Chapter 8: Social Stratification

Case Study: Rural Poverty

Section 1: Systems of Stratification

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Simulation: Applying What You've Learned

Case Study: Rural Poverty

Most Americans equate poverty with images of the urban poor, but 20 percent of poor Americans live in rural areas. Poverty rates are much higher among rural minorities than among rural whites. Most of the rural poor have little access to government services, and the shift to a service economy has hit them especially hard. Both types of poverty are examples of how people around the world are affected by the unequal distribution of a society's resources and rewards.
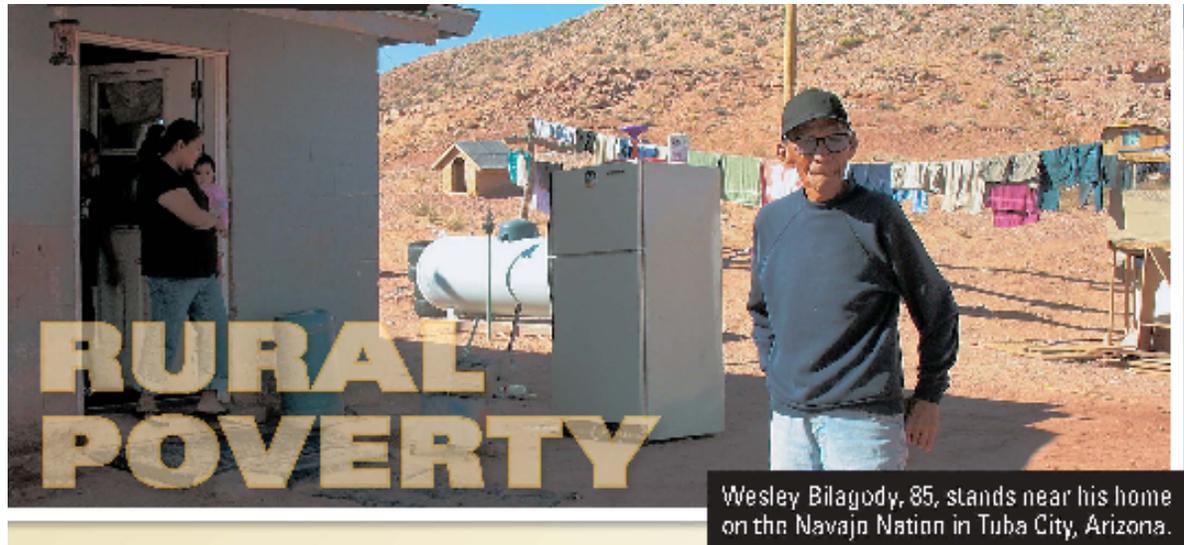
Roxie Hurt, of Hemphill, West Virginia, and her husband Rex work hard to raise their three children on only $724 per month.

RURAL POVERTY

Wesley Bilagody, 85, stands near his home on the Navajo Nation in Tuba City, Arizona.

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Section 1 at a Glance

Systems of Stratification

- Most societies divide their members into ranks based on selected characteristics, which can lead to social inequality.

- Two basic types of stratification systems exist today: caste systems and class systems.

- Systems of stratification range from closed, in which movement between ranks is difficult, to open, in which individuals are able to move between ranks.
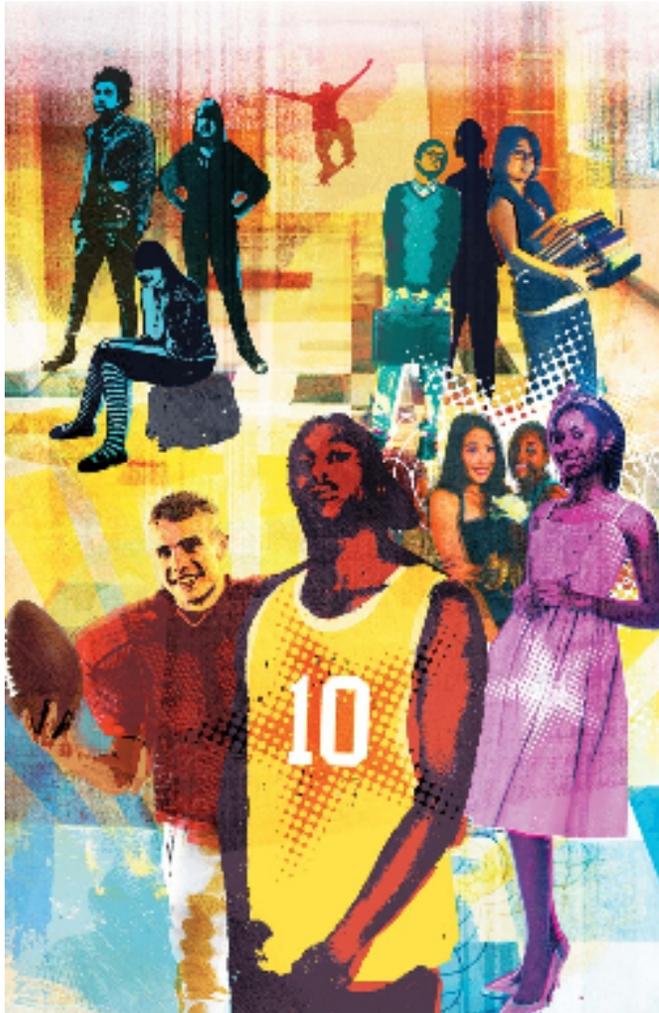
SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

