
Inequality AND Stratification

Race, Class, and Gender

FOURTH EDITION

Robert A. Rothman

FOURTH EDITION

Inequality and Stratification

Race, Class, and Gender

ROBERT A. ROTHMAN

*Professor Emeritus
University of Delaware*

Prentice
Hall

Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rothman, Robert A., (date)

Inequality and stratification : race, class, and gender / Robert A. Rothman.—4th ed.
p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: Inequality & stratification. 3rd ed. c1999.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-13-033669-6 (pbk.)

1. United States—Social conditions. 2. Equality—United States. 3. Social structure—United States. 4. Social classes—United States. 5. Social status—United States. 6. Minorities—United States. I. Rothman, Robert A., (date) Inequality & stratification. II. Title

HN57 .R577 2002

305'.0973—dc21

2001019901

VP, Editorial Director: Laura Pearson

AVP, Publisher: Nancy Roberts

Managing Editor: Sharon Chambliss

Editorial/production supervision and interior design: Mary Araneo

Director of Marketing: Beth Gillett Mejia

Prepress and Manufacturing Buyer: Mary Ann Gloriande

Cover Art Director: Jayne Conte

Cover Designer: Bruce Kenselaar

This book was set in 10/12 Times by A & A Publishing Services, Inc.,
and was printed and bound by Maple Press. The cover was
printed by Phoenix Color Corp.

Prentice
Hall

© 2002, 1999, 1993, 1978 by Pearson Education, Inc.
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reproduced, in any form or by any means,
without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-033669-6

Pearson Education LTD., London

Pearson Education Australia PTY, Limited, Sydney

Pearson Education Singapore, Pte. Ltd

Pearson Education North Asia Ltd, Hong Kong

Pearson Education Canada, Ltd., Toronto

Pearson Educación de México, S.A. de C.V.

Pearson Education — Japan, Tokyo

Pearson Education Malaysia, Pte. Ltd

Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey

To Nancy: For Everything

Preface

There can be no doubt that one of the major developments of the end of the twentieth century was the emergence of digital technology. Computers proliferated, as did cell phones, DVD players, and a host of other electronic devices. Electronic mail forever changed the way people communicate, and the Internet reshaped how we shop, listen to music, write research papers, and search out medical information. It also contributed to the creation of a global economy. The digital revolution has had as well a significant impact on the distribution of wealth and the structure of inequality, simultaneously opening new opportunities for many but handicapping those lacking the skills of the twenty-first century.

This edition systematically explores the implications of the digital revolution in industrial nations. It incorporated up-to-date information and research in keeping with the expansion and elaboration of the subject. Although the American experience remains its central emphasis, the scope of the work has been broadened to include more attention to other industrial systems of social stratification.

The basic format introduced in the third edition has been retained. Part One provides a broad overview and introduction to the field. Part Two is an expanded discussion of the evolution and institutionalization of industrial class systems. The three chapters that focus on the basic elements of inequality—economics, prestige, and politics—define Part Three. Part Four includes separate chapters on life chances and lifestyles as well as class consciousness. Social mobility is the subject of Part Five. However, the format is flexible enough to allow faculty to reorder the chapters to fit their personal preferences.

This edition, like earlier ones, is written with the undergraduate student in mind. It is intended to provide the fundamentals of social stratification for under-

graduates in a concise and readable format. **Key Concepts** are highlighted with bold type in the text and listed at the end of chapters to facilitate review. The book may be used in different ways: as a basic text for stratification courses; in newer sociology courses that focus on the intersection of class, race, and gender courses in stratification; or as one component of courses such as introductions to sociology, social problems, race and minorities, or gender studies. The format is convenient to combine with any of several useful anthologies.

Any book that attempts to lay out the fundamentals of an area as complex and broad as stratification cannot elaborate all the areas of debate and controversy. Therefore, more advanced students are directed to the material contained in footnotes and annotated Suggested Reading sections for the resources needed to explore these issues in more depth and detail. Consistent with the emphasis on the digital revolution, a listing of useful web sites can be found at the end of each chapter.

I would like to thank the following reviewers for their comments and suggestions: Don Anspach, University of Southern Maine; Marcia L. Bellas, University of Cincinnati; Sheryl Grana, University of Minnesota, Duluth; and Cathy D. Martin, Louisiana Tech University.

