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SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN WORLD HISTORY

Contents

Introduction

Scope Social structure can be a very broad term. It refers to the ways societies arrange various subgroups designed to cluster, guide and regulate the behavior of members and organize different functions and interactions (though most people belong to several subgroups). These groups normally include families, at the most basic level, but also extended families and kinship linkages; religious affiliations; ethnic and linguistic affiliations; occupational clusters, such as guilds; legal categories; gender categories (including in many societies various transgender identities). The primary focus, however, though it touches base with many of these subcategories, involves the groupings associated with social stratification – most commonly referred to as social classes. For several millennia many human societies have organized various kinds of social inequality, and the resulting groupings provide the most obvious target for inquiries into social structure—including the ways social structure develops and evolves over time, in the various regions that inform the world history approach.

Social history Until the later 20th century mainstream history paid relatively little attention to social stratification, focusing more on political and intellectual developments and groups in the power positions in society. The social sciences, however, began paying increasing attention to social structural topics in the 1920s, and even before this Karl Marx had urgently urged awareness of the huge social gaps in any society based on differential access to the means of production – which in modern society particularly meant bourgeoisie and proletariat. By the 1960s historians, some of them Marxists, began to use social class and related stratification groupings as a central analytical framework – for example, E. P. Thompson's celebrated *Making of the English Working Class,* which inspired a great deal of research on both sides of the Atlantic. This focus has dimmed a bit in more recent decades, with the rise of interest in more cultural topics and the decline of the classic kinds of worker-middle class struggle. And in the United States race has often inspired more work than social class, though the two concepts are not unrelated. Still, any standard world history syllabus includes emphasis on the importance of determining the ways societies arrange stratification, and how these can be compared across regions and how they change over time. Social historians continue to argue that a focus on stratification captures basic features of human life in the past, and provide attention and perspective for certain groups that are otherwise frequently ignored.

Determinants of social class In any historical or social scientific work, social class can be, indeed must be, approached from several different angles. The first is objective: how do groups differ according to standards of living; educational levels; health conditions; and in some cases political and legal rights. This is arguably the starting point for any further inquiry. The second, however, involves consciousness: do group members share perceptions with each other, and use these to identify differences from other social classes? Is there a "class culture"? (Note: class consciousness may be a factor in active conflict, but it can also emphasize considerable harmony.) The postwar United States features an intriguing tension between these two approaches: 80-85% of all Americans identified themselves as middle class, and were so addressed by politicians; but objective measurements, particularly in terms of education, suggested a much more nuanced class structure. Both approaches, clearly, have a certain degree of reality. Rural-urban divides offer an even more common complexity. Peasants and urban workers may share many objective characteristics, particularly in terms of basic living standards and lack of access to political power; but they may well not share consciousness, and even see themselves in conflict.

Other angles While objective measurement and cultural components provide the most important insights into social class, there are other approaches to consider as well. Many societies generate a larger cultural approach to society, that may define social groupings in terms that differ both from objective criteria and from class consciousness. Thus Confucianism in East Asia famously viewed merchants as low prestige, even though they were frequently wealthy and powerful; The Confucian valuation affected merchant self-perception, but it did not define it fully as many merchants clearly shared a sense of group self-worth. In many modern societies many rural social groups retain greater prestige in the general culture than is suggested by their objective situation or their own sense of class confidence (though the disparities may generate a sense of resentment). And of course a focus on social class must not exclude other stratification factors, such as race and ethnicity: in the United States, these identities have notoriously complicated the development of what in many other societies was a standard kind of working class

identity, from the later 19th century into the later 20th. Finally, social stratification, both old and new, intertwines with gender stratification, another relationship to contend with.

Mobility The history of social structure obviously embraces an interest in social mobility, or lack thereof. Did the social structure (both objectively and culturally) encourage aspirations and opportunities for mobility, or was greater emphasis placed on stasis? A considerable difference divides modern from traditional societies on this score, but there are differentiations within these categories as well – for example, in a notorious (and significant) American tendency to exaggerate mobility opportunities.

Politics Unlike what social historians used to call "conventional history", interest in social structure does not begin with political features. However, the state is intimately involved in the emergence, definition and evolution of social stratification, so the political concomitants of social structure require consistent attention – though not at the level of detail characteristic of much political history. Study of social stratification over time involves more interest in patterns than in events or narrative.

World history A world historical approach to social structure involves applying core world history categories to this major feature of the human experience. Different regional approaches command attention, an obvious aspect for example of the classical period with the huge distinctions between Indian and Chinese systems. Social structure is also affected by major changes over time, such as the impact of the missionary religions, new trade patterns and of course, in more modern periods, the industrial revolution. Contact among regional societies, another world history staple, is also involved, providing another potential spur to change.

Study questions

1. What are the tensions between a political and a social-structural approach to history?
2. What are the most important complexities in defining social class?
3. What is class consciousness

Further reading

Craig Calhoun, "Social Structure", *Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

Claude Crothers, *Social Structure* (Routledge, 1996)

E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Vintage, 1963; rev. ed. 1968)

Chapter 1: The Impact of Agricultural Society

Hunting and gathering Hunting and gathering societies normally had little or no social structure – which is one of the reasons many anthropologists highlight the quality of life they offered compared to what came later in human history. This was of course the original form of human organization, one that lasted for hundreds of thousands of years and still survives in a few isolated areas today. Hunting and gathering groups were small (40-80 people) and relatively egalitarian, among other things because it was impossible to store significant wealth. Men and women had different economic roles but both contributed substantially, reducing gender power distinctions. Many decisions were taken collectively, though children did not participate. Some individual leaders may have gained prominence: burial sites reveal a few skeletons with special adornment. But systematic social differentiations were not present. Families represented the main social institution apart from the group itself.

Advent of agriculture Beginning around 9000 BCE, initially around the Black Sea, reliance on agriculture began to replace the earlier economy, though diffusion of the new system was gradual. Once adopted, agriculture introduced a variety of innovations that might affect social structure. Populations settled down, creating durable communities. And these were larger than the hunting bands – averaging several hundred and sometimes more (quite apart from small cities, that also ultimately emerged). Land ownership became the prime form of wealth. Agricultural economies also normally generated some surplus: eight people could produce enough to support ten, which in principle could support greater occupational differentiation. Agricultural societies also introduced new methods of storing wealth beyond immediate needs. Many of these changes set the basis for new forms of inequality and, therefore, of more complex social structure.

Persistent equality A major new (2021) study, however, urges that many agricultural societies, or societies where hunting and fishing combined with some agriculture, long maintained substantial equality, revising the standard assumption that social differentiation came fast on the heels of agriculture. Even the advent of cities did not necessarily alter the picture. David Graeber, an anthropologist, and archeologist David Wengrow have uncovered evidence of substantial cities that display no particular differentiation at all. Catalhoyuk, for example, in present-day Turkey, a settlement of about 5000 people that lasted for hundreds of years, offered the same kind of housing to all inhabitants: there were no mansions or palaces. Hunting and gathering social forms – that is, considerable equality – were preserved, and there was no formal government (and writing, that crucial bureaucratic tool, had not been introduced). In other cases, some cities did at first introduce inequality only to reverse course and tear down the fancy buildings in favor of standardized housing. This occurred for example in Central America. Periodic meetings brought large numbers of people together to make decisions. In some cases, as in the Pacific Northwest, while certain groups did favor inequality, including slave holding, others explicitly held out, finding these new social forms repugnant. In some cases, as in North America, the relatively egalitarian social forms persisted until they were displaced by force by European arrivals. Graeber and Wengrow argue that their nuanced picture not only should revise conventional historical accounts of inequality, but also open windows to conceive of more radical social and political change in contemporary life.

Most agricultural societies But major inequality did develop, in almost all agricultural societies. Graeber and Wengrow argue that the origin may have rested in initial inequalities within families. Agriculture permitted and required higher birth rates, which in turn prompted growing divisions between men and women. Over time, these divisions began to affect larger political relationships, encouraging more formal inequality among men as well as between the genders. Property based on land and surplus was also open to possible seizure by unusually strong or greedy men, another potential source of inequality. More complex agricultural economies, often built around irrigation, required more careful coordination and property rights, which ultimately encouraged the emergence of governments (and writing), and new distinctions between those in government and religious posts and the rest of society (and between that minority that could afford to learn how to read and write and the rest of society). Governments also developed more formal military forces, which though small could be used to enforce inequality within a society and also conquer other peoples, sometimes forced into slavery. Finally, while some cities may have persisted in collaboration with the countryside and without formal government apparatus, many cities more clearly differentiated urban from rural populations, working to subordinate the latter in service to the city centers.

Early civilizations: Mesopotamia Certainly by around 4000 BCE the first civilization center, in Sumeria in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, demonstrated pronounced social inequality, with many rural farmers held as slaves by the city-state governments. Early written law codes, ultimately including the famous Hammurabic Code of c.1700 BCE (in Babylonia), went to great lengths to defend differential property holdings and even differential punishments for crimes depending on social status. Thus an offense to a nobleman was punished far more harshly than the same offense to a “villein”, or ordinary subject, while an offense to a slave received even less sanction. And all this on top of clear differentiation between men and women. Some studies of Sumeria also differentiate priests as yet a fourth, and obviously superior, group, along with the nobles (warriors and government officials), common people (farmers, artisans, merchants) and slaves.

Egypt Ancient Egypt developed a basically similar pattern, but long without the substantial slave component. Three main social classes predominated: the royal family and wealthy landowners, government officials and priests; a middle class of merchants, manufacturers and artisans (predominantly urban), and the mass of farmers. Slaves, mainly prisoners of war, were less numerous, and had some rights including opportunities for marriage. Some fluidity existed, particularly between lower and middle: a good marriage or hard work could push a man and his family into a higher group.

Basic pattern From the early civilizations onward, most agricultural societies broadly shared a number of social-structural features. A powerful class on top, often hereditary, depended on disproportionate landed wealth plus access to political and religious authority. A major historical study argues that from this point to the present, very few societies have managed to dislodge this top group (though its personnel might change): only major wars or a few revolutions could seriously make a dent. Beneath the upper class,

successful merchants came next in wealth, and sometime gained access to political power; but their social status might vary depending on the regional culture. With the towns, solid merchants and guild artisans held a special place, differentiated as well from the majority rural population as well as from an urban lower class of the unskilled (and prostitutes). Many merchant and artisanal guilds worked hard to limit inequality within their own ranks. Rural populations, aside from being partially separate from the cities and, on average, far less likely to be literate, would usually display some gradations in property ownership; and a variety of labor systems developed, from free farmers to serfs to slaves, with obvious implications for position in social structures. Finally, while no agricultural society eagerly promoted social mobility, patterns here varied as well from one regional culture to another. In other words, after an often fascinating gestation period, most agricultural societies developed a mixture between some standard basic features of social structure and a number of important options and variants.

Study questions:

1. Why and how did most hunting and gathering societies avoid much formal social differentiation?
2. How much do the recent claims about coexistence between agriculture and social equality alter the standard historical picture?
3. Why and how did social inequality ultimately develop?
4. What were the standard features of agricultural social structure, and what were the main variants?

Further reading

David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: a new history of humanity* (Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2021)

R. David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: violence and the history of inequality from the Stone Age to the twenty-first century* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

Chapter 2: Classical China

Classical societies Between 800 BCE (or in China's case a bit earlier) and the early centuries CE, major regional civilizations developed in China, South Asia and the Mediterranean. This was a formative period for these civilizations, and this included the elaboration of characteristic social structures and ideas about social differentiation. Regional civilizations in the classical period all worked within the framework of agricultural society, but they generated strikingly distinctive approaches to social differentiation. Further, these approaches would continue to influence social patterns at least until very recently, and arguably to some extent even today.

