

Deconstructing Class

“Our class position influences how we understand the system, and it helps us all if we talk about how class works in our lives. Otherwise, it often becomes a barrier to our living and working together... One way the ruling class keeps us divided and fearful is by the social silence over class differences and the illusion that we are all just middle class.” - Paul Kivel

Capitalism keeps us confused about class and ashamed or afraid to talk about it, which invisibilizes the massive wealth disparity in this country and the systems that keep it in place. Who does that benefit? If we can't name it, talk about it, understand it, and understand how we fit into the picture and what that means, it will hinder our ability to build the multi-racial cross-class alliances and movements that we need in order to create fabulous, egalitarian social, economic and political systems.

Your homework is to use the readings and the questions below to better understand different dimensions of your own class background. We strongly encourage you to ask about actual numbers, which can be uncomfortable in some families. You can use [this sheet](#) to help you understand your class background, and [this homework](#) to open up about reflections on classism (full links at the bottom).

Note: We know some people might not have access to their families for lots of different reasons. If you don't have access to the people you lived with during most of your childhood, there are other options to explore your class background: ask a relative, family friend or anyone else who knew you as you were growing up; look at records in your town for things like education levels of your parents or the price of a home if your family owned a home; answer the family questions from what you can remember.

To ask your family:

- What was your family's income over the course of your childhood (through high school age)? How did it change? What is your parent's/guardian's average income now?
- What work did they do as you grew up and now?
- How much formal education did they get?
- Did you have healthcare growing up? Dental care?
- How often did you have to move?
- Did your family receive income-based government assistance such as welfare, medicaid, section 8 housing, SSI/disability insurance, or unemployment insurance?
- Did family separation of any kind (ie. divorce, death, abuse, imprisonment) change your access to resources?
- Was your family in debt or constantly worried about paying bills while you were growing up? What were the sources of debt (mortgage? school? healthcare? basic living expenses?)?
- Did or does your family have stocks and bonds? A home or multiple homes that they own? A business? A retirement account? How much wealth did they have from these sources when you were growing up? Now?
- Did you or your parents inherit wealth? Will you?
- How has race affected your family's experience of class?

To ask yourself:

- What is your current income level?
- Do you have debt? How much? Where did it come from? (Education, medical bills, food and rent, etc).
- Do you have savings? a retirement account? accumulated wealth like stocks, inheritance, or property? How much? Where did it come from?

- Do you financially support anyone other than yourself? Who? Did you have to work to support your family as a young person?
- Do you receive any financial support from anyone in your family? Could you if you were in an emergency? If the answer is yes to either of these, what has this made possible in your life?
- Have you ever been able to take a break from paid work? done an unpaid internship?
- How much formal education have you had?
- Do you have healthcare? Have you had it for most of your adult life?
- Has the state ever intervened in your family through Child Protective Services, policing, or imprisonment?
- How does your class impact what spaces you feel comfortable in?
- How has race affected your experience of class?
- How has gender and sexual orientation affected your experience of class?
- How have abilities/disabilities affected your experience of class?

Links to other homeworks

Class Characteristics:

<https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Class-Characteristics.pdf>

Reflections on Classism:

<https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Reflections-on-Classism.pdf>