Robert A. Rothman

Contents

Preface

ix

PART ONE: THE NATURE OF INEQUALITY AND STRATIFICATION 1

CHAPTER ONE Inequality and Social Stratification

2

The Forms of Inequality 2

The Sources of Inequality: Class, Race, and Gender 5

The Institutionalization of Inequality 14

Conclusion: The Intersection of Class, Race, and Gender 17

Key Concepts 18 *Suggested Reading* 18 *Useful Web Sites* 19

CHAPTER TWO Theoretical Approaches to Social Stratification

20

Three Theoretical Traditions 20

The Marxian Tradition 21

The Weberian Tradition 28

The Functionalism Tradition 31

Conclusion: The Central Issues 34

Key Concepts 35 *Suggested Reading* 35 *Useful Web Sites* 36

**PART TWO:
STRATIFICATION
IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES 37**

CHAPTER THREE
Industrial Class Systems 38

The Transformation of Society: From Agriculture to E-Commerce	38
The Industrial Revolution	39
The Digital Revolution	48
A Five-Class Model	52
Conclusion: The Impact of E-Commerce	59
<i>Key Concepts</i>	60
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	60
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	61

CHAPTER FOUR
Institutionalizing and Legitimizing Stratification 62

The Origins and Maintenance of Stratification Systems	62
The American Dream and the Ideology of Individualism	65
Race, Ethnicity, and Stratification	70
Gender and Stratification	79
Conclusion: American Dilemmas	88
<i>Key Concepts</i>	89
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	89
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	90

**PART THREE:
PATTERNS OF INEQUALITY 91**

CHAPTER FIVE
The Dynamics of Economic Inequality 92

The Distribution of Income and Wealth	92
Annual Income	93
Net Worth: Measuring Household Assets	101
Poverty	102
Homelessness: Life on the Streets	109
Conclusion: Favoring Greater Equality	112
<i>Key Concepts</i>	113
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	113
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	113

CHAPTER SIX
Social Evaluations and Social Relations 114

Social Evaluations	114
Social Class and Social Status	115
Occupational Prestige Rankings	118
Class, Race, and Social Relationships	123
Class and Character Judgments	131

Conclusion: Class and Self-Esteem	132
<i>Key Concepts</i>	133
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	133
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	133

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Shape of Political Power and Influence 134

Political Power: Concentrated or Dispersed?	134
The Elite: Patterns of Influence	137
White-Collar and Blue-Collar Political Activity	142
Voting and Political Participation	144
Gender in the Political Sphere	146
Minorities in the Political Sphere	152
Conclusion: Political Alienation	154
<i>Key Concepts</i>	155
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	155
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	157

PART FOUR: EXPERIENCING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION 158

CHAPTER EIGHT

Class, Race, Gender, and Life Chances 159

The Concept of Life Chances	159
The Digital Divide	160
... and the Poor Get Jail: The Criminal Justice System	161
A Stratified Health Care System	168
Conclusion: Shaping Life Chances	174
<i>Key Concepts</i>	175
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	175
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	175

CHAPTER NINE

Class and Lifestyles 177

The Concept of Lifestyles	177
Work, Values, and Personality	177
Lifestyles of the Old Capitalist Elite	179
Lifestyles of the New Capitalist Elite and the Institutional Elite	182
The Upper Middle Class	183
The Lower Middle Class	185
The Working Class	188
The Poor	190
Conclusion: Hunger in the World, Hunger in America	193
<i>Key Concepts</i>	194
<i>Suggested Reading</i>	194
<i>Useful Web Sites</i>	195

CHAPTER TEN

Class Consciousness 196

Subjective Perceptions of Inequality and Stratification	196
Class Awareness	198

viii Contents

Class Identification 200
Class Solidarity 202
Class Action 203
Class Consciousness and the Working Class 205
Family, Gender, and Class Consciousness 207
Conclusion: Factors Mitigating Against Class Consciousness 208
Key Concepts 210 *Suggested Reading* 211 *Useful Web Sites* 211

**PART FIVE:
INHERITANCE AND MOBILITY 212**

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Patterns of Social Mobility 213
Social Mobility: Open and Closed Systems 213
Intergenerational Mobility 217
Class, Race, Gender, and Education 220
Downward Mobility 230
Conclusion: Entrepreneurs and the American Dream 233
Key Concepts 235 *Suggested Reading* 235 *Useful Web Sites* 236

Bibliography 237

Name Index 252

Subject Index 258

PART ONE

The Nature of Inequality and Stratification

Industrial societies are distinguished by several prominent social divisions—~~social classes~~ based on position in the ~~economic system~~ of ~~production~~ and ~~distribution~~, ~~sex~~ and ~~gender~~, and ~~racial~~ and ~~ethnic~~ categories. Many of the most significant rewards and advantages available to people are shaped by these three factors. The consequences of class, race, and gender are most pronounced in areas such as the distribution of earnings and wealth, judgments and evaluations of social prestige, access to political power, and life chances related to health and illness, crime and justice, and educational opportunities. The system of classes, races, ethnic groups, and genders and the distribution of inequalities are supported and maintained by the culture and social structure of the society. Chapter 1 develops the basic ideas and concepts central to the sociological analysis of inequality and stratification. Chapter 2 reviews the major theoretical conceptualizations and interpretations of the origins of industrial social systems that dominate current theory and research.