The Power of Popularity

Do some groups at your school seem to have more power than others?

Types of Stratification Systems

Social stratification is the division of society into categories, ranks, or classes.

These divisions lead to **social inequality**—the unequal sharing of resources and social rewards.

Stratification systems lie on a continuum of open to closed systems according to how easy or difficult it is to change statuses.

Both ascribed and achieved statuses can be used to determine social standing.

Types of Stratification Systems

Caste Systems

- Closed stratification system

- Resources and social rewards distributed based on ascribed statuses

- Lifelong status determined by that of parents

- Prohibits **exogamy**, or marriage outside of caste; promotes **endogamy**, or marriage within caste

- **Caste system** in India has been challenged but still plays a major role

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THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Caste	Typical Occupations
Brahmans	Priests, scholars
Kshatriyas	Rulers, nobles, soldiers
Vaisyas	Merchants, bankers, businesspeople
Sudras	Laborers, artisans
Harijans	Outcasts, limited to the most undesirable tasks

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Class Systems

- **Class system** more open than closed stratification system

- Resources and rewards distributed according to achieved statuses

- Some control over place in society

- Marx divided society into:

  - **Bourgeoisie**, or the owners of the means of production

  - **Proletariat**, or workers who sell their labor in exchange for wages

- Weber described three factors of class:

  - Property

  - Prestige

  - Power

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The Dimensions of Social Stratification

Social class is a grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power, and prestige.

- **Wealth**
    - **Wealth** equals *assets*—value of everything the person owns—and *income*—money earned through salaries, investment returns, or other capital gains
    - In the United States, 1 percent of population controls one-third of wealth

- **Power**
  - **Power** is the ability to control the behavior of others, with or without their consent
  - Can be based on force, a special skill or type of knowledge, particular social status, personal characteristics, or custom and tradition
- **Prestige**
  - **Prestige** is the respect, honor, recognition, or courtesy an individual receives
  - Occupation, education, family background, and area of residence are common factors in the United States.
- **Socioeconomic status** is a rating that combines social factors such as educational level, occupational prestige, and place of residence with the economic factor of income.

Click on the image to play the Interactive.

Statistically Speaking...

Distribution of Wealth and Income In the United States, wealth is unequally distributed. About four-fifths of the country's wealth is in the hands of the richest fifth of the population. The lowest fifth is in debt and has no wealth. Income is also distributed unequally. The top one-fifth of income earners receives approximately half of the total national income.

DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME AND WEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006; Edward N. Wolff, TopAway, 2002

Skills Focus **THINKING CRITICALLY** What do you think is the significance of the lowest fifth having no wealth?

Interactive Feature THINK central thinkcentral.com

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Rating Prestige

These occupational prestige ratings from the General Social Survey (GSS) are based on a scale ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 100. How would your ratings compare?

PRESTIGE RATINGS FOR SELECTED OCCUPATIONS

Occupation	Rating	Occupation	Rating
Physician	86	Firefighter	53
Lawyer	75	Electrician	51
Registered nurse	66	Mail carrier	47
High school teacher	66	Musician/composer	47
Accountant	65	Farmer	40
Airline pilot	61	Child-care worker	36
Computer programmer	61	Retail apparel salesperson	30
Sociologist	61	Garbage collector	28
Police officer	60	Waiter/waitress	28
Actor	60	Janitor	22

Source: James Allan Davis, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden, *General Social Surveys 1972–2006: Cumulative Codebook*

PROCEDURE

❶ Working in pairs, survey a sample of students in your school to create your own occupational prestige ratings. First, list the 20 occupations from the chart in alphabetical order on a piece of paper.

