



# Global Stratification



## Let's contrast two "average" families in different parts of the world:

For Getu Mulleta, 33, and his wife, Zenebu, 28, of rural Ethiopia, life is a constant struggle to keep themselves and their seven children from starving.

They live in a 320-square-foot manure-plastered hut with no electricity, gas, or running water. They have a radio, but the battery is dead. The family farms teff, a grain, and survives on \$130 a year.

**They live in a 320-square-foot manure-plastered hut with no electricity, gas, or running water.**

The Mulletas' poverty is not due to a lack of hard work. Getu works about eighty hours a week, while Zenebu puts in even more hours. "Housework" for Zenebu includes fetching water, cleaning animal stables, and making fuel pellets out of cow dung for the open fire over which she cooks the family's food. Like other Ethiopian women, she eats after the men.

In Ethiopia, the average male can expect to live to age 48, the average female to 50.

The Mulletas' most valuable possession is their oxen. Their wishes for the future: more animals, better seed, and a second set of clothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Springfield, Illinois, is home to the Kellys—Rick, 36, Patti, 34, Julie, 10, and Michael, 7. The Kellys live in a four-bedroom, 2-1/2 bath, 2,434-square-foot, carpeted ranch-style house, with a fireplace, central heating and air conditioning, a basement, and a two-car garage. Their home is equipped with a refrigerator, washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher, garbage disposal, vacuum cleaner, food processor, microwave, and convection oven. They also own six telephones (three cellular), four color televisions (two high definition), two CD players, two digital cameras, digital camcorder, two DVD players, iPod, Xbox, a computer, and a printer-scanner-fax machine, not to mention two blow dryers, an answering machine, a juicer, and an espresso coffee maker. This count doesn't include such items as electric can openers, battery-powered tooth brushes, or the stereo-radio-CD/DVD players in their pickup truck and SUV.

Rick works forty hours a week as a cable splicer for a telephone company. Patti teaches school part time. Together they make \$54,061, plus benefits. The Kellys can choose from among dozens of superstocked supermarkets. They spend \$4,809 for food they eat at home, and another \$3,362 eating out, a total of 15 percent of their annual income.

In the United States, the average life expectancy is 75 for males, 80 for females.

On the Kellys' wish list are a new hybrid car with satellite radio, a 160-gigabyte laptop with Bluetooth wi-fi, a 50-inch plasma TV with surround sound, a DVD camcorder, a boat, a motor home, an ATV, and, oh, yes, farther down the road, an in-ground heated swimming pool. They also have an eye on a cabin at a nearby lake.

Sources: Menzel 1994; *Statistical Abstract* 2007:Tables 99, 668, 676, 937.

## Systems of Social Stratification

Some of the world's nations are wealthy, others poor, and some in between. This division of nations, as well as the layering of groups of people within a nation, is called *social stratification*. Social stratification is one of the most significant topics we shall discuss in this book, for, as you saw in the opening vignette, it affects our life chances—from our access to material possessions to the age at which we die.

Social stratification also affects the way we think about life. If you had been born into the Ethiopian family in our opening vignette, for example, you would be illiterate and would assume that your children would be as well. You also would expect hunger to be a part of life and would not expect all of your children to survive. To be born into the U.S. family, however, would give you quite a different picture of the world. You would expect your children not only to survive, but to go to college as well. You can see that social stratification brings with it ideas of what we can expect out of life.

**Social stratification** is a system in which groups of people are divided into layers according to their relative property, power, and prestige. It is important to emphasize that social stratification does not refer to individuals. It is a way of ranking large groups of people into a hierarchy according to their relative privileges.

It is also important to note that *every society stratifies its members*. Some societies have greater inequality than others, but social stratification is universal. In addition, in every society of the world, *gender* is a basis for stratifying people. On the basis of their gender, people are either allowed or denied access to the good things offered by their society.

Under slavery, humans are sold like a commodity. Wm. F. Talbott bought slaves in Kentucky for the market in New Orleans.

Let's consider three systems of social stratification: slavery, caste, and class.

### Slavery

**Slavery**, whose essential characteristic is that *some individuals own other people*, has been common throughout world history. The Old Testament even lays out rules for how owners should treat their slaves. So does the Koran. The Romans also had slaves, as did the Africans and Greeks. In classical Greece and Rome, slaves did the work, freeing citizens to engage in politics and the arts. Slavery was most widespread in agricultural societies and least common among nomads, especially hunters and gatherers (Landtman 1938/1968). As we examine the major causes and conditions of slavery, you will see how remarkably slavery has varied around the world.

**Causes of Slavery** Contrary to popular assumption, slavery was usually based not on racism but on one of three other factors. The first was *debt*. In some societies, creditors would enslave people who could not pay their debts. The second was *crime*. Instead of being killed, a murderer or thief might be enslaved by the victim's family as compensation for their loss. The third was *war*. When one group of people conquered another, they often enslaved some of the vanquished. Historian Gerda Lerner (1986) notes that women were the first people enslaved



through warfare. When tribal men raided another group, they killed the men, raped the women, and then brought the women back as slaves. The women were valued for sexual purposes, for reproduction, and for their labor.

Roughly twenty-five hundred years ago, when Greece was but a collection of city-states, slavery was common. A city that became powerful and conquered another city would enslave some of the vanquished. Both slaves and slaveholders were Greek. Similarly, when Rome became the supreme power of the Mediterranean area about two thousand years ago, following the custom of the time, the Romans enslaved some of the Greeks they had conquered. More educated than their conquerors, some of these slaves served as tutors in Roman homes. Slavery, then, was a sign of debt, of crime, or of defeat in battle. It was not a sign that the slave was inherently inferior.

**Conditions of Slavery** The conditions of slavery have varied widely around the world. *In some places, slavery was temporary.* Slaves of the Israelites were set free in the year of jubilee, which occurred every fifty years. Roman slaves ordinarily had the right to buy themselves out of slavery. They knew what their purchase price was, and some were able to meet this price by striking a bargain with their owner and selling their services to others. In most instances, however, slavery was a lifelong condition. Some criminals, for example, became slaves when they were given life sentences as oarsmen on Roman warships. There they served until death, which often came quickly to those in this exhausting service.

*Slavery was not necessarily inheritable.* In most places, the children of slaves were slaves themselves. But in some instances, the child of a slave who served a rich family might even be adopted by that family, becoming an heir who bore the family name along with the other sons or daughters of the household. In ancient Mexico, the children of slaves were always free (Landtman 1938/1968:271).

*Slaves were not necessarily powerless and poor.* In almost all instances, slaves owned no property and had no power. Among some groups, however, slaves could accumulate property and even rise to high positions in the community. Occasionally, a slave might even become wealthy, loan money to the master, and, while still a slave, own slaves himself or herself (Landtman 1938/1968). This, however, was rare.

**Slavery in the New World** To meet their growing need for labor, some colonists tried to enslave Native Americans. This attempt failed miserably, in part because when Indians escaped, they knew how to survive in the wilderness and were able to make their way back to their tribe. The colonists then turned to Africans, who were being brought to North and South America by the Dutch, English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Because slavery has a broad range of causes, some analysts conclude that racism didn't lead to slavery, but, rather, that slavery led to racism. Finding it profitable to make people slaves for life, U.S. slave owners developed an **ideology**, beliefs that justify social arrangements. Ideology leads to a perception of the world that makes current social arrangements seem necessary and fair. The colonists developed the view that their slaves were inferior. Some even said that they were not fully human. In short, the colonists wove elaborate justifications for slavery, built on the presumed superiority of their own group.

To make slavery even more profitable, slave states passed laws that made slavery *inheritable*; that is, the babies born to slaves became the property of the slave owners (Stampp 1956). These children could be sold, bartered, or traded. To strengthen their control, slave states passed laws making it illegal for slaves to hold meetings or to be away from the master's premises without carrying a pass (Lerner 1972). As sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1935/1992:12) noted, "gradually the entire white South became an armed camp to keep Negroes in slavery and to kill the black rebel."

The Civil War did not end legal discrimination. For example, until 1954 many states operated separate school systems for blacks and whites. Until the 1950s, in order to keep the races from "mixing," it was illegal in Mississippi for a white and an African American to sit together on the same seat of a car! There was no outright ban on blacks and whites being in the same car, however, because whites wanted to employ African American chauffeurs.

**Slavery Today** Slavery has again reared its ugly head in several parts of the world. The Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, and Sudan have a long history of slavery, and not until the 1980s was slavery made illegal in Mauritania and Sudan (Ayittey 1998). It took until 2004 for slavery to be banned in Niger (Andersson 2005). Although officially abolished, slavery in this region continues, the topic of the Mass Media box on the next page.

The enslavement of children for work and sex is a problem in Africa, Asia, and South America (LaFraniere 2006). A unique form of child slavery occurs in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. There, little boys are held in captivity because they are prized as jockeys in camel races (Brinkley 2005). It is thought that their screams make the camels run faster.

## Caste

The second system of social stratification is caste. In a **caste system**, status is determined by birth and is lifelong. Someone who is born into a low-status group will always

## MASS MEDIA in SOCIAL LIFE

### What Price Freedom? Slavery Today

Children of the Dinka tribe in rural Sudan don't go to school. They work. Their families depend on them to tend the cattle that are essential to their way of life.

On the morning of the raid, ten-year-old Adhieu had been watching the cattle. "We were very happy because we would soon leave the cattle camps and return home to our parents. But in the morning, there was shooting. There was yelling and crying everywhere. My uncle grabbed me by the hand, and we ran. We swam across the river. I saw some children drowning. We hid behind a rock."

By morning's end, 500 children were either dead or enslaved. Their attackers were their fellow countrymen—Arabs from northern Sudan. The children who were captured were forced to march hundreds of miles north. Some escaped on the way. Others tried to—and were shot (Akol 1998).

Journalists provided devastating accounts: In the United States, public television (PBS) ran film footage of captive children in chains. And escaped slaves recounted their ordeal in horrifying detail (Salopek 2003; Mende and Lewis 2005).