China's social signature Several features stand out in the social structure developed in China during the classical period. Government involvement was one: as in other areas, China's government sought an active role in determining and regulating social distinctions – including specifying special dress in some cases. On balance, the Chinese approach also downplayed heredity. Inherited wealth and position played a huge role in populating the upper class, but there was always room for some newcomers, and this space tended to expand with time. Chinese cultural values also attributed unusual significance to the peasantry, often ranked officially as the second most important class – though whether this valuation did peasants much good can be open to question. The flip side of this valuation was the low prestige officially attributed to merchants – even though merchants could gain great wealth and influence. This ranking may have affected official policy at some points, and it definitely encouraged some merchants to seek entry to the upper scholar gentry class for themselves or their sons rather than remain in merchant ranks – an impulse visible in some other societies but particularly vigorous in China.

The main classes Accounts of China in the classical period sometimes emphasize three major social groups – aristocracy and government officials at top (though under the emperor and his family – the only clearly hereditary position); peasants; then the major urban groups. From the Zhou dynasty onward, government rankings listed four: upper class; peasants; artisans; and merchants – the latter sometimes required to wear white clothing, not an auspicious color in the Chinese cultural schema. Informally a fifth

group also existed: the “mean” people, sometimes marked by wearing a green sash, including prostitutes and entertainers. China had a small slave class, no more than 1% of the total population, mainly devoted to domestic service but sometimes involved in agricultural labor. (Slavery oscillated in Chinese history, expanding under the Mongols; but several dynasties tried to abolish internal slave trading.) Women were assumed to be defined by the social position of their fathers and then husbands.

Confucianism Confucius’ social philosophy, developed from the 6th century BCE onward and gaining official support particularly under the Han dynasty and its later successors, paid great attention to social hierarchy. Primary focus rested on the two main groups. The upper class was seen as the source of wise governance, its privileges balanced by responsibility to the general welfare. Lower classes, and particularly the peasantry, had a dignity of their own in fulfilling the production needs of society, while according proper deference to their superiors. The money-making impulses of merchants contributed to their low prestige in the Confucian scheme of things. And Confucian values discouraged excessive displays of wealth – leading on occasion to sumptuary laws that punished imprudent businessmen from showing off, sometimes under pain of death. The Confucian system was an ideal, but it sometimes touched base with reality. During periods of dynastic decline, however, aristocratic landlords frequently seized territorial power and increased exactions on the peasantry – usually leading, ultimately, to the advent of a new dynasty and greater protections for the peasantry. Confucian social values included elaborate manners based on hierarchical position, with a series of etiquette books laying out the rules.

Scholar gentry China’s definition of the upper class, though acknowledging the importance of the landed aristocracy, gave pride of place to the scholar-gentry class, defined in terms of holding bureaucratic positions either in the central court or in representing the imperial government in the provinces. Education, not inherited position, was in principle the source for this class. Under the Han dynasty the vast majority of government slots were given to sons or other relatives. However, the Han did sponsor extensive training centers for bureaucrats, supplemented by private academies, and began to introduce an examination system as the basis for some recruitment. Talented peasant sons, often sponsored by a generous local official or landlord to gain access to education, might occasionally win through in this system. This created a constructive tension between the general Confucian assumption that most people should emphasize the obligations essential for their social station and the opportunity for limited aspirations to mobility.

Changes over time The broad outlines of the classical social structure would last into the 20th century, marked by the ups and downs of various dynasties with intermittent periods of invasion or civil war. During the Mongol period the invaders mixed scorn for Chinese hierarchy with a willingness to work with it in the management of the empire. Over time, two main changes occurred. First, from the Tang dynasty onward, the educational and examination system steadily expanded, ultimately embracing tens of thousands of candidates every year – far more than could find bureaucratic posts (though by the time of the Song dynasty 1.3% of the population belonged to the scholar gentry). Unsuccessful aspirants might nevertheless gain local jobs or serve as tutors. Mobility aspirations, though still restrained, tended to expand; so, on occasion, did efforts to cheat the system, for example by hiring substitutes to take the examination or simply trying to guess what the test questions would be in a system that was highly stylized. The second change reflected the growth of Chinese manufacturing and trade, spurring expansion of urban social classes from the Tang dynasty through the 18th century, even as the vast majority of the population remained rural (urbanites were about 12% of the total under the Song dynasty). Merchants increased in numbers and wealth. Some women gained new opportunities through service as courtesans and urban entertainers – and some parents tried to groom their daughters for this kind of success. However, several later dynasties, including the Ming, worked to make most categories of commoners hereditary, particularly for soldiers, craftsmen, and peasants.

Kinship groups Official Chinese social structure was always complemented by the importance of elaborate kinship ties among members of extended families. Children were carefully taught the names and prestige status of various relatives. Indeed, the combined importance of kinship and hierarchy defined proper Chinese manners, with little attention paid to strangers unless they had identifiable social prestige.

Study questions

1. What were the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese upper class?
2. In what sense was the Chinese government unusually important in shaping social structure?
3. What were the major tensions in Chinese social structure, and how did these increase over time?

Further reading

Ch'u T'ung-tsu, *Han Social Structure* (University of Washington Press, 1972)

Susan Naquim and Evelyn Rawski, eds., *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1989)

Li Yi, *The Structure and Evolution of Chinese Social Stratification* (University Press of America, 2005)

Chapter 3: India and the Caste System

The problem of castes The word caste derives from a Portuguese term introduced in the 16th century to describe the social structure they thought they saw in India. (Spaniards also applied the term to kinship groups they found in the Americas.) The word denotes a rigid, endogamous social group with hereditary transmission and membership, defining both permitted occupations and range of social interactions. The challenge, in dealing with the history of social structure in premodern India, is that the term is often used in an unduly simplistic fashion, making the Indian social system seem more inflexible than it actually was. Many impressions of the caste system were based on observations by Muslims and then Europeans, who did not understand the complexity of actual structures. At the same time, there is no question that, from the classical period onward, Indian society was defined in part by inherited categories, that differed from systems of inequality in other classical societies. There is also no question that religion, and particularly the religion that ultimately developed into Hinduism, played an unusually great role in shaping and legitimizing Indian social stratification. Interestingly, while Indian governments were affected by the caste system, particularly in terms of bureaucratic recruitment, they had little to do with its initial development – in contrast to the situation in China.

Varnas Early religious epics into the 4th century BCE suggest a society divided into four groups, or *varnas*, with the Brahmans, or priests, as the top group. Most current interpretations stress that the schema was probably designed to elevate the priests over other social groups, notably the warriors, who were put in second place. (The high place of priests in traditional Indian social structure is obviously a distinctive feature, quite apart from the caste system, compared to classical China or the Mediterranean where military and government service, as well as land ownership, featured more strongly.) But, again according to most recent scholarship, the varnas at this point were not rigid castes, with a lowest group held out as morally and ritually impure. However, many epics do paint the Brahmans as dedicated to truth, austerity and pure conduct, whereas groups such as the warriors were more appropriate for people prone to anger and capable of physical courage. (The second caste, *Kshatriya,* would also be the source of government officials.) Peasants and artisans were seen as a third group (initially also including merchants), while the last group, the Shudras, were dedicated to service. None of this necessarily describes actual social entities, which were based more on kinship ties, but rather offered a theoretical picture of social organization. The main point is that this literary and religious seedbed of what is now called the caste system suggests a great deal of tentativeness and flexibility. But it is widely agreed that this very general, fourfold division of society continued to describe much Indian social thought and practice from that point onward.

The "untouchables" The idea of a low group, the Shudras, similarly emerged gradually. It may have applied particularly to aboriginal peoples taken over during the in-migration of IndoEuropeans. It may also have applied to groups originally held as slaves. Ultimately --- though the timing is not clear – the lowest castes were associated with morally tainted (though useful) occupations such as leather work and handling dead bodies, and were regarded as impure, barred from social contact with higher groups (though they were for the most part not literally slaves, in the sense of being owned by others). Complicating all this still further is that fact that the nascent caste system varied greatly from one region of India to another, and among the different major religious (including Jainism, for example, as well as Hinduism), and many Indians were not clearly described by a caste system at all, with sons for example frequently choosing occupations that differed from those of their fathers.

Mauryan and Gupta empires By the time of the Mauryan empire (321-185 BCE), what is now called the caste system was apparently becoming more rigid, though particularly in the northern part of the subcontinent. It especially described acceptable marriage boundaries, with choices rigidly confined to one's own caste; and caste membership increasingly became based on inheritance – hence the notion that while one could fall out of a caste by inappropriate behavior, one could not rise into a higher one. Hindu belief began to solidify this notion by arguing that appropriate performance of caste duties was a matter of religious as well as social obligation, that would be rewarded by advancement in the next life, through reincarnation, either into a higher caste or ultimately into a higher spiritual plane altogether. Caste and religion in this sense became increasingly intertwined – at least in some Hindu regions. Further, primary loyalties tended to prioritize social groups, including castes, over devotion to the state; in many region, villages, organized by caste, defined and regulated caste functions. Women at this point were seen in terms of inherited caste, though inferior to men within each group. The later Gupta empire saw the beginnings of a proliferation of castes, building out from the original four. In some regions, for example, a specific merchant caste was identified (with fairly high status).

Jati *Jati* constituted groups within caste, probably originally based on kinship, clustered around specific occupations. Jati may have originated early on, though references in the early epics were sparse; but their importance and complexity undoubtedly increased over time. Smaller than castes, jati provided considerable flexibility; their number and definition changed according to economic need. In the cities, jati were often associated the artisanal trades. Most marriages occurred, not only within the caste but within the jati; however, because definitions of jati evolved, some social mobility was possible. Further, even castes themselves did not described fixed economic positions: members of the Brahman caste, for example, might vary greatly in wealth, with impoverished families nevertheless clinging proudly to their high status. The caste system proved compatible with considerable flexibility, and many people undoubtedly concentrated more on their occupational group and individual opportunities than on the more abstract social categories.

Evolution After the classical period the caste and jati system tended to spread southward, to other parts of the subcontinent, though there was always great regional variation in the precise definitions and numbers of the social groups. The sheer number of both groups expanded. Neither Buddhist nor Muslim minorities fully accepted the caste system, though at the village level there was considerable overlap. There is no question that the Mughal empire, launched early in the 16th century under Muslim rulers, solidified the caste system in extending control over rural areas. Regional Mughal administrators were chosen from the higher castes (mainly the top two), and were responsible for control over the peasantry including taxation. At the same time, majority Hindu groups also emphasized caste loyalties to protect Hindu culture despite Muslim rule at the top. Then the British, particularly by the 19th and early 20th century, gave further impetus to the caste system. They identified the Brahmans as their main contact points, using members of this caste as subordinate administrators and providing opportunities for a more Western education that were not extended to other groups. They also codified lists of caste and jati in documents such as the "scheduled Castes" in the 1935 Government of India Act. Many current critics of British rule make much of this intensification, which unquestionably complicates interpretations of the caste system before Mughal and British rule. At the same time British courts did not fully accept the caste system, for example refusing to adjust punishments to caste position; the railway system that developed from the 1850s onward did not enforce caste distinctions. Further, gradual economic changes in the British period, including some factory development, further complicated the system.

