Chapter 11 NOTES

Systems of stratification

Social Stratification is used to describe inequalities that exist between individuals and groups within human societies.

Can also occur because of other attributes, such as gender, age, religious affiliation or military rank.

Stratification can most simply be defined as structured inequalities between different groupings of people

All socially stratified systems share three basic characteristics

1. People who share a common characteristic without necessarily interacting or identifying with one another. Example: women may be ranked differently from men, or wealthy from poor
2. People’s life experiences and opportunities depend heavily on how their social category is ranked. Being male, female, black or white, upper class or working class makes a big difference in terms of your life chances.
3. The ranks of different social categories tend to change very slowly over time. In the industrialized societies, for example, only recently have women as a whole begun to achieve equality with men.

Hunting/Gatherer societies had very little social stratification mainly because there was very little by way of wealth or other resources to be divided up

The development of agriculture produced considerably more wealth and, as a result, a great increase in stratification.

4 Basic systems of stratification can be distinguished: slavery, caste, estates and class

**Slavery-** is an extreme form of inequality, in which certain people are owned as property by others.

Sometimes slaves were deprived of almost all rights by law.

Slave-labor systems eventually broke down, partly because of the struggles they provoked and partly because economic or other incentives motivate people to produce more effectively than does direct compulsion.

Slavery is simply not economically efficient and many people came to see it as morally wrong

**Caste-** A caste system is a social system in which one’s social position is geven for a lifetime.

All individuals must remain at the social level of their birth throughout life.

Everyone’s social status is based on personal characteristics- such as perceived race or ethnicity, parental religion or parental caste.

Such “purity” of a caste is often maintained by rules of endogamy, marriage within one’s social group as required by custom or law.

The 4 castes in India consist of The Religious Brahmins, the soldiers/military, farmers and merchants, laborers and artisans. And at the very bottom were the untouchables!

As more and more of India is influenced by globalization, it seems reasonable to assume that its caste system will weaken still further.

The South African caste system, termed apartheid, rigidly sperated black Africans, Indians, Asians from whites. In this case the caste was based entirely on race.

**Estates**- were part of European feaualism, but also existed in many other traditional civilizations.

In Europe, the highest estate was composed of the aristocracy, then the clergy, and then the Third Estate was of the commoners.

**Class**-a large scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the type of lifestyle they are they are able to lead.

Ownership of wealth and occupation, are the chief bases of class differences.

1. Fluid, classes are not established by legal or religious provisions. No formal restrictions on intermarriage.
2. Achieved, social mobility
3. Economically based
4. Large scale and impersonal. Class systems operate mainly through large-scale impersonal associations and have pay and working conditions.

Theories developed by Marx and Weber form the basis of most sociological analyses of class and stratification.

**Marx**

His crucial argument was that industrial societies were rooted in capitalist economic relations.

For Marx, Industrial capitalism, for all its progressive elements, was founded in an exploitative system of class relations that led to the oppression of the majority of working people.

The 2 main classes consist of those who own these new means of production (industrialists or capitalists) and those who earn their living by selling their labor to them (the working class)

According to Marx, the relationship between classes is an exploitative one.

Marx used the term pauperization to describe the process by which the working class grows increasingly impoverished in relation to the capitalist class.

**Max Weber: class, status, and party**- Weber regarded society as characterized by conflicts over power and resources. Yet where Marx saw polarized class relations and economic issues at the heart of all social conflict, Weber developed a more complex, multidimensional view of society. Social stratification is not simply a matter of class, according to Weber, but is shaped by two further aspects: **status** and **party**.

According to Weber, class divisions derive not only from control or lack of control of the means of production, but from economic differences that have nothing directly to do with property.

Weber argued that an individual’s *Market Position* strongly influences his or her overall life chances.

Status in Weber’s theory refers to differences between social groups in the social honor or prestige they are accorded by others.

Instead, according to Weber, status came to be expressed through people’s styles of life. Symbols of status such as housing,dress, manner of speech and occupation, all help to shape an individual’s social standing in the eyes of others.

Marx argued that status distinctions are the result of class divisions in society. Weber argued that status often varies independently of class divisions.

In modern societies, Weber pointed out, partly formation is an important aspect of power, and can influence stratification independently of class and status.

Party defines a group of individuals who work together because they have common backgrounds, aims or interests.

Often a party works in an organized fashion towards a specific goal which is in the interest of the party membership.

Marx tended to explain both status differences and party organization in terms of class. Neither, in fact, can be reduced to class divisions, Weber argued, even though each is influenced by them; both can in turn influence the economic circumstances of individuals and groups, thereby affecting class.

Weber’s writing show that other dimensions of stratification besides class strongly influence people’s lives.

Marx saw social class as the key social division, Weber drew attention to the complex interplay of class, status and party as separate aspects of social stratification creating a more flexible basis for empirical analyses of stratification.

**Social Mobility-** refers to the movement of individuals and groups between different socio-econimic positions.

Vertical Mobility means movement up or down the socio-economic scale.

Those who gain in property, income or status are said to be upwardly mobile

Lateral Mobility refers to the movement between neighborhoods, towns or regions.

Vertical and lateral mobility are often combined (raise and move places to new segment example!)

Intragenerational Mobility- how far they move up or down the social scale in the course of their working lives.

Intergenerational Mobility- How far children enter the same type of occupation as their parents or grandparents. Mobility across the generations

The amount of vertical mobility in a society is a major index of the degree of its “openness,” indicating how far talented individuals born into lower strata can move up the socio-economic ladder.

The Kuznets Curve shows that Economic expansion in industrial societies, which created opportunities for people at the bottom to move up, and also to government health insurance, welfare and other programs which aimed at reducing inequality.

Some have argued that social mobility produces a sense of disequilibrium and isolation, others have taken a more optimistic view, suggesting that a gradual process of adaptation to a new class inevitabely takes place.

Downward intragenerational mobility is also common. Mobility of this type is quite often associated with psychological problems and anxieties, where individuals become unable to sustain the lifestyles to which they have become accustomed.