❷ Then ask each student in the sample to assign a prestige value from 1 to 100 to each occupation.

❸ Calculate a rating for each occupation by adding up the values that each student assigned and dividing by the number of students in the sample. Rank the occupations in order of their rating.

ANALYSIS

1. Compare your results with the GSS ratings and discuss your findings as a class.

2. How might you explain the similarities or differences? What factors might influence the values each person assigned?

Explaining Stratification

- **Functionalist Theory:** sees stratification as necessary feature

  - Certain roles must be performed for stability of society

  - Without varying rewards some jobs would go unfilled

  - Critics point out that not everyone has same access to resources

- **Conflict Theory:** see competition over scarce resources as the cause

  - Stratification comes from class exploitation

  - A group in power can shape policy to maintain its power

  - Critics point out that not everyone is suited for every position

- **Efforts at Synthesis**

  - Dahrendorf suggests each approach might be used to explain specific aspects of stratification

  - Lenski suggests each approach might be used to describe different societies

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Cultural Diversity and Sociology

Social Stratification Around the World

All societies have ways to group their members based on specific characteristics. Ascribed statuses such as race, gender, and age are the most commonly used.

- Kiwai Papuans: a simple society where everyone lived in similar dwellings and did the same work, but some men "a little more high" and women "down a little bit"

- Mosuo: matriarchal and matrilineal, females are leaders

- Democratic Republic of the Congo: stratified by gender, women don't have same legal rights

- Maasai: nomadic group, stratified by age-sets

- South Africa: racial stratification, officially ended in 1994 but still affects life

These Maasai prepare for an initiation ceremony that will make them young warriors of the tribe.

Women are at the core of Mosuo culture. These Mosuo tribeswomen wear traditional dress. Women receive their skirts in a coming of age ceremony around ages 12 to 14.

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Thinking Critically

- How do these systems of stratification lead to social inequality?

- Do you think that societies around the world should allow social stratification to continue? Explain your answer.

Section 2 at a Glance

The American Class System

- Sociologists use three techniques to determine social class: the reputational method, the subjective method, and the objective method.

- Most sociologists use a system that identifies six social classes in the United States: the upper class, the upper middle class, the lower middle class, the working class, the working poor, and the underclass.

- Because the United States has an open class system, social mobility—movement between social classes—is possible.

- Sociologists are more interested in the structural causes of social mobility than in the individual causes.

SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

Open to ALL?

Does everyone have access to the nation's best universities?

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Determining Social Class

- The fewer ascribed statuses used to determine class, the more open the class system.

- The United States has a fairly open system, but the rate of social mobility is not equal for every segment.

- Three techniques are used to rank individuals.

Reputational Method

– Individuals in the community are asked to rank other members based on what they know of their characters and lifestyles

– Suitable only for small communities

– Cannot be used across communities

Subjective Method

– Individuals are asked to determine their own social rank

– Most people choose middle class

Objective Method

– Income, occupation, and education

– Statistical nature makes this method least biased

– Choosing different factors brings different results

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Social Classes in the United States

- **The Upper Class:** 1 percent of population

  - "Old money" have been rich for generations

  - "New money" is not as prestigious

- **The Upper Middle Class:** 14 percent of population

  - High-income businesspeople and professionals such as doctors and lawyers

  - Many are politically and socially active

- **The Lower Middle Class:** 30 percent of population

  - Most hold white-collar jobs that require less education and provide less income such as nursing, middle management, sales

  - Live a comfortable life but must work to maintain it

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- **The Working Class:** 30 percent of population

