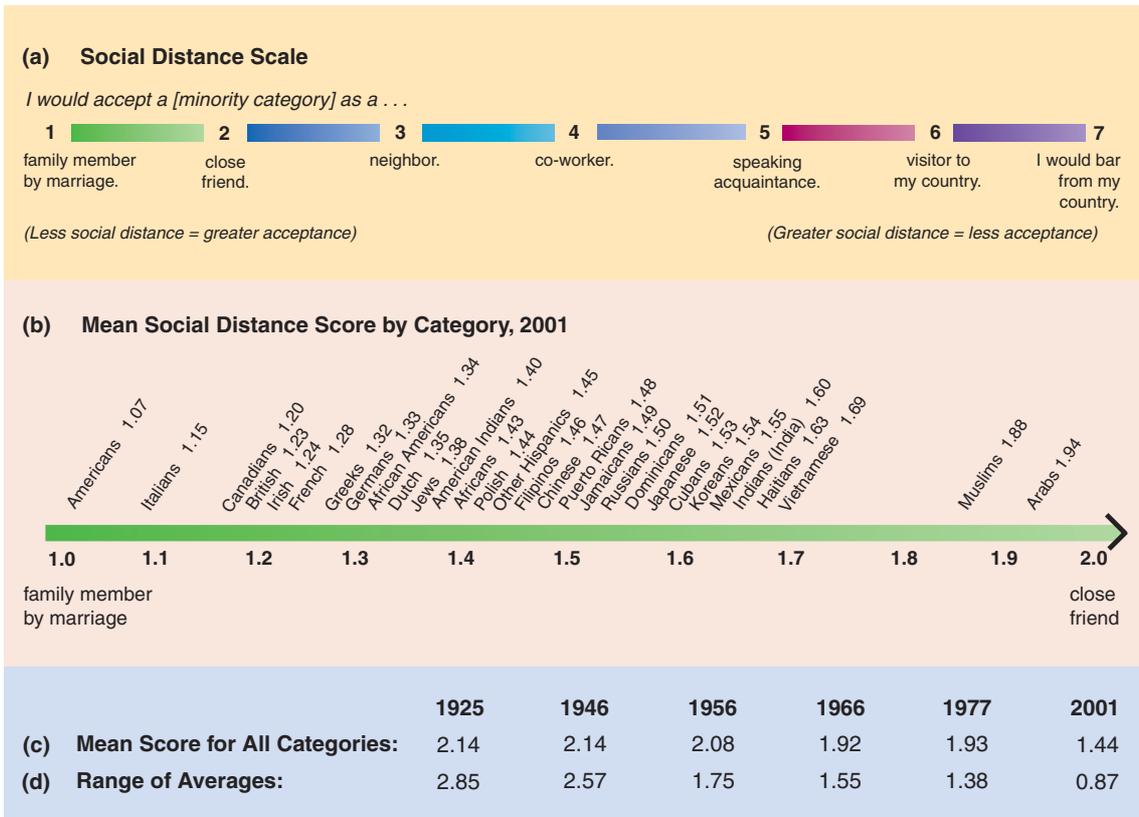
ties in the workplace. If company officials see workers only in terms of a stereotype, they will make assumptions about their abilities, steering them toward certain jobs and limiting their access to better opportunities (R. L. Kaufman, 2002).

Minorities, too, stereotype whites and other minorities (T. W. Smith, 1996; Cummings & Lambert, 1997). Surveys show, for example, that African Americans are more likely than whites to express the belief that Asians engage in unfair business practices and Asians are more likely than whites to criticize Hispanics for having too many children (Perlmutter, 2002).

Measuring Prejudice: The Social Distance Scale

One measure of prejudice is *social distance*, how closely people are willing to interact with members of some category. In the 1920s, Emory

prejudice a rigid and unfair generalization about an entire category of people **stereotype** a simplified description applied to every person in some category



Student Snapshot

FIGURE 14–1 Bogardus Social Distance Research

The social distance scale is a good way to measure prejudice. Part (a) illustrates the complete social distance scale, from least social distance at the far left to greatest social distance at the far right. Part (b) shows the mean (average) social distance score received by each category of people in 2001. Part (c) presents the overall mean score (the average of the scores received by all racial and ethnic categories) in specific years. These scores have fallen from 2.14 in 1925 to 1.44 in 2001, showing that students express less social distance toward minorities today than they did in the past. Part (d) shows the range of averages, the difference between the highest and lowest scores in given years (in 2001, for instance, it was 0.87, the difference between the high score of 1.94 for Arabs and the low score of 1.07 for Americans). This figure has also become smaller since 1925, indicating that today's students tend to see fewer differences between various categories of people.

Source: Parrillo & Donoghue (2005).

Bogardus developed the *social distance scale* shown in Figure 14–1. Bogardus (1925) asked students at U.S. colleges and universities to look at this scale and indicate how closely they were willing to interact with people in thirty racial and ethnic categories. People express the greatest social distance (most negative prejudice) by declaring that a particular category of people should be barred from the country entirely (point 7); at the other extreme, people express the least social distance (most social acceptance) by saying they would accept members of a particular category into their family through marriage (point 1).

Bogardus (1925, 1967; Owen, Elsner, & McFaul, 1977) found that people felt much more social distance from some categories than from others. In general, students in his surveys expressed the most social distance from Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, and Turks, indicating that they would be willing to tolerate such people as co-workers

but not as neighbors, friends, or family members. Students expressed the least social distance from those from northern and western Europe, including English and Scottish people, and also Canadians, indicating that they were willing to include them in their families by marriage.

What patterns of social distance do we find among college students today? A recent study using the same social distance scale reported three major findings (Parrillo & Donoghue, 2005):¹

¹Parrillo and Donoghue dropped seven of the categories used by Bogardus (Armenians, Czechs, Finns, Norwegians, Scots, Swedes, and Turks), claiming they were no longer visible minorities. They added nine new categories (Africans, Arabs, Cubans, Dominicans, Haitians, Jamaicans, Muslims, Puerto Ricans, and Vietnamese), claiming that these are visible minorities today. This change probably encouraged higher social distance scores, making the trend toward decreasing social distance all the more significant.

1. **Student opinion shows a trend toward greater social acceptance.** Today's students express less social distance from all minorities than students did several decades ago. Figure 14–1 shows that the mean (average) score on the social distance scale declined from 2.14 in 1925 to 1.93 in 1977 and 1.44 in 2001. Respondents (81 percent of whom were white) showed notably greater acceptance of African Americans, a category that moved up from near the bottom in 1925 to the top one-third in 2001.
2. **People see less difference between various minorities.** The earliest studies found the difference between the highest- and lowest-ranked minorities (the range of averages) equal to almost three points on the scale. As the figure shows, the most recent research produced a range of averages of less than one point, indicating that today's students see fewer differences between various categories of people.
3. **The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, may have reduced social acceptance of Arabs and Muslims.** The most recent study was conducted just a few weeks after September 11, 2001. Perhaps the fact that the nineteen men who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were Arabs and Muslims is part of the reason that students ranked these categories last on the social distance scale. However, not a single student gave Arabs or Muslims a 7, indicating that they should be barred from the country. On the contrary, the 2001 mean scores (1.94 for Arabs and 1.88 for Muslims) show higher social acceptance than students in 1977 expressed toward eighteen of the thirty categories of people studied.

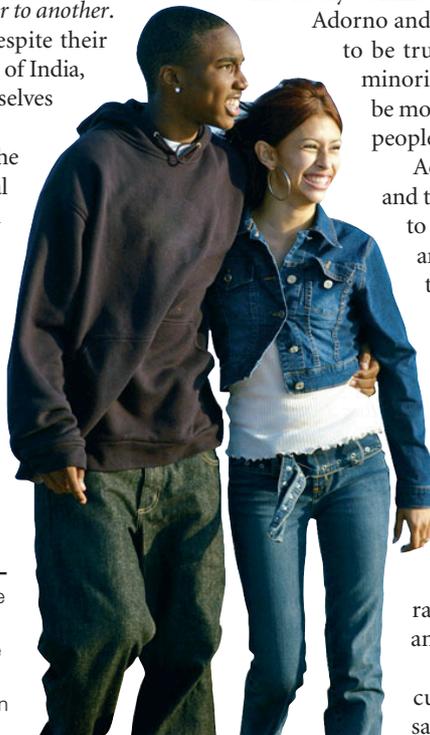
Racism

A powerful and harmful form of prejudice, **racism** is the belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another. Racism has existed throughout world history. Despite their many achievements, the ancient Greeks, the peoples of India, and the Chinese all regarded people unlike themselves as inferior.

Racism has also been widespread throughout the history of the United States, where ideas about racial inferiority supported slavery. Today, overt racism in this country has decreased because more people believe in evaluating others, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Even so, racism remains a serious social problem, as some people think that certain racial and ethnic categories are smarter than others. As the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box explains, however, racial differences in mental abilities result from environment rather than biology.

Recent research measuring student attitudes confirms the trend of declining prejudice toward all racial and ethnic categories. On your campus, does race or ethnicity guide people's choice in romantic attachments? Do some racial and ethnic categories mix more often than others? Explain your answer.



Theories of Prejudice

Where does prejudice come from? Social scientists provide several answers to this question, focusing on frustration, personality, culture, and social conflict.

Scapegoat Theory

Scapegoat theory holds that prejudice springs from frustration among people who are themselves disadvantaged (Dollard et al., 1939). For instance, take the case of a white woman who is frustrated by the low pay she receives from her assembly-line job in a textile factory. Directing hostility at the powerful factory owners carries the obvious risk of being fired; therefore, she may blame her low pay on the presence of minority co-workers. Her prejudice does not improve her situation, but it is a relatively safe way to express anger, and it may give her the comforting feeling that at least she is superior to someone.

A **scapegoat**, then, is a person or category of people, typically with little power, whom people unfairly blame for their own troubles. Because they have little power and thus are usually "safe targets," minorities often are used as scapegoats.

Authoritarian Personality Theory

Theodor Adorno and colleagues (1950) considered extreme prejudice a personality trait of certain individuals. This conclusion is supported by research showing that people who show strong prejudice toward one minority are usually intolerant of all minorities. These *authoritarian personalities* rigidly conform to conventional cultural values and see moral issues as clear-cut matters of right and wrong. People with authoritarian personalities also view society as naturally competitive and hierarchical, with "better" people (like themselves) inevitably dominating those who are weaker (all minorities).

