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Intro to Sociology

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“People Like Us” Movie Response

After watching “People Like Us,” several themes were shown on how society is split by class in the United States social system. Some people live at the top, living lives with little worry while others may be struggling to survive from paycheck to paycheck; those who get everything that they want or need and those who have to wonder if they will even get something to eat that night. This can create all sorts of separation in the lifestyle that people grow up with, social opportunities, and the amount of income that families may earn. The film illustrates this by showing all sorts of different walks of life in order to prove their point.

One of the main topics that this film portrayed was the split between cultures. It seemed, depending on class, people acted in certain ways, had different ideals, and possessed varying mindsets on similar topics. These concepts make sense, as people are raised in different environments, grow up with more or less money than others, and are taught different ways of living. A person that was raised in a poor neighborhood may have been around mainly poor types of people, had harder life situations, or taught to be street-smart. On the other hand, someone who may have been raised in a higher class family may have just been around people who met a certain high standard, been handed everything their whole lives, and not have to worry about making too many decisions on their own. This, in turn, influences what kinds of people are created in these communities, further pushing these ways of life so it continues to stay this way. Because of this, people who belong to a certain class seem to only associate with that class, since that’s what they’ve grown up around and are comfortable with. Even the middle class is split between upper-middle class, middle class, and lower-middle class (the working class). This makes a very fractured society, as people have all sorts of prejudices and hostile thoughts about each other between the different levels of classes in the US. The reason behind this is due to, as said before, how people are raised. In most cases, parents and close family influence peoples’ views on the other classes. The classes stay at a constant level of space between each other, causing all sorts of inequality with race, gender, and the actual class of the individual or group.

There are, however, those who try to challenge staying in their class; people who reach out to other classes by having social mobility and interaction. Social mobility is a very prominent concept in our society and is defined in the textbook as, “the movement of individuals or groups within the hierarchical system of social classes.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 199) By being able to move through the classes, it would make sense that people would move up in the social system, but that isn’t quite the case for a good percentage of the time. Lots of poor families and individuals tend to just accept their fate that they cannot move up any more from where they are in society, since it is a lot more difficult to move up the social latter than it is to fall down it. This sort of behavior is the formation of the “culture of poverty,” which is the “entrenched attitudes that can develop among poor communities and lead the poor to accept their fate rather than attempt to improve their lot.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 205) However, this is not always the case, as some people do indeed “rise up out of the ashes” from poverty and actually make something of themselves like Oprah Winfrey. She was raised up in a poor environment but became a celebrity icon of success. This is a prime example on what is known as the “American Dream,” which is the ideal way of life for any American, rising from “rags to riches,” as they say to achieve what most others cannot. The American Dream, however, seems to be out of reach from people. There was a survey that was done on the Millennial generation that tried to see if people even believe in this dream. 40% believed it existed, 45% believed that it was real at one point, but not anymore, and 10% that flat out said it wasn’t true. (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 209) So, according to the survey, to a good portion of US citizens, the American Dream is an actual possibility for people to achieve social ascension and economic success.

This success is the main theme that determines what class people are in. Having money brings social status, options to support individuals as well as families, and lets people thrive in a materialistic culture. Money is a large factor in how people judge each other as well. If someone doesn’t earn a certain amount, according to the Census Bureau, they are put into categories on how poor they may be. Because of this, many people are labeled as being poor in the eyes of the United States government as well as society as a whole. It entirely affects what groups individuals will be with, what kind of a job a person may get, what access someone may still have to any privileges, and how people are even able to survive. The government does have a system for taking care of those who are considered “under the poverty line,” called “social welfare,” which is supposed to support those who may not be able to afford food or medical assistance. Many people are debating about whether or not to keep giving social welfare, but if the government stops, a lot of people may be in danger of disease, starvation, and even death.

Our society is quite a complicated structure with drastically different cultures, economic standards, and goals in life, which makes the United States very broken socially, but at the same time uniform. Unfortunately, there are lots of people in low living standards and some that are sitting around with more money than they can ever need. However, our society seems to have adapted to these sorts of issues and themes. In recent years, more people have been trying to disrupt what feels like a fake structure in our society with what is accepted with classes. Groups are getting together more prominently and of different varieties to try to change what we as a society have accepted as the norm. In order to push new ideals, people have to do this, or else our society will never be able to progress. Discrimination would stay as prominent as it is, the poor will not be able to have enough help in order to get a good financial foothold, and the American Dream that so many wish to accomplish will stay as just a dream that many may never see.

# References

Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2014). *The Real World.* Canada: W. W. Norton.