  - Many hold jobs that require manual labor or blue-collar jobs

  - Jobs may pay more, but have less prestige than white-collar

  - Unexpected crises can push individuals into lower classes

- **The Working Poor:** 22 percent of population

  - Lowest-paying jobs such as housecleaning, migrant farm work, and day labor

  - Many rely on government programs and are high school dropouts

- **The Underclass:** 3 percent of population

  - Have experienced unemployment and poverty for several generations

  - Most rely on government programs

  - Life is a day-to-day struggle

Social Stratification

Social Classes in the United States

Upper Class

Percent of U.S. Population 1%

Education prestigious universities

Occupations owners and executives of large businesses; investors; heirs

Upper Middle Class

Percent of U.S. Population 14%

Education college or university

Occupations business executives; professionals

Lower Middle Class

Percent of U.S. Population 30%

Education high school, some college

Occupations lower-level managers; skilled craftsworkers; supervisors

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Working Class

Percent of U.S. Population 30%

Education high school

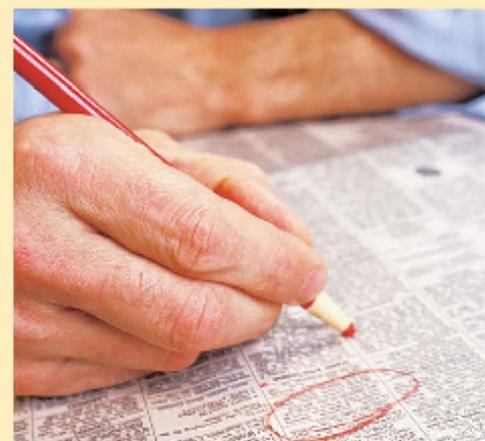**Occupations** factory workers; clerical workers; lower-level salespeople

Working Poor

Percent of U.S. Population 22%

Education some high school

Occupations laborers; service workers such as gardeners and house cleaners

Underclass

Percent of U.S. Population 3%

Education some high school

Occupations undesirable, low-paying jobs; unemployed; on welfare

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Social Mobility

- **Social mobility** is the movement between or within social classes.

- **Horizontal mobility** refers to movement within a social class or stratum.

- **Vertical mobility** refers to the movement between social classes or strata.

- There are two kinds of vertical mobility:

  - **intragenerational mobility** (within a person's lifetime)

  - **intergenerational mobility** (several generations of one family)

Social Mobility

Causes of Upward Mobility

- Individual effort
- Technological change
- Change in merchandising patterns
- Increase in population's general educational level

Causes of Downward Mobility

- Personal factors such as illness, divorce, or retirement
- Technological change altering the demand for labor
- Overall economic health

Section 3 at a Glance

Poverty

- About 37 million Americans live in poverty, or below what society considers to be the minimum adequate standard of living.

- The government calculates the poverty level annually based on the cost of an adequate diet.

- Characteristics such as age, sex, and race affect poverty.

- Poor and wealthy members of society have different life changes and behavior patterns.

- Government welfare programs attempt to reduce inequality.

SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

¢ A Penny Per Pound

Can you imagine having to struggle for a one-cent raise?

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers organized protests such as this one in an effort to secure a raise for local tomato pickers.

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Defining Poverty in the United States

- Although the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, about 13 percent of its population lives below the poverty line.

- **Poverty** is a standard of living that is below the minimum level considered adequate by society. What one society sees as poverty might be seen as adequate by another society.

- **Poverty level** is the minimum income needed by a family to survive, calculated as the cost of an adequate diet.

- Criticism of the method of calculating poverty has led to attempts to find a better definition of poverty.

POVERTY LEVEL BY FAMILY SIZE, 2007

QUICK FACTS

Family Size	Poverty Level
1 person	
Under 65 years	$10,787
65 years and over	$9,944
2 persons	
Householder under 65 years	$13,884
Householder 65 years and older	$12,533
3 persons	$16,218
4 persons	$21,386
5 persons	$25,791
6 persons	$29,664
7 persons	$34,132
8 persons	$38,174
9 persons or more	$45,921

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Statistically Speaking...

Poverty in America Poverty affects Americans of all races, ethnicities, and age groups. However, because of a history of discrimination and many other factors, certain groups suffer from greater percentages of poverty. As you can see in the table at right, the poverty rate for whites averages 2 percentage points lower than the rate for the overall population. African Americans and Hispanics, on the other hand, have poverty rates that are almost twice that of the nation as a whole.

Although the poverty level is uniform across the country, the percentage of people below the poverty level varies by state. In Mississippi—the state with the most residents living in poverty—21.3 percent of the population is below the poverty level. In contrast, only 7.5 percent of New Hampshire residents are below the poverty level. Economic factors such as the strength of local industries or education programs can cause these variations. Cost of living, a local measure, may also play a role. For example, urban areas tend to have high costs of living. In New York City the cost of living is among the highest in the nation, and one in five people there live below the poverty level.

Skills Focus INTERPRETING MAPS What region suffers the most from poverty? Why do you think this is so?