Although the United States bombed Kosovo (in Serbia) into submission for its crimes against humanity, in the face of this outrage it remained largely silent. A cynic might say that Kosovo was located at a politically strategic spot in Europe, but Sudan occupies an area of Africa in which the U.S. and European powers have had little interest. A cynic might add that these powers fear Arab retaliation, which might take the form of oil embargoes and terrorism. A cynic might also suggest that outrages against black Africans are not as significant to these powers as those against white Europeans. Finally, a cynic might add that this will change as Sudan's oil reserves become more strategic to Western interests.

When the world's most powerful governments didn't act on behalf of the slaves, private groups stepped in. One was Switzerland's Christian Solidarity International (CSI). CSI sent Arab "retrievers" to northern Sudan,



*In this photo, a representative of the Liaison Agency Network (on the left) is buying the freedom of the Sudanese slaves (in the background).*

where they either bought or abducted slaves. CSI paid the retrievers \$50 per slave (Mabry 1999). Critics claimed that buying slaves, even to free them, encourages slavery. The money provides motivation to enslave people in order to turn around and sell them. Certainly \$50 is a lot of money in Sudan, where people are lucky to make \$50 a month (*Statistical Abstract* 2007: Table 1324).

CSI said that this was a bogus argument. What is intolerable, they said, is to leave women and children in slavery where they are deprived of their freedom and families and are beaten and raped by brutal masters.

#### For Your Consideration

What do you think about buying the freedom of slaves? Can you suggest a workable alternative? Why do you think the U.S. government remained largely silent about this issue, when it invaded other countries such as Serbia and Haiti for human rights abuses? Do you think that, perhaps, political motivations outweigh human rights motivations? If not, why the silence in the face of slavery?

With the media coverage of this issue, some U.S. high schools—and even grade schools—raised money to participate in slave buyback programs. If you were a school principal, would you encourage this practice? Why or why not?



During my research in India, I interviewed this 8-year-old girl. Mahashury is a *bonded laborer* who was exchanged by her parents for a 2,000-rupee loan (about \$14). To repay the loan, Mahashury must do construction work for one year. She will receive one meal a day and one set of clothing for the year. Because this centuries-old practice is now illegal, the master bribes Indian officials, who inform him when they are going to inspect the construction site. He then hides his bonded laborers. I was able to interview and photograph Mahashury because her master was absent the day I visited the construction site.

The lowest group listed in Table 7.1, the Dalit, make up India's "untouchables." If a Dalit touches someone of a higher caste, that person becomes unclean. Even the shadow of an untouchable can contaminate. Early morning and late afternoons are especially risky, for the long shadows of these periods pose a danger to everyone higher up the caste system. Consequently, Dalits are not allowed in some villages during these times. Anyone who becomes contaminated must follow *ablution*, or washing rituals, to restore purity.

Although the Indian government formally abolished the caste system in 1949, centuries-old practices cannot be eliminated so easily, and the caste system remains part of everyday life in India (Beckett 2007). The ceremonies people follow at births, marriages, and deaths, for example, are dictated by caste (Chandra 1993a). The upper castes dread the upward mobility of the untouchables, sometimes resisting it even with violence and ritual suicide (Crossette 1996; Jaffrelot 2006). From personal observations in India, I can add that in some villages Dalit children are not allowed in the government schools. If they try to enroll, they are beaten.

**A U.S. Racial Caste System** Before leaving the subject of caste, we should note that when slavery ended in the United States, it was replaced by a *racial caste system*. From the moment of birth, everyone was marked for life (Berger 1963/2007). In this system, *all* whites, even if they were poor and uneducated, considered themselves to have a higher status than *all* African Americans. As in India and

have low status, no matter how much that person may accomplish in life. In sociological terms, a caste system is built on ascribed status (discussed on page 89). Achieved status cannot change an individual's place in this system.

Societies with this form of stratification try to make certain that the boundaries between castes remain firm. They practice **endogamy**, marriage within their own group, and prohibit intermarriage. To reduce contact between castes, they even develop elaborate rules about *ritual pollution*, teaching that contact with inferior castes contaminates the superior caste.

**India's Religious Castes** India provides the best example of a caste system. Based not on race but on religion, India's caste system has existed for almost three thousand years (Chandra 1993a; Jaffrelot 2006). India's four main castes are depicted in Table 7.1. These four castes are subdivided into about three thousand subcastes, or *jati*. Each *jati* specializes in a particular occupation. For example, one subcaste washes clothes, another sharpens knives, and yet another repairs shoes.

**TABLE 7.1** India's Caste System

Caste	Occupation
Brahman	Priests and teachers
Kshatriya	Rulers and soldiers
Vaishya	Merchants and traders
Shudra	Peasants and laborers
Dalit (untouchables)	The outcastes; degrading or polluting labor

In a *caste system*, status is determined by birth and is lifelong. At birth, these women received not only membership in a lower caste but also, because of their gender, a predetermined position in that caste. When I photographed these women, they were carrying sand to the second floor of a house being constructed in Andhra Pradesh, India.



South Africa, the upper caste, fearing pollution from the lower caste, prohibited intermarriage and insisted on separate schools, hotels, restaurants, and even toilets and drinking fountains in public facilities. In the South, when any white met any African American on a sidewalk, the African American had to move aside—which the untouchables of India still must do when they meet someone of a higher caste (Deliege 2001).

## Class

As we have seen, stratification systems based on slavery and caste are rigid. The lines drawn between people are firm, and there is little or no movement from one group to another. A **class system**, in contrast, is much more open, for it is based primarily on money or material possessions, which can be acquired. This system, too, is in place at birth, when children are ascribed the status of their parents, but, unlike in the other systems, individuals can change their social class by what they achieve (or fail to achieve) in life. In addition, no laws specify people's occupations on the basis of birth or prohibit marriage between the classes.

A major characteristic of the class system, then, is its relatively fluid boundaries. A class system allows **social mobility**, movement up or down the class ladder. The potential for improving one's life—or for falling down the class ladder—is a major force that drives people to go far in school and to work hard. In the extreme, the family background that a child inherits at birth may present such obstacles that he or she has little chance of climbing very far—or it may provide such privileges that it makes it almost impossible to fall down the class ladder. Because

social class is so significant for our own lives, we will focus on class in the next chapter.

## Global Stratification and the Status of Females

In *every* society of the world, gender is a basis for social stratification. In no society is gender the sole basis for stratifying people, but gender cuts across *all* systems of social stratification—whether slavery, caste, or class (Huber 1990). In all these systems, on the basis of their gender, people are sorted into categories and given different access to the good things available in their society.

Apparently these distinctions always favor males. It is remarkable, for example, that in *every* society of the world men's earnings are higher than women's. Men's dominance is even more evident when we consider female circumcision (see the box on page 271). That most of the world's illiterate are females also drives home women's relative position in society. Of the several hundred million adults who cannot read, about two-thirds are women (UNESCO 2006). Because gender is such a significant factor in what happens to us in life, we shall focus on it more closely in Chapter 10.

## What Determines Social Class?

In the early days of sociology, a disagreement arose about the meaning of social class. Let's compare how Marx and Weber analyzed the issue.



Taken at the end of the 1800s, these photos illustrate the contrasting worlds of *social classes* produced by early capitalism. The sleeping boys shown in this classic 1890 photo by Jacob Riis sold newspapers in London. They did not go to school, and they had no home. The children on the right, Cornelius and Gladys Vanderbilt, are shown in front of their parents' estate. They went to school and did not work. You can see how the social locations illustrated in these photos would have produced different orientations to life and, therefore, politics, ideas about marriage, values, and so on—the stuff of which life is made.

### Karl Marx: The Means of Production

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the breakup of the feudal system displaced masses of peasants from their traditional lands and occupations. Fleeing to cities, they competed for the few available jobs. Paid only a pittance for their labor, they wore rags, went hungry, and slept under bridges and in shacks. In contrast, the factory owners built mansions, hired servants, and lived in the lap of luxury. Seeing this great disparity between owners and workers, Karl Marx (1818–1883) concluded that social class depends on a single factor: people's relationship to the **means of production**—the tools, factories, land, and investment capital used to produce wealth (Marx 1844/1964; Marx and Engels 1848/1967).

Marx argued that the distinctions people often make among themselves—such as clothing, speech, education, paycheck, the neighborhood they live in, even the car they drive—are superficial matters. These things camouflage the only dividing line that counts. There are just two classes of people, said Marx: the **bourgeoisie** (*capitalists*), those who own the means of production, and the **proletariat** (*workers*), those who work for the owners. In short, people's relationship to the means of production determines their social class.

Marx did recognize other groups: farmers and peasants; a *lumpenproletariat* (people living on the margin of society, such as beggars, vagrants, and criminals); and a middle group of self-employed professionals. Marx did not consider these groups social classes, however, for they lack **class consciousness**—a shared identity based on their position in the means of production. In other words, they did not

perceive themselves as exploited workers whose plight could be solved by collective action. Consequently, Marx thought of these groups as insignificant in the future he foresaw—a workers' revolution that would overthrow capitalism.

The capitalists will grow even wealthier, Marx said, and the hostilities will increase. When workers come to realize that capitalists are the source of their oppression, they will unite and throw off the chains of their oppressors. In a bloody revolution, they will seize the means of production and usher in a classless society—and no longer will the few grow rich at the expense of the many. What holds back the workers' unity and their revolution is **false class consciousness**, workers mistakenly thinking of themselves as capitalists. For example, workers with a few dollars in the bank may forget that they are workers and instead see themselves as investors, or as capitalists who are about to launch a successful business.

The only distinction worth mentioning, then, is whether a person is an owner or a worker. This decides everything else, Marx stressed, for property determines people's lifestyles, establishes their relationships with one another, and even shapes their ideas.

### Max Weber: Property, Power, and Prestige

Max Weber (1864–1920) was an outspoken critic of Marx. Weber argued that property is only part of the picture. *Social class*, he said, has three components: property, power, and prestige (Gerth and Mills 1958; Weber 1922/1968). Some call these the three P's of social class. (Although Weber used the terms *class*, *power*, and *status*,

some sociologists find *property*, *power*, and *prestige* to be clearer terms. To make them even clearer, you may wish to substitute *wealth* for *property*.)