CHAPTER ONE

Inequality and Social Stratification

THE FORMS OF INEQUALITY

The scope of inequality in the contemporary world is obvious. Discrepancies—sometimes vast discrepancies—in wealth, material possessions, power and authority, prestige, and access to education, health care, and simple creature comforts dominate the social life of societies. At the extremes are the homeless and the super-rich, the esteemed and the degraded, the powerful and the powerless, and many levels between them. There are many forms of inequality, but since the nineteenth century sociologists have tended to focus on ~~three major forms—economic, social, and political~~—an analytic practice first suggested by the pioneering German sociologist ~~Max Weber~~.

Economic Inequalities

Disparities in wealth and material resources are usually the most visible form of inequality. Industrial societies contain millions of people whose daily lives are a struggle against calamity. Forty-four million Americans have no health insurance (Toner, 1999). ~~One child in ten lives in poverty in the major industrial nations—Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, Israel, and Italy (Pear, 1996). In America, it is one child in five!~~ Hundreds of thousands of the destitute are homeless, compelled to wander the streets and fill the shelters in Los Angeles, London, and Moscow.

While many struggle for survival, others in the same society enjoy the benefits of great wealth. Professional athletes, entertainers, corporate executives, and e-business entrepreneurs earn millions of dollars each year. Others, fortunate enough to have been born into prosperous families with names such as duPont or Rockefeller or Walton (Wal-Mart), never need to worry about the source of their next meal or confront the fear of being unable to pay the rent. On the contrary, some of the very rich indulge unbelievably ostentatious and extravagant lifestyles. One couple flies their palm trees from Southampton, NY, to Palm Beach, FL, in the winter months to keep them warm (Yazigi, 1999). Wealthy tobacco heiress Doris Duke always felt it necessary to fly her two pet camels with her on trips to Hawaii (Clancy, 1988). Ranged between such extremes are smaller gradations of monetary inequality, often measured by the size of homes, the kind of cars people drive, or the quality of the schools their children can afford to attend.

Social Status

A second important form of inequality is social status. Social status is the social standing, esteem, respect, or prestige that people command from other members of society. It is a judgment of the relative ranking of individuals and groups on scales of social superiority and inferiority. Social status is a relevant prize because people are highly sensitive to the evaluations of others, valuing the admiration and approval of their peers as is readily evident when they attempt to embellish their social standing through the public display of designer clothing and jewelry, luxury cars and homes. An individual might be able to write equally well with a Bic pen as with a Mont Blanc, but only the latter confers social status.

Individuals can earn social status on the basis of their own efforts (athletic ability) or personal attributes (physical attractiveness, intelligence), but there is also a powerful structural dimension to social status—occupations, social classes, racial and ethnic groups, and the sexes are typically ranked relative to one another. For example, at various times and in various places, women and men have formed clearly demarcated status groups. In the United States it was common for males to be openly rated as superior to females by both men and women well into the 1950s and 1960s (McKee & Sherriffs, 1957). Occupational prestige rankings are probably the status hierarchies with which most people are familiar. Occupations around the world are typically arranged on a strict hierarchy of prestige, usually with physicians, lawyers, and scientists at the top and garbage collectors and janitors near the bottom.

The significance of social ranking extends beyond questions of social approval and ego gratification. Status considerations can dictate the form of social interaction between people at different levels. People are likely to show courtesy to those ranked above them, but they tend to expect deference from those ranked below them. Social considerations also lead to practices designed to limit social contacts with people defined as inferior, which shows up in residential segregation and other forms of exclusionary behavior.