Adorno and his colleagues also found the opposite pattern to be true: People who express tolerance toward one minority are likely to be accepting of all. They tend to be more flexible in their moral judgments and treat all people as equals.

Adorno thought that people with little schooling and those raised by cold and demanding parents tend to develop authoritarian personalities. Filled with anger and anxiety as children, they grow into hostile, aggressive adults who seek out scapegoats.

Culture Theory

A third theory claims that although extreme prejudice may be found in some people, some prejudice is found in everyone. Why? Because prejudice is part of the culture in which we all live and learn. The Bogardus social distance studies help prove the point. Bogardus found that students across the country had much the same attitudes toward specific racial and ethnic categories, feeling closer to some and more distant from others.

More evidence that prejudice is rooted in culture is the fact that minorities express the same attitudes as white people toward categories



As we go through an average day, we encounter people of various racial and ethnic categories. We also deal with people who are very intelligent as well as those whose abilities are more modest. Is there a connection between race or ethnicity and intelligence?

Common stereotypes say there is. Many people believe that Asian Americans are smarter than white people and that the typical white person is more intelligent than the average African American. These stereotypes are not new. Throughout the history of the United States, many people have assumed that some categories of people are smarter than others. Just as important, people have used this thinking to justify privileges for the allegedly superior category and even to bar supposedly inferior people from entering this country.

So what do we know about intelligence? We know that people, as individuals, differ in mental abilities. The distribution of human intelligence forms a “bell curve,” as shown in the figure. A person’s *intelligence quotient* (IQ) is calculated as the person’s mental age in years, as measured by a test, divided by the person’s actual age in years, with the result multiplied by 100. An eight-year-old who performs like a ten-year-old has an IQ of $10 \div 8 = 1.25 \quad 100 = 125$. Average performance yields an IQ of 100.

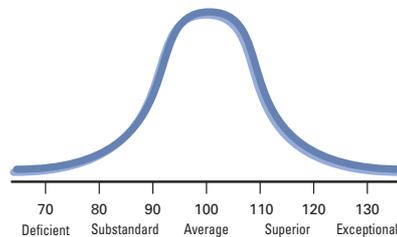
In a controversial study of intelligence and social inequality, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994) claimed that race was related to measures of intelligence. They said that the average IQ for people with European ancestry was 100; for people with East Asian ancestry, 103; and for people with African ancestry, 90.

Such assertions go against our democratic and egalitarian beliefs that no racial type is naturally better than another. Because these findings can

increase prejudice, critics charge that intelligence tests are not valid and even that the concept of intelligence has little real meaning.

Most social scientists believe that IQ tests do measure something important that we think of as intelligence, and they agree that *individuals* vary in intellectual aptitude. But they reject the idea that any *category* of people, on average, is naturally or biologically smarter than any other. So how do we explain the overall differences in IQ scores by race?

Thomas Sowell (1994, 1995) explains that most of this difference results not from biology but from environment. In some skillful sociological detective work, Sowell traced IQ scores for various racial and ethnic categories throughout the twentieth century. He found that on average, early-twentieth-century immigrants from European nations such as Poland, Lithuania, Italy, and Greece, as well as from Asian countries including China and Japan, scored 10 to 15 points below the U.S. average. But by the end of the twentieth century, people in these same categories had IQ scores that were average or above average. Among Italian Americans, for example, average IQ jumped almost 10 points; among Polish and Chinese Americans, the increase was almost 20 points.



IQ: The Distribution of Intelligence

Because genetic changes occur over thousands of years and most people in these categories marry others like themselves, biological factors cannot explain such a rapid rise in IQ scores. The only reasonable explanation is changing cultural patterns. The descendants of early immigrants improved their intellectual performance as their standard of living rose and their opportunity for schooling increased.

Sowell found that much the same was true of African Americans. Historically, the average IQ score of African Americans living in the North has been about 10 points higher than the average score of those living in the South. Among the descendants of African Americans who migrated from the South to the North after 1940, IQ scores went up, just as they did with descendants of European and Asian immigrants. Thus environmental factors appear to be critical in explaining differences in IQ among various categories of people.

According to Sowell, these test score differences tell us that *cultural patterns matter*. Asians who score high on tests are no smarter than other people, but they have been raised to value learning and pursue excellence. African Americans are no less intelligent than anyone else, but they carry a legacy of disadvantage that can undermine self-confidence and discourage achievement.

What Do You Think?

1. If IQ scores reflect people’s environment, are they valid measures of intelligence? Could they be harmful?
2. According to Thomas Sowell, why do some racial and ethnic categories show dramatic short-term gains in average IQ scores?
3. Do you think parents and schools influence a child’s IQ score? If so, how?

other than their own. Such patterns suggest that individuals hold prejudices because we live in a “culture of prejudice” that has taught us all to view certain categories of people as “better” or “worse” than others.

Conflict Theory

A fourth explanation proposes that prejudice is used as a tool by powerful people to oppress others. Anglos who look down on Latino immigrants in the Southwest, for example, can get away with paying the immigrants low wages for long hours of hard work. Similarly, all elites benefit when prejudice divides the labor force along racial and

ethnic lines and discourages them from working together to advance their common interests (Geschwender, 1978; Olzak, 1989; Rothenberg, 2008).

According to another conflict-based argument, made by Shelby Steele (1990), minorities themselves encourage *race consciousness* to win greater power and privileges. Because of their historical disadvantage, minorities claim that they are victims entitled to special consideration based on their race. This strategy may bring short-term gains, but Steele cautions that such thinking often sparks a backlash from whites or others who oppose “special treatment” on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Discrimination

Evaluate

Closely related to prejudice is **discrimination**, *unequal treatment of various categories of people*. Prejudice refers to attitudes, but discrimination is a matter of action. Like prejudice, discrimination can be either positive (providing special advantages) or negative (creating obstacles) and ranges from subtle to extreme.

Institutional Prejudice and Discrimination

We typically think of prejudice and discrimination as the hateful ideas or actions of specific people. But Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967) pointed out that far greater harm results from **institutional prejudice and discrimination**, *bias built into the operation of society's institutions*, including schools, hospitals, the police, and the workplace. For example, researchers have found that banks reject home mortgage applications from minorities at a higher rate than those from white people, even when income and quality of neighborhood are held constant (Gotham, 1998; Blanton, 2007).

According to Carmichael and Hamilton, people are slow to condemn or even recognize institutional prejudice and discrimination because it often involves respected public officials and long-established traditions. A case in point is *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision that ended the legal segregation of schools. The principle of "separate but equal" schooling had been the law of the land, supporting racial inequality by allowing school segregation. Despite this change in the law, half a century later, most U.S. students still attend schools in which one race overwhelmingly predominates (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In 1991, the courts pointed out that neighborhood schools will never provide equal education as long as our population is segre-

gated, with most African Americans living in central cities and most white people and Asian Americans living in suburbs.

Prejudice and Discrimination: The Vicious Circle

Prejudice and discrimination reinforce each other. The Thomas theorem, discussed in Chapter 6 ("Social Interaction in Everyday Life"), offers a simple explanation of this fact: *Situations that are defined as real become real in their consequences* (Thomas & Thomas, 1928; Thomas, 1966:301, orig. 1931).

Applying the Thomas theorem, we understand how stereotypes can become real to people who believe them and sometimes even to those who are victimized by them. Prejudice on the part of white people toward people of color does not produce *innate* inferiority, but it can produce *social* inferiority, pushing minorities into low-paying jobs, inferior schools, and racially segregated housing. Then, as white people interpret that social disadvantage as evidence that minorities do not measure up, they unleash a new round of prejudice and discrimination, giving rise to a vicious circle in which each perpetuates the other, as shown in Figure 14–2.

Majority and Minority: Patterns of Interaction

Analyze

Sociologists describe patterns of interaction among racial and ethnic categories in a society in terms of four models: pluralism, assimilation, segregation, and genocide.

Pluralism

Pluralism is a state in which people of all races and ethnicities are distinct but have equal social standing. In other words, people who differ in appearance or social heritage all share resources roughly equally.

The United States is pluralistic to the extent that all people have equal standing under the law. Also, many large cities contain "ethnic villages," where people proudly display the traditions of their immigrant ancestors. These include New York's Spanish Harlem, Little Italy, and Chinatown; Philadelphia's Italian "South Philly"; Chicago's Little Saigon; and Latino East Los Angeles. New York City alone has more than 300 magazines, newspapers, and radio stations that publish in more than ninety languages (Logan, Alba, & Zhang, 2002; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2008b; New York Community Media Alliance, 2011).

But the United States is not truly pluralistic, for three reasons. First, although most people value their cultural heritage, few want to live exclusively with others exactly like themselves (NORC, 2009). Second, our tolerance of social diversity goes only so far. One reaction to the rising number of U.S. minorities is a social movement to make English the nation's official language. Third, as you will see later in this chapter, people of various colors and cultures do *not* have equal social standing.

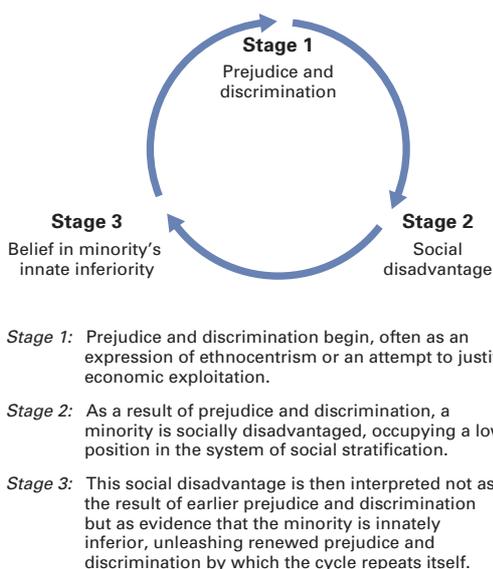


FIGURE 14–2 Prejudice and Discrimination: The Vicious Circle

Prejudice and discrimination can form a vicious circle, thereby perpetuating themselves.

discrimination unequal treatment of various categories of people

institutional prejudice and discrimination bias built into the operation of society's institutions

Should we expect people who come to the United States to change their language and other cultural patterns in order to “fit in,” or should we expect them to hold onto their own traditions? Why?

Assimilation

Many people think of the United States as a “melting pot” in which different nationalities blend together. But rather than everyone “melting” into some new cultural pattern, most minorities have adopted the dominant culture established by our earliest settlers. Why? Because doing so is both the path to upward social mobility and a way to escape the prejudice and discrimination directed at more visible foreigners. Sociologists use the term **assimilation** to describe *the process by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture*. Assimilation can involve changing modes of dress, values, religion, language, and friends.

