

Omi, Michael. 2008. *Racial Formation in the New Millennium*. New York: Routledge.

Steinberg, Stephen. 2001. *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*. 3rd ed. Boston: Beacon Press.

CLAIMS MAKING

Claims making entails the activities by which groups of people (such as advocacy or social movement organizations, community groups, legislators, or journalists) attempt to persuade an audience (such as Congress, other government officials, or the general public) to perceive that a condition is a social problem in need of attention. The concept of claims making originates from the social constructionist theory, which rejects the perception of social problems as objective realities. Rather, conditions, which may or may not exist, or are currently considered the normal state of affairs, are defined or redefined as social problems via social interactions between interested groups and audiences. Consequently, of analytical interest is how or why a condition is or is not constructed as a “social problem” via claims making, and what features of the claims-making activities are likely to facilitate public support of the claims makers’ cause.

Using this perspective, social scientists examine various social problems, such as child abuse and abduction, domestic violence, prostitution, and cigarette smoking. Researchers analyzing claims and claims-making activities might explore such questions as follows.

About Claims Makers

Who is making the claims, and what stake do they have in the successful construction of their issue as a social problem? How do their different statuses (such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, professional affiliation, and religion) influence their decision to make claims, the rhetorical features of their claims, and the likelihood that their claims will be heard and either accepted or rejected? How are their claims different or similar to other claims makers approaching the same issue? Do they adjust their claims in response to others’ reactions to their claims? What modes of communication (such as television, newspapers, Web sites) are they using to

convey their claims, and how do the modes influence the claims?

About Claims

What are the rhetorical features of the claims being made, and what about them are or are not compelling? What types of evidence (e.g., statistics, expert testimony, victims’ stories) are being given regarding the nature, magnitude, and reach of the social problem? What solutions are being proposed as a way of addressing the social problem? What values or interests are being reflected in the claims? Are the claims constructing “victims” and “victimizers,” and, if so, who are they? What motifs or themes (such as good/evil, right/wrong, justice/injustice, or morality/immorality) are being conveyed in the claims? Do the claims contain broader or localized social, historical, or cultural themes (such as civil rights, value of or protection of freedom), and will these resonate with the target audience(s)? What emotions or ideologies are being appealed to in the claims (such as anger, sympathy, patriotism and freedom, or social/moral responsibility)?

Amanda Swygart-Hobaugh

See also Moral Entrepreneurs; Social Constructionist Theory

Further Readings

Loseke, Donileen. 2003. *Thinking about Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives*. 2nd ed.

New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Loseke, Donileen and Joel Best, eds. 2003. *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Nichols, Lawrence. 2003. “Rethinking Constructionist Agency: Claimsmakers as Conditions, Audiences, Types and Symbols.” *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 26:125–45.

Spector, Malcolm and John I. Kitsuse. 2001. *Constructing Social Problems*. New ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

CLASS

In its broadest sense, class refers to group inequalities based on economic attributes. The specific economic attributes used to define class vary by theoretical

perspective, with some focusing on ownership or control of wealth-producing property, and others emphasizing material and cultural holdings, such as income, wealth, occupational prestige, and lifestyle. Class is thus a primary concept for analyzing social inequality and, as such, provides insight for almost all social problems.

Class denotes both a social group and a social force. As a social group, class is researchers' categorization of people by the various economic attributes. Class as a social force refers to its micro- and macro-level patterned influences. Class shapes myriad inequalities experienced individually, such as those in health, health care, residence, vocabulary, speech, crime, criminal justice, education, employment, marriage, family life, and many more. It may also develop, in some, a sense of class identification that may create macro-level social change, as exemplified by business owners' shaping of national tax laws and global trade pacts or workers' achievement of the right to unionize and the 8-hour workday.

Two Main Perspectives on Class

The relationship between class and social problems is explained differently in numerous theories on class. Most of these theories can be arranged into two main camps, notwithstanding differences within and broad areas of agreement between them: one broadly defined as Marxian, the other as distributional.