Study questions

1. What is a caste? What are some of the key complexities in dealing with the history of India's caste system?
2. In what ways did the caste system allow some social mobility?
3. What was the relationship between the caste system and Hinduism?
4. How did the caste system change under the Mughals and the British?

Further reading

Tim Dyson, *A Population History of India, from the first modern people to the present day* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: the caste system and its implications* (revised ed., University of Chicago Press, 1963

Chapter 4: Greece and Rome

Overview Classical Greece and Rome both emphasized the importance of the landed aristocracy, in a pattern not totally dissimilar to that of classical China though with less emphasis on the importance of bureaucratic position and service. As in China as well, the social structure allowed some possibilities for mobility – there was no effort to implement even a flexible caste structure – though there was no equivalent to China's formal upper-class education and examination system. Merchants ranked somewhat higher on the social prestige scale than in China, though there was considerable reliance on foreigners. On the other hand the Mediterranean was marked by much more extensive slavery than was the case in the other two classical societies.

Aristocracy The term aristocracy comes from a Greek word meaning "rule of the best", and many classical political philosophers, including Aristotle, urged the importance of having a superior class of people with the wisdom and resources to rule well. Many Greek city states, and also republican Rome with its Senate, emphasized governance by a largely hereditary aristocracy (though in the later republic some wealthy nonaristocrats also were selected for the Senate). However, the basic position of the aristocracy in the Mediterranean societies rested on extensive agricultural estates. Many Greek city states, and then republican Rome, experienced a period of intense struggle between the aristocracy and a substantial free peasantry, as the former expanded their estates often wTh eith a focus on more commercial agricultural products such as grapes and olives that required substantial investment. In both cases the aristocracy essentially won out, reducing the range of independent farming. During the Roman Empire the role of the aristocracy persisted, even as the powers of the Senate were steadily reduced; elements of the aristocracy increasingly indulged in elaborate consumer pleasures, at the expense of some of the moral qualities that the class had previously emphasized. Here was one of a number of historical cases where a privileged aristocracy rose on the basis of military leadership as well as land ownership, evolving toward greater emphasis on political role and then distinctive lifestyle.

Patricians and plebeians in Rome In Rome (both republic and empire), the hereditary aristocracy were called patricians. Many patricians had extensive clientage relationships with ordinary people (plebeians), who provided a number of services in return for support: this mutual relationship was one of the unifying features in Roman society. Many plebeian families managed to acquire considerable wealth, often through trade, while some patricians fell into poverty. However, the hereditary distinction between the two groups long persisted, at one point even involving prohibitions on intermarriage. Only by the time of the later republic did the difference between the two groups (at the upper end of the wealth scale) decline somewhat.

Slavery The prominence of slavery in Greece and Rome was a particularly distinctive feature of the social structure. Many slaves were seized as prisoners of war (particularly during Rome's expansion, when many Greeks among others were taken) – including many women and children. (In the Greek city state of Sparta, conquered locals were held as *helots*, who were at least near-slaves and constituted the majority of the agricultural labor force.) The conquests of the later Roman republic and empire brought many slaves from northern Europe and North Africa. The status was hereditary, and Roman law devoted great attention to specifying the status of slaves as property and the lack of significant legal rights (plus the authority of owners to inflict punishments). Slaves were bought and sold in markets in Rome and elsewhere. More slaves worked in agriculture than in any other sectors, particularly as the aristocratic estates expanded. Slaves who were violent or disobedient or were otherwise regarded as dangerous were sent to work in the mines, where conditions were exceptionally bleak. Athenian silver mining, for example, was based on slave labor. However, slaves might provide a variety of other functions. Educated slaves, including many Greeks, often served as tutors. Others ran shops or performed additional forms of service. A few slaves were able to advance their education, sometimes with encouragement by their owners: Epitectus, for example, born a slave in Greece around 50 CE, became a prominent Stoic philosopher. The variety of slave occupations (as well as the variety of ethnic groups serving as slaves)

complicates any generalizations. In at least a few cases, impoverished Romans sought to sell their children as slaves, believing that they would gain more assured support in that condition. Overall, by the time of the early Roman empire, up to a third of the population was held as slaves, though percentages are estimates at best. Though a few slave revolts marked Roman history, they were in fact rare. Reliance on slaves helps explain the aggressive foreign policy of many Greek city states and also Rome, eager to seize additional prisoners and reliant on this labor force to expand production. By the same token, use of slaves may help explain the relative lack of technological innovation in manufacturing and agriculture, compared for example to classical China.

Freed slaves For a variety of reasons, including gratitude for service, a number of owners freed slaves (sometimes at death). Further, thanks to the variety of occupations available for some slaves, it was also not uncommon to purchase freedom. The taint of former slavery persisted, however, at least for several generations, though over time a few descendants of slaves managed considerable economic and social success.

Legacies Classical Mediterranean social structure largely persisted in the Byzantine Empire, with distinctions between the “privileged” (*honestiores)* and the humble, along with considerable slavery, though (as in Rome) there was a significant intermediate business class as well. A variety of family relationships and intermarriage helped sustain the privileges of the upper class, often including some links to the imperial family. In the western Mediterranean, however, the collapse of the Roman empire largely eliminated the characteristic social structure. Outright slavery declined (though it persisted more strongly in medieval Western Europe than is sometimes realized), and the aristocracy was reconstituted. Here, the classical heritage rested more strongly in the philosophical support for aristocracy as the rule of the best, and in the legal traditions involved with slavery, some of which would be revived later on with the rise of Atlantic slavery.

Study questions

1. What were the most distinctive features of classical Mediterranean social structure?
2. What forms of social mobility were available for a few?
3. What were the functions and impacts of slavery?

Further reading

Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (expanded ed., B.D. Shaw ed., Markus Wiener, 1988)

David Small, *Ancient Greece: social structure and evolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2019)

Henry Boren, *Roman Society* (Cengage Learning, 1991)

Chapter 5: The Islamic Middle East

Impact of religion The period of world history after the fall of the great classical empires was marked by the increasing role of missionaries religions, including the advent of Islam around 600 CE. The religious impact on social structure, however, was hardly straightforward. In some cases, the opportunity to focus on spiritual goals and prepare for an afterlife may have distracted attention from social issues, including social inequality. Hinduism of course had actively intertwined with the caste system since the classical period. While Buddhism opposed caste, and argued for the fundamental spiritual equality of all humans, its role in social structure was otherwise fairly limited. Buddhist monks and nuns maintained equality in their own ranks, but they coexixted with more conventional types of social inequality amid the bulk of the population. Christianity, another source of belief in spiritual equality, proved compatible with the legacy of Roman social structure in the Byzantine Empire, and adjusted to new forms of social hierarchy in Western Europe as well. Some similar compromises marked Islam, though its influence on social structure in the Middle East, in the age of the caliphates and beyond, was arguably somewhat more distinctive. Revealing, while Islamic religious service segregated men and women in ways not characteristic of Christianity, they more commonly mixed people of varying levels of wealth and status. The strong Muslim obligation of charity on the one hand acknowledged economic inequality, but on the other pressed the wealthy to pay some attention to the poor.

The Caliphates: legal structure From the formation of the caliphates onward, Islamic society in the Middle East and North Africa was officially divided in terms of religious groupings. This would remain true in many ways later on, through the Ottoman period and into the early 20th century. The ruler and his family, or more precisely the men in his family, stood atop the hierarchy, wielding considerable power. Beneath them were what might broadly be called an upper middle class of Muslim professionals (doctors, teachers) and businesspeople. These commanded great respect for their wealth and service to society. Many families invested considerably in education for talented sons, into secondary levels and beyond, as a key component of social position. Next in rank were the *dhimmis*, people of protected faiths like Christians and Jews; these groups had considerable autonomy so long as they respected the primacy of Islamic groups and paid their taxes regularly. At several points, both under the caliphates and later in the Ottoman Empire, individual Christians and Jews could amass considerable wealth and power, even serving in the bureaucracy. At the bottom of the pyramid came slaves.

Related hierarchies The Islamic Middle East did not develop a formal aristocracy in the fashion of China or Western Europe. Hierarchy in this sense was constrained by the importance of the ruler and his family, and by the principle of spiritual equality of all believers. However, a variety of men definitely held a superior position not only because of wealth (including landed property) but because of political or religious roles and, in some cases, heredity. Many men thus held the title of sheik. In some cases this was an honorific reflecting religious leadership or scholarly achievement; but it also denoted village or tribal leaders, whose position was often hereditary. Caliphs also characteristically appointed viceroys and regional subordinates who wielded considerable power, though these positions were not usually hereditary. Islamic social structure was also marked by the importance of successful urban classes, including merchants; more than most religions, Islam gave merchants considerable prestige so long as they fulfilled religious obligations including charity. Male peasants who were Muslim (particularly if born Muslim) had legal rights, and over time these extended to non-Arabs; but their position in the social hierarchy was otherwise inferior.

Gender Gender was a more crucial divide in Islamic society than in the other characteristically patriarchal societies of the classical and postclassical periods. Islam offered a number of protections for women in principle, including the right to own property and claim a share in inheritance (though with portions inferior to those of men). They also had rights to divorce, though again with more constraints than applied to men. In principle, their consent was required for marriage; and even when marriages were arranged in childhood, some women were able to void the contract when they reached adulthood. In general, however, the legal inferiority of women was strongly emphasized, including limits on their ability to testify in courts. In some cases, for example, the right to divorce was further qualified by a requirement that a husband's consent must be acquired first.

Slavery Slavery was an important feature of Islamic society, though with many complications. Early on, Arab conquests produced many slaves captured in war, and these were often put to work on agricultural estates. (Slavery had already been a feature of Arab societies before Islam.) However, massive slave rebellions responded to harsh treatment, most notably the Zanj rebellion of 869-883 CE, and this convinced Arab leaders that amassing large agglomerations of male slaves was a risky proposition. Thereafter, male slaves were primarily used for domestic duties or service to the state—including military service, where large numbers of slaves were frequently involved. (And where slaves periodically seized or acquired considerable power, as with the Mamluk slave soldiers under the Abbasids or, later, the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire.) Ultimately, about 2/3 of all slaves were female, and used for sexual purposes ("slaves for pleasure"), up to service in the royal harems. Slave women included military captives, but an extensive slave trade also developed, particularly with Africa – with upwards of 11-15 million people, disproportionately female, imported from the 7th to the 19th centuries. Islam featured a somewhat ambivalent response to slavery, In principle it was inappropriate for a Muslim to hold other Muslims as slaves – and this provided considerable motivation for slaves to convert. A compromise often involved pledges to make sure Islamic slave families were not disrupted by sales and were otherwise humanely treated. At the same time many Muslim owners freed slaves as a matter of religious obligation – which is one reason that the extensive slave trade remained essential, since inherited servitude might not suffice to generate the necessary slave population. Finally, while Islamic slavery was rarely explicitly racial – many slaves and slave women were imported from Europe and Central Asia, for example – the African component was frequently unusually important.

Study questions

1. How did Islam influence the social structure of the Middle East and North Africa?
2. Why and how was slavery a complex social category in the region?
3. How did Middle Eastern social hierarchy reflect the importance of the cities and urban activities?

