

# Chapter 8

## Overview

# Social Classes in America

## Chapter 15

Social classes are changeable and full of exceptions, but sociologists have identified and described several social classes in the United States.

- Upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class
- Working class
- Working poor
- Underclass

Typical Occupations		Typical Incomes	
Upper Class	Investors, heirs, chief executive officers	1%	\$1.5 million
Upper Middle Class	Upper-level managers, professionals, owners of medium-sized businesses	14%	\$80,000+
Middle Class	Lower-level managers, semiprofessionals, craftspeople, foremen, non-retail salespeople, clerical	30%	\$45,000
Working Class	Low-skill manual, clerical, and retail sales workers	30%	\$30,000
Working Poor	Lowest-paid manual, retail, and service workers	13%	\$20,000
Underclass	Unemployed, people in part-time menial jobs, people receiving public assistance	12%	\$10,000

# The Upper Class Chapter 16

This class includes only one percent of the population, and is divided into the upper-upper class and the lower-upper class.

- At the top is the “aristocracy.” Its members represent the old-money families whose names appear in high society—Ford, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and du Pont, among others. The basis for membership is birth and inherited wealth, and people in this group seldom marry outside their class.
- Members of the lower-upper class may actually be better off financially than the upper-upper class, but often are not accepted into the most exclusive social circles.

# The Middle Classes

## Chapter 17

Although most Americans think of themselves as middle class, only about 40 to 50 percent actually fit this description.

- The upper-middle class (14 percent) is composed of those who have been successful in business, the professions, politics, and the military.
- The middle-middle class (30 percent) include owners of small businesses and farms, some professionals, lower-level managers, and some sales and clerical workers. Their income level is at about the national average.

# The Working Class

## Chapter 18

This group often referred to as lower-middle class, comprises almost 1/3 of the population.

- Working class people include roofers, delivery truck drivers, machine operators, salespeople, and clerical workers.
- In general, their economic resources are lower than those of the middle class.
- Members of the working class have below-average income and unstable employment.
- They generally lack hospital insurance and retirement benefits.
- Members of this group are not likely to enter the middle class.

# The Working Poor Chapter 19

Thirteen percent of the population consists of people employed in low-skill jobs with the lowest pay.

- Its members are the lowest-level clerical workers, manual workers (laborers), and service workers (fast-food servers).
- Lacking steady employment, the working poor do not earn enough to rise above the poverty line.

# The Underclass Chapter 20

Twelve percent of the population is composed of people who are usually unemployed and who come from families with a history of unemployment for generations.

- These people either work part-time menial jobs (unloading trucks, picking up litter) or are on public assistance.
- The most common shared characteristic of the working poor and the underclass is a lack of skills to obtain jobs that pay enough to meet basic needs.
- There are many routes into the underclass and the working poor class—birth, old age, loss of a marriage partner, lack of education or training, alcoholism, physical or mental disability.

# Poverty in America

## Chapter 21

Poverty in America can be measured in absolute or relative terms. The poor are disproportionately represented by African Americans, Latinos, women, and children.

- **Absolute poverty** is the absence of enough money to secure life's necessities—enough food, a safe place to live, and so forth.
- We measure **relative poverty** by comparing the economic condition of those at the bottom of a society with the economic conditions of other members of that society.



# Measuring Poverty

## Chapter 22

- The United States determines poverty by setting an annual income level. In 2000, it was \$17,050 for a family of four.
- The poor comprise 12.7 percent of the population or more than 34.5 million people, according to a 1999 United States Census Bureau Report.
- Race, ethnicity, gender, and age are all related to poverty.

# Responses to the Problem of Poverty

## Chapter 22a

- The War on Poverty was introduced by the federal government in 1964 to help poor people help themselves. This program was not as successful as predicted.
- Social welfare reform has been an ongoing process since 1996.

# Welfare Reform

## Chapter 23

The most recent legislation on welfare reform, enacted in 1996, limits the amount of time those able to work can receive welfare payments. The bill has three major elements: 1) it reduces welfare spending, 2) it increases state and local power to oversee welfare rules, and 3) it adds new restrictions on welfare eligibility.

- A recent major study has shown that the welfare rolls have decreased more dramatically than most predicted.
- Just over seven million people are on welfare, down from over twelve million in 1996.
- Many of those leaving welfare still live in poverty.