Marxian Perspective

Based on the ideas of Karl Marx, the Marxian perspective emphasizes class-based exploitation, struggle, and social change. From this perspective, classes are distinct groups defined by relations of production, that is, the roles the groups have in the way a society produces its goods and services. Industrial societies form two major classes based on the relations of production: the capitalist class, which owns and controls the means of production (i.e., production facilities and raw materials) and which employs and manages others for purposes of profit making, and the working class, or proletariat, which owns only the capacity to produce for the capitalist class. Other classes are recognized (e.g., landlords, small-business owners, intellectuals), but it is the capitalist and working classes that are central to the way societies operate and change.

Most important is the unequal and antagonistic relationship between the two main classes: Capitalists need workers to produce goods and services, and workers need capitalists for wages, but capitalists exploit the working class, which means they appropriate more value from the workers than they give them in the form of wages and benefits. Owing to this economic power of exploitation, the capitalist class attains greater social, cultural, and political power. It has a greater ability to ensure that its interests are represented in the public policy, legal order, and dominant values of society, such as the primacy of economic development policies, laws upholding private property, and the social norm of profit maximization. However, Marx saw class relations as the resolution as well as the source of social inequality. Because of its subordinate position, the working class would form strong class solidarity, or class consciousness, and initially struggle against the capitalist class for workplace reform. Ultimately, this class struggle would expand to create an entirely new social order based on public ownership and control of production, thereby abolishing exploitative and antagonistic relations between classes and thus the classes themselves, so defined.

Distributional Perspective

The distributional perspective is an amalgamation of diverse approaches, most of which derive in some measure from Max Weber's notions of class and status. For Weber a social class is a group that shares similar life chances, that is, chances of achieving a socially valued living standard. Life chances are determined by one's income and ownership of various types of material property, including the means of production, but also by the possession of what Weber referred to as status, that is, social prestige and related cultural attributes, such as educational attainment, type of occupation, and lifestyle. In this view the Marxian relations-of-production approach is too broad to address inequalities rooted in the distribution of these multiple cultural attributes. Thus, in the distributional view classes are nuanced social groupings based on distributions of numerous economic and cultural attributes that shape life chances, and identified generally as lower class, middle class, and upper class. Each designation may be further modified (e.g., lower middle class) or alternatively titled to recognize tradition or prestige (e.g., "old money").

The class borders are less distinct and more permeable than as seen in the Marxian view; upward social mobility is both possible and socially expected. Poor life chances, however, are a major obstacle to upward mobility, and they may result from social closure, that is, conscious attempts by groups to control and exclude others from resources, and from weak internalization of achievement norms. In addition, social-psychological problems of class and mobility are examined, such as perceptions of low self-worth or uncertainty of social standing. For example, one may attain the income of a higher class but still be excluded by its members because the important attributes of lifestyle, taste and speech, do not automatically follow.

Class-Based Social Problems

Exploitation

In the Marxian perspective, exploitation of the working class produces surplus value, which is the value workers create during production that goes uncompensated. It is the source of profits for the capitalist class but also the source of economic inequality. This inequality is evidenced in 2004 Census Bureau data showing that after production costs, manufacturers received a value-added total of \$1.584 trillion, but the total wages for production workers was \$332 billion. This means the average U.S. production worker made about \$35,500 per year in wages but created about \$170,000 in surplus value for the business owner, thus enabling the capitalist to sell commodities for a profit. The capitalist class keeps the lion's share of its profits for its income, and this share has grown over the past quarter-century, as seen in the ratio between the average pay of chief executive officers and the average pay of workers: from 35:1 in 1978 to 185:1 in 2003. Thus, an average chief executive officer in 2003 could earn in about one and one-half days what the average worker made in the entire year. Working-class families use most or all of their incomes for personal consumption (e.g., food, utilities, clothes). However, the capitalist class may use much of its vastly higher income for further profit-making, such as reinvestment in its operations and investment in other businesses. Ownership of significant (over \$5,000) direct stock is dominated by the capitalist class, whereas the wealth of the working class is mainly in the form of houses, cars, or pensions.

The capitalist class is positioned to generate more wealth; the working class is more likely to own more personal debt.