PERCENT OF POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LEVEL BASED ON SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS, 2005

Age	All Races	White	African American	Hispanic American
Total Population	12.6	10.6	24.9	21.8
Under 18	17.6	14.4	34.5	28.3
18 to 24	18.2	16.1	28.1	23.2
25 to 34	12.6	10.8	22.4	19.2
35 to 44	9.7	8.6	18.6	18.3
45 to 54	8.2	6.7	16.7	12.8
55 to 59	8.1	6.9	17.7	14.5
60 to 64	9.6	8.5	22.0	17.0
65 and over	10.1	8.7	23.3	19.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, 2006

POVERTY LEVELS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey
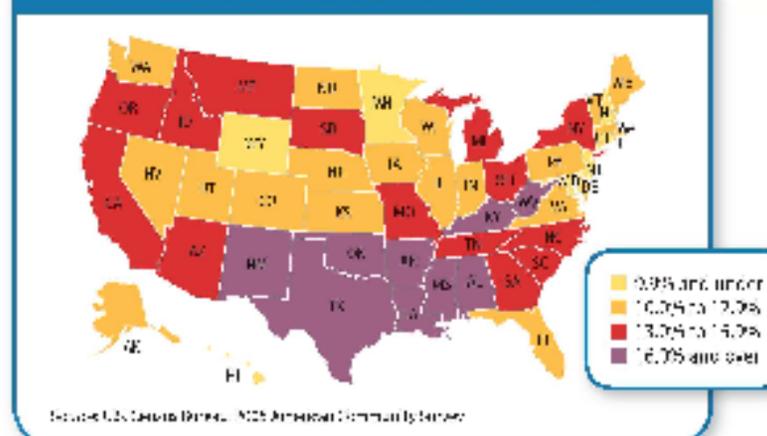
Variations in American Poverty

Not every American runs the same risk of being poor.

Characteristics such as age, sex, and race and ethnicity affect poverty.

- **Age**
  - As an age group, children have the largest percentage in poverty
- **Sex**
  - About 57 percent of the poor are women
- **Race and Ethnicity**
  - African Americans and Hispanics are more likely than whites to live in poverty

Effects of Poverty

Poor and wealthy members of society have different life chances and behavior patterns.

Life Chances

- **Life chances** define the likelihood that an individual will share in the opportunities and benefits of society.

- Life chances include health, length of life, housing, and education.

- Poverty is a disadvantage in health and **life expectancy.**

Patterns of Behavior

- Divorce rates are higher among low-income families.

- Crime rates are higher in poor communities.

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Government Responses to Poverty

- In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson declared a "war on poverty," and the federal government has taken an active role in attempting to reduce inequality.

- Almost 37 million Americans still live in poverty.

- Increased Social Security benefits and Medicare have reduced poverty among the aged.

- **Transfer payments** redistribute money within society by funneling a percentage of tax revenues to groups that need public assistance.

- Subsidies transfer goods and services rather than cash.

- In 1996 federal law turned some welfare over to the states.

- Those who get off welfare face difficulty feeding their families.

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MILESTONES IN WELFARE LEGISLATION — QUICK FACTS

Date	Legislation	Significance
1935	Social Security Act	Established Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), requiring states to assist eligible families
1964	Economic Opportunity Act	Cornerstone of Johnson's war on poverty; provided job training, adult education, and small business loans
1996	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act	Replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), changing the criteria for determining eligibility and delivering benefits
2006	Deficit Reduction Act of 2005	Revised TANF, changes designed to promote work and support children

Skills Focus INTERPRETING CHARTS How long did Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) operate before being replaced?

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Simulation: Applying What You've Learned

Only What You Can Afford

What are the significant, everyday lifestyle differences between people of different classes in the United States?

1. Introduction

- In this simulation you will glimpse what some of the American social classes look like from within using three imaginary families.
- Create a budget for each.
- Chart the budget in a pie graph.

2. Creating Your Budget

- Figure out how much money your family has for each month.
- Decide what percentage of the family's income should go toward housing, transportation, food, health care, personal care, and miscellaneous items.

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Sample Budget Worksheet

Total Net Annual Income	$_____
Total Net Monthly Income	$_____

Housing

Mortgage or Rent	$
Maintenance (applies to houses only)	$
Utilities	$
TOTAL	$

Transportation

Car Payment	$_____
Cost of mass transit (if car not possible)	$_____
TOTAL	$_____

Food

Groceries	$
Dining Out (total cost of meals chosen)	$
TOTAL	$

Health Care

TOTAL	$_____

Personal Care

TOTAL	$

Miscellaneous

Phone, landline	$
Phone, cellular	$
Basic cable	$
High-speed Internet access	$_____
Vacation	$_____
Pet supplies and pet care	$_____
Entertainment	$_____
Other	$_____
TOTAL	$_____

TOTAL EXPENSES	$
SURPLUS OR SHORTAGE	$

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Simulation *(cont.)*

3. Discussion

- **What did you learn from this lab? As a group, discuss the following:**

- How did the options for each family differ?

- Which families bought and which rented?

- How did the amount of money for unnecessary expenses vary?

- Did your families have any money for emergencies?

- How might government programs change the Drake family budget?