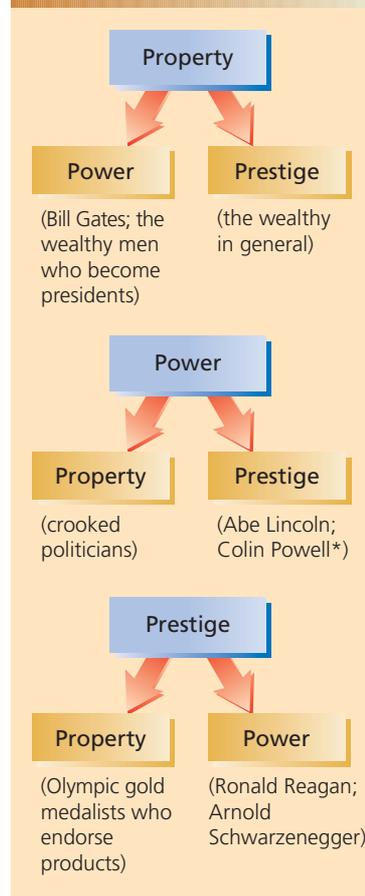
*Property* (or wealth), said Weber, is certainly significant in determining a person's standing in society. On that point he agreed with Marx. But, added Weber, ownership is not the only significant aspect of property. For example, some powerful people, such as managers of corporations, *control* the means of production even though they do not *own* them. If managers can control property for their own benefit—awarding themselves huge bonuses and magnificent perks—it makes no practical difference that they do not own the property that they use so generously for their own benefit.

*Power*, the second element of social class, is the ability to control others, even over their objections. Weber agreed with Marx that property is a major source of power, but he added that it is not the only source. For example, prestige can be turned into power. Two well-known examples are actors Arnold Schwarzenegger, who became governor of California, and Ronald Reagan, who became governor of California and president of the United States. Figure 7.1 shows how property, power, and prestige are interrelated.

*Prestige*, the third element in Weber's analysis, is often derived from property and power, for people tend to admire the wealthy and powerful. Prestige, however, can be based on other factors. Olympic gold medalists, for example, might not own property or be powerful, yet they have high prestige. Some are even able to exchange their prestige for property—such as those who are paid a small fortune for endorsing a certain brand of sportswear or for claiming that they start their day with “the breakfast of champions.” In other words, property and prestige are not one-way streets: Although property can bring prestige, prestige can also bring property.



**FIGURE 7.1** Weber's Three Components of Social Class



\*Colin Powell illustrates the circularity of these components. Powell's power as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff led to prestige. Powell's prestige, in turn, led to power when he was called from retirement to serve as Secretary of State in George W. Bush's first administration.

The text describes the many relationships among Weber's three components of social class: property, power, and prestige. Colin Powell is an example of power that was converted into prestige—which was then converted back into power. Power, of course, can be lost, as it was when Powell resigned after disagreeing with the Bush administration.

**In Sum:** For Marx, social class was based solely on a person's relationship to the means of production. One is a member of either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Weber argued that social class is a combination of property, power, and prestige.

## Why Is Social Stratification Universal?

What is it about social life that makes all societies stratified? We shall first consider the explanation proposed by functionalists, which has aroused controversy in sociology, and then explanations proposed by conflict theorists.

### The Functionalist View: Motivating Qualified People

Functionalists take the position that the patterns of behavior that characterize a society exist because they are functional for that society. Because social inequality is universal, inequality must help societies survive. But how?

**Davis and Moore's Explanation** Two functionalists, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945, 1953), wrestled with this question. They concluded that stratification of society is inevitable because

1. Society must make certain that its positions are filled.
2. Some positions are more important than others.
3. The more important positions must be filled by the more qualified people.
4. To motivate the more qualified people to fill these positions, society must offer them greater rewards.

To flesh out this functionalist argument, consider college presidents and military generals. The position of college president is more important than that of student because the president's decisions affect a large number of people, including many students. College presidents are also accountable for their performance to boards of trustees. It is the same with generals. Their decisions affect many people and can determine life and death. Generals are accountable to superior generals and to the country's leader.

Why do people accept such high-pressure positions? Why don't they just take less demanding jobs? The answer, said Davis and Moore, is that society offers greater rewards—prestige, pay, and benefits—for its more demanding and accountable positions. To get highly qualified people to compete with one another, some positions

offer a salary of \$2 million a year, country club membership, a private jet and pilot, and a chauffeured limousine. For less demanding positions, a \$30,000 salary without fringe benefits is enough to get hundreds of people to compete. If a job requires rigorous training, it, too, must offer more salary and benefits. If you can get the same pay with a high school diploma, why suffer through the many tests and term papers that college requires?

**Tumin's Critique of Davis and Moore** Davis and Moore tried to explain *why* social stratification is universal, not to justify social inequality. Nevertheless, their view makes many sociologists uncomfortable, for they see it as coming close to justifying the inequalities in society. Its bottom line seems to be, The people who contribute more to society are paid more, while those who contribute less are paid less.

Melvin Tumin (1953) was the first sociologist to point out what he saw as major flaws in the functionalist position. Here are three of his arguments.

*First*, how do we know that the positions that offer the higher rewards are more important? A heart surgeon, for example, saves lives and earns much more than a garbage collector, but this doesn't mean that garbage collectors are less important to society. By helping to prevent contagious diseases, garbage collectors save more lives than heart surgeons do. We need independent methods of measuring importance, and we don't have them.

*Second*, if stratification worked as Davis and Moore described it, society would be a **meritocracy**; that is, positions would be awarded on the basis of merit. But is this what we have? The best predictor of who goes to college, for example, is not ability but income: The more a family earns, the more likely their children are to go to college (Carnevale and Rose 2003). This has nothing to do with merit. It is simply another form of the inequality that is built into society. In short, people's positions in society are based on many factors other than merit.

*Third*, if social stratification is so functional, it ought to benefit almost everyone. Yet social stratification is *dysfunctional* for many. Think of the people who could have made valuable contributions to society had they not been born in slums, dropped out of school, and taken menial jobs to help support their families. Then there are the many who, born female, are assigned "women's work," thus ensuring that they do not maximize their mental abilities.

**In Sum:** Functionalists argue that society works better if its most qualified people hold its most important positions. Therefore, those positions offer higher rewards. For example, to get highly talented people to become surgeons—to undergo years of rigorous training and then cope

with life-and-death situations, as well as malpractice suits—society must provide a high payoff.

### The Conflict Perspective: Class Conflict and Scarce Resources

Conflict theorists don't just criticize details of the functionalist argument. Rather, they go for the throat and attack its basic premise. Conflict, not function, they stress, is the reason that we have social stratification. Let's look at the major arguments.

**Mosca's Argument** Italian sociologist Gaetano Mosca argued that every society will be stratified by power. This is inevitable, he said in an 1896 book titled *The Ruling Class*, because

1. No society can exist unless it is organized. This requires leadership of some sort in order to coordinate people's actions and get society's work done.
2. Leadership (or political organization) requires inequalities of power. By definition, some people take leadership positions, while others follow.
3. Human nature is self-centered. Therefore, people in power will use their positions to seize greater rewards for themselves.

There is no way around these facts of life, added Mosca. They make social stratification inevitable, and every society will stratify itself along lines of power.

**Marx's Argument** If he were alive to hear the functionalist argument, Karl Marx would be enraged. From his point of view, the people in power are not there because of superior traits, as the functionalists would have us believe. This view is simply an ideology that members of the elite use to justify their being at the top—and to seduce the oppressed into believing that their welfare depends on keeping society stable. Human history is the chronicle of class struggle, of those in power using society's resources to benefit themselves and to oppress those beneath them—and of oppressed groups trying to overcome domination.

This cartoon of political protest appeared in London newspapers in 1843. It illustrates the severe exploitation of labor that occurred during early capitalism, which stimulated Marx to analyze relations between capitalists and workers.

Marx predicted that the workers would revolt. The day will come, he said, when class consciousness will overcome the ideology that now blinds workers. When they realize their common oppression, workers will rebel against the capitalists. The struggle to control the means of production may be covert at first, taking the form of work slowdowns or industrial sabotage. Ultimately, however, resistance will break out into the open. The revolution will not be easy, for the bourgeoisie control the police, the military, and even the educational system, where they implant false class consciousness in the minds of the workers' children.

**Current Applications of Conflict Theory** Just as Marx focused on overarching historic events—the accumulation of capital and power and the struggle between workers and capitalists—some of today's conflict sociologists are doing the same. Their focus is on the current capitalist triumph on a global level (Sklair 2001). They analyze both the use of armed forces to keep capitalist nations dominant and the exploitation of workers as capital is moved from the Most Industrialized Nations to the Least Industrialized Nations.

Some conflict sociologists, in contrast, examine conflict wherever it is found, not just as it relates to capitalists and workers. They examine how groups *within the same class* compete with one another for a larger slice of the pie (Schellenberg 1996; Collins 1988, 1999). Even within the same industry, for example, union will fight against union for higher salaries, shorter hours, and more power. A special focus has been conflict between racial-ethnic groups as they compete for education,



housing, and even prestige—whatever benefits society has to offer. Another focus has been relations between women and men, which conflict theorists say are best understood as a conflict over power—over who controls society’s resources. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists say that just beneath the surface of what may appear to be a tranquil society lies conflict that is barely held in check.

### Lenski’s Synthesis

As you can see, functionalist and conflict theorists disagree sharply. Is it possible to reconcile their views? Sociologist Gerhard Lenski (1966) thought so. He suggested that surplus is the key. He said that the functionalists are right when it comes to groups that don’t accumulate a surplus, such as hunting and gathering societies. These societies give a greater share of their resources to those who take on important tasks, such as warriors who risk their lives in battle. It is a different story, said Lenski, with societies that accumulate surpluses. In them, groups fight over the surplus, and the group that wins becomes an elite. This dominant group rules from the top, controlling the groups below it. In the resulting system of social stratification, where you are born in that society, not personal merit, becomes important.