Further reading

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Gordon Murray, *Slavery in the Islamic World* (New Amsterdam Press, 1987)]

Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: the other Black diaspora* (Farrer Strauss and Giroux, 2001)

Chapter 6: Western Europe in Feudalism and Beyond

Impact of Christianity The Christianization of Western Europe was one of the central developments in the region from the later Roman Empire onward. With few exceptions, it did not have a major impact on social structure. The belief in the spiritual equality of all was not translated into social action, though it may have contributed to periodic popular protest against inequality: for example, in the social unrest of the later 14th century, spurred by the impact of bubonic plagus, some peasants protested against the privileges of aristocrats with the argument that in God's original creation there were no social superiors. Church officials were regarded as a distinct social group (like the aristocracy), but in fact they often mirrored the larger social structure: many top leaders in the Church's own hierarchy were drawn from the aristocracy (a favorite recourse for younger sons who could not inherit the family estate), though in principle religious orders of monks and nuns established internal equality around vows of poverty. Christianity may have had its biggest effect in reducing levels of slavery (passed on from the Roman Empire, though also a tradition in some Germanic tribes). Slave populations undoubtedly declined (replaced by serfdom), though Christian merchants (as in Venice) became active in trading slaves (including Europeans) to other societies – a foretaste of the heavy involvement of Europeans in the Atlantic slave trade from the 16th century onward. To be sure, considerable slavery persisted within Europe, particularly through the use of nonChristians seized in border wars in east-central Europe; some monasteries even utilized slaves. Still, slavery became a less prominent feature of the overall social structure than was true in the Middle East or the Byzantine Empire.

Aristocracy and feudalism Landed aristocrats constituted the top tier of the social hierarchy. They formed initially, after the fall of the Roman empire, on the basis of military prowess, but this led – either directly or through royal grants – to control over large estates. Military capacity continued to be crucial, which meant an emphasis on prowess but also the resources to afford horse and some kind of armor, in a period when cavalry constituted a key component of military action. Aristocratic position became hereditary, often with transmission exclusively to eldest son. The class was further bound together with the hierarchical ties associated with feudalism: in return for protection, lesser lords, or vassals, pledged loyalty and military service to a greater lord (who might in turn be vassal to another superior; the crisscrossing of feudal ties could be quite complex). Later in the postclassical period, by the 11th and 12th centuries, monarchs became somewhat more important in countries like France and England, but feudal linkages and aristocratic power persisted, often including maintenance of independent military force. Size of the aristocracy is difficult to calculate; It was larger in regions with frequent military action—like Spain during the Christian "reconquest", where it could range up to 10% of the total population. In more settled areas, like France and England, the class constituted about 1-2% of the total. Despite the importance of heredity, entry to the aristocracy was not entirely closed to newcomers, including men who distinguished themselves in battle and gained knighthood on that basis.

Peasants and the manorial system Throughout most of Western Europe, rural peasants formed the bulk of the population – up to 90% -- and most of these, in turn, were serfs. Some free peasants operated their own land, and of course some slavery persisted. However, in the chaotic conditions of postclassical Europe, serfdom provided the bulk of rural labor, a system in between slave and free. (Serfdom formed

part of the manorial system, which coexisted with feudalism but was in fact separate, rooted more in economic hierarchy in contrast to the political/military hierarchy within feudalism.) Under manorialism, serfs were obligated to pay rent (either in kind or in money) for use of their land, and also were required to do labor service on land the manorial lord controlled outright. On the other hand, in principle serfs could not be evicted so long as they fulfilled their obligations; the land they worked directly essentially belonged both to them and to their noble landlord. In principle serfs were not free to leave the estate, though tradition held that if they escaped (usually to a city) and maintained freedom for a year and a day, their obligations ended.

Urban population As in many agricultural societies, urban dwellers fit uneasily into the social hierarchy. Even the wealthy were socially inferior to the aristocracy, and had tax obligations to the government from which aristocrats, as the legally privileged order, were usually exempt. However, European cities often gained considerable independence from aristocratic control, and some merchants acquired great wealth. Within cities, the wealthier merchants clearly sat atop the hierarchy; some were organized into powerful merchant guilds. Right below them were skilled artisans, who had their own guilds, with considerable economic and political authority within the city. (As in many urban settings, artisans had their own internal hierarchy: young apprentices at the bottom; then trained journeymen; on top artisan masters, who actually owned the shops though working alongside their journeymen and apprentices. The result was a mobility ladder within each craft.) Though many urban positions were largely inherited (artisan masters often passed their operation onto their sons, after the latter were appropriately trained), opportunities for mobility did exist, even for rural newcomers, and there were some rags to riches stories. On the other hand cities also included a number of propertyless workers, dependent on occasional wage labor and including beggars and prostitutes; some of these migrated seasonally between city and countryside.

Change over time From the 12th century onward, the European social system began to gain complexity. Cities grew, making the urban component more important in society overall. Opportunities for agricultural sales correspondingly increased, and the opportunity to earn money, along with other factors, loosened the manorial system in some regions – often in favor of paying some rent rather than maintaining a full set of manorial obligations. (Regional differences also opened, between areas like England, eastern German, south Spain and Italy dominated by large estates and tenancy or wage labor, and areas like France where peasants gained greater independence.) Gradually expanding central governments created small bureaucracies, recruited mainly from the urban business classes; some of these, in turn, might be ennobled, creating a “nobility of the robe” alongside the older “nobility of the sword” – with concomitant jockeying for prestige and power within the aristocracy. In response to stronger monarchies, aristocrats in many regions insisted on the formation of parliaments, to provide some check on royal power (particularly, taxation power). These feudal parliaments, which spread widely in Europe, both reflected and long confirmed the hierarchical social structure. They were normally based on separate and equal representation for three “estates” – clergy, aristocracy, and a third estate effectively dominated by wealthier urban business groups. (In some parts of central Europe, a fourth estate provided some representation to wealthier peasants.) Finally, aristocrats themselves I many regions took on a more elaborate lifestyle, often associated with royal courts. More generally, the basic social structure – a hereditary but not entirely closed aristocracy at top; a somewhat inferior but separate urban hierarchy; the peasant majority including some outright serfs; a lowest group of propertyless workers, both urban and rural – would persist into the later 18th century, when it would be more fully challenged by more dramatic economic changes and more revolutionary social ideas.

Study questions

1. What were the differences between feudal and manorial hierarchies?
2. How did urban populations fit into the overall social structure?
3. How did early parliaments both reflect and confirm the class structure?

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CHAPTER 7: Sub-Saharan Africa

Overview Generalizing about African social structure before the 20th century is challenging. The subcontinent is huge, and embraced a number of different social and economic systems. Hunting and gathering persisted in some places, such as the Kalahari desert, with the characteristic lack of formal social structure. Several agricultural areas in west and west-central Africa continued to be "stateless" societies, without a very formal hierarchy. Many port cities on the Indian Ocean coast had a large merchant class that mixed natives and Arabs, along with usually small regional governments that included some aristocracy. In West Africa the growth of trade, including trans-Saharan trade, from the 3rd century onward, created the growth of merchant and artisan classes (often largely hereditary), and increasing distinctions between urban and rural social structures.

Kinship Kinship ties helped organize African social structure. This was a common element in stratification in many agricultural societies, such as China and India, but it may have played an even greater role in Africa (in both patrilineal and matrilineal families). Many Western African merchants, for example, shared common kinship and came close to being a hereditary class. Many African regions sponsored extensive polygamy, particularly though not exclusively among the wealthy (including royal families, which in some cases surrounded monarchs with scores of wives). This was an obvious source of inherited kinship ties often linked both to occupation and to status. Children were schooled in kinship relationship, carefully learning the respect due to various collateral relatives but also learning how relationships would provide mutually beneficial social and economic service.

Aristocracies A number of African kingdoms developed formal aristocracies. In some parts of southeastern Africa migrating Bantu peoples by the 16th century, gaining access to land and often exercising considerable force, formed a durable aristocracy over more local ethnic groups, that would last into the 20th century. In some cases hereditary aristocracies formed from groups of priests. In the empire of Mali, by the 13th and 14th centuries, aristocrats may have originated as particularly successful merchants, then taking a rank right below that of the royal family, though successful warriors were also involved (sometimes called the "nobility of the quiver"). Emperors of Mali recognized particular kin groups in terms of hereditary occupation and status, in what for a time bore some resemblance to a caste system. As in other societies, West African aristocracies enjoyed diets and living standards far different from, and superior to, those of ordinary people.

Slavery Slavery was pervasive in many parts of Africa, quite apart from the important slave trading that developed for the Middle East and, later, for the Atlantic trade. However, the system involved a number of special features. Many different forms were present. Prisoners of war constituted a standard group, and were probably the worst treated. Other slaves were seized as debt payments. Impoverished parents sometimes sold children into slavery. Criminals were also frequently enslaved. Considerable slavery centered on prostitution. Slaves were also used as domestics and for service in royal courts. Slaves were also used on agricultural plantations, particularly in East Africa and some Western regions. This was a diverse system. Upper classes in the empire of Mali competed with each other in terms of the numbers of slaves they held; when the North African Ibn Batuta visited in the 14th century he was given a slave boy as a gift. Considerable slavery was inherited and indeed formed part of larger kinship systems; on the other hand slave kinship groups sometimes interwined with those of the master, allowing some individual slaves to acquire great social importance. (This particularly contrasted with the inferior position of captured or socially-outcast slaves.) In some places slaves were freely bought and sold, but in others, particularly where kinship links were involved, domestic slaves could only be sold in rare circumstances. Some slaves could even own land and pass it on to their children. As in the Middle East, some slaves were also used in the military. This was, in sum, a complex and highly varied system. (In a few cases, slaves were also used in religious sacrifice.) However, slavery was rare in the stateless societies and several West African kingdoms banned slavery outright. Estimating slave numbers if difficult, particularly because of the variety of systems involved, but in 19th century Ethiopia up to a quarter of the population was regarded as slave (mainly domestics and sex workers). Finally, economic slavery undoubtedly increased in many parts of Africa in the 19th century, following the end of the Atlantic trade, as plantation owners sought cheap labor to produce vegetable oil and other products for export. This continued until

the burst of European imperialism brought efforts to end internal slave trading and slavery itself – though some European colonies, like the Belgian Congo, introduced systems of forced labor for mining that were essentially a form of slavery.

New urban centers and the Atlantic slave trade Prior to the pressure of European traders, coastal areas in West Africa were far less populous than those of the rural interior. However, the rise of slave ports promoted new African activity, based on but not confined to the transmission of slaves. Various urban social structures developed, in some cases centered on enforcing the authority and privilege of African royal families. In other case, however, clear new urban elites arose among the African population. As usual, large extended families provided much of the composition of this new social structure. In some cases, as in Angola, small urban elites as well as regional aristocrats participated in church-run schools, enhancing their power by allowing them to serve as intermediaries with the Europeans.

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CHAPTER 8: The Americas

General A variety of social situation prevailed in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. Many areas remained in hunting and gathering economies, or mixed economies involving some agriculture but very limited social hierarchies. Evidence from the Pacific Northwest figures prominently in recent studies of relatively advanced societies that preserved substantial social equality (and avoided extensive formal government). However, key civilizations emerged both in Central America and in the Andes, and though the two regions were quite separate, they both developed clearly hierarchical social structures.

Evidence Detailed evidence of the nature of social hierarchy is limited thanks to the destruction of most written records by European conquerors. However, imaginative work for example on the Mayan people in Central America uncovers clear data on pronounced social hierarchy. A minority – probably about 10% -- of the population thus lived in distinctively opulent and highly decorated housing. Their skeletons are better preserved in death, thanks in part to better nutrition, in part to more elaborate burial procedures. They had more cavities in their teeth, somewhat ironically reflecting diets richer in various carbohydrates. The Mayan upper classes also deployed some system of wooden clamps on the heads of their infants, creating elongated skulls that differentiated them visibly from the bulk of the common people.