The amount of assimilation varies by category. For example, Canadians have “melted” more than Cubans, the Dutch more than Dominicans, Germans more than the Japanese. Multiculturalists oppose making assimilation a goal because it suggests that minorities are a problem and the ones who need to do all the changing.

Note that assimilation involves changes in ethnicity but not in race. For example, many descendants of Japanese immigrants discard their ethnic traditions but retain their racial identity. For racial traits to diminish over generations, **miscegenation**, or *biological reproduction by partners of different racial categories*, must occur. Although interracial marriage is becoming more common, it still amounts to only 7 percent of all U.S. marriages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Segregation

Segregation is *the physical and social separation of categories of people*. Some minorities, especially religious orders like the Amish, voluntarily segregate themselves. However, majorities usually segregate minorities by excluding them. Residential neighborhoods, schools, occupations, hospitals, and even cemeteries may be segregated. Pluralism encourages distinctiveness without disadvantage, but segregation enforces separation that harms a minority.

Racial segregation has a long history in the United States, beginning with slavery and evolving into racially separated housing, schools, buses, and trains. Court decisions such as the 1954 *Brown* case have reduced *de jure* (Latin, “by law”) discrimination in this country. However, *de facto* (“in actual fact”) segregation continues in



the form of countless neighborhoods that are home to people of a single race.

Despite some recent decline, segregation persists in the United States. For example, Livonia, Michigan, is 90 percent white, and neighboring Detroit is 76 percent African American. Kurt Metzger (2001) explains, “Livonia was pretty much created by white flight [from Detroit].” Further, research shows that across the country, whites (especially those with young children) avoid neighborhoods where African Americans live (Emerson, Yancey, & Chai, 2001; Krysan, 2002). At the extreme, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1989) document the *hypersegregation* of poor African Americans in some inner cities. Hypersegregation means having little contact of any kind with people outside the local community. Hypersegregation is the

daily experience of about 20 percent of poor African Americans and is a pattern found in about twenty-five large U.S. cities (Wilkes & Iceland, 2004).

Genocide

Genocide is *the systematic killing of one category of people by another*. This deadly form of racism and ethnocentrism violates nearly every recognized moral standard, yet it has occurred time and again in human history.

Genocide was common in the history of contact between Europeans and the original inhabitants of the Americas. From the sixteenth century on, the Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch forcibly colonized vast empires. Although most native people died from diseases brought by Europeans, against which they had no natural defenses, many who opposed the colonizers were killed deliberately (Matthiessen, 1984; Sale, 1990).

Genocide also occurred during the twentieth century. During World War I, at least 1 million Armenians in Eastern Europe perished under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Soon after that, European Jews experienced a reign of terror known as the Holocaust during Adolf Hitler’s rule in Germany. From about 1935 to 1945, the Nazis murdered more than 6 million Jewish men, women, and children, along with gay people, Gypsies, and people with handicaps. During the same period, the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin murdered on an even greater scale, killing perhaps 30 million real and imagined enemies during decades of violent rule. Between 1975 and 1980, Pol Pot’s Communist regime in Cambodia butchered all “capitalists,” a category that included anyone able to speak a Western language. In all, some 2 million people (one-fourth of the population) perished in the Cambodian “killing fields.”

Patterns of Majority and Minority Interaction

pluralism a state in which people of all races and ethnicities are distinct but have equal social standing

assimilation the process by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture

segregation the physical and social separation of categories of people

genocide the systematic killing of one category of people by another

Tragically, genocide continues in the modern world. Recent examples include Hutus killing Tutsis in the African nation of Rwanda, Serbs killing Bosnians in the Balkans of Eastern Europe, and the killing of hundreds of thousands of people in the Darfur region of Sudan in Africa.

These four patterns of minority-majority interaction have all been played out in the United States. Although many people proudly point to patterns of pluralism and assimilation, it is also important to recognize the degree to which U.S. society has been built on segregation (of African Americans) and genocide (of Native Americans). The remainder of this chapter examines how these four patterns have shaped the history and present social standing of major racial and ethnic categories in the United States.

Race and Ethnicity in the United States

Analyze

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

These words by Emma Lazarus, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, express cultural ideals of human dignity, personal freedom, and economic opportunity. The United States has provided more of the “good life” to more immigrants than any other nation. About 1.3 million immigrants come to this country every year, and their many ways



In an effort to force assimilation, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs took American Indian children from their families and placed them in boarding schools like this one, Oklahoma's Riverside Indian School. There they were taught to speak English by non-Indian teachers with the goal of making them into “Americans.”

of life create a social mosaic that is especially evident in large cities with many distinctive racial and ethnic neighborhoods.

However, as a survey of this country's racial and ethnic minorities will show, our country's golden door has opened more widely for some than for others. We turn next to the history and current social standing of the major categories of the U.S. population.

Native Americans

The term “Native Americans” refers to the hundreds of societies—including the Aztec, Inca, Aleuts, Cherokee, Zuni, Sioux, and Mohawk—that first settled the Western Hemisphere. Some 15,000 years before Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492, migrating peoples crossed a land bridge from Asia to North America where the Bering Strait (off the coast of Alaska) lies today. Gradually, they spread throughout North and South America.

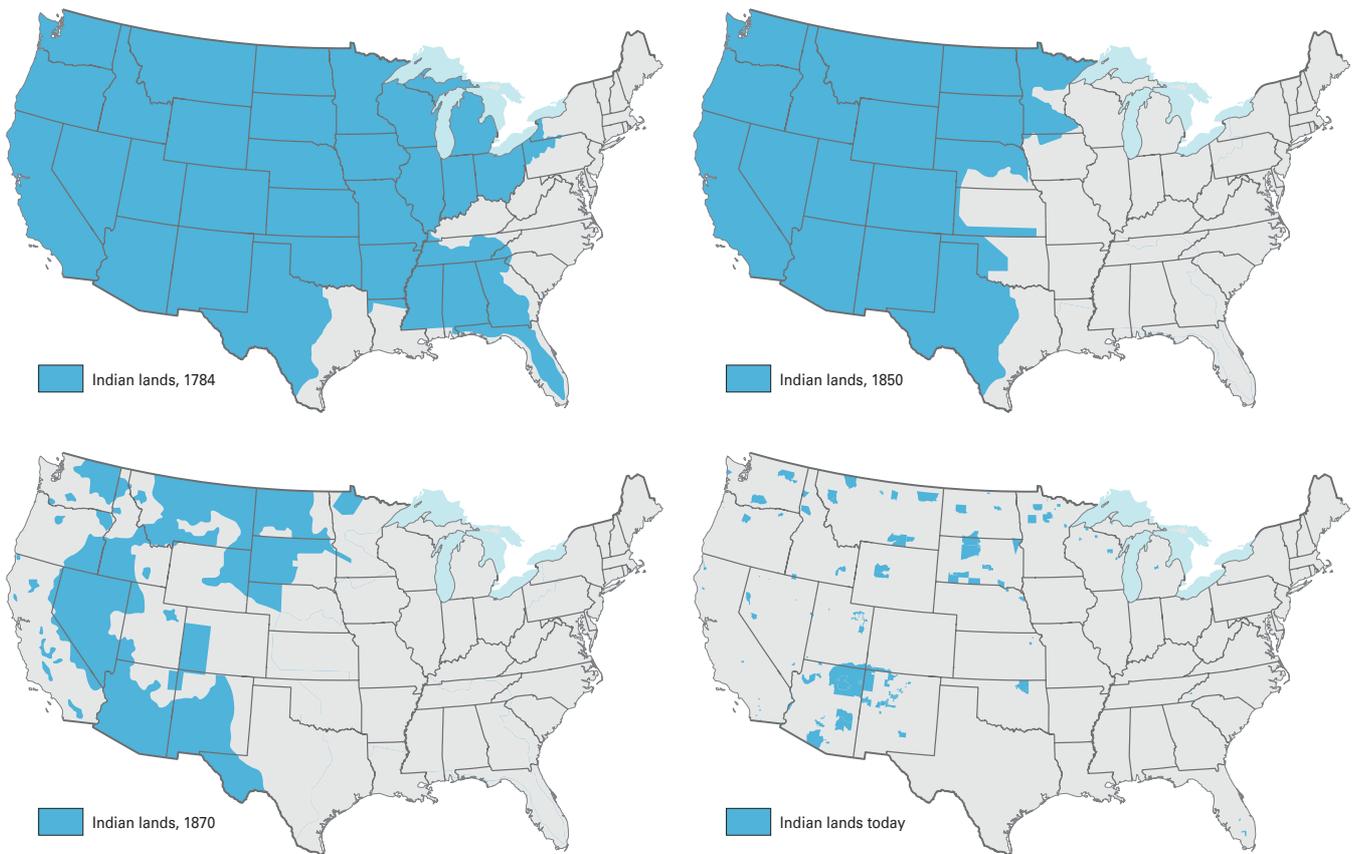
When the first Europeans arrived late in the fifteenth century, Native Americans numbered in the millions. But by 1900, after centuries of conflict and even acts of genocide, the “vanishing Americans” numbered just 250,000 (Dobyns, 1966; Tyler, 1973). The land they controlled also shrank dramatically, as National Map 14–2 shows.

Columbus first referred to Native Americans that he encountered as “Indians” because he mistakenly thought he had reached the coast of India. Columbus found the native people passive and peaceful, in stark contrast to the materialistic and competitive Europeans. Yet Europeans justified the seizure of Native American land by calling their victims thieves and murderers (Josephy, 1982; Matthiessen, 1984; Sale, 1990).

After the Revolutionary War, the new U.S. government took a pluralistic approach to Native American societies, seeking to gain more land through treaties. Payment for the land was far from fair, however, and when Native Americans resisted the surrender of their homelands, the U.S. government simply used its superior military power to evict them. By the early 1800s, few Native Americans remained east of the Mississippi River.

In 1871, the United States declared Native Americans wards of the government and adopted a strategy of forced assimilation. Relocated to specific territories designated as “reservations,” Native Americans continued to lose their land and were well on their way to losing their culture as well. Reservation life encouraged dependency, replacing ancestral languages with English and traditional religion with Christianity. Officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs took children from their parents and put them in boarding schools, where they were resocialized as “Americans.” Authorities gave local control of reservation life to the few Native Americans who supported government policies, and they distributed reservation land, traditionally held collectively, as private property to individual families (Tyler, 1973).