**In Sum:** Conflict theorists stress that in every society groups struggle with one another to gain a larger share of their society’s resources. Whenever a group gains power, it uses that power to extract what it can from the groups beneath it. This elite group also uses the social institutions to keep itself in power.

## How Do Elites Maintain Stratification?

Suppose that you are part of the ruling elite of your society. What can you do to make sure you don’t lose your privileged position? The key lies in controlling people’s ideas, the information they receive, and the threat and use of force.

The *divine right of kings* was an ideology that made the king God’s direct representative on earth—to administer justice and punish evildoers. This theological-political concept was supported by the Roman Catholic Church, whose representatives crowned the king. Shown here is Pope Clement IV crowning Charles Anjou as king of Sicily in 1226.

### Ideology Versus Force

Medieval Europe provides a good example of the power of ideology. At that time, land was the primary source of wealth—and only the nobility and the church could own it. Almost everyone else was a peasant (or serf) who worked for these powerful landowners. The peasants farmed the land, took care of the livestock, and built the roads and bridges. Each year, they had to turn over a designated portion of their crops to their feudal lord. Year after year, for centuries, they did so. Why?

**Ideas Controlling the Masses** Why didn’t the peasants rebel and take over the land themselves? There were many reasons, not the least of which was that the nobility and church controlled the army. Coercion, however, goes only so far, for it breeds hostility and nourishes rebellion. How much more effective it is to get the masses to *want* to do what the ruling elite desires. This is where *ideology* (beliefs that justify the way things are) comes into play, and



the nobility and clergy used it to great effect. They developed an ideology known as the **divine right of kings**—the idea that the king’s authority comes directly from God. The king delegates authority to nobles, who, as God’s representatives, must be obeyed. To disobey is a sin against God; to rebel is to merit physical punishment on earth and eternal suffering in hell.

Controlling people’s ideas can be remarkably more effective than using brute force. Although this particular ideology governs few peoples’ minds today, the elite in *every* society develops ideologies to justify its position at the top. For example, around the world, schools teach that their country’s form of government—*no matter what form of government that is*—is good. Religious leaders teach that we owe obedience to authority, that laws are to be obeyed. To the degree that their ideologies are accepted by the masses, the elite remains securely in power.

**Controlling Information and Using Technology** To maintain their positions of power, elites try to control information. Fear is a favorite tactic of dictators. To muffle criticism, they imprison, torture, and kill reporters who dare to criticize their regime. (Under Saddam Hussein, the penalty for telling a joke about Hussein was having your tongue cut out [Nordland 2003].) Lacking such power, the ruling elites of democracies rely on more covert means. They manipulate the media by selectively releasing information—and by withholding information “in the interest of national security.”

The new technology is another tool for the elite. Machines can read the entire contents of a computer in a second, without leaving evidence that they have done so. Security cameras—“Tiny Brothers”—have sprouted almost everywhere. Face-recognition systems can scan a crowd of thousands, instantly matching the scans with digitized files of individuals. With these devices, the elite can monitor citizens’ activities without anyone knowing that they are being observed. Dictatorships have few checks on how they employ such technology, but in democracies, checks and balances, such as requiring court orders for search and seizure, at least partially curb their abuse. The threat of bypassing such restraints on power is always present, as with Homeland Security laws that allow officials to spy on citizens without their knowledge.

The new technology is a two-edged sword. Just as it gives the elite powerful tools for monitoring citizens, it also makes it more difficult for them to control information. Satellite communications, e-mail, and the Internet pay no respect to international borders. Information (both true and fabricated) flies around the globe in seconds. Internet users also have free access to PGP (Pretty Good Privacy), a code that

no government has been able to break. Then, too, there is zFone, a voice encryption for telephone calls that prevents wiretappers from understanding what people are saying.

Feeling threatened that their citizens will criticize them, Chinese leaders have put tight controls on Internet cafes and search engines (French 2005; Hutton 2007). U.S. officials, unable to wield the sword, have distributed fake news reports to be broadcast to the nation (Barstow and Stein 2005). We are still in the early stages of the new technology, so we will see how this cat and mouse game plays out.

**In Sum:** To maintain stratification within a society, the elite tries to dominate its society’s institutions. In a dictatorship, the elite makes the laws. In a democracy, the elite influences the laws. In both, the elite controls the police and military and can give orders to crush a rebellion—or to run the post office or air traffic control if workers strike. Force has its limits, and a nation’s elite prefers to maintain its stratification system by peaceful means, especially by influencing the thinking of its people.

## Comparative Social Stratification

Now that we have examined systems of social stratification, considered why stratification is universal, and looked at how elites keep themselves in power, let’s compare social stratification in Great Britain and in the former Soviet Union. In the next chapter, we’ll look at social stratification in the United States.

### Social Stratification in Great Britain

Great Britain is often called England by Americans, but England is only one of the countries that make up the island of Great Britain. The others are Scotland and Wales. In addition, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Like other industrialized countries, Great Britain has a class system that can be divided into a lower, a middle, and an upper class. Great Britain’s population is about evenly divided between the middle class and the lower (or working) class. A tiny upper class, perhaps 1 percent of the population, is wealthy, powerful, and highly educated.

Compared with Americans, the British are very class conscious. Like Americans, they recognize class distinctions on the basis of the type of car a person drives or the stores someone patronizes. But the most striking charac-

teristics of the British class system are language and education. Because these show up in accent, distinctive speech has a powerful impact on British life. As soon as someone speaks, the listener is aware of that person's social class—and treats him or her accordingly (Sullivan 1998).

Education is the primary way by which the British perpetuate their class system from one generation to the next. Almost all children go to neighborhood schools. Great Britain's richest 5 percent, however—who own *half* the nation's wealth—send their children to exclusive private boarding schools (which, strangely, they call “public” schools). There the children of the elite are trained in subjects that are considered “proper” for members of the ruling class. An astounding 50 percent of the students at Oxford and Cambridge, the country's most prestigious universities, come from this 5 percent of the population. To illustrate how powerfully this system of stratified education affects the national life of Great Britain, sociologist Ian Robertson (1987) said,

**Eighteen former pupils of the most exclusive of [England's high schools], Eton, have become prime minister. Imagine the chances of a single American high school producing eighteen presidents!**

## Social Stratification in the Former Soviet Union

Heeding Karl Marx's call for a classless society, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) and Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) led a revolution in Russia in 1917. They, and the nations that followed their banner, never claimed to have achieved the ideal of communism, in which all contribute their labor to the common good and receive according to their needs. Instead, they used the term *socialism* to describe the intermediate step between capitalism and communism, in which social classes are abolished but some inequality remains.

To tweak the nose of Uncle Sam, the socialist countries would trumpet their equality and point a finger at glaring inequalities in the United States. These countries, however, also were marked by huge disparities in privilege. Their major basis of stratification was membership in the Communist party. Party members decided who would gain admission to the better schools or obtain the more desirable jobs and housing. The equally qualified son or daughter of a nonmember would be turned down, for such privileges came with demonstrated loyalty to the party.

The Communist party, too, was highly stratified. Most members occupied a low level, where they fulfilled such tasks as spying on fellow workers. For this, they might get easier jobs in the factory or occasional access to special

stores to purchase hard-to-find goods. The middle level consisted of bureaucrats who were given better than average access to resources and privileges. At the top level was a small elite: Party members who enjoyed not only power but also limousines, imported delicacies, vacation homes, and even servants and hunting lodges. As with other stratification systems around the world, women held lower positions in the party. This was evident at each year's May Day, when the top members of the party reviewed the latest weapons paraded in Moscow's Red Square. Photos of these events showed only men.

The leaders of the USSR became frustrated as they saw the West thrive. They struggled with a bloated bureaucracy, the inefficiencies of central planning, workers who did the minimum because they could not be fired, and a military so costly that it spent one of every eight of the nation's rubles (*Statistical Abstract* 1993:1432, table dropped in later editions). Socialist ideology did not call for their citizens to be deprived, and in an attempt to turn things around, the Soviet leadership initiated reforms. They allowed elections to be held in which more than one candidate ran for an office. (Before this, voters had a choice of only one candidate per office.) They also sold huge chunks of state-owned businesses to the public. Overnight, making investments to try to turn a profit changed from a crime into a respectable goal.

Russia's transition to capitalism took a bizarre twist. As authority broke down, a powerful Mafia emerged (Varese 2005; Chazman 2006). These criminal groups are headed by gangsters, corrupt government officials (including members of the former KGB, now FSB), and crooked businessmen. In some towns, they buy the entire judicial system—the police force, prosecutors, and judges. They assassinate business leaders, reporters, and politicians who refuse to cooperate. They amass wealth, launder money through banks they control, and buy luxury properties in popular tourist areas around the world.

As Moscow reestablishes its authority, Mafia ties have brought wealth to some of the members of this central government. This group of organized criminals is taking its place as part of Russia's new capitalist class.

## Global Stratification: Three Worlds

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, just as the people within a nation are stratified by property, power, and prestige, so are the world's nations. Until recently, a

simple model consisting of First, Second, and Third Worlds was used to depict global stratification. *First World* referred to the industrialized capitalist nations, *Second World* to the communist (or socialist) countries, and *Third World* to any nation that did not fit into the first two categories. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989 made these terms outdated. In addition, although *first*, *second*, and *third* did not mean “best,” “better,” and “worst,” they implied it. An alternative classification that some now use—developed, developing, and undeveloped nations—has the same drawback. By calling ourselves “developed,” it sounds as though we are mature and the “undeveloped” nations are somehow retarded.

To try to solve this problem, I use more neutral, descriptive terms: *Most Industrialized*, *Industrializing*, and *Least Industrialized* nations. We can measure industrialization with no judgment implied as to whether a nation’s industrialization represents “development,” ranks it “first,” or is even desirable at all. The intention is to depict on a global level the three primary dimensions of social stratification: property, power, and prestige. The Most Industrialized Nations have much greater property (wealth), power (they usually get their way in international relations), and prestige (they are looked up to as world leaders). The two families sketched in the opening vignette illustrate the far-reaching effects of global stratification.

