

From the Anne Braden Program 2011

Class Characteristics for Class-based Caucusing

Low Income, Working Poor and Working Class Caucus

Low Income and Working Poor

Family income between \$0 - \$24,000, average net worth minus \$8,900

- Substandard housing or homelessness
- Long-time use of public benefits, such as welfare
- Chronic lack of health care, food, or other necessities
- Frequent involuntary moves, chaos, and disruption of life

Working Class

Family income between \$24,000 and \$62,500, primary net worth, if any, is in home

- Little or no college education, in particular no BA from a four year college
- Low or negative net worth (assets minus debt), usually modest income
- Rental housing, or one non-luxury home long saved for and lived in for decades
- Occupation involving physical work and/or little control in the workplace

Middle Class Caucus

Middle Class

Family income between \$62,500 and \$94,000, average net worth \$161,000, primarily in home and savings for education and retirement)

- Two to four years of college, sometimes a degree from a professional school
- Homeownership
- More control over the hours and methods of work than working class people have, and/or control over others' work
- More economic security than working-class people have, but no way to pay bills without working
- Social status and social connections to help the next generation remain in the same class

Managerial and Ruling Class Caucus

Managerial Class

Family income between \$94,000 and \$373,000, average net worth \$344,000 including at least \$100,000 net financial wealth

- Education at elite private schools and elite colleges, or at public universities without student loans
- Large inheritances
- Luxuries, multiple homes and international travel
- Social connections, status, and financial knowledge to help the next generation remain well-off
- Depends on salaries, not investments, to pay bills.

Ruling Class

Family income above \$373,000 and net financial wealth at least \$2,045,000

- Enough income from assets that they don't have to work to pay basic bills
- Education at elite private schools and elite colleges without student loans
- Large inheritances
- Luxuries, multiple homes and international travel
- Social connections, status and financial knowledge to help the next generation remain wealthy

Homework: 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

We want to talk about class as part of the Anne Braden Anti-Racist Organizing Training Program because the systems of racism and class exploitation are deeply intertwined. We believe the fight against white supremacy and capitalism requires building multiracial, broad-based movements with working class leadership. There is a lot of confusion in the US around class, and who does that benefit? Capitalism keeps us confused about class and scared to talk about it, and part of the invisibility of class is strategic, because it invisibilizes the massive wealth disparity in this country and the systems that keep it in place. 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 and economic systems.

Your homework is to use the “Working Definitions of Class”, the “Class Chart” and the questions in “Where are You in the Class System?” to better understand different dimensions of your own class background. We want you to come to the next session prepared, as much as possible, to talk about where your class background fits in the big picture. You won't be asked to share the answers to these questions in the big group, but we will be breaking into class-based caucuses, and you may need to do some research ahead of time to figure out where to go.

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, talk to us about some other options to explore your class background.

To ask your family BEFORE study group if possible:

- What was your family's average income over the course of your childhood (through high school age) and what were their primary occupations?
- What is your parent's/guardian's average income now and what is their main occupation?
- How much formal education did they get?
- Was income from accumulated wealth a significant factor in your family's finances during your childhood or now? (Accumulated wealth refers to things like inheritance, stocks, bonds, property, a business, or a farm).
- Was your family in debt or constantly worried about paying bills while you were growing up?

To ask yourself:

- What is your current income level?
- Do you have savings or accumulated wealth like stocks, inheritance, or property?
- Do you have debt, and where did it come from? (Education, medical bills, etc).
- How much formal education have you had?
- How has race affected your experience of class?
- How has gender and sexual orientation affected your experience of class?