²In making comparisons of education and especially income, keep in mind that various categories of the U.S. population have different median ages. In 2009, the median age for all U.S. people was 36.8 years; for Native Americans, the figure was 31.0 years. Because people's schooling and income increase over time, this age difference accounts for some of the disparities seen in Table 14–2.



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 14-2 Land Controlled by Native Americans, 1784 to Today

In 1784, Native Americans controlled three-fourths of the land (blue-shaded areas) that eventually became the United States. Today, Native Americans control 304 reservations, scattered across the United States, that account for just 2 percent of the country's land area. How would you characterize these locations?

Source: Waldman (2000).

Not until 1924 were Native Americans entitled to U.S. citizenship. After that, many migrated from reservations, adopting mainstream cultural patterns and marrying non-Native Americans. Today, almost half of Native Americans consider themselves biracial or multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and many large cities now contain sizable Native American populations. However, as Table 14-2 shows, Native American income is far below the U.S. average, and relatively few Native Americans earn a college degree.²

From in-depth interviews with Native Americans in a western city, Joan Albon (1971) linked low Native American social standing to a range of cultural factors, including a noncompetitive view of life and a reluctance to pursue higher education. In addition, she noted, many Native Americans have dark skin, which makes them targets of prejudice and discrimination.

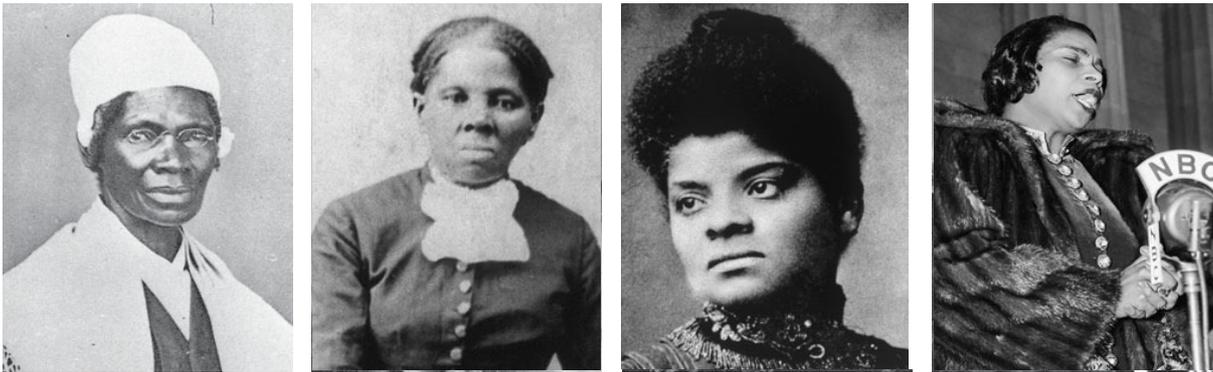
Members of more than 200 American Indian nations today are reclaiming pride in their cultural heritage. Traditional cultural organizations report a surge in new membership applications, and many chil-

dren can speak native languages better than their parents. The legal right of Native Americans to govern their reservations has enabled some tribes to build profitable gaming casinos. But the wealth produced from gambling has enriched relatively few Native peoples, and most profits go to non-Indian investors (Bartlett & Steele, 2002). While some prosper, most Native Americans remain severely disad-

TABLE 14-2 The Social Standing of Native Americans, 2009

	Native Americans	Entire U.S. Population
Median family income	\$40,552	\$60,088
Percentage in poverty	27.3%	14.3%
Completion of four or more years of college (age 25 and over)	13.0%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).



The efforts of these four women greatly advanced the social standing of African Americans in the United States. Pictured from left to right: Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), born a slave, became an influential preacher and outspoken abolitionist who was honored by President Lincoln at the White House. Harriet Tubman (1820–1913), after escaping from slavery herself, masterminded the flight from bondage of hundreds of African American men and women via the “Underground Railroad.” Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), born to slave parents, became a partner in a Memphis newspaper and served as a tireless crusader against the terror of lynching. Marian Anderson (1902–1993), an exceptional singer whose early career was restrained by racial prejudice, broke symbolic “color lines” by singing in the White House in 1936 and on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of almost 100,000 people in 1939.

vantaged and share a profound sense of the injustice they have suffered at the hands of white people.

White Anglo-Saxon Protestants

White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) were not the first people to inhabit the United States, but they soon dominated after European settlement began. Most WASPs are of English ancestry, but the category also includes people from Scotland and Wales. With some 35 million people claiming English, Scottish, or Welsh ancestry, 11.6 percent of our society has some WASP background, and WASPs are found at all class levels (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Many people associate WASPs with elite communities along the East and West Coasts. But the highest concentrations of WASPs are in Utah (because of migrations of Mormons with English ancestry), Appalachia, and northern New England (also due to historical patterns of immigration).

Looking back in time, WASP immigrants were highly skilled and motivated to achieve by what we now call the Protestant work ethic. Because of their high social standing, WASPs were not subject to the prejudice and discrimination experienced by other categories of immigrants. In fact, the historical dominance of WASPs has led others to want to become more like them (K. W. Jones, 2001).

WASPs were never one single group; especially in colonial times, considerable hostility separated English Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians (Parrillo, 1994). But in the nineteenth century, most WASPs joined together to oppose the arrival of “undesirables” such as Germans in the 1840s and Italians in the 1880s. Those who could afford it sheltered themselves in exclusive suburbs and restrictive clubs. Thus the 1880s—the decade when the Statue of Liberty first welcomed immigrants to the United States—also saw the founding of the first country club with exclusively WASP members (Baltzell, 1964).

By about 1950, however, WASP wealth and power had peaked, as indicated by the 1960 election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the first

Irish Catholic president. Yet the WASP cultural legacy remains. English is this country’s dominant language and Protestantism its majority religion. Our legal system also reflects our English origins. But the historical dominance of WASPs is most evident in the widespread assumption that the terms “race” and “ethnicity” apply to everyone but them.

African Americans

Africans accompanied European explorers to the New World in the fifteenth century. But most accounts date the beginning of black history in the United States to 1619, when a Dutch trading ship brought twenty Africans to Jamestown, Virginia. Many more ships filled with African laborers followed. Whether these people arrived as slaves or as indentured servants (who paid for their passage by agreeing to work for a period of time), being of African descent on these shores soon became virtually synonymous with being a slave. In 1661, Virginia enacted the first law in the new colonies recognizing slavery (Sowell, 1981).

Slavery was the foundation of the southern colonies’ plantation system. White people ran plantations using slave labor, and until 1808, some were also slave traders. Traders—Europeans, Africans, and North Americans—forcibly transported some 10 million Africans to various countries in the Americas, including 400,000 to the United States. On small sailing ships, hundreds of slaves were chained together for the several weeks it took to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Filth and disease killed many and drove others to suicide. Overall, perhaps half died en route (Franklin, 1967; Sowell, 1981).

The reward for surviving the miserable journey was a lifetime of servitude. Although some slaves worked in cities at various trades, most labored in the fields, often from daybreak until sunset and even longer during the harvest. The law allowed owners to use whatever disciplinary measures they deemed necessary to ensure that slaves were obedient and hardworking. Even killing a slave rarely prompted legal

The Congressional Black Caucus represents the increasing political power of African Americans in the United States. Even so, in 2011, African Americans accounted for just forty-four members of the House of Representatives, one state governor, and no members of the U.S. Senate.

action. Owners also divided slave families at public auctions, where human beings were bought and sold as property. Unschooling and dependent on their owners for all their basic needs, slaves had little control over their lives (Franklin, 1967; Sowell, 1981).

Some free persons of color lived in both the North and the South, laboring as small-scale farmers, skilled workers, and small business owners. But the lives of most African Americans stood in glaring contradiction to the principles of equality and freedom on which the United States was founded. The Declaration of Independence states:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

However, most white people did not apply these ideals to black people, and certainly not to slaves. In the *Dred Scott* case of 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court addressed the question “Are slaves citizens?” by writing, “We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures for citizens of the United States” (quoted in Blaustein & Zangrando, 1968:160). Thus arose what the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal (1944) called the “American dilemma”: a democratic society’s denial of basic rights and freedoms to one category of people. People would speak of equality, in other words, but do little to make all categories of people equal. Many white people resolved this dilemma by defining black people as naturally inferior and undeserving of equality (Leach, 2002).

In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution outlawed slavery. Three years later, the Fourteenth Amendment reversed the *Dred Scott* ruling, giving citizenship to all people born in the United States. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, stated that neither race nor previous condition of servitude could deprive anyone of the right to vote. However, so-called *Jim Crow laws*—classic cases of institutional discrimination—segregated U.S. society into two racial castes. Especially in the South, white people beat and lynched black people (and some white people) who challenged the racial hierarchy.



The twentieth century brought dramatic changes for African Americans. After World War I, tens of thousands of men, women, and children left the rural South for jobs in northern factories. Although most did find economic opportunities, few escaped racial prejudice and discrimination, which placed them lower in the social hierarchy than white immigrants arriving from Europe.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a national civil rights movement led to landmark judicial decisions outlawing segregated schools and overt discrimination in employment and public accommodations. The Black Power movement gave African Americans a renewed sense of pride and purpose.

Despite these gains, people of African descent continue to occupy a lower social position in the United States, as shown in Table 14–3. The median income of African American families in 2009 (\$38,409) was only 57 percent of non-Hispanic white family income (\$67,341), a ratio that has changed little in thirty years.³ Black families remain almost three times as likely as white families to be poor.

The number of African Americans securely in the middle class rose by more than half between 1980 and 2010; 41 percent earn \$48,000 or more. This means that the African American community is now economically diverse. Even so, a majority of African Americans are still working class or poor. In recent years, many have seen earnings slip as urban factory jobs, vital to residents of central cities, have been lost to other countries where labor costs are lower. This is one reason that black unemployment is almost twice as high as white unemployment; among African American teenagers, the figure exceeds 40 percent (R. A. Smith, 2002; Pattillo, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011).

TABLE 14–3 The Social Standing of African Americans, 2009

	African Americans	Entire U.S. Population
Median family income	\$38,409	\$60,088
Percentage in poverty	25.8%	14.3%
Completion of four or more years of college (age 25 and over)	19.8%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

³Here again, a median age difference (non-Hispanic whites, 41.2; blacks, 31.3) accounts for some of the income and educational disparities. More important is a higher proportion of one-parent families among blacks than whites. If we compare only married-couple families, African Americans (median income \$61,360 in 2009) earned 80 percent as much as non-Hispanic whites (\$76,103).