### The Most Industrialized Nations

The Most Industrialized Nations are the United States and Canada in North America; Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and the other industrialized countries of western Europe; Japan in Asia; and Australia and New Zealand in the area of the world known as Oceania. Although there are variations in their economic systems, these nations are capitalistic. As Table 7.2 shows, although these nations have only 16 percent of the world’s people, they possess 31 percent of the earth’s land. Their wealth is so enormous that even their poor live better and longer lives than do the average citizens of the Least Industrialized Nations. The Social Map on pages 186–187 shows the tremendous disparities in income among the world’s nations.

### The Industrializing Nations

The Industrializing Nations include most of the nations of the former Soviet Union and its former satellites in eastern Europe. As Table 7.2 shows, these nations account for 20 percent of the earth’s land and 16 percent of its people.

**TABLE 7.2** Distribution of the World’s Land and Population

	Land	Population
Most Industrialized Nations	31%	16%
Industrializing Nations	20%	16%
Least Industrialized Nations	49%	68%

Sources: Computed from Kurian 1990, 1991, 1992.

The dividing points between the three “worlds” are soft, making it difficult to know how to classify some nations. This is especially the case with the Industrializing Nations. Exactly how much industrialization must a nation have to be in this category? Although soft, these categories do pinpoint essential differences among nations. Most people who live in the Industrializing Nations have much lower incomes and standards of living than do those who live in the Most Industrialized Nations. The majority, however, are better off than those who live in the Least Industrialized Nations. For example, on such measures as access to electricity, indoor plumbing, automobiles, telephones, and even food, most citizens of the Industrializing Nations rank lower than those in the Most Industrialized Nations, but higher than those in the Least Industrialized Nations. As you saw in the opening vignette, stratification affects even life expectancy.

The benefits of industrialization are uneven. Large numbers of people in the Industrializing Nations remain illiterate and desperately poor. Conditions can be gruesome, as we explore in the following Thinking Critically section.

## ThinkingCRITICALLY

### Open Season: Children as Prey

**W**hat is childhood like in the Industrializing Nations? The answer depends on who your parents are. If you are the son or daughter of rich parents, childhood can be pleasant—a world filled with luxuries and even servants. If you are born into poverty, but living in a rural area where there is plenty to eat, life can still be good—although there may be no books, television, and little education. If you live in a slum, however, life can be horrible—worse even than in the slums of the

**Most Industrialized Nations.** Let's take a glance at a notorious slum of Brazil.

Not enough food—this you can take for granted—along with wife abuse, broken homes, alcoholism and drug abuse, and a lot of crime. From your knowledge of slums in the Most Industrialized Nations, you would expect these things. What you may not expect, however, are the brutal conditions in which Brazilian slum (*favela*) children live.

Sociologist Martha Huggins (Huggins et al. 2002) reports that poverty is so deep that children and adults swarm through garbage dumps to try to find enough decaying food to keep them alive. You might also be surprised to discover that the owners of some of these dumps hire armed guards to keep the poor out—so that they can sell the garbage for pig food. And you might be shocked to learn that the Brazilian police and death squads murder some of these children. Although this is not typical, some shop owners have hired hit men. The pay for this dirty work is low, sometimes half a month's salary—figured at the low Brazilian minimum wage.

Life is cheap in the poor nations—but death squads for children? To understand this, we must first note that Brazil has a long history of violence. Brazil also has a high rate of poverty, has only a tiny middle class, and is controlled by a

small group of families who, under a veneer of democracy, make the country's major decisions. Hordes of homeless children, with no schools or jobs, roam the streets. To survive, they wash windshields, shine shoes, beg, and steal (Huggins and Rodrigues 2004).

The “respectable” classes see these children as nothing but trouble. They hurt business, for customers feel intimidated when they see begging children—especially teenaged males—clustered in front of stores. Some shoplift; others dare to sell items that place them in competition with the stores. With no effective social institutions to care for these children, one solution is to kill them. As Huggins notes, murder sends a clear message—especially if it is accompanied by ritual torture: gouging out the eyes, ripping open the chest, cutting off the genitals, raping the girls, and burning the victim's body.

Not all life is bad in the Industrializing Nations, but this is about as bad as it gets.

### For Your Consideration

Do you think there is anything the Most Industrialized Nations can do about this situation? Or is it, though unfortunate, just an “internal” affair that is up to the Brazilians to handle as they wish?



## The Least Industrialized Nations

In the Least Industrialized Nations, most people live on small farms or in villages, have large families, and barely survive. These nations account for 68 percent of the world's people but only 49 percent of the earth's land.

Poverty plagues these nations to such an extent that some families actually *live* in city dumps. This is hard to believe, but look at the photos on pages 188–189, which I took in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. Although wealthy nations have their pockets of poverty, *most* people in the Least Industrialized nations are poor. *Most* of them have no running water, indoor plumbing, or access to trained teachers or physicians. As we will discuss in Chapter 14, most of the world's population growth occurs in these nations, placing even greater burdens on their limited resources and causing them to fall farther behind each year.

Homeless people sleeping on the streets is a common sight in India's cities. I took this photo in Chennai (formerly Madras).

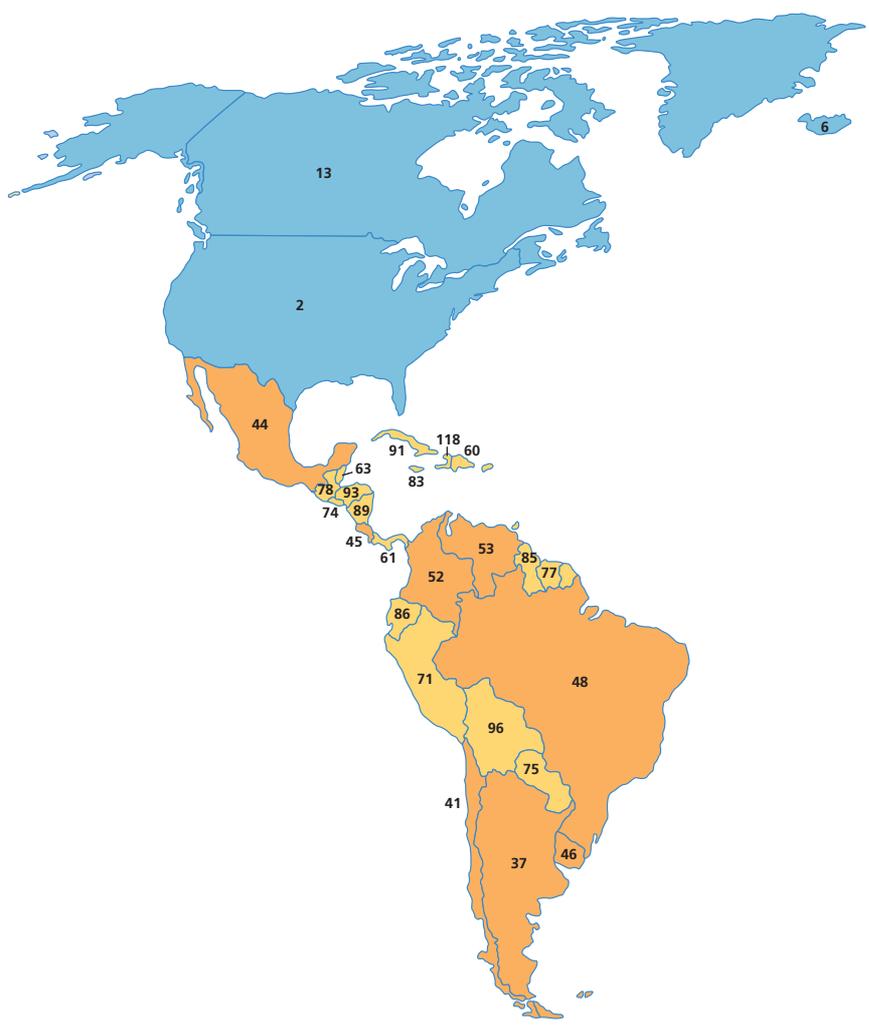
**FIGURE 7.2** Global Stratification: Income<sup>1</sup> of the World's Nations

**The Most Industrialized Nations**

Nation	Income per Person
1 Luxembourg	\$58,900
2 United States	\$39,820
3 Norway	\$38,680
4 Switzerland	\$35,660
5 Ireland	\$32,930
6 Iceland	\$31,900
7 Austria	\$31,800
8 Denmark	\$31,770
9 Hong Kong (a part of China)	\$31,560
10 Belgium	\$31,530
11 United Kingdom	\$31,430
12 Netherlands	\$31,360
13 Canada	\$30,760
14 Sweden	\$29,880
15 Japan	\$29,810
16 Finland	\$29,800
17 France	\$29,460
18 Australia	\$29,340
19 Germany	\$28,170
20 Italy	\$28,020
21 Singapore	\$27,370
22 Taiwan	\$25,300
23 Israel	\$23,770
24 New Zealand	\$22,260

