

TOPIC: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE U.S.

Class System in the U.S.

- ◆ The United States class system is based on both birth and ability.
 - ▶ While many things influence social class, _____ is a major factor.

Class	% of Population	Annual Income	Common Source of Income
Upper Class	5%	> \$306,000	<i>Old money:</i> _____ wealth. <i>New money:</i> _____ wealth. 
Middle Class	40-45%	\$67,000 - 306,000	_____ collar jobs. 
Working Class	30-35%	\$38,000 - 67,000	_____ collar jobs. 
Lower Class	20%	< \$38,000	_____ wage work or unemployed. 

- ◆ **Class Traits:** Behaviors, customs, and norms that are common within each social class.
 - ▶ Class traits have _____ in recent decades within the U.S.

EXAMPLE

Match the following terms with the type of occupation it is often associated with.

Upper Class	
Middle Class	
Working Class	
Lower Class	

- a) Blue-collar jobs.
- b) Unemployment.
- c) Old money/ inherited wealth.
- d) White-collar jobs.

PRACTICE

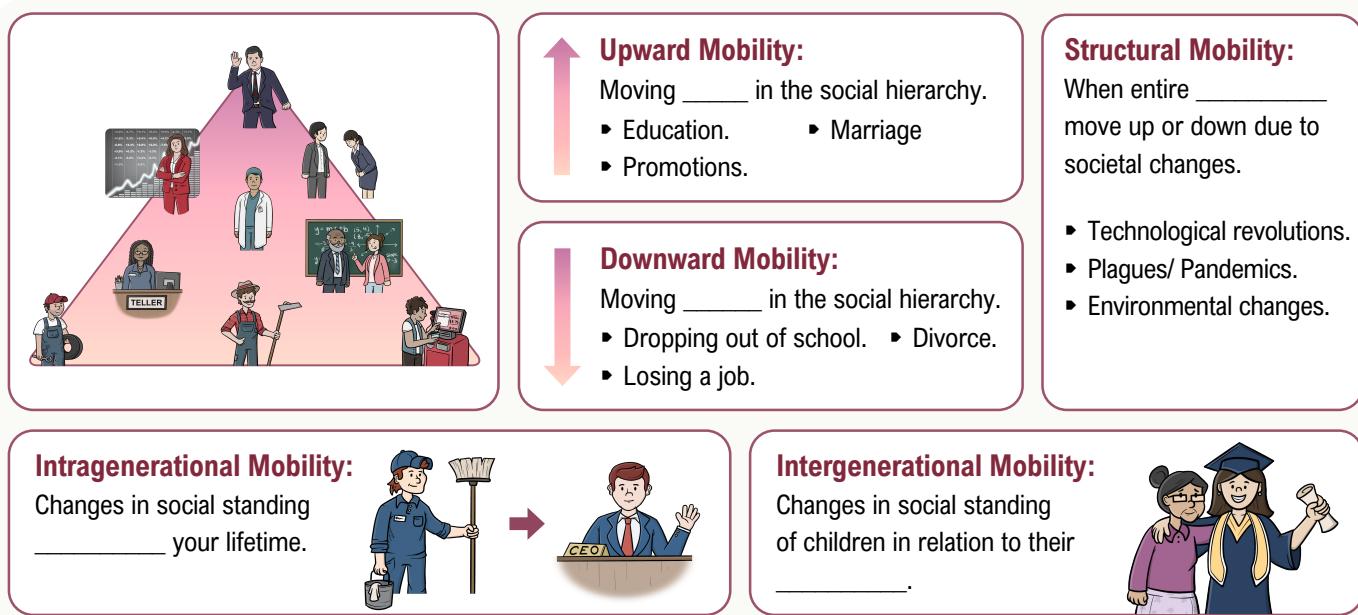
The customs and behaviors associated with a social class are known as...

- a) Working class.
- b) Open system norms.
- c) Class traits.
- d) Class mobility.

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Social Mobility

◆ Recall: **Social Mobility:** The ability to move between classes in an open social hierarchy.



EXAMPLE

For each situation below, determine if it describes intragenerational mobility or intergenerational mobility. For intragenerational, write “INTRA”; for intergenerational, write “INTER”.

1	Luis, a middle class guy from the Midwest, goes to college and marries a wealthy woman from a prominent family	
2	Kelsey, whose parents immigrated to the U.S. with almost no money, just graduated with her masters and is considered upper-middle class.	
3	Shaun comes from a family of wealthy lawyers, but spent his entire inheritance partying in his 20's	

PRACTICE

Which of the following is an example of structural mobility?

- Cory loses his job and has to move to a smaller apartment to make ends meet.
- A community is forced to relocate after a flood, resulting in the loss of their homes, jobs, and other assets.
- Jess gets promoted after years of dedicated work at the local bank.
- Anna changes careers but stays within the same pay grade.