Since 1980, African Americans have made remarkable educational progress. The share of adults completing high school rose from half to 84 percent in 2009, nearly closing the gap between whites and blacks. Between 1980 and 2009, the share of African American adults with at least a college degree rose from 8 to just under 20 percent. But as Table 14–3 shows, African Americans are still well below the national standard when it comes to completing four years of college.

The political clout of African Americans has also increased. As a result of black migration to the cities and white flight to the suburbs, African Americans have gained greater political power in urban places, and many of this country’s largest cities have elected African American mayors. At the national level, the election of Barack Obama as this country’s forty-fourth president—the first African American to hold this office—is a historic and hugely important event. It demonstrates that our society has moved beyond the assumption that race is a barrier to the highest office in the land (West, 2008). Yet in 2011, African Americans accounted for just forty-four members of the House of Representatives (10 percent of the 435), no members of the Senate (out of 100), and only one of fifty state governors (National Governors Association, 2011).

In sum, for nearly 400 years, people of African ancestry in the United States have struggled for social equality. As a nation, we have come far in this pursuit. Overt discrimination is now illegal, and research documents a long-term decline in prejudice against African Americans (Firebaugh & Davis, 1988; J. Q. Wilson, 1992; NORC, 2009).

Fifty years after the abolition of slavery, W. E. B. Du Bois (1913) pointed to the extent of black achievement but cautioned that racial caste remained strong in the United States. Almost a century later, this racial hierarchy persists.

Asian Americans

Although Asian Americans share some racial traits, enormous cultural diversity characterizes this category of people with ancestors from dozens of nations. In 2009, the total number of Asian Americans exceeded 14 million, or about 4.8 percent of the U.S. population. The largest category of Asian Americans is people of Chinese ancestry (3.2 million), followed by those of Asian Indian (2.6 million), Filipino (2.5 million), Vietnamese (1.5 million), Korean (1.3 million), and Japanese (767,000) descent. One-third of Asian Americans live in California.

Young Asian Americans command attention and respect as high

On average, Asian Americans have income above the national median. At the same time, however, the poverty rate in many Asian American communities—including San Francisco’s Chinatown—is well above average.



achievers and are disproportionately represented at our country’s best colleges and universities. Many of their elders, too, have made economic and social gains; most Asian Americans now live in middle-class suburbs, and an increasing number of Asian Americans live in some of the highest-income neighborhoods in the country. Yet despite (and sometimes because of) this achievement, Asian Americans often find that others are aloof or outright hostile toward them (O’Hare, Frey, & Fost, 1994; Chua-Eoan, 2000; Lee & Marlay, 2007).

The achievement of some Asian Americans has given rise to a “model minority” stereotype that is misleading because it hides the sharp differences in class standing found among their ranks. We will focus first on the history and current standing of Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans—the longest-established Asian American minorities—and conclude with a brief look at the more recent arrivals.

Chinese Americans

Chinese immigration to the United States began in 1849 as a result of the economic boom of California’s Gold Rush. New towns and businesses sprang up overnight, and the demand for cheap labor attracted some 100,000 Chinese immigrants. Most Chinese workers were young men who were willing to take difficult, low-status jobs that whites did not want. But the economy soured in the 1870s, and desperate whites began to compete with the Chinese for whatever work could be found. Suddenly, the hardworking Chinese were seen as a threat. Economic hard times led to prejudice and discrimination (Ling, 1971; Boswell, 1986). Soon laws were passed barring Chinese people from many occupations, and public opinion turned strongly against the “Yellow Peril.”

In 1882, the U.S. government passed the first of several laws limiting Chinese immigration. This action caused domestic hardship in the United States, because Chinese men in effect were then living in a “bachelor society” where they outnumbered Chinese women by twenty to one. This sex imbalance drove the Chinese population down to only 60,000 by 1920. Because Chinese women already in the United States were in high demand, they soon lost much of their traditional submissiveness to men (Hsu, 1971; Lai, 1980; Sowell, 1981).

Responding to racial hostility, some Chinese moved east; many more sought the relative safety of urban Chinatowns. There Chinese traditions flourished, and kinship networks, called *clans*, provided financial assistance to individuals and represented the interests of all. At the same time, however, living in an all-Chinese community discouraged residents from learning English, which limited their job opportunities (Wong, 1971).

A renewed need for labor during World War II prompted President Franklin Roosevelt to end the ban on Chinese immigration in 1943 and to extend the rights of citizenship to Chinese Americans born abroad. Many responded by moving out

TABLE 14-4 The Social Standing of Asian Americans, 2009

	All Asian Americans	Chinese Americans	Japanese Americans	Asian Indian Americans	Filipino Americans	Entire U.S. Population
Median family income	\$75,027	\$82,129	\$88,129	\$100,431	\$84,670	\$60,088
Percentage in poverty	12.5%	12.7%	7.8%	7.5%	5.8%	14.3%
Completion of four or more years of college (age 25 and over)	52.4%	51.9%	47.4%	70.7%	47.3%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

of Chinatowns and pursuing cultural assimilation. In Honolulu in 1900, for example, 70 percent of Chinese people lived in Chinatown; today, the figure is below 20 percent.

By 1950, many Chinese Americans had experienced upward social mobility. Today, people of Chinese ancestry are no longer limited to self-employment in laundries and restaurants; many hold high-prestige positions, especially in fields related to science and technology.

As shown in Table 14-4, the median family income of Chinese Americans in 2009 was \$82,129, which is above the national average of \$60,088. However, the higher income of all Asian Americans reflects a larger number of family members in the labor force.⁴ Chinese Americans also have a record of educational achievement, with almost twice the national average of college graduates.

Despite their successes, many Chinese Americans still deal with subtle (and sometimes blatant) prejudice and discrimination. Such hostility is one reason that poverty remains a problem for many Chinese Americans. The problem of poverty is most common among people who remain in the socially isolated Chinatowns working in restaurants or other low-paying jobs, which raises the question of whether racial and ethnic enclaves help their residents or exploit them (Portes & Jensen, 1989; Kinkead, 1992; Gilbertson & Gurak, 1993).

Japanese Americans

Japanese immigration to the United States began slowly in the 1860s, reaching only 3,000 by 1890. Most were men who came to the Hawaiian Islands (annexed by the United States in 1898 and made a state in 1959) as a source of cheap labor. After 1900, however, as the number of Japanese immigrants to California rose (reaching 140,000 by 1915), white hostility increased (Takaki, 1998). In 1907, the United States signed an agreement with Japan curbing the entry of men—the chief economic threat—while allowing women to enter this country to ease the Japanese sex ratio imbalance. In the 1920s, state laws in California and elsewhere segregated the Japanese and banned interracial marriage, just about ending further Japanese immigration. Not until 1952 did the United States extend citizenship to foreign-born Japanese.

⁴Median age for all Asian Americans in 2009 was 35.3 years, somewhat below the national median of 36.8 and the non-Hispanic white median of 41.2. But specific categories vary widely in median age: Japanese, 47.7; Filipino, 38.7; Chinese, 38.1; Korean, 36.3; Asian Indian, 32.3; Cambodian, 29.0; Hmong, 20.7 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Immigrants from Japan and China differed in three important ways. First, there were fewer Japanese immigrants, so they escaped some of the hostility directed toward the more numerous Chinese. Second, the Japanese knew more about the United States than the Chinese did, which helped them assimilate (Sowell, 1981). Third, Japanese immigrants preferred rural farming to clustering in cities, which made them less visible. But many white people objected to Japanese ownership of farmland, so in 1913, California barred further purchases. Many foreign-born Japanese (called *Issei*) responded by placing farmland in the names of their U.S.-born children (*Nisei*), who were constitutionally entitled to citizenship.

Japanese Americans faced their greatest crisis after Japan bombed the U.S. naval fleet at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Rage was directed at the Japanese living in the United States. Some people feared that Japanese Americans would spy for Japan or commit acts of sabotage. Within a year, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, an unprecedented action designed to ensure national security by detaining people of Japanese ancestry in military camps. Authorities soon relocated 120,000 people of Japanese descent (90 percent of all U.S. Japanese) to remote inland reservations (Sun, 1998; Ewers, 2008).

Concern about national security always rises in times of war, but Japanese internment was sharply criticized. First, it targeted an entire category of people, not a single one of whom was known to have committed a disloyal act. Second, most of those imprisoned were *Nisei*, U.S. citizens by birth. Third, the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy, but no comparable action was taken against people of German or Italian ancestry.

Relocation meant selling homes, furnishings, and businesses on short notice for pennies on the dollar. As a result, almost the entire Japanese American population was economically devastated. In military prisons—surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers—families crowded into single rooms, often in buildings that had previously sheltered livestock. The internment ended in 1944 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, although the last camp did not close until 1946 (after the war had ended). In 1988, Congress awarded \$20,000 to each of the victims as token compensation for the hardships they endured.

After World War II, Japanese Americans staged a dramatic recovery. Having lost their traditional businesses, many entered new occupations; driven by cultural values stressing the importance of education and hard work, Japanese Americans have enjoyed remarkable success. In 2009, the median income of Japanese American families was more than 45 percent higher than the national average, and

In 2010, claiming the federal government is not securing our borders, Arizona officials enacted a new law making law enforcement officials more proactive in determining the immigrant status of people they have a lawful reason to engage. While popular in Arizona, the new law drew the fire of critics who saw the law as an attack on people of Hispanic descent.



the rate of poverty among Japanese Americans was well below the national figure.

Upward social mobility has encouraged cultural assimilation and intermarriage. Younger generations of Japanese Americans rarely live in residential enclaves, as many Chinese Americans do, and most marry non-Japanese partners. In the process, some have abandoned their traditions, including the Japanese language. A high proportion of Japanese Americans, however, belong to ethnic associations as a way of maintaining their ethnic identity. Still, some appear to be caught between two worlds: no longer culturally Japanese yet, because of racial differences, not completely accepted in the larger society.

Recent Asian Immigrants

More recent immigrants from Asia include Filipinos, Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Guamanians, and Samoans. The Asian American population increased by 93 percent between 1990 and 2009 and currently accounts for more than one-third of all immigration to the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010).

The entrepreneurial spirit is strong among Asian immigrants. In part this reflects cultural patterns that stress achievement and self-reliance, but having one's own small business is also a strategy for dealing with societal prejudice and discrimination. Small business success is one reason that Asian American family income is above the national average, but it is also true that in many of these businesses, a number of family members work long hours.