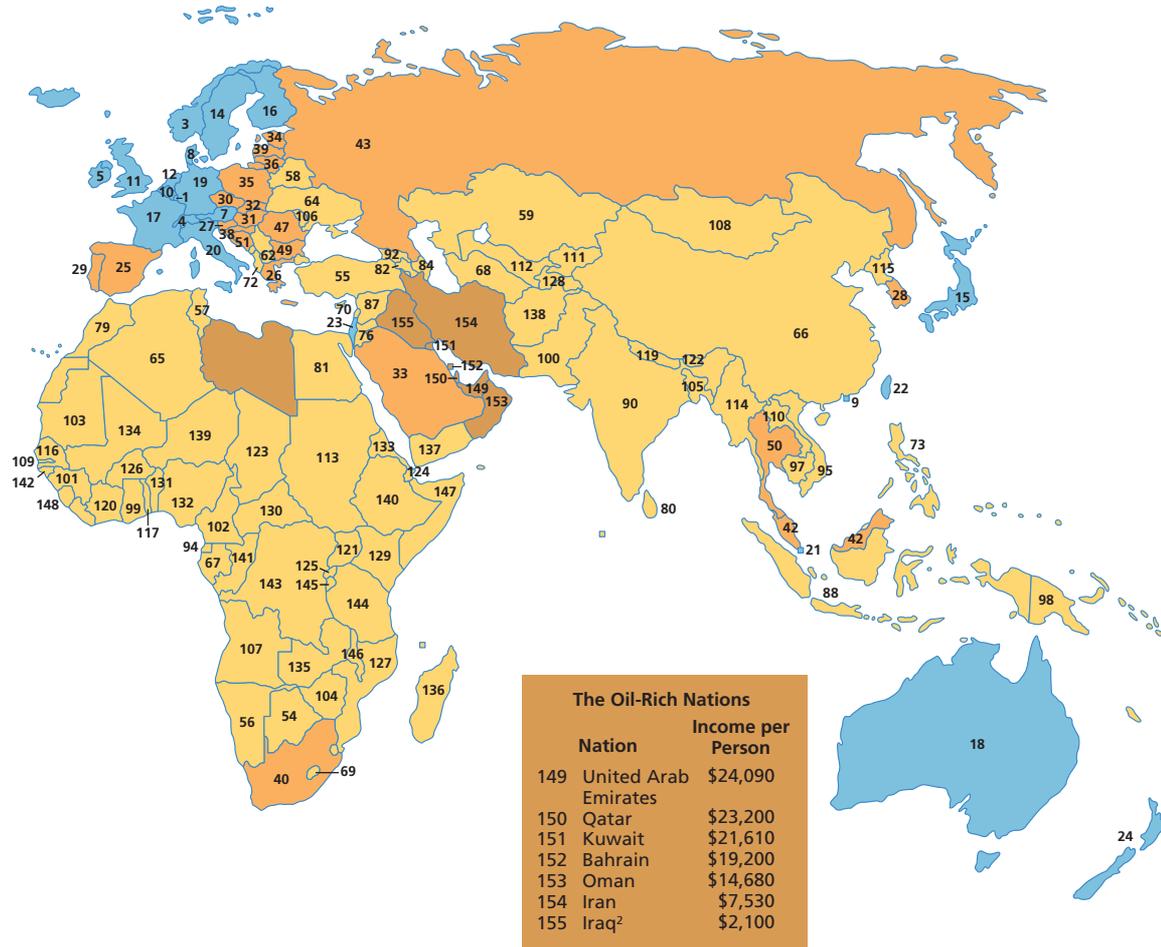
**The Industrializing Nations**

Nation	Income per Person
25 Spain	\$24,750
26 Greece	\$22,230
27 Slovenia	\$20,830
28 Korea, South	\$20,530
29 Portugal	\$19,240
30 Czech Republic	\$18,420
31 Hungary	\$15,800
32 Slovakia	\$14,480
33 Saudi Arabia	\$13,810
34 Estonia	\$13,630
35 Poland	\$12,730
36 Lithuania	\$12,690
37 Argentina	\$12,530
38 Croatia	\$11,920
39 Latvia	\$11,820
40 South Africa	\$10,960
41 Chile	\$10,610
42 Malaysia	\$9,720
43 Russia	\$9,680
44 Mexico	\$9,640
45 Costa Rica	\$9,220
46 Uruguay	\$9,030
47 Romania	\$8,330
48 Brazil	\$7,940
49 Bulgaria	\$7,940
50 Thailand	\$7,930
51 Bosnia	\$7,230
52 Colombia	\$6,940
53 Venezuela	\$5,830



**The Least Industrialized Nations**

Nation	Income per Person	Nation	Income per Person
54 Botswana <sup>3</sup>	\$9,580	70 Lebanon	\$5,550
55 Turkey	\$7,720	71 Peru	\$5,400
56 Namibia	\$7,520	72 Albania	\$5,070
57 Tunisia	\$7,430	73 Philippines	\$4,950
58 Belarus	\$6,970	74 El Salvador	\$4,890
59 Kazakhstan	\$6,930	75 Paraguay	\$4,820
60 Dominican Republic	\$6,860	76 Jordan	\$4,770
61 Panama	\$6,730	77 Suriname	\$4,300
62 Macedonia	\$6,560	78 Guatemala	\$4,260
63 Belize	\$6,500	79 Morocco	\$4,250
64 Ukraine	\$6,330	80 Sri Lanka	\$4,210
65 Algeria	\$6,320	81 Egypt	\$4,200
66 China	\$5,890	82 Armenia	\$4,160
67 Gabon	\$5,700	83 Jamaica	\$3,950
68 Turkmenistan	\$5,700	84 Azerbaijan	\$3,810
69 Swaziland	\$5,650	85 Guyana	\$3,800
		86 Ecuador	\$3,770



Nation	Income per Person	Nation	Income per Person	Nation	Income per Person	Nation	Income per Person
87 Syria	\$3,500	102 Cameroon	\$2,120	119 Nepal	\$1,480	135 Zambia	\$890
88 Indonesia	\$3,480	103 Mauritania	\$2,050	120 Cote d'Ivoire	\$1,470	136 Madagascar	\$840
89 Nicaragua	\$3,480	104 Zimbabwe	\$2,040	121 Uganda	\$1,450	137 Yemen	\$810
90 India	\$3,120	105 Bangladesh	\$1,970	122 Bhutan	\$1,400	138 Afghanistan	\$800
91 Cuba	\$3,000	106 Moldova	\$1,950	123 Chad	\$1,340	139 Niger	\$780
92 Georgia	\$2,900	107 Angola	\$1,930	124 Djibouti	\$1,300	140 Ethiopia	\$750
93 Honduras	\$2,760	108 Mongolia	\$1,900	125 Rwanda	\$1,240	141 Congo	\$740
94 Equatorial Guinea	\$2,700	109 Gambia	\$1,890	126 Burkina Faso	\$1,170	142 Guinea-Bissau	\$690
95 Vietnam	\$2,700	110 Laos	\$1,880	127 Mozambique	\$1,170	143 Congo, Democratic Republic	\$680
96 Bolivia	\$2,600	111 Kyrgyzstan	\$1,860	128 Tajikistan	\$1,160	144 Tanzania	\$670
97 Cambodia	\$2,310	112 Uzbekistan	\$1,860	129 Kenya	\$1,130	145 Burundi	\$660
98 Papua-New Guinea	\$2,280	113 Sudan	\$1,810	130 Central African Republic	\$1,100	146 Malawi	\$630
99 Ghana	\$2,220	114 Burma	\$1,700	131 Benin	\$1,090	147 Somalia	\$600
100 Pakistan	\$2,170	115 Korea, North	\$1,700	132 Nigeria	\$970	148 Sierra Leone	\$550
101 Guinea	\$2,160	116 Senegal	\$1,660	133 Eritrea	\$960		
		117 Togo	\$1,510	134 Mali	\$950		
		118 Haiti	\$1,500				

<sup>1</sup>Income is a country's purchasing power parity based on its per capita gross domestic product measured in U.S. dollars. Since some totals vary widely from year to year, they must be taken as approximate.

<sup>2</sup>Iraq's oil has been disrupted by war. <sup>3</sup>Botswana's relative wealth is based on its diamond mines.

Sources: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2007*:Table 1324, with a few missing countries taken from the CIA's latest *World Factbook*.

THROUGH THE AUTHOR'S LENS

# The Dump People

Working and Living and Playing in the City Dump of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

■ **went to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, to inspect** orphanages, to see how well the children were being cared for. While there, I was told about people who live in the city dump. *Live there?* I could hardly believe my ears. I knew that people made their living by picking scraps from the city dump, but I didn't know they actually lived among the garbage. This I had to see for myself.

I did. And there I found a highly developed social organization—an intricate support system. Because words are inadequate to depict the abject poverty of the Least Industrialized Nations, these photos can provide more insight into these people's lives than anything I could say.

This is a typical sight—family and friends working together. The trash, which is constantly burning, contains harmful chemicals. Why do people work under such conditions? Because they have few options. It is either this or starve.



The people live at the edge of the dump, in homemade huts (visible in the background). This woman, who was on her way home after a day's work, put down her sack of salvaged items to let me take her picture.



After the garbage arrives by truck, people stream around it, struggling to be the first to discover something of value. To sift through the trash the workers use metal picks, like the one the child is holding. Note that children work alongside the adults.



The children who live in the dump also play there. These children are riding bicycles on a "road," a packed, leveled area of garbage that leads to their huts. The huge stacks in the background are piled trash. Note the ubiquitous Nike.



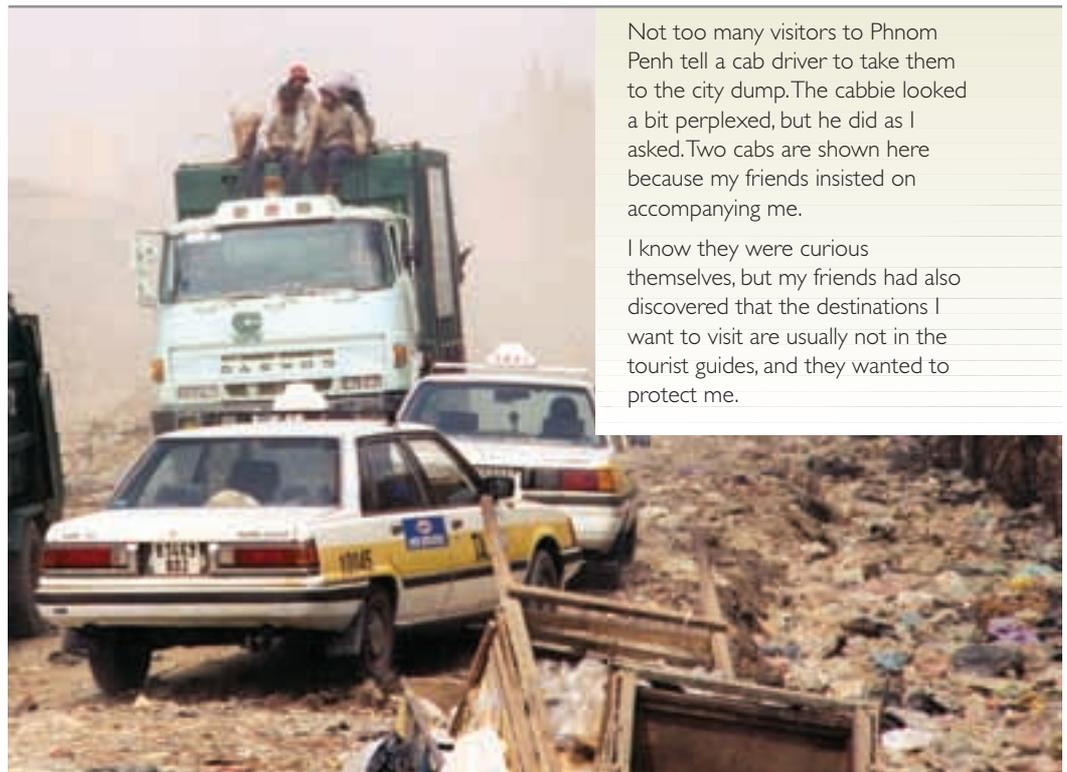
One of my many surprises was to find food stands in the dump. Although this one primarily offers drinks and snacks, others serve more substantial food. One even has chairs for its customers.



