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Class designates an aggregate of persons, within a society, possessing approximately the same status. The class system, or the system of stratification of a society, is the system of classes in their internal and external relationships. The class system is not identical with the system of power, i.e., with the network of relationships in which behavior is influenced by commands and coercion. It is not identical with the property system, in which the use of physical objects and their resultant benefits is reserved to those having specific qualifications (property rights). The class system is not identical with the occupational system. The class system is the set of relationships constituted by the granting of deference to individuals, roles, and institutions in the light of their place in the systems of power, property, occupation, etc.

Deference is an action of respect or honor, associated with the feeling of equality or inferiority. By logical extension, sentiments of disrespect or disesteem, feelings of contempt and superiority, are also comprehended in the conception of deference. Deference is an act of implied judgment of the worth and dignity of a person, office, or institution, made in the light of a scale of values. Deference is simultaneously an act of judgment regarding the person judged and the person judging.

Deference is expressed in ceremonial actions symbolizing sentiments of respect or inferiority; it is also expressed in etiquette, in actions granting precedence and in modes of verbal address and of verbal reference. It is expressed in titles and in the award of medals and insignia of rank. These are the "pure" expressions of deference. Deference, which is the acknowledgment of status, also works conjointly with the systems of power and of property. The readiness to obey or utter commands, the completeness of obedience and the extreme of imperiousness are very much affected by the sentiments of deference of the persons involved. The person who is very deferential toward his officer, his employer, his supervisor, etc., will more readily carry out his official superior's command than the person who feels little deference toward his official superiors and who has at the same time great self-esteem.

Bases of Class

The deference which defines class position is granted to persons, offices, and institutions in accordance with the deferring person's perception,

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which may be erroneous and which is almost always fragmentary and vague, of the characteristics of the person, office, or institution being judged. A man is judged in accordance with the judging person's perception of his income and wealth, his occupation, his level of achievement within his occupation, his standard of living (including the location of his residence), his ethnic characteristics, his kinship connections, his educational level, his relationships to the main centers of the exercise of power in the society as a whole and in his particular institutions, such as business firms, churches, universities, armies, governmental departments, etc., and his associates, formal and informal. (His wife and children are usually granted deference corresponding to his status.) These various characteristics are not always evaluated in the same way in all societies. For example, in the United States the significance of kinship connection is less important than it is in China or Great Britain in affecting a person's social status (i.e., the rank which is accorded to him by the deference judgment of the members of the society). Similarly, ethnic characteristics are more important in the United States than they are in France or Brazil, although they were diminishing in their significance in the United States at mid-twentieth century.

Within each category (e.g., occupation), variations occur in the rankings which result from the criteria and judgments of deference. Scientists, for example, have moved up considerably on the scale in western countries, while the clergy has been undergoing a gradual decline over several hundred years. The military profession rose in the deference hierarchy in the United States after 1940, as it does everywhere when the society is militarily endangered.

The judgment which underlies the act of deference is a synthetic judgment which assesses simultaneously a large number of relevant characteristics. A process similar to that of averaging occurs. Hence, a very wealthy man who keeps low company and whose occupation is disreputable might rank lower in most people's opinion than a less wealthy person whose occupation is most estimable and who is an intimate of the great and worthy. In a society which regards the kinship bond as one of the primary ties, close blood relationship to a great person might compensate for a moderate income and a mediocre professional accomplishment in setting one person above another who is wealthier and more successful but who has no eminent ancestors.

Class System

The class system is an imperfect equilibrium of innumerable individual acts of deference, both "pure" and "mixed," with elements of the occupational, property and political systems. The class system might be extremely inequalitarian, as in the ante-bellum South, or it might be highly equalitarian, as in modern Norway. The members of the society might classify themselves and each other into a set of status classes which

shade off into one another, or the classes might be sharply defined and distinguished from one another.

In an inequalitarian society, the acts of deference will express sentiments of great inferiority or superiority. The deference of the lower classes will be full of self-abasement before the superiors, and the latter will treat the former as barely human. European feudal society was like this. In contrast, there can be societies with a much higher degree of equalitarianism, in which the highest and the lowest both feel themselves to be part of a common community or humanity and in which accordingly there are not such sentiments of profound and far-reaching superiority and inferiority. Few persons in these societies feel themselves to be very much better or worse than anyone else. The modern Western countries, and above all those societies which grew up on the frontiers without an inheritance of an elaborate inequalitarian class structure—namely, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—tend in this direction.