Unionized workers have higher compensation compared with non-unionized workers, but since the 1970s the capitalist class has taken strong and successful anti-union measures, a form of class struggle that has included illegally firing or disciplining more than 20,000 pro-union workers each year since the 1990s. A problem the capitalist class faces from exploiting the working class and from the consequent disparity in income and wealth is a weakened ability to sell the very goods on which its profits depend.

Unequal Life Chances

Since the 1970s, as income and wealth inequality have increased, as union membership has declined sharply, and as employers have reduced health care benefits for their workers, life chances have diminished for most Americans, be it absolute or relative to the upper or capitalist class. From the distributional standpoint, the inability to attain socially valued goods in socially accepted ways poses a threat to the social order, as evidenced by such social problems as crime, decline in community ties, and withdrawal from electoral processes. Higher education, health, and residence are some important yet unequally distributed life chances.

Regarding higher education, the likelihood of applying, being admitted, and graduating, and the type of college considered are influenced by class. The lower the average income of parents, the less likely the children are to apply, and average Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have varied directly by family income brackets since the 1990s. In 2004, 71 percent of students from families in the top income quartile received a bachelor's degree, but the rate was only 10 percent for those from families in the bottom income quartile. Moreover, an early 21st-century trend is that more students from high-income families are admitted into prestigious private colleges, while the number of students from low-income families admitted is declining.

Lower-class families report they are in poor health more often than do upper-class families, and in fact are more likely than upper-class families to suffer morbidity, such as lung cancer and hypertension, and to experience infant mortality, and their members die an average of 7 years earlier. Employer-provided

health insurance coverage varies directly by wages: In 2003 more than 3 times as many top-fifth wage earners had job-based health insurance as did those in the bottom fifth.

Homeownership varies directly by income. In 2001, just half of those in the lowest income group owned homes, while in the highest income group the figure was 88 percent. Moreover, the geographical distance between homeowners by income has been growing since 1970 in U.S. metropolitan areas. Upper-class families have the ability to move farther away from central cities and form homeowner associations which help maintain their isolation from the lower classes by such means as “gated communities” that limit residence to those with similarly high levels of income, education, and occupational prestige. Because of such distancing, municipal services (such as education and recreation) for the lower classes in urban centers may be reduced.

Class Reproduction

The Marxian and distributional perspectives see class reproduction as a problem, that is, that most stay within their class position and the class structure tends to remain stable over time. The Marxian view sees class borderlines as mainly impermeable; the possibility of a worker becoming a capitalist is very weak. Through inheritance of wealth-producing property and financial wealth, the offspring of capitalists have the advantage to remain in the capitalist class, while children of working-class families are less likely to accumulate enough capital to become big business owners and employ others. According to this view, education does not resolve this problem because school curricula vary by social class and prepare students for work roles consistent with their class origins.

Given its emphasis on cultural as well as economic attributes, the distributional perspective finds more possibilities for movement between and within classes. For example, movement from the lower class to the capitalist class is unlikely, but attaining income and prestige higher than one’s parents is common. Yet, while research has long found intergenerational upward mobility, especially from manual work to white-collar work, most children remain in the same occupational and status group as their parents or move down.

Some researchers attribute this to the ways parents socialize their children for work and future, which is shaped by features of parents’ work. Middle-class

occupations typically require self-direction (independent judgment and autonomy), whereas working-class occupations are usually closely supervised and require much rule following. Middle-class parents tend to internalize values of self-direction and, in turn, impart these values to their children. Working-class parents, on the other hand, internalize and socialize obedience. Consequently, middle-class parents tend to socialize their young to be curious and attain self-control, which thus leaves them well prepared for middle-class work; working-class parents tend to socialize their young to obey rules and maintain neatness and cleanliness, and thus they are ill prepared for middle-class work. Another explanation for class reproduction concerns the role of cultural capital, which refers to cultural possessions, such as credentials, artifacts, and dispositions. The cultural capital of upper-class families, which includes professional degrees, taste for “high” art, and a reserved disposition, is more highly valued by educators, employers, and other gatekeepers than is the cultural capital of lower- and working-class families. Because children embody the cultural capital of their parents, upper-class schoolchildren tend to receive higher rewards in school, thus gaining better chances for admission into prestigious colleges, which ultimately ensures their upper-class position in adulthood.

