

**Table 8-1** The Relative Social Prestige of Selected Occupations in the United States

White-Collar Occupations	Prestige Score	Blue-Collar Occupations
Physician	86	
Lawyer	75	
College/university professor	74	
Physicist, astronomer	73	
Architect	73	
Dentist	72	
Member of the clergy	69	
Psychologist	69	
Pharmacist	68	
Optometrist	67	
Registered nurse	66	
Secondary school teacher	66	
Elementary school teacher	66	
Accountant	65	
Athlete	65	
Electrical engineer	64	
Economist	63	
Veterinarian	62	
Airplane pilot	61	
Computer programmer	61	
Sociologist	61	
Editor, reporter	60	
	60	Police officer
Actor	58	
Radio or TV announcer	55	
Librarian	54	
	53	Aircraft mechanic
	53	Firefighter
Dental hygienist	52	
Painter, sculptor	52	
Social worker	52	
	51	Electrician
Real estate agent	49	
Bookkeeper	47	
	47	Machinist
Musician, composer	47	
	47	Mail carrier
	46	Secretary
Photographer	45	
Bank teller	43	
	42	Tailor
	40	Farmer
	39	Carpenter
	36	Bricklayer, stonemason
	36	Hairdresser
	36	Child care worker
	35	Baker
	34	Bulldozer operator
	31	Auto body repairer
	30	Truck driver
Retail apparel salesperson	30	
Cashier	29	
	28	Garbage collector
	28	Taxi driver
	28	Waiter, waitress
	27	Bellhop
	25	Bartender
	23	Household laborer
	22	Door-to-door salesperson
	22	Janitor
	9	Shoe shiner

SOURCE: Adapted from *General Social Surveys, 1972-2010: Cumulative Codebook* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2011), pp. 3211-18.

*outstanding debts.* Wealth—including stocks, bonds, and real estate—is distributed even more unequally than income.

The pie chart at the right in Figure 8-3 shows the proximate distribution of wealth in the United States. The richest 20 percent of U.S. families own roughly 89 percent of the country's entire wealth. High up in this pyramid category are the top 5 percent of families, the "very rich" who own 65 percent of all private property. Rich families with wealth into the tens of millions of dollars, and 1 percent of families that qualify as "super-rich" own and possess about 37 percent of the nation's privately held wealth sources (Wolff, 2014). At the top of the wealth pyramid, the ten richest individuals in our society have a combined net worth of more than \$461 billion (Forbes, 2014). This amount equals the total property of 5.7 million average families, enough people to fill the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

The wealth of the average U.S. family is about \$100,000 (Bricker et al., 2014). Family wealth reflects the total value of homes, cars, investments, insurance policies, retirement pensions, furniture, clothing, and all other personal property, minus a home mortgage and other debts. The wealth of average people is not only less than that of the rich, it is also different in kind. Most people's wealth consists of a home and a car—property that generates no income. The greater wealth of the rich is mostly in the form of stocks and other income-producing investments.

When financial assets are balanced against debts, the lowest-ranking 40 percent of families have virtually no net wealth at all. The negative percentage shown in Figure 8-3 for the poorest 20 percent means that these families are actually live in debt.

In the United States, wealth is an important source of social power. The small proportion of families that control the majority of the country's wealth also has the ability to shape the agenda of the entire society. As explained in Chapter 10 ("Economics and Politics"), some sociologists argue that such concentrated wealth weakens democracy because the political system primarily serves the interests of the super-rich.

## Occupational Prestige

In addition to generating income, work is also an important source of social prestige. We commonly evaluate people other according to the kind of work we do, giving more respect to those who do what we consider to be more important work and less to others with more modest jobs.

Sociologists measure the relative social prestige of various occupations (Smith et al., 2013). Table 8-1 shows that people give high prestige to occupations, such as medicine, law, and engineering, that require extensive training and generate high income. By contrast, less prestigious occupations