Another factor that raises the family income of Asian Americans is a high level of schooling. As shown in Table 14–4, for all categories of Asian Americans, the share of adults with a four-year college degree is well above the national average. Among Asian Indian Americans, who have the highest educational achievement of all Asian Americans, more than two-thirds of all men and women over the age of twenty-five have completed college, a proportion that is more than

twice the national average. This remarkable educational achievement is one reason that Asian Indian Americans had a median family income of \$100,431 in 2009, about 67 percent higher than the average.

In sum, a survey of Asian Americans presents a complex picture. The Japanese come closest to having achieved social acceptance. But some surveys reveal greater prejudice against Asian Americans than against African Americans (Parrillo & Donoghue, 2005). Median income data suggest that many

Asian Americans have prospered. But these numbers reflect the fact that many Asian Americans live in Hawaii, California, or New York, where incomes are high but so are living costs. Then, too, many Asian Americans remain poor. One thing is clear—their high immigration rate and their increasing political clout mean that people of Asian ancestry will play a central role in U.S. society in the decades to come (Takaki, 1998; Barbassa, 2009).

Hispanic Americans/Latinos

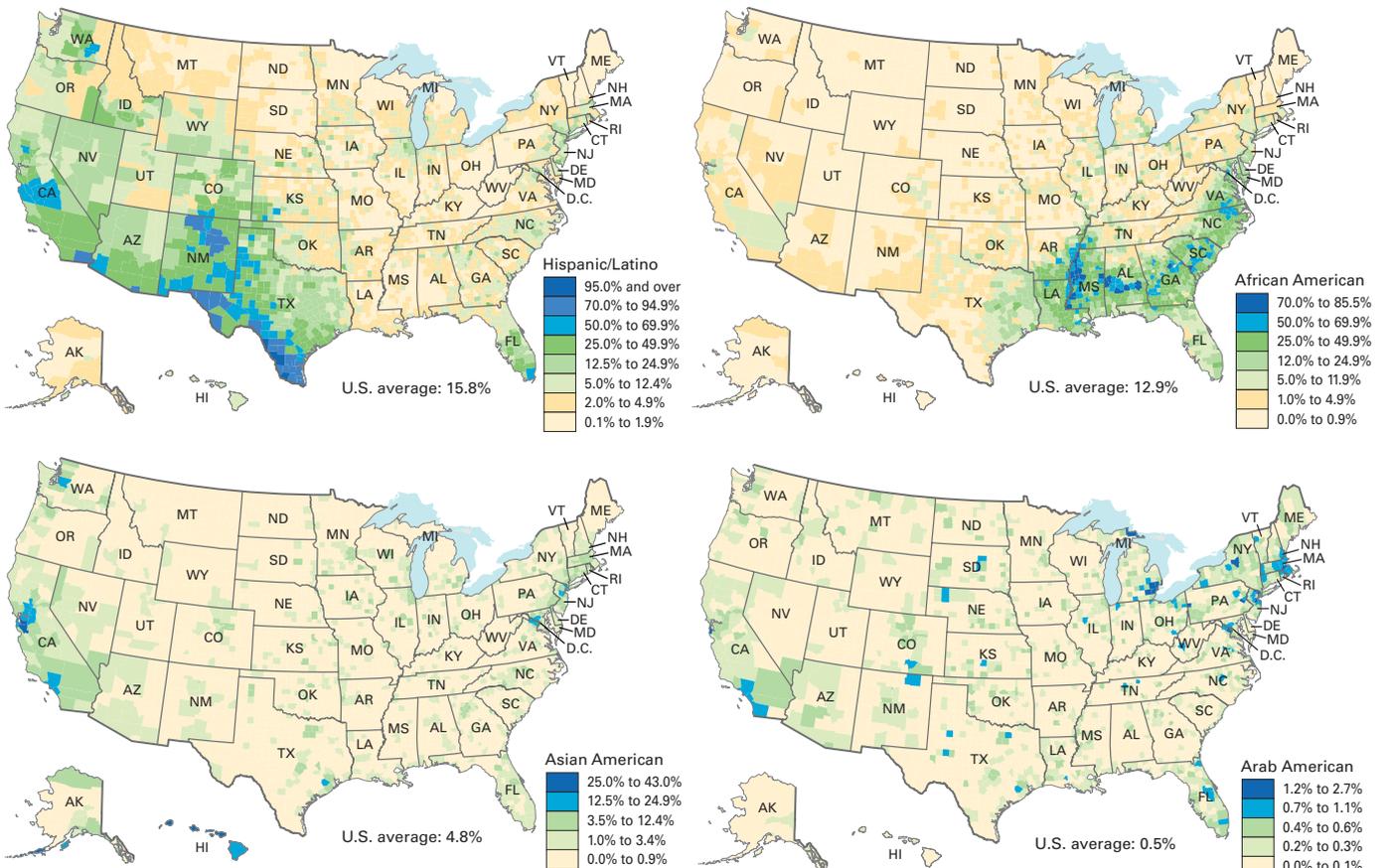
In 2009, the number of people of Hispanic descent in the United States topped 48 million (15.8 percent of the population), surpassing the number of Asian Americans (14.6 million, or 4.8 percent of the U.S. population) and even African Americans (39.6 million, or 12.9 percent) and making Hispanics the largest racial or ethnic minority. However, keep in mind that few people who fall into this category describe themselves as “Hispanic” or “Latino.” Like Asian Americans, Hispanics are really a cluster of distinct populations, each of which identifies with a particular ancestral nation and particular families may or may not feel a part of a national Hispanic community (Marín & Marín, 1991; Jiménez, 2007). About two out of three Hispanics (some 32 million) are Mexican Americans, or “Chicanos.” Puerto Ricans are next in population size (4.4 mil-

⁵The 2009 median age of the U.S. Hispanic population was 27.4 years, far below the non-Hispanic white median of 41.2 years. This difference accounts for some of the disparity in income and education.

TABLE 14–5 The Social Standing of Hispanic Americans, 2009

	All Hispanics	Mexican Americans	Puerto Ricans	Cuban Americans	Entire U.S. Population
Median family income	\$39,730	\$39,754	\$41,542	\$49,356	\$60,088
Percentage in poverty	25.3%	25.1%	25.7%	15.5%	14.3%
Completion of four or more years of college (age 25 and over)	13.9%	9.0%	15.4%	24.0%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 14-3 The Concentration of Hispanics or Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Arab Americans, by County

In 2009, people of Hispanic or Latino descent represented 15.8 percent of the U.S. population, compared with 12.9 percent African Americans, 4.8 percent Asian Americans, and 0.6 percent Arab Americans. These maps show the geographic distribution of these categories of people in 2010 (data for Arab Americans is 2000). Comparing them we see that the southern half of the United States is home to far more minorities than the northern half. But do they all concentrate in the same areas? What patterns do the maps reveal?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2001, 2011).

lion), followed by Cuban Americans (1.7 million). Many other nations of Latin America are represented by smaller numbers.

Although the Hispanic population is increasing all over the country, most Hispanic Americans still live in the Southwest. More than one in three Californians are Latino (in greater Los Angeles, almost half the people are). National Map 14-3 shows the distribution of the Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and Arab American populations across the United States.

Median family income for all Hispanics—\$39,730 in 2009, as shown in Table 14-5—is well below the national average.⁵ As the following sections explain, however, some categories of Hispanics have fared better than others.

Mexican Americans

Some Mexican Americans are descendants of people who lived in a part of Mexico annexed by the United States after the Mexican American War (1846–48). Most, however, are more recent immigrants. Currently, more immigrants come to the United States from Mexico than from any other country.

Like many other immigrants, many Mexican Americans have worked as low-wage laborers on farms and in factories. Table 14-5 shows that the 2009 median family income for Mexican Americans was \$39,754, which is two-thirds of the national average. One-fourth of Chicano families are poor—a rate that is above the national average. Finally, despite gains since 1980, Mexican Americans still have a



Arab American communities can be found in many large cities on the East and West Coasts of the United States, but the heaviest concentrations are found across the upper Midwest. This mosque rises above the cornfields in a rural area near Toledo, Ohio.

high dropout rate and receive much less schooling, on average, than the U.S. population as a whole.

Puerto Ricans

The island of Puerto Rico, like the Philippines, became a U.S. possession when the Spanish-American War ended in 1898. In 1917, Congress passed the Jones Act, which made Puerto Ricans (but not Filipinos) U.S. citizens and made Puerto Rico a territory of the United States.

New York City is home to more than 750,000 Puerto Ricans. However, about one-third of this community is severely disadvantaged. Adjusting to cultural patterns on the mainland—including, for many, learning English—is one major challenge; also, Puerto Ricans with dark skin encounter prejudice and discrimination. As a result, more people return to Puerto Rico each year than arrive. Between 1990 and 2009, the Puerto Rican population of New York actually fell by more than 100,000 (Navarro, 2000; Marzán, Torres, & Luecke, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

This “revolving door” pattern limits assimilation. Two out of three Puerto Rican families in the United States speak Spanish at home. Speaking Spanish keeps ethnic identity strong but limits economic opportunity. Puerto Ricans also have a higher incidence of female-headed households than most other Hispanics and double the

national average, a pattern that puts families at greater risk of poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Table 14–5 shows that the 2009 median family income for Puerto Ricans was \$41,542, or about 69 percent of the national average. Although long-term mainland residents have made economic gains, more recent immigrants from Puerto Rico continue to struggle to find work. Overall, Puerto Ricans remain the most socially disadvantaged Hispanic minority.

Cuban Americans

Within a decade after the 1959 Marxist revolution led by Fidel Castro, 400,000 Cubans had fled to the United States. Most settled with other Cuban Americans in Miami, Florida. Many were highly educated business and professional people who wasted little time becoming as successful in the United States as they had been in their homeland.

Table 14–5 shows that the 2009 median family income for Cuban Americans was \$49,356, above that of other Hispanics but still well below the national average of \$60,088. The 1.7 million Cuban Americans living in the United States today have managed a delicate balancing act, achieving in the larger society while holding on to much of their traditional culture. Of all Hispanics, Cubans are the most likely to speak Spanish in their homes: Eight out of ten Cuban families do so. However, cultural distinctiveness and highly visible communities, such as Miami’s Little Havana, provoke hostility from some people.