Although logically it is possible for any number of classes to be formed in a given society, once individuals of approximately similar status are grouped into classes, this does not, in fact, happen. There is a tendency for the society or its parts to act as if there were relatively few classes. Such classes as are recognized are not, of course, internally homogeneous, and persons within them make many distinctions which are not seen or acknowledged by those who are not in intimate contact with them. They are, moreover, practically never defined in the minds of most of those who refer to them. Persons who are especially "conscious" or sensitive about their own social status will try to define quite precisely the boundaries separating, among the persons with whom they come into face-to-face contact, those with whom they will associate and those with whom they will not associate on the grounds of their class status. Such "status-sensitive" persons are in most societies in varying but almost always small minorities, and even they do not have precise conceptions of the boundaries between classes other than those adjacent to their own class. Most of the class system is rather dimly differentiated in the minds of their members. Thus, the status judgment is not a precise judgment: it is only vague and approximate, in terms of higher and lower.

Boundaries are more precise in societies with an official system of stratification (i.e., a titled nobility, a system of "estates" and a body of sumptuary legislation designed to demarcate class boundaries) and with relatively undeveloped mercantile, administrative and professional middle classes (like France in the seventeenth century or Russia before 1917). Even in such societies, however, the official stratification system covers in a differentiated manner only a small proportion of the social hierarchy. For the rest of the society, although retaining significance, it is too undifferentiated to suffice. In consequence, a further system of stratification of the type discussed in the preceding paragraph emerges spontaneously.

The sharpness of the boundaries of status groups is at its height in a

caste system, because endogamy is a requirement there to an extent unattained in other types of stratification systems. There is of course a tendency for all status groups to be endogamous, but where personal affection is accorded some sway and where other considerations, such as personal beauty and personal merit, enjoy relative autonomy in competition with status considerations in the selection of marriage partners, this endogamy is always far from complete. In the caste system, however, endogamy reaches its highest level; in consequence, the inheritance of occupations in a static economic system and the strength of kinship ties add their force to already powerful status sentiments.

In modern societies, and particularly in those becoming rather more industrial, urban, and bureaucratic, a considerable amount of upward mobility and some downward mobility are inevitable. It is especially pronounced in societies in which there are special institutional arrangements for training and selection and for the inculcation of standards of judgment which accord a high value to improved class status. This used to raise problems relating to claims to higher status on the part of the recently ascended and denial of these claims by those with whom the recently risen persons sought to associate as confirmation of their higher status. The denial of claims to deference of the "parvenu," because he was too new, or too crude, or too rich, or too contaminated with foreign connections or for whatever reasons, was a fertile source of alienation in society and a powerful factor in the promotion of change.

This phenomenon brings to the fore another property of the status system which merits mention. The discussion hitherto has proceeded as if there were, vagueness notwithstanding, a consensus in every society regarding the criteria for the granting of status as well as consensus in the assignment of the status of particular persons and institutions. This is not so. There is some disagreement and a great deal of sheer unconnectedness in the status judgments of all large societies. The groups which enjoy higher status positions in their own eyes and in the eyes of those adjacent to them will usually have a stronger view of their claims and merits than will those groups that feel themselves to be inferior. The lower classes, while acknowledging the superiority of their "betters," do so with reluctance and ambivalence. And in some instances some of the members of these classes deny outrightly that superiority. Ethically radical and politically revolutionary attitudes constitute the extreme form of denial of the claims of the "superior" to their superior status.

The human mind finds inferiority hard to accept in unadulterated doses, and some persons find it harder to take than others. In the lower and middle classes there is often a tendency to deny the validity of the criteria by which the upper classes have enjoyed their superior status. For example, in eighteenth-century France there was a widespread denial by the mercantile and professional classes of the legitimacy of kinship connections and of heredity as a basis for deference, while they praised the

criteria of occupational proficiency and personal merits such as honesty, diligence, and intelligence. (This outlook was expressed in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, which declared "careers open to talent"). Ambivalence and resentment are widespread without, however, going so far as revolution—and even revolutionaries cannot completely expunge from their minds all the status criteria of the society they are revolting against, as is shown by the reestablishment of many of the prerevolutionary status patterns in the Soviet Union. Those whom the prevailing system of evaluation relegates to a lower status, even while sharing and acknowledging that status, simultaneously resent and deny it. The proportions of acknowledgment and denial vary among individuals and among societies, but it is safe to assert that it practically never approximates either extreme in any large society.

