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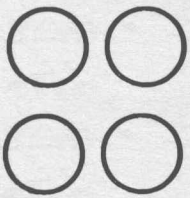
CLASS & SOCIETY

Third Edition



CLASS and SOCIETY

Third Edition

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Preface to the Third Edition

Because of the very gratifying success this study has enjoyed since its first publication in 1955, the general approach and the order of presentation have been retained unchanged in this new, revised edition. At the same time, however, we have not only updated the empirical data but have also revised and considerably expanded the conceptual framework to take account of the many important contributions which have been added to the ever-expanding literature on social stratification during the last fifteen years.

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CLASS AND SOCIETY

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Social Differentiation and Social Stratification

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Ever since men began to meditate and speculate about the nature of human society thousands of years ago, their attention has been drawn to the manifold differences that can readily be observed among human beings in every society. Some of these differences are biological variations, such as sex, age, size, mental capacity, and other traits inherent in the human organism. In addition to these inherited differences, the members of every society are further differentiated by many acquired social distinctions. Everywhere individuals differ from one another in occupation and possessions; in prestige and authority; in habits,

interests, and cultural accomplishments; in tastes, attitudes, values, beliefs, and other acquired traits. All human societies take note of such individual differences. Some of these distinctions become the bases of different social positions and of different tasks in the organization of group activities and the patterns of daily living. This division of distinctive social roles and tasks, based upon both inherited and socially acquired individual differences, is called social *differentiation.*

Social differentiation is a universal characteristic of human societies. Early human societies survived and became dominant among animal species because of their superior social organization—that is, their more elaborate division of labor and consequent close coordination of activities. As individual animals, humans were not biologically superior; their strength and success lay in their superior intellect and language ability and the sociocultural organization that these made possible (and that in turn enhanced them). In the nonhuman world, on the other hand, differentiation is mainly determined by heredity: the division of labor is accomplished by physiological specialization of individual organisms that react in a relatively fixed, instinctive manner to stimuli provided by other organisms of the same species. Thus the whole intricate structure and detailed functional specialization of such insect societies as those of bees and ants are essentially a consequence of physiological differentiation. This does not hold true on the human level, however, where patterns of social behavior are shaped more specifically by culture than by the broader potentials provided by heredity. In human societies the coordination of individual efforts necessary for the preservation of the group is achieved through cultural specialization. The division of labor is accomplished by cultural means: individual members of society come, in one way or another, to fill the traditional positions and to acquire the different skills involved in the performance of the corresponding duties. Thus social differentiation is an integral aspect of human society. But as primitive societies gradually developed, there emerged out of the increasingly complex differentiation that

particular kind of social organization that we refer to as *stratification.*

STRATIFICATION AS A SPECIAL TYPE OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Individuals in the earliest primitive groups—where there was minimal division of labor—were socially distinguished largely on the basis of biological characteristics: sex, age, strength, and physical and psychological skills. Any invidious distinctions that were made tended to be in these terms. This meant that superior and inferior rankings of individuals could not be passed on by social inheritance but had to be acquired anew by each generation. Also, such groups, organized as they were almost entirely in terms of kinship relations, could not develop independent systems of social positions in which important invidious distinctions of rank could inhere. This is an important consideration, for—as we shall see—stratification emerges out of differentiation as distinctions of rank become attached to established social *positions,* rather than to individual, nontransferrable traits, and hence can be socially transmitted independently of innately endowed traits of inferiority or superiority.

