GOVERNMENT

THE MOST POWERFUL AGENCY STRUCTURE

FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

1. SOCIALIZATION
2. ENFORCEMENT OF NORMS
3. DEFINITIONS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY
4. STRATIFICATION
5. CONTROL SYSTEMS

FOUNDATIONS OF GOVERNMENT

• AUTHORITY
  – PROMOTION OF INTERESTS WITH CONSENT OF THOSE GOVERNED

• POWER
  – PROMOTION OF INTERESTS AGAINST THE WILL OF THOSE GOVERNED
20th Century Government Models

- Monarchy
  - Disappears after World War I
- Democracy
  - Grounded in Civil Society (Voluntary Organization)
- Communism
  - Economically Based Social System
- Fascism
  - Ideologically Based Social System

Sociological Perspective

- Democracy ideal type, but difficult to attain and maintain
  - Multiple political parties with diverse interests, outlooks and plans
  - Leaders with
    - Intelligence (seek and absorb data)
    - Imagination
    - Courage

Failure of Government?

- War
  - Total – Destroy virtually all components of social structure, including components of the foundations, and rebuild
  - Limited – Avoid total destruction; attempt reorganization through introduction of new variables
Economic Systems

• **Comparing Capitalism and Communism**
  – **Social class**: The way economic differences among groups or individuals in a society are measured
  – **Economy**: Entire social institution that produces and distributes goods and services
  – **Capitalist Economies**: based on the private ownership of property and the investment of capital
  – **Communist Economies**: government owns property, and profit by individuals is illegal
• **Cold War (1945 to 1989)**: tensions between the “West” and “East”

DOMINANCE

• **The triumph of Capitalism**
  – **Social Inequality**—the unequal distribution of wealth, income, power, and poverty
  – But, Capitalism offers both individual freedoms and the opportunity for economic success

ECONOMIC DANGERS

• Stagnant incomes
  – **Real Income**: Income adjusted for inflation
• Inappropriate taxation
• The savings rate
• A debtor nation
  – **National Debt**: The total amount the U.S. government owes
The Nature of Poverty

**Biological Poverty:** starvation and malnutrition

**Relative Poverty:** people living below the standard of living for their society

**Official Poverty:** income level at which people are eligible for welfare

**Problems with the poverty line**
Not adjusted for different costs of living
Subjective Concerns and Objective Conditions

Objective conditions alone not enough to make poverty a social problem
Subjective concerns also essential and more important
Changes in concerns and conditions

*People assumed that poverty was a natural part of life*

Launching the war on poverty
1960, President Kennedy

TODAY

Progress limited since the 1960’s
Controversy over numbers

Government does not count as income many benefits people receive from antipoverty programs

The significance of poverty

No matter how we compute poverty, millions of Americans are poor
How we define poverty has serious consequences for people’s lives
Poverty lies at the root of many other social problems
SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Existence of poverty contradicts the ideal American vision of success

**Structural Inequality:** The inequality built into our economic and social institutions

Distribution of Income and Wealth

- Inequality of income
- Inequality of wealth

**Wealth:** How much property, savings, investments, and economic assets people own

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THE RACIAL DIVIDE

**FIGURE 7-4** Racial Wealth Disparities Are More Severe Than Racial Income Disparities

Note: Median income and median net worth by race/ethnicity, 2000.

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THE GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

**FIGURE 7-5** Who Owns What? How the Wealth of the United States Is Distributed

- The wealthiest 1% of Americans owns 31% of the nation's wealth

Source: Bruegmann (2000).
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

The relativity of poverty
   To fully understand poverty we must focus on
   what poverty means to people
   Poverty is relative: What poverty is differs from
   group to group
Help us understand that the meanings of
   poverty change as social conditions
   change

FUNCTIONALISM

Income inequality helps society
   Some tasks in society are more important
   than others
   To attract such talented people, the
   positions must offer high income and
   prestige
Poverty is functional for society
   We need the poor because their poverty
   contributes to society’s well-being

CONFLICT THEORY

The cause of social inequality
   Basic struggle over limited resources
A general theory of social class
   Karl Marx (1818–1883)
   Social class revolves around means of production
   Capitalists (bourgeoisie) or workers (proletariat)
False Class Consciousness: mistaken idea
   of future prosperity
Class Consciousness: realization that there
   will never be a future prosperity