Basic Mayan structures Beneath the ruler, the top layer of Mayan society was composed of priests and nobles, both wealthy and privileged; this stratum was ranked into several subgroups. Nobles provided government administrators and also led military forces. The two groups were the only literate segments of society. Merchants and artisans came next, followed by the peasantry, the largest group (some of whom were serfs). Slaves included criminals and military captive, debtors, children sold into slavery by impoverished parents, and some hereditary slaves. In some cases, slaves were sacrificed when their masters died (so they could continue service after death). Slaves did domestic work, agricultural labor, and helped build the monumental temples – as well as being the likeliest targets for ritual sacrifice. Social divisions were for the most part quite rigid, with the nobility a hereditary class.

Aztec society Patterns were similar to those of the Mayans earlier on. Technically a five-fold division prevailed, headed by the emperor (a position that was not hereditary, though a council chose new emperors from the family of the previous ruler). Priests, nobles and other military leaders formed the second tier (divided into four segments). Nobility was technically not hereditary, but based on government office; but most offices were filled from noble families. Most though not all priests were from the noble class. The broad cluster of commoners were clearly headed by merchants whose status was hereditary;

this group had many privileges, including opportunities to send children to the schools of the nobility. Artisans came next, and then other commoners (about 30% of the population), most of whom were farmers or fishers. The fourth group were peasants, technically free but inferior to commoners; some of these were laborers, with no land of their own. At the bottom were slaves, some of whom however could actually own property. Slavery was not hereditary, and some slaves bought freedom during their own lifetimes or were freed on a master's death. Overall, this was not a caste system, and limited mobility based on talent was possible – even into the priesthood. However, class lines were rigid and largely hereditary.

Inca society This society, expanding in the Andes in the centuries shortly before European arrival, was close to a caste system, with detailed rules barring social interaction among different groups depending on position in the hierarchy. Mobility was difficult, though some young women managed to marry older men of a higher caste, based on looks and ability to work. Several gradations of nobility depended heavily on relationships to or positions in the royal family (with emperor clearly on top). The nobility in general were excused from taxation. And they were easily distinguished (in ways intriguingly similar to those of the Mayans): boards were attached to the heads of young children in the noble class, creating a visibly pointed skull – the symbol of nobility, up to and including the emperor himself. Leading nobles were all ethnic Incas, but as the empire expanded it needed more officials, so some non-Incas became lower-level aristocrats (regarded as Incas by adoption). Beneath them was a familiar pyramid of merchants and artisans, and then the agricultural population, some of them slaves though Inca society did not include a rigid category for slaves.

Drawbacks Features of the social structure contributed to problems in the later stages of empire, right before the arrival of the Spanish and contributing to their success. Particularly with the Aztecs, subject peoples resented the taking of slaves for use in religious sacrifice, weakening support for the empire when it came under attack.

Study questions

1. Were the pre-Columbian American civilizations unusually hierarchical?
2. What was the social position of the major urban groups?
3. How did ethnicity relate to social class for the Incas and Aztecs?

Further reading

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Chapter 9 : Russian Society before Communism

Background Before the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, what is sometimes called Russia, or Kievan Rus', was centered mainly in what is now Ukraine and Belarus, though there were also Slavic populations to the east. This was a fairly loosely organized society, with a significant merchant class in cities like Kyiv and Novgorod. Aristocrats, or boyars, held considerable regional power, but there was also a fairly independent peasantry. This situation began to change under the Mongol invasion. Many peasants sought the protection of landlords against possible Mongol depredations, though in fact the Mongols ruled with a fairly light hand, mainly insisting on tribute payments. The situation gave additional economic as well as political power to the landlords, launching a system of serfdom that would play a huge role in Russian society up to Emancipation in 1861, and indeed beyond. From this point onward Russian social structure bore many similarities to some other parts of east-central Europe such as Poland and Hungary.

Aristocracy While earlier Russian nobles depended heavily on their military role, by the 17th century the class relied increasingly on ownership of substantial landed estates, and in turn most large landowners were nobles. The Tsar granted many estates in return for government service, including military service. Peter the Great confirmed the status and titles of the nobility, while abolishing the older boyar reference.

By 1914 the nobility constituted about 1.1% of the total population (just short of 2 million people). (In other east European countries such as Poland the class was larger.) The ranks of the nobles themselves divided between great magnates, unusually wealthy and sometimes quite cosmopolitan, and more conservative, smaller estate owners who sometimes resented the pretentions of their richer colleagues. The class as a whole had something of a love-hate relationship with the tsarist state. Periodic rebellions against tsarist power surfaced in the early modern centuries and beyond; even the abortive 1825 Decembrist revolt was heavily aristocratic. At the same time the nobility provided most of the upper levels of the bureaucracy and military, all the way to the revolution of 1917. Mutual dependence of tsar and aristocracy was a fundamental feature of Russian society. Partly because of this, the aristocracy was somewhat fluid. Many people – including the father of Vladimir Lenin – were advanced into the aristocracy on the basis of state service. Finally, from Peter the Great onward, many aristocrats, particularly the wealthy, participated actively in cultural Westernization, often speaking French, enjoying extensive "grand tours" to the West in their youth, sometimes intermarrying with their counterparts elsewhere. This enhanced the distance between this class and the bulk of the Russian population – even though a few Westernized aristocrats urged social reforms

Serfdom The vast majority of this largely rural population were held as serfs, either on landlord estates or on state property. They were subject to the usual burdens of serfdom: they had their own land to work, but had to pay rent in money or more commonly in kind, and also had to provide labor service on the landlord's holdings (often other fees were charged, for example for use of the lord's grain mill). Many serfs participated in an active village life, which was the framework for a variety of popular religious festivals and also for dispute resolution (sometimes eased by alcohol). On the other hand, further by the state, landlord power and exactions steadily increased. Under Peter the Great, some landlords were allowed to sell whole villages, and their serfs, for example for use in metallurgy or mining. Landlord judicial powers expanded, including by the 18th century the right to impose capital punishment. Some historians have argued that this was the harshest social system ever imposed on one's own people (as opposed to foreign slaves). Russia relied heavily on serfdom both for tis economy, with serf estates producing the increasing supply of grain for export, and for political administration in a vast empire where local government officials were few and far between. Harsh conditions, and sometimes land shortages, provoked recurrent peasant risings, including the great Pugachev revolt of 1773-4, which was brutally repressed by the government, Various risings continued through the 19th century (even after serfdom was formally abolished.

Other social classes Into the 19th century, urban residents constituted little more than 5% of the total population. A good bit of Russia's foreign trade was conducted by British, French and German companies, some of which had permanent enclaves in key Russian cities. Russian merchants existed, and traded with Central Asia as well as locally, but their numbers and status were limited given the focus on the aristocracy – a key feature, and arguably a limitation, of Peter the Great's reforms. In contrast to the West or the Middle East, no large artisanal groups arose in the cities, though there were some craftsmen, and a guild structure did not develop. Slavery also persisted in Russian society (quite apart that Russian territories were often raided for slaves, for use particularly in the Middle East). By the early modern period most slaves served as domestics for the wealthy, but in 1723 Peter the Great converted domestics into serfs, abolishing formal slavery.

Reforms and industrialization The great emancipation of the serfs, in 1860s, responded to the growing belief that Russia was falling behind the West and needed a more flexible labor force; concern about rural unrest and some liberal reformist motives also entered in. The reform however sought to preserve the aristocracy by requiring redemption payments from the former serfs, which created persistent unrest including rural revolts both in 1905 and 1917. Some wealthier independent peasants, or kulaks, did emerge, often resented by other peasants. A local middle class of merchants and professionals also gained ground, and won some local political power in administrations set up to compensate for the end of landlord rule. By the later 19th century expanded industrialization prompted further social change. Cities grew, and an urban working class developed rapidly. Artisan ranks also expanded, as in printing, which also played a role in new labor organizations. A number of Russians, including some religious dissidents, entered the ranks of industrialists, though about half of all Russian factory industry was foreign-owned. The result by 1917 was a complex and combustible mixture of older and newer social structural features.

Study questions

1. Why was serfdom so important and durable in Russian history?
2. What were the limitations on social change that resulted from the 19th-centu8ry reform period?
3. How was the history of the Russian middle classes different from that in the West?

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CHAPTER 10: The Modern Framework: Ideas and Economies

Overview Economic, ideological and political changes in various parts of the world began to shift social structure away from many of the fundamental features that had defined agricultural societies, from the early modern period on to the 20th century. Shifts occurred at different specific times, depending on region, and there were many holdovers from the more traditional patterns. Furthermore, substantial inequality persisted almost everywhere, even when the component social groups had changed – only occasionally did major war or revolution cut into the position of a wealthy upper class. However, modern or industrial social structure differed in many ways from its agricultural predecessor, and social mobility on the whole increased as well.

Early modern trade Most of the world was still defined by some version of agricultural social structure by the later 18th century, but there had been some important shifts. The expansion of commerce and manufacturing in places like China and Western Europe, plus the increasing production of foods and raw materials for export in other centers, adjusted the standard social order. The importance of the business sector grew, without yet displacing the landed aristocracy or (in China) the Confucian bureaucracy. Urban social groups, though still a minority, began to expand. More and more rural producers began to participate in market sales, which would alter the characteristics of the peasantry. In several places, including Western Europe, the expansion of domestic manufacturing added another new element to rural life. Again in Western Europe, several social groups began participating in new forms of consumerism, for example buying more fashionable clothing – leading to conservative complaints that it was becoming more difficult to identify a person's social place by what they wore. On the other hand, export production also increased pressure on coerced labor. Slave systems expanded in the Americas, based on the new Atlantic trade from Africa. In parts of Latin America but also in Russia and Poland, serf labor became more intense on large agricultural estates. This was a period of considerable but varied shifts in social and economic structure.

The Americas European conquests and settlements in the Americans overturned indigenous social structures in many ways, largely eliminating for example the Aztec and Inca aristocracies. New racial hierarchies were introduced, not only through imported African slaves and a concomitant development of racism. In Latin America, society increasingly divided between Europeans and natives of European origin (creoles); a majority population of mestizos, or people of mixed blood; and indigenous and slave groups. At the same time, no formal aristocracy developed – an explicit policy on the part of Spain and Portugal. A landowner class emerged in Latin America, among Dutch settlers in New York, and in the southern colonies of British North America; but it was not officially titled or privileged in law over other colonists of European origin. In British North America, furthermore, White rural populations featured independent farmers and their workers instead of a more traditional peasantry.

New ideologies The 18th-century Enlightenment in Western Europe (and to some extent the Americas) produced new and increasingly intense social ideas. Privileged aristocrats were criticized, contrasted with the hard-working, productive majority. Equality under the law became an increasingly popular rallying cry. In fact, in Western Europe, many aristocrats tried to close ranks in the 18th century, seeking to protect position against upstart middle-class elements, and this spurred growing demands for more open access

to government posts. New ideas also created the beginnings of the abolitionist movement, aimed at eradicating the slave trade and slavery – another manifestation of a growing belief in a common humanity as opposed to divisions in status and law. Ideas of this sort blossomed quickly in the French revolution of 1789, which immediately eliminated the old Three-Estate system in parliament in favor of a single chamber and removed aristocratic titles and legal privileges. Government careers were now, in principle, "open to talent" rather than noble birth. New ideas and pressure also led to the British decision, in 1807, to end the Atlantic slave trade and to the abolition of slavery in a number of northern states in the new United States and also in several newly-independent Latin American countries such as Mexico.