This independence of innate "talents"—which are only potentials depending heavily on the social environment for their shaping and full realization—from recruitment of persons into social positions is shown clearly in the well-established fact that until very recent times such recruitment in all societies has taken place mainly on the basis of what sociologists have called ascription rather than achievement. That is, the positions individuals were to fill as adults were, within rather narrow limits, socially ascribed at birth and thus independent of any potential, or "innate," talents. This process apparently did not overly handicap most societies in their development since, as some anthropologists and sociologists have argued, most social positions in even the complex societies can quite adequately and

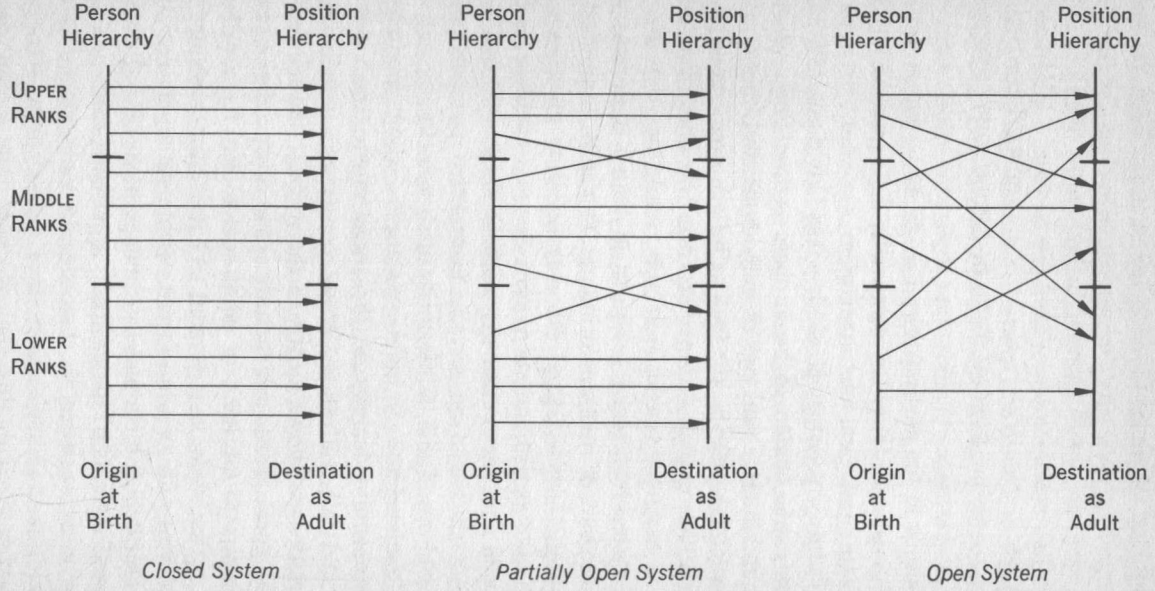

Figure 1 Degrees of Openness of Stratification Systems

conscientiously be filled by most individuals, given the training and social encouragement.[1] In contrast, some of the more recent societies are now characterized by an appreciable, though not predominant, degree of achievement of social positions. The concept of achievement implies, of course, adequate opportunities for the development of innate talents and a clear procedure for the testing and matching of such talents to the skill requirements of social positions. This poses the problem of "equality of opportunity" that has always been central to the study of social stratification.

Stratification, then, must be distinguished from the fact that individuals as well as social positions have always been differentiated to some degree in terms of invidious rankings. For social stratification refers to a particular relationship between individuals or subgroupings of a society and their recruitment into the particular hierarchy of social positions that have been conventionally established in that society. Thus the concept of stratification implies that there are two hierarchies that must be conceptually distinguished. First, when a society is stratified we find that individuals, families, and their subcultures may be arranged in a hierarchy on the basis of such criteria as wealth and income, prestige and styles of living, and power and authority. Second, we can distinguish a hierarchy of social, especially occupational, positions into which generations of individuals are recruited and from which they eventually retire. This hierarchy of positions is differentiated in terms of the resources—the material and psychological gratifications—and the power made available to those who hold them. The central focus of stratification study is the fact that, over a number of generations, those individuals who fill positions in any particular level of the positional hierarchy tend to be recruited from the corresponding level of the hierarchy of individuals and subgroups. That is, individuals tend to inherit the level of position they come to fill as adults through a complex of social, cultural, and psychological mechanisms and processes that we shall be discussing throughout the book (see Figure 1).

In sum, then, while all social differences may contain an in-