4 The Nature of Inequality and Stratification

Power and Authority

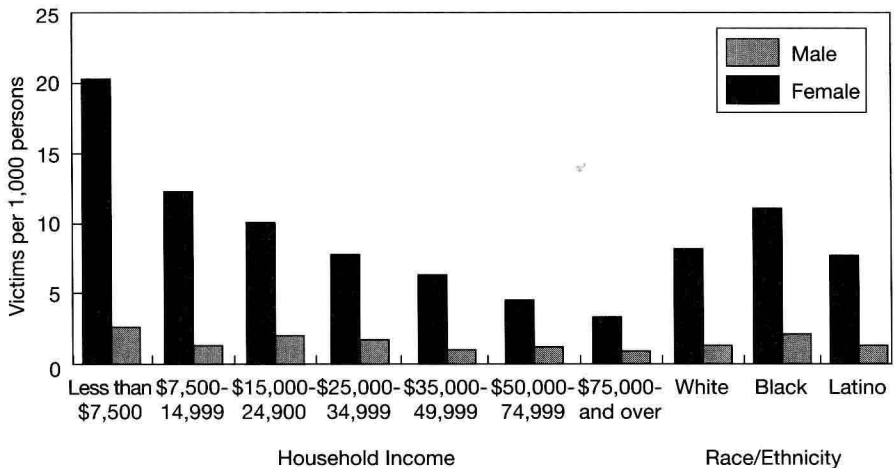
There is a third salient, more complex form of inequality, dealing with the unequal distribution of power and authority in society. Although there is a lack of consensus on precise definitions of such terms, there is general agreement that the essence of **power** is the ability to control events or to determine the behavior of others in the face of resistance, and to resist attempts at control by others. **Authority** refers to a specific form of control where the right to command is considered as appropriate and legitimate. Authority may be based on tradition, or it may reside in organizational position (as with generals' right to direct the behavior of lieutenants or supervisors' ability to sanction workers) or in expert knowledge (lawyers' capacity to prescribe the actions of clients).

Discrepancies in power are difficult to document, but it is clear that enormous power is concentrated in the hands of the people who head the large organizations that dominate the business, governmental, military, and social landscape. Sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956) was among the first to point out that the growth of major organizations during the twentieth century consolidated unusual amounts of power in the government (the president and congress), the military (the Joint Chiefs of Staff), corporate executives, labor union leaders, church officials, and university presidents. In contrast, a majority of Americans feel quite powerless politically, believing they have little or no influence over the activities of the government. Four out of five believe the government is run by special interests (Apple, 1995).

Life Chances

Economic, social, and political inequalities are direct and have readily observable consequences, but there are also subtle and less obvious forms of inequality. Max Weber (1946) introduced the concept of **life chances** to identify the role of social class in enhancing or weakening the probability of enjoying experiences that enhance the quality of life or facing barriers that diminish it. It is appropriate in contemporary analysis to extend the term *life chances* to include the implications of race, ethnicity, and gender as well as class. Life chances include the odds of a newborn surviving infancy; the chances of going to college; the risk of suffering mental illness, loneliness, or obesity; and the probability of being a victim of violent crime such as robbery, assault, or rape.

The idea of life chances is highlighted by considering the problem of domestic violence or what is now called "intimate partner violence." About 1 million cases of violent crimes are committed by current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends each year. Murder, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault are included as violent crimes, and 85 percent of the victims are women. The chances of falling victim to violence are not evenly distributed across the stratification system, as shown in Exhibit 1.1. Women in the poorest households are almost seven times as likely to be harmed as those in the top income group. Race also makes a difference, with African-American women victimized more fre-

EXHIBIT 1.1 Intimate Partner Violence by Household Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Note: Victims per 1,000 females or males.

Source: Callie Marie Rennison and Susan Welchans. *Intimate Partner Violence*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000.

quently than in any other group. These numbers can only hint at the scope and significance of social stratification.

THE SOURCES OF INEQUALITY: CLASS, RACE, AND GENDER

Many of the rewards, advantages, and benefits of life in the modern world are shaped by peoples' location in the social structure of society, and there are three that are among the most consequential.¹ Industrial societies are divided into social classes based on position in an economic system of production and distribution, racial and ethnic group membership, and gender. **Class, race, and gender** are sometimes approached as distinct and separate sources of inequality in contemporary society. Some social scientists go so far as to argue that one of these three factors is more salient than the others. However, they are **best understood as overlapping or intersecting bases of inequality and stratification**. None can be fully understood or explained without analyzing the interrelationships among them. For example, the

¹Obviously, considerations of factors such as age and sexual orientation are also powerfully important.

6 The Nature of Inequality and Stratification

experiences and opportunities of middle-class African-American women or working-class white men must be approached as the convergence of class, race, and gender. Therefore, each of the concepts requires clarification.