Industrialization The industrial revolution began in Britain in the later 18th century, and fairly quickly spread to other parts of Western Europe and to the United States. Factory cities and some other urban centers began to grow very rapidly. The older social order did not immediately disappear: the industrial impact on social structure was a matter of decades, not years. But there was no question about the direction of change. By 1850 in Britain, for example, half the population was living in cities, for the first time in human history, and a similar transformation reached the United States and Germany around the end of the century.

The old social classes: aristocracies All of the old social groups declined, at least as a percentage of the population and in most cases in prestige and power as well. Aristocracies had a hard time with the combination of a rising big business class and legal equality. Furthermore, governments increasingly adopted civil service reforms that recruited on the basis of an examination system, weakening aristocratic privilege from another direction. Individual aristocrats might fare well, even becoming industrialists in their own right. As Japan began to industrialize in the later 19th century, a new upper class emerged that combined some former samurai (feudalism had been abolished) and new business types. But the aristocratic class as a whole suffered, and would be further undercut by 20th-century revolutions in Russia and China.

Other traditional groups A strong peasantry might persist, adjusting to greater involvement with the market and even new educational requirements, but its relative position inevitably declined and ultimately other "peasant" characteristics yielded as well. Most industrial societies still gave the rural sector disproportionate political voice, and some nostalgic prestige, but there was no question that considerable decline occurred, creating clear resentments. Artisans suffered as well: skills remained important but old guild institutions were abolished everywhere, and distinctions from the rest of the working class blurred. Finally, during the later 19th and early 20th century virtually all societies (pressed by the West) decided to abolish formal slavery and serfdom, seen as incompatible with the kind of mobility required for industrialization. Considerable slavery continued to exist on the margins, including sex slavery, but its importance as well as its legality was clearly reduced.

New elements The principal components of industrial social structure – all primarily urban – were now a growing middle class and the even larger urban working classes. "Middle class" could include some older merchant and professional groups and shopkeepers, but it was increasingly dominated by factory owners and new professions such as engineering. Older professions, like medicine and law, had to retool through more demanding education and licensing. From the later 19th century onward, a white collar or lower-middle-class group became increasingly important, filling the ranks of sales clerks, bank tellers, secretaries and so on – often including a substantial female component. Many white collar workers eagerly sought to maintain distinctions from the urban working class. By the later 20th century, in the most advanced industrial societies, urban working classes stabilized or declined, now limited by increasing automation. Levels of education became increasingly important in shaping position in the social hierarchy. "Industrial" social structure was a shifting phenomenon, but it clearly differed massively from its agricultural predecessor.

Conclusion The fundamental social changes of the past two-three centuries provide some guidelines for examining the social evolution of specific regions during this period of major adjustment. Specifics, however, varied greatly, as did timing. Communist revolutions for example produced different versions of modern social structure from those of the capitalist West – though the differences should not be exaggerated. Older social categories did not roll over and die. Rural sectors even today, as in India and parts of Africa, maintain many older patterns. Basic legal changes were often less transformational than

intended: the abolition of slavery was conditioned by continued racial prejudice; the 1947 ending of the caste system in India hardly destroyed the significance of caste. Many older groups fought social change with considerable success: the East German aristocracy, for example, successfully maintained itself until the collapse of Nazism. Small shopkeepers sometimes used political clout to hang on despite new competition. A preliminary roadmap of the basic contours of industrial society cannot replace more specific treatments of modern social change.

Study questions

1. What were the main new challenges to aristocracy?
2. What were the bases of the principal industrial social classes?
3. Were new ideas or new economic forms most important in undermining traditional social structures?

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Chapter 11: Western Europe and The United States: from the late 18th century onward

Overview Social structure in both Western Europe and the United States was deeply affected, from the late 18th century onward, by the twin forces of new political ideas and policies and fairly fairly rapid industrialization and urbanization. Social patterns were, admittedly, not identical. The United States did not have an aristocracy to contend with, but it was strongly marked by slavery and its legacy, plus rapid immigration. As a result race and ethnicity long factored into American social structure, and thinking about social structure, than social class did; social class and class consciousness were much more explicit factors in Europe. The United States also developed an intense belief in the possibility of social mobility, from the early 19th century onward. Americans were far more likely to believe in the ease of social mobility than Europeans were, even though the actual rates, in two industrial societies, were very similar. Western Europe itself exhibited important variety. Most notably, some regions, like France and Western Germany, featured peasant landholding while others, like England, eastern Germany, southern Italy and Spain, highlighted large estates and agricultural laborers. Still, overall trends were widely shared, and on the whole social structures in Western society grew more similar during the 20th century.

Upper classes Europe's landed aristocracy declined gradually but inexorably. The French Revolution effectively ended legal privileges in several areas, though some use of aristocratic titles persisted for several decades. The class lost any particularly distinctive political role. Change was more gradual in Britain and Germany, where large estates continued to pump out agricultural goods and the class continued to use political influence. However, higher taxes on estates reduced aristocratic economic position in Britain in the 20th century; honorific titles persisted, but increasingly rewarded various kinds of achievement, not birth. Defeat in World War II and communist takeover of eastern Germany ended the aristocracy in central Europe. The big news was the rise of a new upper middle class, based on business success in industry, railroads and banking and wielding disproportionate, if informal, political power. Business fortunes in the United States created a number of durable dynasties, particularly in the so-called Gilded Age of the later 19th century. After World War II the upper middle class itself was partially transformed; a new generation of skilled corporate managers, usually highly educated, gained growing importance. New industries, like information technology, catapulted a host of new men into great wealth and political influence. Economic inequality actually increased at the top of the wealth scale, particularly in the United States, but the new upper class was never a closed group.

Rural classes Industrialization and urbanization steadily reduced the numbers and importance of rural groups, often to their considerable dismay. The United States long highlighted the role of landowning farmers, supplemented by agricultural laborers. After the end of slavery in the South, many African Americans continued to struggle as sharecroppers, though there was some independent land ownership.

In parts of Western Europe peasant producers held on into the 20th century, though adapting by acquiring at least a primary education and producing more for market sales. In several regions, new peasant cooperatives facilitated peasant market agriculture. However, increasing involvement with market agriculture, growing interest in higher living standards, and acquisition of more expensive farm equipment gradually reduced any distinctively peasant qualities. Everywhere also, though most obviously in the United States, large agricultural businesses, amassing quantities of land and utilizing massive equipment and cheap, often immigrant labor, mounted growing competition with family farms. Rural social classes did retain disproportionate political clout, leading at various points to various kinds of government support and efforts to maintain agricultural prices.

Urban middle classes Western society already had a solid middle class before industrialization, based on merchant activity and the older professions such as law and medicine. During the 19th century this core was altered by the addition of various new kinds of businessmen and professionals (who in contrast to the business group depended on more advanced education). By the later 19th century a growing component of the middle classes was comprised of middle managers in corporate and government bureaucracies; the older middle-class ideal of independent entrepreneurship became increasingly complicated. The 19th-century middle class also developed something of a class ethic, based around ideals of hard work, education, mobility, and family cohesion. This was an ethic lovingly maintained in contrast both to older aristocratic ideals and the interests of the urban working classes, and it would survive into the 20th century.

Urban working classes The most obvious news was sheer growth. From the early 19th century into the 20th, this was the fastest growing social group in the Western world, based on the rise of industry and the extraordinary expansion of cities. The class was fed by in-migration from the countryside and often foreign immigration as well. This latter was particularly true in the United States, but even in Europe immigration from Ireland and southern and eastern Europe played a role in forming the new working class. The bulk of the factory labor force was semi-skilled, relying on skills obtained on the job. However, a highly skilled and even artisanal segment remained, for example in industries like construction that were not fully mechanized. Though guilds were outlawed everywhere in the West, artisans and skilled workers were the first to develop new kinds of trade unions, capitalizing on their skills and organizational traditions. Relationships with the newer working class groups, and the kinds of unions these ultimately developed, were long somewhat complicated, though something of a shared class consciousness did emerge particularly in Europe.

Lower middle classes A small, traditional lower middle class predated industrialization, including literate clerks who, though not paid well, were proud of their distinction from manual laborers, and also the ranks of small shopkeepers. However the size and nature of the lower middle classes changed greatly by the later 19th century with the rise of corporate and government bureaucracies and the establishment of new institutions like department stores dependent on an army of salespeople. Divisions between older and new lower middle class groups were often marked, with shopkeepers harboring special resentments against big business competition that sometimes included new forms of anti-Semitism. The lower middle classes generally maintained pride in their distinction from the working classes. They shared patterns of dress and many mobility ideals with their wealthier middle-class counterparts. Employers also emphasized their distinctiveness, providing superior pension programs for example. Their consumption habits differed from those of the working class as well, and their birth rates and family values overlapped with those of the middle class. Many in the lower middle class, including large numbers of employed women, were subject to considerable emotional manipulation, urged for example to control their responses in order to curry favor with customers.

Later 20th century and beyond Growing prosperity in much of Western society after World War II promoted further social changes, and new welfare programs provided new levels of support for the lower classes, reducing class tensions. Many observers noted increasing convergence between European and American social patterns, though the American welfare network was far less robust than its European counterpart. Working-class class consciousness softened amid a higher standard of living, though (particularly in Europe) a sense of the distinction from the middle classes persisted. The size of the working class stabilized and then fell, thanks above all to growing automation. Many lower-skilled jobs were increasingly taken over by immigrants, on both sides of the Atlantic. Ethnic and racial divisions

began to supersede more conventional class divisions. More and more jobs depended on considerable education, and university enrollments soared, feeding into an expanded professional middle class. Older industrial regions were increasingly bypassed in favor of new high-technology corridors, as in the coastal United States or southeastern Britain, creating a new set of tensions including, by the 21st century, new forms of populism.

Study questions

1. What were the key transformations in rural society as the West industrialized?
2. What were some of the major characteristics of the newer middle classes?
3. How did older and newer segments of the working classes interact?
4. What were the main differences and similarities between American and West European social structures in the 19th and 20th centuries?

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Chapter 12: Latin America since 1900

Overview Three features of Latin American social structure over the past two centuries, since the end of the colonial era, are worth special attention. First is the ongoing importance of racial hierarchies, though this varies with the specific region. Groups of European origin continue to predominate in wealth and prestige over mestizos and indigenous groups. In places like Brazil, with an extensive population of African or partly African origin, gradations by skin color are pronounced, more in fact than in the United States though there is less systematic prejudice against the lighter-skinned. Second, and somewhat related, income inequality between the wealthy and the majority of the population has been and remains unusually great, in comparative terms, and persistent over time, again since the colonial period – despite the absence of a formal aristocracy. And third, social structure has reflected the important evolution of the Latin American economy, from emphasis on low-wage agricultural and mineral exports to a much more diversified portfolio, along with extensive urbanization and the growth of urban as well as rural poverty.

Class structure in the 19th century Into the 20th century, Latin American social structure was dominated by the push to expand export production of agricultural and mineral products, backed by governments as well as powerful landlords. Small peasant proprietors were increasingly displaced by larger estates for products such as coffee (in several regions) or wheat (in Argentina). In parts of Central America by 1900, banana production had similar impact. Several regions were also shaped by mining or, again by 1900, oil production. Both mines and plantation agriculture expanded the population dependent on wage labor – and where workers were scarce, as in Argentina and Brazil, European immigrants or in some cases Asian immigrants, some of them on indenture contracts, were brought in as supplements, aimed at keeping wages low. Landowning elites gained great political and well as economic power, joined by a new group of export-oriented merchants in some of the major cities. Middle classes were weak, though they gained some ground by the early 20th century thanks to a growth in public sector employment and the expansion of educational opportunities for a growing minority. In a few cases also, as in Mexico, a noticeable urban working class began to develop, along with some labor unions.