I was surprised to learn that ice is delivered to the dump. This woman is using a hand grinder to crush ice for drinks for her customers. The customers, of course, are other people who also live in the dump.



At the day's end, the workers wash at the community pump. This hand pump serves all their water needs—drinking, washing, and cooking. There is no indoor plumbing. The weeds in the background serve that purpose.



Not too many visitors to Phnom Penh tell a cab driver to take them to the city dump. The cabbie looked a bit perplexed, but he did as I asked. Two cabs are shown here because my friends insisted on accompanying me.

I know they were curious themselves, but my friends had also discovered that the destinations I want to visit are usually not in the tourist guides, and they wanted to protect me.

## How Did the World's Nations Become Stratified?

How did the globe become stratified into such distinct worlds? The commonsense answer is that the poorer nations have fewer resources than the richer nations. As with many commonsense answers, however, this one, too, falls short. Many of the Industrializing and Least Industrialized Nations are rich in natural resources, while one Most Industrialized Nation, Japan, has few. Three theories explain how global stratification came about.

### Colonialism

The first theory, **colonialism**, stresses that the countries that industrialized first got the jump on the rest of the world. Beginning in Great Britain about 1750, industrialization spread throughout western Europe. Plowing some of their immense profits into powerful armaments and fast ships, these countries invaded weaker nations, making colonies out of them (Harrison 1993). After subduing these weaker nations, the more powerful countries left behind a controlling force in order to exploit the nations' labor and natural resources. At one point, there was even a free-for-all among the industrialized European countries as they rushed to divide up an entire continent. As they sliced Africa into pieces, even tiny Belgium got into the act and acquired the Congo, which was *seventy-five* times larger than itself.

The purpose of colonialism was to establish *economic colonies*—to exploit the nation's people and resources for the benefit of the “mother” country. The more powerful European countries would plant their national flags in a colony and send their representatives to run the government, but the United States usually chose to plant corporate flags in a colony and let these corporations dominate the territory's government. Central and South America are prime examples. There were exceptions, such as the conquest of the Philippines, which President McKinley said was motivated by the desire “to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them” (Krugman 2002).

Colonialism, then, shaped many of the Least Industrialized Nations. In some instances, the Most Industrialized Nations were so powerful that when dividing their spoils, they drew lines across a map, creating new states without regard for tribal or cultural considerations (Kifner 1999). Britain and France did just this as they divided up North Africa and parts of the Middle East—which is why the national boundaries of Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries are so straight. This legacy of European conquests is a back-

ground factor in much of today's racial–ethnic and tribal violence: Groups with no history of national identity were incorporated arbitrarily into the same political boundaries.

### World System Theory

The second explanation of how global stratification came about was proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979, 1990). According to **world system theory**, industrialization led to four groups of nations. The first group consists of the *core nations*, the countries that industrialized first (Britain, France, Holland, and later Germany), which grew rich and powerful. The second group is the *semiperiphery*. The economies of these nations, located around the Mediterranean, stagnated because they grew dependent on trade with the core nations. The economies of the third group, the *periphery*, or fringe nations, developed even less. These are the eastern European countries, which sold cash crops to the core nations. The fourth group of nations includes most of Africa and Asia. Called the *external area*, these nations were left out of the development of capitalism altogether. The current expansion of capitalism has changed the relationships among these groups. Most notably, Asia is no longer left out of capitalism.

The **globalization of capitalism**—the adoption of capitalism around the world—has created extensive ties among the world's nations. Production and trade are now so interconnected that events around the globe affect us all. Sometimes this is immediate, as happens when a civil war disrupts the flow of oil, or—perish the thought—as would be the case if terrorists managed to get their hands on nuclear or biological weapons. At other times, the effects are like a slow ripple, as when a government adopts some policy that gradually impedes its ability to compete in world markets. All of today's societies, then, no matter where they are located, are part of a *world system*.

The interconnections are most evident among nations that do extensive trading with one another. The following Thinking Critically section explores implications of Mexico's *maquiladoras*.

## ThinkingCRITICALLY

### When Globalization Comes Home: *Maquiladoras* South of the Border

**T**wo hundred thousand Mexicans rush to Juarez each year, fleeing the hopelessness of the rural areas in pursuit of a better life. They have no running water



A photo taken inside a maquiladora in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

or plumbing, but they didn't have any in the country anyway, and here they have the possibility of a job, a weekly check to buy food for the kids.

The pay is \$10 a day.

This may not sound like much, but it is more than twice the minimum daily wage in Mexico.

Assembly-for-export plants, known as *maquiladoras*, dot the Mexican border (Wise and Cypher 2007). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) allows U.S. companies to import materials to Mexico without paying tax and to then export the finished products into the United States, again without tax. It's a sweet deal: few taxes and \$10 a day for workers starved for jobs.

That these workers live in shacks, with no running water or sewage disposal, is not the employers' concern.

Nor is the pollution. The stinking air doesn't stay on the Mexican side of the border. Neither does the garbage. Heavy rains wash torrents of untreated sewage and industrial wastes into the Rio Grande (Lacey 2007).

There is also the loss of jobs for U.S. workers. Six of the fifteen poorest cities in the United States are located along the sewage-infested Rio Grande. NAFTA didn't bring poverty to these cities. They were poor before this treaty, but residents resent the jobs they've seen move across the border (Thompson 2001).

What if the *maquiladora* workers organize and demand better pay? Farther south, even cheaper labor beckons. Guatemala and Honduras will gladly take the *maquiladoras*. Mexico has already lost many of its *maquiladora* jobs to places where people even more desperate will work for even less (Luhnnow 2004).

Many Mexican politicians would say that this presentation is one-sided. "Sure there are problems," they would say, "but that is always how it is when a country industrializes. Don't you realize that the *maquiladoras* bring jobs to people who have no work? They also bring roads, telephone

lines, and electricity to undeveloped areas." "In fact," said Vicente Fox, when he was the president of Mexico, "workers at the *maquiladoras* make more than the average salary in Mexico—and that's what we call fair wages" (Fraser 2001).

### For Your Consideration

Let's apply our three theoretical perspectives. Conflict theorists say that capitalists try to weaken the bargaining power of workers by exploiting divisions among them. In what is known as the *split labor market*, capitalists pit one group of workers against another to lower the cost of labor. How do you think that *maquiladoras* fit this conflict perspective?

When functionalists analyze a situation, they identify its functions and dysfunctions. What functions and dysfunctions of *maquiladoras* do you see?

Do *maquiladoras* represent exploitation or opportunity? As symbolic interactionists point out, reality is a perspective based on one's experience. What multiple realities do you see here?



Where the workers live—no running water or sewage system.

### Culture of Poverty

The third explanation of global stratification is quite unlike the other two. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1979) claimed that the cultures of the Least Industrialized Nations hold them back. Building on the ideas of anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1966a, 1966b), Galbraith argued that some nations are crippled by a **culture of poverty**, a way of life that perpetuates poverty from one generation to the next. He explained it this way: Most of the world's poor people are farmers who live on little

plots of land. They barely produce enough food to survive. Living so close to the edge of starvation, they have little room for risk—so they stick closely to tried-and-true, traditional ways. To experiment with new farming techniques is to court disaster, for failure would lead to hunger and death.

Their religion also encourages them to accept their situation, for it teaches fatalism: the belief that an individual's position in life is God's will. For example, in India, the Dalits are taught that they must have done very bad things in a previous life to suffer so. They are supposed to submit to their situation—and in the next life maybe they'll come back in a more desirable state.

### Evaluating the Theories

Most sociologists prefer colonialism and world system theory. To them, an explanation based on a culture of poverty places blame on the victim—the poor nations themselves. It points to characteristics of the poor nations, rather than to international political arrangements that benefit the Most Industrialized Nations at the expense of the poor nations. But even taken together, these theories yield only part of the picture. None of these theories, for example, would have led anyone to expect that after World War II, Japan would become an economic powerhouse: Japan had a religion that stressed fatalism, two of its major cities had been destroyed by atomic bombs, and it had been stripped of its colonies.

Each theory, then, yields but a partial explanation, and the grand theorist who will put the many pieces of this puzzle together has yet to appear.

## Maintaining Global Stratification

Regardless of how the world's nations became stratified, why do the same countries remain rich year after year, while the rest stay poor? Let's look at two explanations of how global stratification is maintained.

### Neocolonialism

Sociologist Michael Harrington (1977) argued that when colonialism fell out of style it was replaced by **neocolonialism**. When World War II changed public sentiment about sending soldiers and colonists to exploit weaker countries, the Most Industrialized Nations turned to the international markets as a way of controlling the Least Industrialized Nations. By selling them goods on

credit—especially weapons that their elite desire so they can keep themselves in power—the Most Industrialized Nations entrap the poor nations with a circle of debt.

