



Social Stratification in the United States: The American Profile Poster

Stephen J. Rose

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A much-anticipated update of the classic book-and-poster set depicting who owns what, who makes how much, who works where, and who lives with whom.

Generations of teachers, union organizers, and activists have relied on this book-and-poster set, originally published in 1979, to illustrate the magnitude of America's economic divide—which has only grown ever since. This completely updated edition, drawn from the 2005 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census, brings together fresh primary data to provide a clear—and "eye-opening" (*Chicago Tribune*)—picture of the U.S. social structure.

Folded inside the companion booklet, the poster depicts color-coded figures that make it possible to compare social groups at a glance and to understand how income distribution relates to race, sex, education, and occupation. With charts and careful explanations, the booklet shows how to make the most of the poster in the classroom and beyond, and reveals the considerable changes in America's social landscape over the last few decades.

Rose's latest findings reveal that recent economic growth has mostly benefited the wealthiest households, that the term "middle class" has lost most of its meaning, that a gender gap persists in the workplace, and that, on average, African Americans and Latinos still earn far less than other Americans. Bringing to life the dry statistics underpinning our discussions of inequality, *Social Stratification in the United States* is, in the words of Barbara Ehrenreich, "a unique achievement."

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Social stratification reflects an unequal distribution of resources. In most cases, having more money means having more power or more opportunities. Stratification can also result from physical and intellectual traits. Categories that affect social standing include family ancestry, race, ethnicity, age, and gender. The most significant threat to the relatively high standard of living we're accustomed to in the United States is the decline of the middle class. The size, income, and wealth of the middle class have all been declining since the 1970s. This is occurring at a time when corporate profits have increased more than 141 percent, and CEO pay has risen by more than 298 percent (Popken 2007). Stratification systems are either closed, meaning they allow little change in social position, or open, meaning they allow movement and interaction between the layers. A caste system is one in which social standing is based on ascribed status or birth. Class systems are open, with achievement playing a role in social position. People fall into classes based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. There are three main classes in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Social mobility describes a shift from one social class to another. Class traits, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class.

9.3 Global Stratification and Inequality.

Research in Social Stratification and Mobility is dedicated to publishing the highest, most innovative research on issues of social inequality from a broad diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives. The journal is also dedicated to cutting edge summaries of prior research and fruitful exchanges that will stimulate future research on issues of social inequality.

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