The imperfection in the integration of the class system is furthered by the limited range of attention and interest of a large porportion of the population. As a result, they do not participate as much in the larger class system as they do in their local class subsystem, comprising largely the persons with whom they have face-to-face contact. Only occasionally do they respond explicitly to the larger class system, and then they might do so dissensually.

Status System and Society

The conflict of classes is a reality of all large societies and cannot be eliminated. It is inevitable for the reasons given in the foregoing section. Their lowly status is injurious to the sense of dignity of many persons, especially when it is reinforced by resentment against authority, however legitimate, and the desire for goods and services which cannot be acquired on the basis of income earned through the sale of services or goods in the market. The modern labor unions and employer's associations are responses to these facts. But even in societies in which labor unions are either not allowed or are shorn of the functions which they have developed in free societies, the conflict of classes persists, though it must operate through other institutions or even surreptitiously.

The conflict of classes is not always of constant intensity. It varies among societies and periods, and even at any one time in a given society only an extremely small proportion of the population will be much absorbed by the class conflict in its more active and organized form. (In the Bolshevik revolution in St. Petersburg, only a few thousand persons were actively engaged.) Much of the population participates by assent, a much smaller number participates by the payment of dues to organizations which promise to bring advantages to the class or some sector of it, and a far smaller number plays an active part in the organization. (It has been said that in Great Britain only 10 percent of those who vote for the Labour party belong to the party; of those who come to meetings only 10 percent

take an active part in party affairs, even of the most humble and occasional sort.) Thus what the Marxists call "class consciousness," which would be more precisely called "aggressively alienated class identification," is a rather uncommon phenomenon, even in modern industrial societies. Normal class conflict is fully compatible with a high degree of responsible citizenship and a considerable measure of social order.

Sentiments concerning class status and the individual's identification of himself in terms of a particular class status do, however, short of aggressively alienated class identifications, play a very permeative role in social life. Within the family, they affect parents' hopes for their children's future careers, spouses, friends, and associates. They influence the extent to which a parent will exert himself to improve his economic lot so that the family will not only have more conveniences and amenities but so that it can also enjoy a higher status. It influences in large part the mother's decisions in the domestic economy and in the expenditure of income on various types of household articles. It affects the choice of place of residence and the choice of friends and associates. It is seldom the exclusive factor in such choices, but it is also seldom entirely absent.

Face-to-face relationships are of particular significance in the stratification system. It is in such relationships that individuals perceive their own status in the judgments of others. It is in such relationships that they can exhibit their own claims to the deference of others by acting, speaking, and dressing in a certain manner. This is the reason why more discriminating and sensitive judgments are rendered about the nearby social environment than about those sectors of the society which are more remote. Yet considerations of class status do not overwhelm all other considerations in face-to-face relationships. The more human beings see of each other, the more they respond to each other as persons. They judge each other as persons worthy of being liked or disliked, of being loved or hated. Relationships which commence with status considerations foremost often develop into relationships in which personal affection or dislike becomes preponderant. Because personal relationships tend to begin in a situation of homogeneity in class status, friendships and marriages tend to fall within narrow ranges in class status. To the extent that they do not, they bring the classes rather closer together.

Face-to-face relationships, whether status or personal elements preponderate, play an important role in the status system as a whole. For those who are in the lower part of the status system, face-to-face relationships, usually with persons of approximately similar status, reduce the danger of denial of their dignity through the resentment or contempt of those who are respectively lower or higher; while for those at the top of the status hierarchy, the tendency for like to associate with like confirms self-esteem and diminishes the danger of direct denial.

Thus, through the individual's sense of civil membership and his belief in its justice and through his face-to-face relationships and his limited

focus of attention, inequalities in class status, which are an inevitability of large, differentiated societies, are rendered more tolerable to the sense of individual dignity. Therewith, his society is maintained in a state of equilibrium.