Challenges to Democracy

From the distributional and Marxian standpoints, unequal class power threatens democracy. In the distributional view, those with high income and social status wield disproportionate political power, especially at the federal level: Most U.S. presidents were wealthy; about two thirds of cabinet appointments by Presidents John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush were of people from top corporations and law firms; three fourths of Congress in 2001 was composed of business executives, bankers, realtors, and lawyers; and 81 percent of individuals who have donated to congressional candidates since the 1990s had incomes over \$100,000, and almost half in this group had incomes over \$250,000.

Some hold a pluralist view, finding that those with high socioeconomic status form more powerful lobby groups and raise more money through political action committees than do those from the lower classes and are thereby more successful in achieving legislation favorable to their interests, such as reduced capital gains taxes. Others find that a tripartite elite composed

of a small group of wealthy corporate owners, the executive branch of the federal government, and the top military officials form a power elite in the United States. Members of the power elite share similar perspectives and dominate national-level decision making, such as foreign policy, for their unified interests.

The Marxian perspective holds that it is the capitalist class that dominates national political power and is a nation's ruling class. Some with this view find that a segment of the capitalist class purposefully dominates the three branches of the U.S. government financially and ideologically. This is evidenced by their strong financial support of candidates and officeholders and by their creation and domination of large foundations (e.g., the Ford Foundation), policy-formation groups (e.g., the Council on Foreign Relations), and national news media. Others find that the interests of the capitalist class for profit accumulation are so deeply embedded in the culture that little direct influence by the capitalist class is necessary for public policy and legislation to express its interests, as is evidenced in the conventional wisdom that business expansion is the national imperative and must be facilitated by business deregulation.

Vincent Serravallo

See also Class Consciousness; Cultural Capital; Deindustrialization; Economic Restructuring; False Consciousness; Inequality; Intergenerational Mobility; Life Chances; Social Mobility; Socioeconomic Status; Stratification, Social; Underclass Debate

Further Readings

- Domhoff, G. William. 2005. *Who Rules America? Power and Politics*. 5th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Gilbert, Dennis. 2008. *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*. 7th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Grusky, David B., ed. 2008. *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- New York Times* Correspondents. 2005. *Class Matters*. New York: Times Books.
- Perrucci, Robert and Earl Wysong. 2007. *The New Class Society: Goodbye American Dream?* 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb. 1993. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Norton.
- Tucker, Robert C., ed. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: Norton.

Wright, Erik Olin, ed. 2005. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Class consciousness is an awareness of one's position in the class structure that can be shared by members of the same class. It enables individuals to come together in opposition to the interests of other classes and, therefore, can be important for people challenging inequality and exploitation. Although members of any class can have class consciousness, it is particularly important for those in the working class because they are at the bottom of the class hierarchy and have the most to gain from being unified.

The concept of class consciousness originates in the work of Karl Marx, who emphasized that it is important for the working class (proletariat) to see itself as a group with shared interests in order for workers to come together and overthrow the dominant capitalist class (bourgeoisie) and to take control of the means of production in a revolution. Although Marx never actually used the term *class consciousness*, he distinguished between "class in itself," where workers merely have a common relation to the means of production, and "class for itself," where they organize to pursue common class interests.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Friedrich Engels encouraged workers to unite by informing them of their exploitation by 19th-century capitalists who forced them to endure bad working conditions, long working hours, and wages so low that many families had to send their children to work to supplement the family income. Marx and Engels wrote that proletarians faced alienation—estrangement from both their work and the world in general. *The Communist Manifesto* states that because the dominant classes control major social institutions like education and religion, they can shape cultural norms and values so that members of the proletariat will blame themselves for their misfortunes. An individual who blames him- or herself will fail to recognize that others have the same problems and will fail to see a collective solution for them. Thus, Marx and Engels thought that an awareness of the increasingly exploitative nature of capitalism would make class consciousness inevitable and that it would help workers around the world to overthrow the bourgeoisie.