Impact of the Depression Declining export demand hit Latin American economies hard in the 1930s, leading to growing populist political pressure. In many countries, policies shifted to emphasize industrialization, seeking to replace imports from the West with home-grown products. This change prompted considerable growth of urban groups, both middle class and working class. Urban demand also encouraged more commercial agriculture, including (in Mexico) the first stages of the “green revolution”. This however benefited larger landholders, further pressing small-holding peasants. The result was a growing migration of many poorer people into the cities, beginning the creation of the characteristic Latin

American urban structure, with vibrant center cities surrounding by massive urban slums on the outskirts (called *favelas* in Brazil) and a correspondingly large informal economy. However, a large factory working class also emerged, forming the largest economic group in many countries by 1960. Many landless peasants now depended heavily on remittances from relatives in the cities (or emigrants to the United States).

More recent developments The complexity and heterogeneity of the Latin American class structure clearly increased from the final decades of the 20th century onward. The further growth of commercial agriculture plus some land reform largely displaced the old landlord class, with many farms now run by middle-class managers. However, rural poverty has remained high. Rural activism Increased, but the outflow to the cities continued as well. Many rural residents combine cultivation of tiny plots of land with wage labor on commercial farms (plus remittances from family members elsewhere). A distinct and wealthy upper class now combines merchants and exporters with newer industrialists and leading managers in state-run enterprises. Middle classes have grown considerably, with managers and professional personnel, civil servants, and professionals. The ranks of the urban working class, however, have diminished, with significant declines in the manufacturing and mining population thanks to growing automation and foreign competition. Some regions have however benefited from employment opportunities in foreign-owned enterprises producing for export (and often utilizing many female workers). Urban slums and their informal economies remain vitally important, though slower population growth has eased some pressures and a number of successful independent industries have developed as well, creating a more mixed picture. Overall, urban populations continue to gain ground, constituting about 75% of the total by 2000.

Study questions

1. Why, despite considerable social change, has modern Latin America consistently displayed unusual economic inequality?
2. What have been the main challenges to peasant land ownership from the 19th century to the present?
3. What are the principal features of Latin America's urban social structure in the 20th century?

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Chapter 13: Communist Revolutions and Social Structure: Soviet Russia

Overview Communist revolutions in major societies like Russia and China intended to revolutionize social structure, and they had a huge impact. Demolition of older patterns was the most immediate outcome, particularly in doing away with the longstanding upper classes. Correspondingly, massive new opportunities for mobility opened up, enhanced by the rapid expansion of educational systems, particularly in filling the expanding ranks of the Communist Party and government personnel. Treatment of the peasant class, another traditional segment, proved more complicated, though there was major change. Extensive industrialization generated social groupings not entirely dissimilar from those that had developed earlier in the West, as communism yielded some unexpected stratification.

Aristocracy The Russian Revolution immediately abolished the aristocracy, replacing aristocratic titles with the egalitarian term, comrade, and seizing remaining agricultural estates. Many aristocrats were killed, including some engaged in counterrevolutionary activities, and many fled to Western Europe or the United States. A longstanding staple of Russian social structure was removed.

Bases for the new order The professed goal of the communist leadership was a classless society. Economic and political issues during the 1920s complicated plans, as the government had to allow some private enterprise. Differentiations within the peasantry increased, with a minority gaining particular commercial success and sometimes expanding landholding; and a class of small businessmen persisted in the cities. But these were short term features. Overall, thanks to increasing government control of the economy, social structure ceased to depend on differentials in property ownership, and depended instead on differences in prestige (often linked to levels of educational achievement) and political power (often linked to membership in the Communist Party). (The Party had about half a million members in 1924, expanded to several million in the 1930s but was never more than a minority of the population as a whole.) Income was generally a consequence of social position, rather than determining it. All of this was in obvious contrast to the bases of social structure in the West. Officially, the Party claimed that there were only two social classes in the Soviet Union, workers and peasants, and that they were equal, differentiated only by location and specific function. In fact, a more complex structure developed arguably involving four major components: an elite at the top; white collar workers; blue collar workers; and finally peasants and other agricultural workers.

The elite This group, almost entirely composed of Party members including the leadership element, initially reflected a great deal of upward mobility, with many former peasants and workers rising into positions of power. Some mobility opportunities continued throughout the Soviet period: the final communist leader, for example, Mikhail Gorbachev, came from a poor peasant village and rose initially through his performance as a student. The functions of the new elite centered on top government, Party and intellectual activities (the cultural and scientific intelligentsia). Members of the elite received a growing number of privileges, including access to special stores that carried an unusual variety of foods and other consumer items (including imports not available to most citizens) plus access to particularly luxurious summer homes, or dachas. Position depended on function; it was not the result of inheritance. And demotion was always possible, particularly under Stalin. Over time, however, and particularly after Stalin's death in 1953, a certain degree of self-perpetuation described the elite, as children had a better chance to receive and succeed at university education than was true of the population at large.

White collar This category (including some Party members but not confined to this group) included doctors, teachers, engineers as well as the broader run of white collar workers. They were often paid less well than factory workers, but carried higher prestige. Many women participated in the relevant job categories.

Urban blue collar This class, already established before the Revolution, expanded rapidly with industrialization, its ranks swelled by the growth of cities and arrivals from the countryside. (The growth of cities was steady, even during World War II, and by 1989 the overall population was 73% urban – an important shift though below Western levels.) The class had great prestige in the Soviet scheme of things, was glorified in official art and propaganda, and often enjoyed comparatively high wages and benefits. The government for example carefully established vacation resorts for blue collar workers, along the Black Sea and in other desirable sites. At the same time, as was true for working classes in every industrial revolution, factory and mine workers faced intense production pressure and had to adapt to a variety of demanding working conditions.

Peasantry and rural laborers This group, diminishing in numbers though still very large, was at the bottom of the social order (despite some attention from the government). Stalin, aiming at the collectivization of agriculture, took particular aim at the independent peasantry, and millions of recalcitrant peasants were killed. Most remaining peasants lost access to property and simply became part of a rural working class – and agricultural production frequently faltered as a result. Industrialization generally enhanced the rural-urban differential, and Soviet policies simply enhanced the divide.

Trends over time By the 1960s it was becoming clear that the professional and white collar group, like the elite, was increasingly solidifying its position – rather like its counterpart in Western society – and becoming something of a modern middle class. Professionals and factory managers carefully limited their birth rates and devoted great attention to fostering their offspring's success in school with an eye to assuring access to universities. The same phenomenon was noted in other East European communist societies, leading to accusations that the revolution was being betrayed.

Post-communist society The end of communist rule by 1991 most obviously removed Communist Party membership as a vehicle for social power or mobility. At the same time, the transition created new opportunities and, possibly, new clarity for the urban middle classes, now able to enjoy greater access to an array of consumer goods. Many observers in the 1990s noted the characteristics of what they called "New Russians", who seemed to have many of the same aspirations and values as their middle-class counterparts in Western societies (including the continued interest in education). At the same time, however, a new elite group was formed among business oligarchs, closely tied to the government, who managed to acquire ownership of a variety of former state enterprises and real estate holdings, and who frequently rose to great wealth and showy life styles. While no rigid hierarchy developed, social differentiation expanded and was increasingly based on wealth.

Study questions

1. What were the biggest changes in social structure under Communism?
2. What were the main differences between Soviet social structure, as the society industrialization, and its counterpart in the West?
3. Was there a middle class in the Soviet system, and if so what were its principal features?

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Chapter 14: Communist Revolutions and Social Structure: China

Overview China's communist takeover dates to 1949, after decades of struggle complicated by the invasion of the Japanese before and during World War II. Implications for social structure were similar to those in the Soviet Union. They were complicated, however, by the twists and turns of industrial policy under Mao Zedong, who initially sought to foster a standard type of industrialization and then turned to an effort to develop a distinctive national variant with an emphasis on small-scale production. This was a failure, at least in the short run, though it exposed more peasants to some manufacturing work; but the result somewhat delayed the more normal rates of urbanization and working-class formation. These developed with extraordinary rapidity, however, from 1978 onward, with the adoption of new policies of industrial promotion. The Mao era was also noteworthy for the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), introduced in part to distract from economic problems: here, Chinese policy aimed at a more thorough eradication of the social and cultural bases of traditional social structure than had ever been attempted in the Soviet Union. Here too, however, patterns changed after 1978, as Chinese economic development began to create an urban middle and upper class rather different from its counterparts under the Soviet Union. Like the Soviet Union, Chinese social structure under communism proved very different from its pre-revolutionary counterpart; however, at the same time, the specifics varied considerably.

Initial moves Communist leadership immediately turned against the remnants of the old landlord-bureaucratic class, eliminating the landlords through land reforms. As in the Soviet Union, collectivization was imposed to prevent the emergence of a new rural propertied class, but the policy severely reduced food production leading to massive rural famine. Members of the Communist Party (drawn disproportionately from the ranks of urban workers) became a new elite, provided with special benefits (including superior housing) and opportunities for training – fairly quickly threatening some reproduction of the old bureaucratic class simply with new membership. The government worked to expand the educational system at all levels, but urban residents had disproportionate access, creating a growing educated middle class. Further development of the urban working class was complicated by state policies requiring permission to leave the countryside. Like his Soviet counterparts, Mao claimed that the revolution had unified the prerevolutionary social classes into one social whole, but this was not the case.

Cultural Revolution This move involved a number of features, but attacks on both the new hierarchy and the older Confucian principles of social structure were central. Many schools and universities were closed, with students sent to the countryside to perform manual labor in social and economic solidarity with rural workers. Bands of youths were authorized to attack older cultural monuments, symbolizing wider rejection of the authority of elders. New attention was paid to peasants, though overall they remained the lowest and poorest social class.

After 1978 New economic and demographic policies not only reversed the cultural revolution, but led to China's extraordinary, decades-long industrial growth (often at 10% annual rates). This had a number of predictable effects on social structure, including the rapid growth of a host of mega-cities, while also significantly modifying, without eliminating, any special communist features. Poverty declined substantially, though this was clearest in the cities and in the coastal regions, leaving some inland villages behind. Communist party membership was still an important social as well as political differential, but economic change created new mobility opportunities partially independently. Rapid expansion of higher education, and interest in higher education, had similar effects, though by the 21st century there was some danger of over-producing university graduates in relation to available jobs. The professional and middle classes expanded, along with a new elite of the very wealthy. By 2019, for example, a middle-income group constituted at least 30% of the overall population, and 71% of Chinese families owned cars – suggesting a familiar kind of middle class based on income and consumer habits. At the same time, however, communist principles prompted recurrent concern about growing inequality, particularly at the upper end of the economic scale. After 2013, under the more severe political regime of Xi Jinping and with some renewed emphasis on the importance of Party membership, anti-corruption programs and other measures were introduced with the professed purpose of bringing the upper business and bureaucratic groups under greater control. A few leading tycoons were actually arrested, leading to interesting questions about the future of the higher end of the Chinese social scale in the future.

Peasants and workers Rapid industrialization steadily increased the size of the working class, and while working conditions were often severe (with little outlet for complaint), pay tended to improve, along with a greater degree of social mobility. A large number of industrial workers were rural migrants, often leaving family members back in the village and often enduring severe housing constraints and marginal legal status in the cities. These same developments steadily reduced the relative size of the rural population, and increased its average age. Many younger peasants, if they did not migrate outright, began to express growing aspirations for greater independence and, often, education – further shattering many traditional features of the peasantry. Changes of this sort arguably added some of the standard social consequences of industrialization to any remaining special features of communist society.