Social Class

A **social class** is a group of individuals or families who occupy a similar position in the economic system of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in industrial societies. For the overwhelming majority of people, social class position is defined by occupation.² Social class position is actually much more complex than a job description, but work is the most useful starting point. People's work sets effective limits on financial rewards and social status, influences the stability of employment and the chances for social mobility, locates people in systems of workplace authority and power having consequences that extend beyond the work place, defines some features of social relations on and off the job, contributes to the way people think about themselves and others, and has enduring implications for their children.

Many of the problems of the poorest members of society can be traced to their tenuous link to the economic system. The unemployed and the working **poor** form a large pool of people lacking a secure position in the work place. They are **handicapped by a lack of experience, weak educational credentials, a lack of job opportunities, discrimination, or personal habits**. Whatever the combination of reasons that explains the plight of specific individuals, their collective impoverishment has its origins in an economic system that is unable to provide jobs at decent wages for all who seek them.

One of the issues that divides sociologists is the problem of distinguishing the number and form of classes in contemporary industrial societies.³ Despite some areas of ambiguity and the lack of clear boundaries between class levels, American society can conveniently be divided into **five broad social classes**.⁴ At the **top of the stratification system** is a **small elite class** that wields unusual economic, political, and social influence. The elite includes an **institutional elite** made up of the **women and men** who direct the **dominant national organizations and institutions** (**government, business and industry, the media, education, and religion**) and a **capitalist elite** of individuals and families whose power derives from wealth and property rather than structural position. One segment of the capitalist elite amassed fortunes through efforts and abilities during their own lives, as is the case of **Oprah Winfrey, Pete Sampras, and Bill Gates**.

²Sociologists frequently disagree on the definition and measurement of social class. A good discussion of the issues is found in Grusky & Sorensen, 1998.

³There is one school of thought that argues that discrete classes have been eroded by the social and economic forces of postmodern society, a situation of "capitalism without classes" according to one author (Block, 1992: 88). The case for the persistence of classes is given by Hout, Brooks, & Manza (1993).

⁴The composition of classes is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

This group is called the **new capitalist elite** to distinguish them from the **old capitalist elite**, where wealth has been passed down through several generations in families such as Mars (the candy family) and Heinz (the food family).

The next level, the **upper middle class**, combines occupations based on expert knowledge (professional people such as physicians, computer programmers, and scientific personnel) and administrators and managers below the executive level. The **lower middle class** includes technicians, lower-level administrators, and most clerical and sales personnel. In the United States the term **working class** means **manual work**, also called **blue-collar work**, and describes those who do the physical labor in the factories, mills, and mines. Some are engaged in highly skilled work (auto mechanics) while others perform more routine tasks on assembly lines. Skill differentials are an important consideration in understanding how manual workers perceive themselves. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the **poor**, who live on the very margins of the productive system. Numbered in this class are both the “**working poor**” who fill the least skilled jobs in the economy and those caught up in **unstable and poorly paid jobs** (the unemployed, the under-employed, and those discouraged because they believe they cannot find work).

Developing an accurate picture of the class structure of American society is a complex and controversial task, but one model is suggested by Exhibit 1.2. The **elite** is a small group, comprising no more than 1 or 2 percent of the population. About 30 percent can be defined as **upper middle class** on the basis of administrative, managerial, and professional occupations. About one worker in three holds a **lower middle-class** job in clerical, sales, or administrative support positions, and another one in three fills the **manual occupations** of the working class. Perhaps one in six Americans may be counted among the **poor**, holding marginal jobs or facing unemployment. This model must be viewed as merely a starting point since considerations of wealth, social status, political power, and life chances will reveal significant patterns of inequality.

Social Stratification

The phrase **social stratification** is a general term used to refer to the hierarchy of layers or strata of individuals and families where position is a major source of rewards. Social stratification has taken many forms in different places and at different points in history, but the three most familiar forms are **slave**, **caste**, and **class systems**. Each form arises under different historical conditions, singles out distinctive social categories of people, generates alternative kinds of hierarchies, and differs in the scope and magnitude of inequalities.

Slave systems divide people into two fundamental groups, the **free** and the **unfree**. Slave systems are coercive, with one group imposing its will upon vulnerable groups. Despite a great deal of progress in the area of global human rights, slavery survives in a number of places around the globe such as Mauritania (Masland, et al., 1992). There is also a largely hidden worldwide system of slavery that penetrates even into the **United States**. As many as 700,000 women and children are forced into