As many of us learn the hard way, owing a large debt and falling behind on payments puts us at the mercy of our creditors. So it is with neocolonialism. The *policy* of selling weapons and other manufactured goods to the Least Industrialized Nations on credit turns those countries into eternal debtors. The capital they need to develop their own industries goes instead as payments toward the debt, which becomes bloated with mounting interest. Keeping these nations in debt forces them to submit to trading terms dictated by the neocolonialists (Carrington 1993; S. Smith 2001).

The oil-rich Middle Eastern nations provide an example of neocolonialism that has become highly significant for our own lives. Because of the two Gulf Wars and the terrorism that emanates from this region, it is worth focusing on Saudi Arabia (*Strategic Energy Policy* 2001; Mouawad 2007). Great Britain founded Saudi Arabia, drawing its boundaries and naming the country after the man (Ibn Saud) that Great Britain picked to lead it. The Most Industrialized Nations need low-priced oil to keep their factories running at a profit—and until recently the Saudis have been providing it. When other nations pumped less—no matter the cause, whether revolution or an attempt to raise prices—the Saudis made up the shortfall. For decades, this arrangement brought us low oil prices. In return, the United States overlooked the human rights violations of the Saudi royal family and propped them up by selling them the latest weapons. Oil shortages have short-circuited this arrangement, at least temporarily, and have brought higher gasoline prices at the pump.

### Multinational Corporations

**Multinational corporations**, companies that operate across many national boundaries, also help to maintain the global dominance of the Most Industrialized Nations. In some cases, multinational corporations exploit the Least Industrialized Nations directly. A prime example is the United Fruit Company, which used to control national and local politics in Central America. This U.S. corporation ran Central American nations as fiefdoms for the company's own profit while the U.S. Marines waited in the wings. An occasional invasion to put down dissidents reminded regional politicians of the military power that supported U.S. corporations.

Most commonly, however, it is simply by doing business that multinational corporations help to maintain international stratification. A single multinational corporation may

manage mining operations in several countries, manufacture goods in others, and market its products around the globe. No matter where the profits are made, or where they are reinvested, the primary beneficiaries are the Most Industrialized Nations, especially the one in which the multinational corporation has its world headquarters.

In this game of profits, the elites of the Least Industrialized Nations are essential players (Sklair 2001; Wise and Cypher 2007). The multinational corporations funnel money to these elites, who, in return, create what is known as a “favorable business climate”—that is, low taxes and cheap labor. The money paid to the elites is politely called “subsidies” and “offsets,” not bribes. Although most people in the Least Industrialized Nations live in remote villages where they eke out a meager living on small plots of land, the elites of these countries favor urban projects, such as building laboratories and computer centers in the capital city. The elites live a sophisticated upper-class life in the major cities of their home country, with many sending their children to prestigious Western universities, such as Oxford, the Sorbonne, and Harvard.

The money given to the elites (whether by direct payment or by sharing profits with companies the elites control) helps to maintain stratification. Not only do these payoffs allow the elites to maintain a genteel lifestyle but also they give them the ability to purchase high-tech weapons. This allows them to continue to oppress their people and to preserve their positions of dominance. The result is a political stability that keeps alive the diabolical partnership between the multinational corporations and the national elites.

This, however, is not the full story. Multinational corporations also play a role in changing international stratification. This is an unintentional by-product of their worldwide search for cheap resources and labor. When these corporations move manufacturing from the Most Industrialized Nations to the Least Industrialized Nations, not only do they exploit cheap labor but also they bring jobs and money to these nations. Although workers in the Least Industrialized Nations are paid a pittance, it is more than they can earn elsewhere. With new factories come opportunities to develop skills and a capital base.

This does not occur in all nations, but it did in the Pacific Rim nations, nicknamed the “Asian tigers” (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, with some “emerging tigers” now appearing in this region). In return for providing the “favorable business climate” just mentioned, the multinational corporations invested billions of dollars in this region. These nations now have such a strong capital base that they have begun to rival the older capitalist countries. Subject to capitalism’s “boom and bust” cycles, many workers and investors in these nations,

including those in the *maquiladoras* that you just read about, will have their dreams smashed as capitalism moves into its next downturn.

## Technology and Global Domination

The race between the Most and Least Industrialized Nations to develop and apply the new technologies is like a race between a marathon runner and someone with a broken leg. Can the outcome be in doubt? As the multinational corporations amass profits, they are able to invest huge sums in the latest technology. Gillette, for example, spent \$100 million simply so that it could adjust its production “on an hourly basis” (Zachary 1995). These millions came from just one U.S. company. Many Least Industrialized Nations would love to have \$100 million to invest in their entire economy, much less to use for fine-tuning the production of razor blades.

The race is not this simple, however. Although the Most Industrialized Nations have a seemingly insurmountable head start, some of the other nations are shortening the distance between themselves and the front runners. With cheap labor making their manufactured goods inexpensive, China and India are exporting goods on a massive scale. They are using the capital earned to extend their infrastructure (building dams, transportation, communication, and electrical systems), to develop their industry, and to adopt high technology. Although the maintenance of global domination is not in doubt at this point, it could be on the verge of a major shift from West to East.

**Unintended Public Relations** Bono and other celebrities have used the media well in their campaign to pressure the world’s wealthiest and most powerful nations to forgive the debts of some of the poorest nations. This has made a good story, which the mass media have promoted widely. With Bono at their side, the wealthy and powerful nations have basked in the spotlight. Amidst television reporters and global drum rolls, they have cancelled the debts of some poor nations. The image has been powerful—good-hearted capitalists having mercy on the poor. Behind the scenes was something vastly different: The wealthy nations had already written these debts off as uncollectible. But what a tool, for the publicity that accompanies their pronouncements helps to soften opposition to the global dominance of capitalism.

## A Concluding Note

The term *global stratification* is a remote-sounding term, so let’s return to the two families featured in our opening vignette. These families represent distinct worlds of

privilege and power—that is, unique locations in global stratification. By comparing these families, we can see how profoundly global stratification affects our life chances—from access to material possessions to our opportunity for education and even the likely age at which

we will die. The division of the globe into interconnected units of nations with more or less wealth and more or less power and prestige, then, is much more than a matter of theoretical interest. In fact, it is *your* life we are talking about.

## SUMMARY *and* REVIEW

### Systems of Social Stratification

#### *What is social stratification?*

**Social stratification** refers to a hierarchy of relative privilege based on property, power, and prestige. Every society stratifies its members, and in every society men as a group are placed above women as a group. P. 172.

#### *What are three major systems of social stratification?*

Three major stratification systems are slavery, caste, and class. The essential characteristic of **slavery** is that some people own other people. Initially, slavery was based not on race but on debt, punishment, or defeat in battle. Slavery could be temporary or permanent and was not necessarily passed on to one's children. North American slaves had no legal rights, and the system was gradually buttressed by a racist **ideology**. In a **caste system**, status is determined by birth and is lifelong. A **class system** is much more open than these other systems, for it is based primarily on money or material possessions. Industrialization encourages the formation of class systems. Gender cuts across all forms of social stratification. Pp. 172–176.

#### *What Determines Social Class?*

Karl Marx argued that a single factor determines social class: If you own the means of production, you belong to the **bourgeoisie**; if you do not, you are one of the **proletariat**. Max Weber argued that three elements determine social class: *property*, *power*, and *prestige*. Pp. 177–179.

#### *Why Is Social Stratification Universal?*

To explain why stratification is universal, functionalists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore argued that to attract the most capable people to fill its important positions, society must offer them greater rewards. Melvin Tumin said that if this view were correct, society would be a **meritocracy**, with all positions awarded on the basis of merit. Gaetano Mosca argued that stratification is inevitable because every society must have leadership, which by definition means inequality. Conflict theorists argue that stratification came about because resources are limited, and an elite emerges as groups struggle for them.

Gerhard Lenski suggested a synthesis between the functionalist and conflict perspectives. Pp. 179–181.

### How Do Elites Maintain Stratification?

To maintain social stratification within a nation, the ruling class adopts an ideology that justifies its current arrangements. It also controls information and uses technology. When all else fails, it turns to brute force. Pp. 181–182.

### Comparative Social Stratification

#### *What are key characteristics of stratification systems in other nations?*

The most striking features of the British class system are speech and education. In Britain, accent reveals social class, and almost all of the elite attend “public” schools (the equivalent of U.S. private schools). In the former Soviet Union, communism was supposed to abolish class distinctions. Instead, it merely ushered in a different set of classes. Pp. 182–183.

### Global Stratification: Three Worlds

#### *How are the world's nations stratified?*

The model presented here divides the world's nations into three groups: the Most Industrialized, the Industrializing, and the Least Industrialized. This layering represents relative property, power, and prestige. Pp. 183–189.

### How Did the World's Nations Become Stratified?

The main theories that seek to account for global stratification are **colonialism**, **world system theory**, and the **culture of poverty**. Pp. 190–192.

### Maintaining Global Stratification

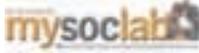
#### *How do elites maintain global stratification?*

There are two basic explanations for why the world's countries remain stratified. **Neocolonialism** is the ongoing dominance of the Least Industrialized Nations by the Most Industrialized Nations. The second explanation points to the influence of **multinational corporations**. The new technology gives further advantage to the Most Industrialized Nations. Pp. 192–194.

## THINKING CRITICALLY *about* Chapter 7

1. How do slavery, caste, and class systems of social stratification differ?
2. Why is social stratification universal?
3. Do you think that the low-wage factories of the multinational corporations, located in such countries as Mexico, represent exploitation or opportunity? Why?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What can you find in MySocLab?  [www.mysoclab.com](http://www.mysoclab.com)

- Complete Ebook
- Practice Tests and Video and Audio activities
- Mapping and Data Analysis exercises
- Sociology in the News
- Classic Readings in Sociology
- Research and Writing advice

### Where Can I Read More on This Topic?

Suggested readings for this chapter are listed at the back of this book.