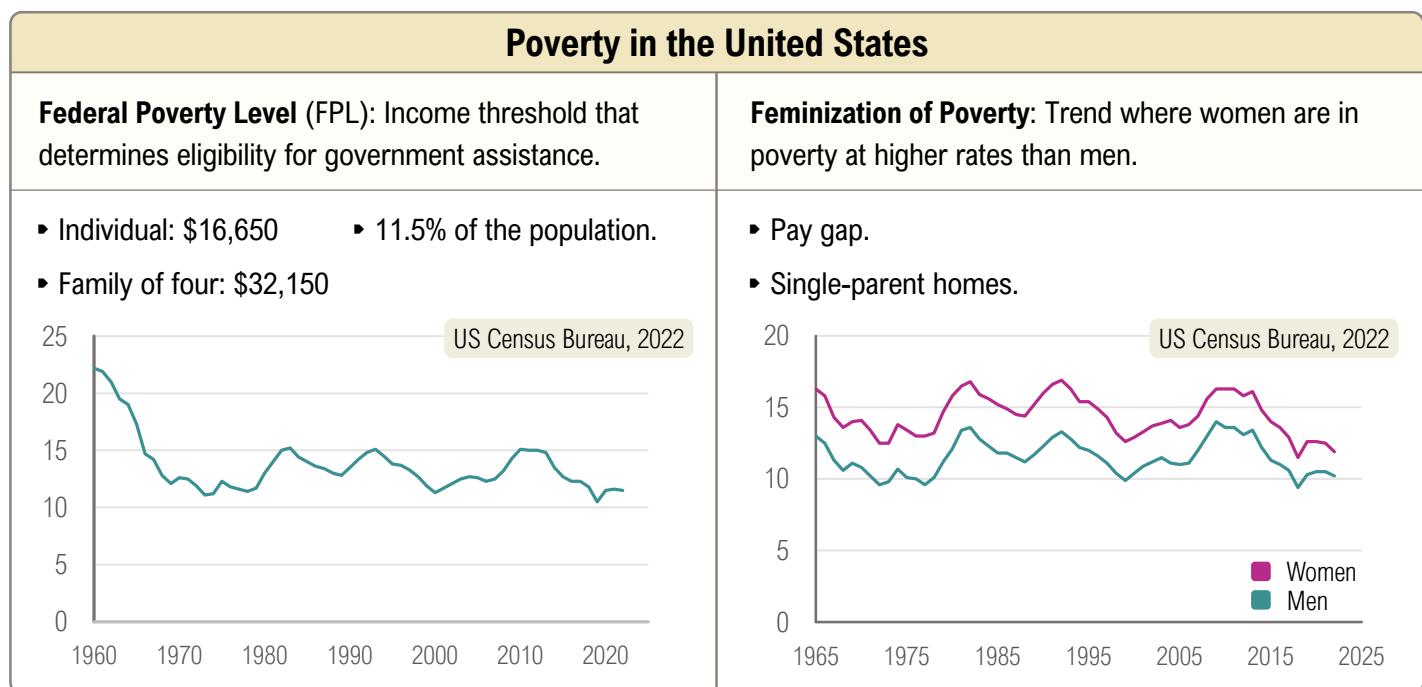
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Poverty

◆ **Poverty:** Condition in which someone _____ the resources to meet basic standards of living.

► **Absolute Poverty:** Lack of resources that is _____ threatening.

► **Relative Poverty:** Lack of resources _____ to those around you.



Emily A. Shrider and John Creamer, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-280, Poverty in the United States: 2022, U.S. Government Publishing Office, Washington, DC, September 2023.

EXAMPLE

In both the United States and abroad, scholars have noted the feminization of poverty.

1. In a few words, explain what the feminization of poverty is.

2. What are some of the factors that contribute to this phenomenon?

TOPIC: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE U.S.

PRACTICE

Anna and her family live in an apartment in a low-income neighborhood. Though they have enough money for heat and food, Anna can't afford many of the things her friends have, like new clothes, streaming services, and fieldtrips. Her family's income is below the median income in her city. Which concept best describes Anna's situation?

- a) Absolute poverty.
- b) Relative poverty.
- c) Intergenerational mobility.
- d) Extreme poverty.

PRACTICE

Which of the following statements best distinguishes absolute poverty from relative poverty?

- a) Absolute poverty has remained stable since the 1950's, whereas relative poverty changes every year.
- b) Relative poverty exists in wealthy nations and absolute poverty only exists in developing nations.
- c) Absolute poverty indicates a lack of resources for basic survival, whereas relative poverty indicates lacking resources compared to others in the society.
- d) Relative poverty refers more to income inequality, whereas absolute poverty is related to structural mobility.

TOPIC: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE U.S.

Explaining Poverty

- ◆ Sociologists have offered opposing views on the root cause of poverty:

Individualistic Explanations

- ▶ **Core Idea:** Poverty results from the characteristics of individuals.
- ▶ **Influential researcher:** Oscar Lewis (1961):
Poverty creates a _____ that limits ambition.
 - Short-term thinking, fatalistic attitudes.



Structural Explanations

- ▶ **Core Idea:** _____ forces make it difficult to break from the cycle of poverty.
- ▶ **Influential researcher:** William Julius Wilson (1996):
Lack of good _____ leads to poverty.
 - Unequal distribution of opportunities.



Political Spectrum

EXAMPLE

For each statement below, determine if it is in line with the individualist explanation of poverty or the structuralist explanation of poverty. Write "I" on the line for individualist and "S" for structuralist.

1	"Individuals raised on welfare have little reason to improve their situation"	
2	"Many individuals who receive assistance are unable to find decent paying work"	
3	"Lack of access to jobs and social safety nets continue the cycle of poverty"	
4	"Poverty comes from a lack of ambition to provide for oneself"	

PRACTICE

Which explanation of poverty focuses on access to opportunities (including employment and education)?

- a) Symbolic interactionist perspective.
- b) Individualistic explanation.
- c) Functionalist perspective.
- d) Structural explanation.