Arab Americans

Arab Americans are another U.S. minority that is increasing in size. Like Hispanic Americans, these are people whose ancestors lived in a variety of countries. What is sometimes called “the Arab world” includes twenty-two nations and stretches across northern Africa, from Mauritania and Morocco on Africa’s west coast to Egypt and Sudan on Africa’s east coast, and extends into the Middle East (western Asia), including Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Not all the people who live in these nations are Arabs, however; for example, the Berber people in Morocco and the Kurds of Iraq are not Arabs.

Arab cultures differ from society to society, but they share widespread use of the Arabic alphabet and language and have Islam as their dominant religion. But keep in mind that “Arab” (an ethnic category) is not the same as “Muslim” (a follower of Islam). A majority of the people living in most Arab countries are Muslims, but some Arabs are Christians or followers of other religions. In addition, most of the world’s Muslims do not live in Africa or the Middle East and are not Arabs.

Because many of the world’s nations have large Arab populations, immigration to the United States has created a culturally diverse population of Arab Americans. Some Arab Americans are Muslims, and some are not; some speak Arabic, and some do not; some maintain the traditions of their homeland, and some do not. As is the case with Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans, some are recent immigrants, and some have lived in this country for decades or even for generations.

As noted in Table 14–1 on page 322, the government gives the official number of Arab Americans as 1.7 million, but because people may not declare their ethnic background, the actual number may

be twice as high.⁶ The largest populations of Arab Americans have ancestral ties to Lebanon (30 percent of all Arab Americans), Egypt (12 percent), and Syria (10 percent). Most Arab Americans (69 percent) report ancestral ties to one nation, but 31 percent report both Arab and non-Arab ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A look at National Map 14-3 on page 337 shows the Arab American population is distributed throughout the United States.

Included in the Arab American population are people of all social classes. Some are highly educated professionals who work as physicians, engineers, and professors; others are working-class people who perform various skilled jobs in factories or on construction sites; still others do service work in restaurants, hospitals, or other settings or work in small family businesses. As shown in Table 14–6, median family income for Arab Americans is slightly above the national average (\$65,843 compared to the national median of \$60,088 in 2009), but Arab Americans have a much higher than average poverty rate (17.8 percent versus 14.3 percent for the population as a whole) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

There are large, visible Arab American communities in a number of U.S. cities, including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, and Dearborn (Michigan). Even so, Arab Americans may choose to downplay their ethnicity as a way to avoid prejudice and discrimination. The fact that many terrorist attacks against the United States and other nations have been carried out by Arabs has fueled a stereotype that links being Arab (or Muslim) with being a terrorist. This stereotype is unfair because it blames an entire category of people for actions by a few individuals. But it is probably the reason that the social distance research discussed earlier in this chapter shows students expressing more negative attitudes toward Arabs than toward any other racial or ethnic category. Its also helps explain why Arab Americans have been targets of an increasing number of hate crimes and why many Arab Americans feel that they are subject to “ethnic profiling” that threatens their privacy and freedom (Ali & Juarez, 2003; Ali, Lipper, & Mack, 2004; Hagopian, 2004).

White Ethnic Americans

The term “white ethnics” recognizes the ethnic heritage and social disadvantages of many white people. White ethnics are non-WASPs whose ancestors lived in Ireland, Poland, Germany, Italy, or other European countries. More than half the U.S. population falls into one or more white ethnic categories.

High rates of emigration from Europe during the nineteenth century first brought Germans and Irish and then Italians and Jews to our shores. Despite cultural differences, all shared the hope that the United States would offer greater political freedom and economic opportunity than their homelands. Most did live better in this country, but the belief that “the streets of America were paved with gold” turned out

⁶The 2009 median age for Arab Americans was 30.5 years, below the national median of 36.8 years.

TABLE 14–6 The Social Standing of Arab Americans, 2009

	Arab Americans	Entire U.S. Population
Median family income	\$65,843	\$60,088
Percentage in poverty	17.8%	14.3%
Completion of four or more years of college (age 25 and over)	44.5%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

to be a far cry from reality. Most immigrants found only hard labor for low wages.

White ethnics also endured their share of prejudice and discrimination. Many employers shut their doors to immigrants, posting signs that warned, “None need apply but Americans” (Handlin, 1941:67). In 1921, Congress enacted a quota system that greatly limited immigration, especially by southern and eastern Europeans, who were likely to have darker skin and different cultural backgrounds than the dominant WASPs. This quota system continued until 1968.

In response to prejudice and discrimination, many white ethnics formed supportive residential enclaves. Some also established footholds in certain businesses and trades: Italian Americans entered the construction industry; the Irish worked in construction and in civil service jobs; Jews predominated in the garment industry; many Greeks (like the Chinese) worked in the retail food business (W. M. Newman, 1973).

Many working-class people still live in traditional neighborhoods, although those who prospered have gradually assimilated. Most descendants of immigrants who labored in sweatshops and lived in crowded tenements now lead more comfortable lives. As a result, their ethnic heritage has become a source of pride.



White ethnic communities persist in many U.S. cities, especially in the Northeast region of the country. These communities are primarily home to working-class men and women whose ancestors came here as immigrants. To many more people, areas such as Philadelphia’s Italian Market are a source of attractive cultural diversity.

Sociology in Focus



Affirmative Action: Solution or Problem?

Stephanie: I think Gruttner got, well, a raw deal. She should have been admitted.

Gina: Perhaps. But diversity is important. I believe in affirmative action.

Marco: Maybe some people do get into college more easily. But that includes guys like me whose father went here.

Barbara Gruttner, who is white, claimed that she was the victim of racial discrimination. She maintained that the University of Michigan Law School had unfairly denied her application for admission while admitting many less qualified African American applicants. The basis of her claim was the fact that Michigan, a state university, admitted just 9 percent of white students with her grade point average and law school aptitude test scores while admitting 100 percent of African American applicants with comparable scores.

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court heard Gruttner's complaint in a review of the admissions policies of both the law school and the undergraduate program at the University of Michigan. In a 6–3 decision, the Court ruled against Gruttner, claiming that the University of Michigan Law School could use a policy of affirmative action that takes account of the race of applicants in the interest of creating

a socially diverse student body. At the same time, however, the Court struck down the university's undergraduate admissions policy, which awarded points not only for grades and college board scores

but also for being a member of an underrepresented minority. A point system of this kind, the Court ruled, is too close to the rigid quota systems rejected by the Court in the past.

With this ruling, the Supreme Court continued to oppose quotalike systems while at the same time reaffirming the importance of racial diversity on campus. Thus colleges and universities can take account of race in order to increase the number of traditionally underrepresented students as long as race is treated as just one variable in a process that evaluates each applicant as an individual (Stout, 2003).

How did the controversial policy of affirmative action begin? The answer takes us back to the end of World War II, when the U.S. government funded higher education for veterans of all races. The so-called G.I. Bill held special promise for African Americans, most of whom needed financial assistance to enroll in college. By 1960, government funding helped 350,000 black men and women attend college.

There was just one problem: These individuals were not finding the kinds of jobs for which they were qualified. So the Kennedy administration devised a program of "affirmative action" to provide broader opportunities to qualified minorities.



Race and Ethnicity: Looking Ahead

Evaluate

The United States has been and will remain a land of immigrants. Immigration has brought striking cultural diversity and tales of hope, struggle, and success told in hundreds of languages.

Millions of immigrants arrived in a great wave that peaked about 1910. The next two generations saw gradual economic gains and at least some assimilation into the larger society. The government also

extended citizenship to Native Americans (1924), foreign-born Filipinos (1942), Chinese Americans (1943), and Japanese Americans (1952).

Another wave of immigration began after World War II and swelled as the government relaxed immigration laws in the 1960s. Today, about 1.3 million people come to the United States each year—about 1.1 million legally and another 200,000 illegally. Today's immigrants come not from Europe but from Latin America and Asia, with Mexicans, Chinese, and Filipinos arriving in the largest numbers.

Many new arrivals face the same kind of prejudice and discrimination experienced by those who came before them. In fact, recent years have witnessed rising hostility toward foreigners (an expression

Employers were instructed to monitor hiring, promotion, and admissions policies to eliminate discrimination against minorities, even if unintended.

Defenders of affirmative action see it, first, as a sensible response to our nation's racial and ethnic history, especially for African Americans, who suffered through two centuries of slavery and a century of segregation under Jim Crow laws. Throughout our history, they claim, being white gave people a big advantage. They see minority preference today as a step toward fair compensation for unfair majority preference in the past.

Second, given our racial history, many analysts doubt that the United States will ever become a color-blind society. They claim that because prejudice and discrimination are rooted deep in U.S. culture, simply claiming that we are color-blind does not mean that everyone will be treated fairly.

Third, supporters maintain that affirmative action has worked. Where would minorities be if the government had not enacted this policy in the 1960s? Major employers, such as fire and police departments in large cities, began hiring minorities and women for the first time only because of affirmative action. This program has helped expand the African American middle class and increased racial diversity on college campuses and in the workplace.

Only about 12 percent of white people say they support racial preferences for African Americans. Even among African Americans themselves, just 44 percent support this policy (NORC, 2011). Critics point out, first of all, that affirmative action was intended as a temporary remedy to ensure fair competition but soon became a system of "group preferences" and quotas—in short, a form of "reverse discrimination," favoring people not because of performance but because of race, ethnicity, or sex.

Second, critics say, if racial preferences were wrong in the past, they are wrong now. Why should whites today, many of whom are far from privileged, be penalized for past discrimination that was in no way their fault? Our society has undone most of the institutional prejudice and discrimination of earlier times—doesn't the election of an African American president suggest that? Giving entire categories of people special treatment compromises standards of excellence and calls into question the real accomplishments of minorities.

A third argument against affirmative action is that it benefits those who need it least. Favoring minority-owned corporations or holding places in law school helps already privileged people. Affirmative

action has done little for the African American underclass that needs the most help.

There are good arguments for and against affirmative action, and people who want our society to have more racial or ethnic equality fall on both sides of the debate. Voters in a number of states, including California, Washington, Michigan, and Nebraska, have passed ballot initiatives banning the use of affirmative action based on gender or race. In 2008, however, voters in Colorado voted down such a proposal. So the country remains divided on this issue. The disagreement is not whether people of all colors should have equal opportunity but whether the current policy of affirmative action is part of the solution or part of the problem.

Join the Blog!