Study questions

1. What were the implications of the cultural revolution for social structure?
2. What was the impact of policy changes from 1978 onward on social structure?
3. Does China's current social structure reflect any significantly distinctive communist features?

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Chapter 15: India after Inderpendence

Overview The big, distinctive issue in the recent history of India's social structure is obviously the heritage of the caste system. Legally banned since independence in 1947, based on the belief by nationalist leaders that the tradition was incompatible with a modern, democratic state, and subject to a host of remedial measures, the lingering attachment to caste identity has remained a vital feature – often compared to the intractability of racial divisions in places like the United States. Caste has however changed significantly – for example with an interesting increase in the rate of inter-caste marriage. Too

much attention to the changes and continuity in caste should not however obscure other features of the social structure. Stratification is profoundly affected by the continued numerical dominance of the rural population – still 65% of the total in 2021, though this is markedly down from the 83% figure of 1950. The expansion of education and its role in providing opportunities for social mobility similarly reflects the rural urban divide, with significant gains falling well short of universal access even at the primary level. Overall, the attacks on the caste system plus changes associated with considerable industrialization provide a distinctive version of the combination of new ideas and new economic forces characteristic of many key societies at some point during the past two centuries.

Dealing with caste: legal and policy changes Article 15 of India's constitution prohibited discrimination based on caste and Article 17 declared the practice of Untouchability illegal. At various points from 1956 onward the government has conducted inquiries into discrimination, setting up a National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to investigate the progress of the "lower" castes. It has provided economic and other incentives for intermarriage among people of different castes and for university admission for the lower castes. Two major castes categories have received primary attention: the Scheduled Castes (sometimes called Dalit) and the Other Backward Class, including castes above the historical Untouchables but presumably suffering economic and educational disadvantages. (It is estimated that about 16% of India's population belongs to the Dalit group, while about 43% are in the Other Backward Class. Another 9% belong to listed Tribes.) These figures are however sometimes disputed, amid assertions that the intermediate and lower groups are not as large as claimed.) This list has been periodically revised, depending on various criteria, with some castes removed from the list because of progress, but others added. A certain number of government posts are reserved for the lower caste categories. In the 1990s for example 27% of all posts in government-owned enterprises and agencies were reserved for the Other Backward Class, along with 22% for the lowest groups. The efforts to undo the effects of caste have commanded considerable attention and resources. Some critics contend, however, that they actually help perpetuate caste identity, because they provide incentives for demonstrating membership in one of the lower castes (while also potentially creating resentments and assertions of identity in other caste groups). At the same time, leaders in some of the lower groups, particularly the Dalits, have been active in attempting to boost achievement and group esteem. And it is important to note that several of India's top politicians, including Prime Minister Nardendra Modi, have come from levels below the top castes.

Rates of change Caste identities have remained extremely important. This applies obviously to the pride and identity claimed by people of historically higher caste origin, but also to many in the lower group who continue to find caste position natural and who see caste not only as a source of identity but in terms of active mutual assistance. Caste identities and discrimination have even extended to groups of Indians who have emigrated elsewhere; a 2020 case in California thus alleged discrimination against an engineer from a historically lower caste, and issues have also arisen in the United Kingdom. In India itself, change has occurred, but with limitations. Thus despite the reserved posts, people of lower caste origin are overrepresented in the lowest category of government jobs (there are four major categories), but underrepresented in the two top groups. Only 6.1% of all marriages currently involve people from different castes, meaning that for most people caste continues to define boundaries of acceptable social interaction. Violence against people from lower castes remains a problem and according to some indications has increased during the past decade as Hindu Nationalism has gained ground in politics; and convictions for crimes in this category are low. This said, despite the low rates, inter-caste marriages doubled between 1981 and 2005 (almost exclusively in urban India), while the percentage of lowest caste people in the highest paying, most senior jobs in India (public and private sectors combined) increased tenfold, from 1% of all such jobs in 1959 to 10% in 1995. Literacy and health rates for people of lower caste origin have improved steadily, while remaining below overall national averages; the poverty level of these groups dropped from 48% in 1995 to 39% a decade later (compared to the national rates of 35% and 27% respectively). Some authorities now argue that poverty is a much more important variable than caste origin in the actual impact of stratification on Indian life.

Other changes in social stratification: rural As in other societies such as Latin America, India's rural population has been deeply affected, and divided, by changes in the agricultural economy. Large numbers of peasants get by on very small plots of land, while other proprietors have taken fuller advantage of expanding markets for food. India's fabled "green revolution", introducing new methods and

crops that have heightened production and reduced food shortages, disproportionately benefited peasants and other owners with more substantial holdings in land, creating new social and regional divisions in the countryside.

Other changes: urban Urban growth obviously expanded the working class, while new educational levels – including very high production of people with doctoral degrees – and white-collar job opportunities greatly enlarged the urban middle class, estimated in 2019 to contain almost 100 million people, or about 5% of the total population (this is up from 30 million and 1% of the total as recently as 1990, a product of rapid recent economic growth). (A substantial segment of the lower end of this class work in service sector jobs, providing customer relations via telephone and computer for insurance companies and other businesses in the United States and Britain, taking advantage of English language capacity.) As in China, the middle class is increasingly defined by consumer life style and income levels, though major acquisitions are far less common and the class as a whole is noticeably smaller than its Chinese counterpart. Economic setbacks from the 2020-21 pandemic may have reduced the size of this class considerably, at least for the time being.

Study questions

1. Why has caste identity remained important in India's social structure?
2. What have been the main changes in the role of caste in India's social structure?
3. What are the characteristics of India's urban middle class?

Further reading

Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: the rise of the lower castes* (C. Hurst, 2003)

Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: changing patterns of stratification in a Tangore village* (University of California Press, 1965)

Dipankar Gupta, *Caste in Question: identity or hierarchy?* (Sage, 2004)

Chapter 16: Sub-Saharan Africa

Overview Social structure in post-colonial Africa (late 1950s to the present) continued to be marked by several legacies from the past: in some areas primarily in the south, a substantial White minority made race a key differentiator in social and economic status, despite political change. In many parts of Africa, shading off from race, patrilineal lineage continued to define many identities. Among several groups particularly in west and central Africa (but also Madagascar), caste systems still prevailed, little changed from before the colonial era. Traditional stratification was bolstered in many cases by the fact that the majority of the population remained rural. However, considerable urbanization increasingly cut into the traditional social structure, with mainly familiar effects including the growing role of both income and differential educational levels in reflecting and promoting social inequality. At the same time, low-wage labor in some cases created some degree of working-class consciousness among some Africans (both rural and urban), here too cutting across older forms of social differentiation.

Change and diversity An obvious challenge in dealing with recent African social history involves regional diversity. The subcontinent as a whole has seen considerable urbanization as well as expansion of literacy, both particularly in recent decades. Overall the urbanization level is now about 44% (up from 35% in 2000), but this ranges from 67-68% in places like South Africa or Botswana, to 52% in Nigeria (the most populous nation), to countries like Rwanda and Niger where urbanization remains below 20%. Literacy rates range similarly: 94% in South Africa, but 37% in the Central African Republic, 62% in Nigeria (64% for the subcontinent as a whole).

Race Legal systems of racial stratification ended with the collapse of the Apartheid system in South Africa in the mid-1990s, preceded by the termination of minority White rule in what is now Zimbabwe. Politically, majority Black rule prevailed. In South Africa Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected president, proclaimed a nation defined by a "rainbow coalition" of all the races and ethnic and linguistic groups, and his vision was widely hailed. In fact, however, Whites continued to control many agricultural estates and

major businesses, leading to a persistent stratification based on wealth and economic power. This was not however a significant feature of social stratification in other parts of the sub-continent.

Lineage More significant generally was the continuation of affiliations and identities based on extended family relationships, and particularly patrilineal relationships, which also contributed to larger ethnic linkages and tensions within a number of the new African nations. This system of stratification placed a premium on the status and authority of older males, rather than simply income or property levels, and in principle it could cut across rural-urban divides. Urbanization and growing interest in consumerism did place a strain on this older system, with some families pulling away from the obligations (including extensive hospitality) that were customary for extended family relationships.

Caste In many parts of Africa particular ethnic or tribal groups maintained older caste systems, often with little modification and independent of any government support. There are a number of examples, from many different regions. Thus the Amhara people in Ethiopia maintain endogamy and pronounced hierarchy, with different castes assigned to distinct occupations and patterns of social interaction (including marriage); caste identity is fixed through inheritance. The Fula people, a Muslim group widely distributed in parts of West Africa, divide into nobles, then priests, then cattle-owning agriculturalists, then artisans, then groups that were once slave. No intermarriage occurs among the groups. Elsewhere castes similarly still reflect former slave status as well as endogamous occupational groups such as agriculturalists or blacksmiths. In some cases entertainers and story tellers (griots) also form castes. In Madagascar the Merina people maintain castes that reflect former free or slave status, and that ostracize inter-caste marriage.

Upper class In a number of African nations a partially new upper class developed after independence, based on a combination of business success and special ties to the government. The group might include some traditional tribal leaders. It often benefited from the dominance of a particular ethnic group in the government, as well as links to authoritarian leaders bent on perpetuating their power. Access to government contracts or grants of mineral rights was sometimes involved. Wealthy Africans also often had special ties to global businesses, serving essentially as middlemen to the larger corporations. Many enjoyed fairly elaborate lifestyles: a preference for Mercedes Benz automobiles provided special cachet and also (in Kenya and elsewhere) a somewhat derisive class label, *wa benzi.*

Urban classes Recent assessments of South Africa contend that race has diminished as a stratification factor mainly because a noticeable number of Black South Africans have risen to middle class or lower middle class status based on income and education. (An upper class of top managers and owners represents about 1% of the total.) Middle-class groups – businessmen and professionals – now constitute about 6% of population holding formal jobs, and lower-middle class elements (teachers, clerks and so on) about 29%. 25% belong to a semi-skilled working class, 18% to the unskilled (along with 6% in the category of domestics). This distribution reflects the nation's relatively high urbanization and education rates, so should not be taken as characteristic of the whole region, but it suggests some of the trends that are generally associated with recent patterns in the regional economy. Everywhere, the emergence of an urban middle class is associated with new interests in consumerism and educational opportunity, and an emphasis on the nuclear family.

Rural society and the informal economy Rural populations divide between peasant smallholders and large numbers of estate workers producing export goods like cocoa or vegetable oils, often under miserable conditions. African social structure is also marked by substantial numbers of people operating in an essentially informal economy with often occasional jobs, both in cities and the countryside. Overall, clearly, African society in recent history has been marked by unusual variety, both in conventional social class terms and because of the mixture of stratification systems particularly in the countryside – all complicated by rapid recent social change.

Study questions

1. What social structural systems operate in Africa besides economic class?
2. What is the interaction between race and class in South Africa since Apartheid?
3. What are the bases for the African middle class?

Further reading

Jeremy Seekings, “Social Stratification and Inequality in South Africa at the End of Apartheid,” Centre for Social Science Research (Capetown) *Working Paper* #31, 2003.

Steven Danver, *Native Peoples of the World: an encyclopedia of groups, cultures and contemporary issues* (Routledge, 2015)

John Iliffe, *The African Poor: a history* (Cambridge University Press, 1987)