What do *you* think? Is the policy of affirmative action part of the problem or part of the solution? Why? Go to MySocLab.com and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Bowen & Bok (1999), Kantrowitz & Wingert (2003), Flynn (2008), Leff (2008), and NORC (2011).

of *xenophobia*, from Greek roots meaning "fear of what is strange"). In 1994, California voters passed Proposition 187, which stated that illegal immigrants should be denied health care, social services, and public education; it was later overturned in federal court. More recently, voters there mandated that all children learn English in school. Some landowners in the Southwest have taken up arms to discourage the large number of illegal immigrants crossing the border from Mexico, and our nation is increasing border security as we also wonder how to best deal with the 10.8 million illegal immigrants already here.

Even minorities who have been in the United States for generations feel the sting of prejudice and discrimination. Affirmative action,

a policy meant to provide opportunities for members of racial and ethnic minorities, continues to be hotly debated in this country. The Sociology in Focus box describes the debate and invites you to weigh in with your opinions on the Sociology in Focus blog on MySocLab.

Like other minorities, today's immigrants hope to gain acceptance and to blend into U.S. society without completely giving up their traditional culture. Some still build racial and ethnic enclaves so that in many cities across the country, the Little Havanas and Koreatowns of today stand alongside the Little Italys and Chinatowns of the past. In addition, new arrivals still carry the traditional hope that their racial and ethnic identities can be a source of pride rather than a badge of inferiority.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 14 Race and Ethnicity

Does race still matter in people's social standing?

This chapter explores the importance of race and ethnicity to social standing in the United States. You already know, for example, that the rate of poverty is three times higher for African Americans than for whites, and you have also learned that the typical black family earns just 57 percent as much as the typical (non-Hispanic) white family. But rich people—here, we'll define “rich” as a family earning more than \$75,000 a year—come in all colors. Here's a chance to test your sociological thinking by answering several questions about how race affects being rich. Look at each of the statements below: Does the statement reflect reality or is it a myth?



1. In the United States, all rich people are white. *Reality or myth?*
2. Rich white families are actually richer than rich African American families. *Reality or myth?*
3. People in rich black families don't work as hard as members of rich white families. *Reality or myth?*
4. When you are rich, color doesn't matter. *Reality or myth?*

- A**
1. *Of course, this is a myth.* But when it comes to being rich, race does matter: About 23 percent of African American families are affluent (for Hispanic families, 22 percent), compared to about 46 percent of non-Hispanic white families.
 2. *Reality.* Rich white, non-Hispanic families have a mean (average) income more than \$200,000 per year. Rich African American families average about \$130,000 per year.
 3. *Myth.* On average, rich black families are more likely to rely on multiple incomes (that is, they have more people working) than their white counterparts. In addition, rich white families receive more unearned income—income from investments—than rich African American families.
 4. *Myth.* Rich African Americans still face social barriers based on their race, just as rich whites benefit from the privileges linked to their color.



Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Give several of your friends or family members a quick quiz, asking them what share of the U.S. population is white, Hispanic, African American, and Asian (see Table 14–1 on page 322). Why do you think most white people exaggerate the minority population of this country? (C. A. Gallagher, 2003)
2. Does your college or university take race and ethnicity into account in its admissions policies? Ask to speak with an admissions officer to see what you can learn about your school's use of race and ethnicity in admissions. Ask whether there is a “legacy” policy that favors children of parents who attended the school.
3. Do you think people tend to see race in terms of biological traits or as categories constructed by society? What about you? Go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on mysoclab.com to read more about how society constructs the meaning of race and also for some suggestions about how you might think about the meaning of race.

The Social Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

Race refers to socially constructed categories based on biological traits a society defines as important.

- The meaning and importance of race vary from place to place and over time.
- Societies use racial categories to rank people in a hierarchy, giving some people more money, power, and prestige than others.
- In the past, scientists created three broad categories—Caucasoids, Mongoloids, and Negroids—but there are no biologically pure races. **pp. 320–22**

📖 **Read the Document** on [mysoclab.com](#)

Ethnicity refers to socially constructed categories based on cultural traits a society defines as important.

- Ethnicity reflects common ancestors, language, and religion.
- The importance of ethnicity varies from place to place and over time.
- People choose to play up or play down their ethnicity.
- Societies may or may not set categories of people apart based on differences in ethnicity. **p. 322**

🗺️ **Explore the Map** on [mysoclab.com](#)

👁️ **Watch the Video** on [mysoclab.com](#)



race (p. 320) a socially constructed category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of a society consider important

ethnicity (p. 322) a shared cultural heritage

minority (p. 322) any category of people distinguished by physical or cultural difference that a society sets apart and subordinates

Prejudice and Stereotypes

Prejudice is a rigid and unfair generalization about a category of people.

- The social distance scale is one measure of prejudice.
- One type of prejudice is the **stereotype**, an exaggerated description applied to every person in some category.
- **Racism**, a very destructive type of prejudice, asserts that one race is innately superior or inferior to another. **pp. 323–26**

There are four **theories of prejudice**:

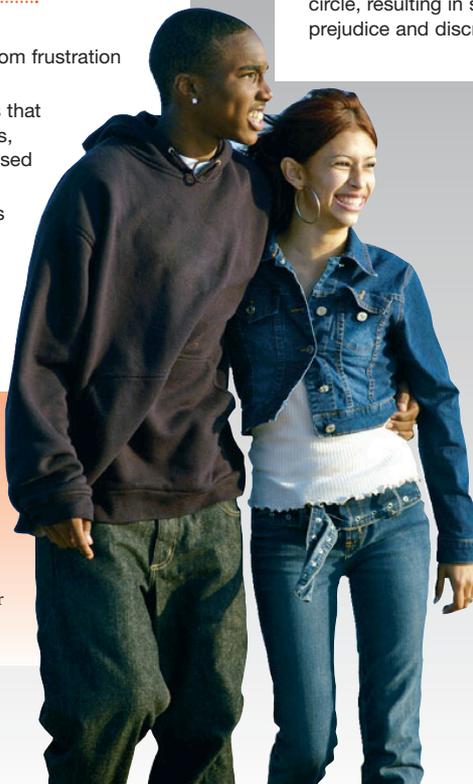
- **Scapegoat theory** claims that prejudice results from frustration among people who are disadvantaged.
- **Authoritarian personality theory** (Adorno) claims that prejudice is a personality trait of certain individuals, especially those with little education and those raised by cold and demanding parents.
- **Culture theory** (Bogardus) claims that prejudice is rooted in culture; we learn to feel greater social distance from some categories of people.
- **Conflict theory** claims that prejudice is a tool used by powerful people to divide and control the population. **pp. 326–27**

prejudice (p. 323) a rigid and unfair generalization about an entire category of people

stereotype (p. 324) a simplified description applied to every person in some category

racism (p. 326) the belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another

scapegoat (p. 326) a person or category of people, typically with little power, whom people unfairly blame for their own troubles



Discrimination

Discrimination refers to actions by which a person treats various categories of people unequally.

- Prejudice refers to *attitudes*; discrimination involves *actions*.
- **Institutional prejudice and discrimination** are biases built into the operation of society's institutions, including schools, hospitals, the police, and the workplace.
- Prejudice and discrimination perpetuate themselves in a vicious circle, resulting in social disadvantage that fuels additional prejudice and discrimination. **p. 328**

discrimination (p. 328) unequal treatment of various categories of people

institutional prejudice and discrimination (p. 328) bias built into the operation of society's institutions

Majority and Minority: Patterns of Interaction

Pluralism means that racial and ethnic categories, although distinct, have roughly equal social standing.

- U.S. society is pluralistic in that all people in the United States, regardless of race or ethnicity, have equal standing under the law.
- U.S. society is not pluralistic in that all racial and ethnic categories do not have equal social standing. **p. 328**

Assimilation is a process by which minorities gradually adopt the patterns of the dominant culture.

- Assimilation involves changes in dress, language, religion, values, and friends.
- Assimilation is a strategy to escape prejudice and discrimination and to achieve upward social mobility.
- Some categories of people have assimilated more than others. **p. 329**

Segregation is the physical and social separation of categories of people.

- Although some segregation is voluntary (as by the Amish), majorities usually segregate minorities by excluding them from neighborhoods, schools, and occupations.
- *De jure* segregation is segregation by law; *de facto* segregation describes settings that contain only people of one category.
- Hypersegregation means having little social contact with people beyond the local community. **p. 329**

Genocide is the systematic killing of one category of people by another.

- Historical examples of genocide include the extermination of Jews by the Nazis and the killing of Western-leaning people in Cambodia by Pol Pot.
- Recent examples of genocide include Hutus killing Tutsis in the African nation of Rwanda, Serbs killing Bosnians in the Balkans of Eastern Europe, and systematic killing in the Darfur region of Sudan. **pp. 329–30**

pluralism (p. 328) a state in which people of all races and ethnicities are distinct but have equal social standing

assimilation (p. 329) the process by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture

miscegenation (p. 329) biological reproduction by partners of different racial categories

segregation (p. 329) the physical and social separation of categories of people

genocide (p. 329) the systematic killing of one category of people by another

Race and Ethnicity in the United States

Native Americans, the earliest human inhabitants of the Americas, have endured genocide, segregation, and forced assimilation. Today, the social standing of Native Americans is well below the national average. **pp. 330–32**

White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) were most of the original European settlers of the United States, and many continue to enjoy high social position today. **p. 332**

African Americans experienced more than two centuries of slavery. Emancipation in 1865 gave way to segregation by law (the so-called Jim Crow laws). In the 1950s and 1960s, a national civil rights movement resulted in legislation that outlawed segregated schools and overt discrimination in employment and public accommodations. Today, despite legal equality, African Americans are still disadvantaged. **pp. 332–34**

Asian Americans have suffered both racial and ethnic hostility. Although some prejudice and discrimination continue, both Chinese and Japanese Americans now have above-average income and schooling. Asian immigrants—especially Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos—now account for more than one-third of all immigration to the United States. **pp. 334–36**

Hispanic Americans/Latinos, the largest U.S. minority, include many ethnicities sharing a Spanish heritage. Mexican Americans, the largest Hispanic minority, are concentrated in the southwest region of the country and are the poorest Hispanic category. Cubans, concentrated in Miami, are the most affluent Hispanic category. **pp. 336–38**

Arab Americans are a growing U.S. minority. Because they come to the United States from so many different nations, Arab Americans are a culturally diverse population, and they are represented in all social classes. They have been a target of prejudice and hate crimes in recent years as a result of a stereotype that links all Arab Americans with terrorism. **pp. 338–39**

White ethnic Americans are non-WASPs whose ancestors emigrated from Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In response to prejudice and discrimination, many white ethnics formed supportive residential enclaves. **p. 339**

