# Paths to Power

Compare how two societies create and sustain unequal opportunities.

**S.4.2** "Compare the stratification of different societies along with its causes and effects."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline two ways family resources shape opportunity in each society. Circle one difference in how people can change their social position.

### Who Gets a Head Start?

1 In much of medieval Western Europe, land helped determine social rank. Noble families held large estates and claimed authority over the people who lived on them. Many peasants farmed land controlled by lords, paid rents or owed labor, and had little say in local decisions. Some peasants owned land, and merchants in towns gained wealth, so society was not a single rigid ladder. Still, family birth strongly shaped access to land and political power. A child born into a farming household was unlikely to become a lord, while an heir to an estate could expect land and influence.

2 In the contemporary United States, law does not assign people a hereditary rank or make them owe labor to a lord. Yet families differ sharply in income, savings, and property. These resources can pay for stable housing, tutoring, and college, which may open paths to higher-paying work. Families without such resources may face debt or have fewer choices about where to live and study. Employment, education, discrimination, and public policies also affect who gains wealth. A young person can move into a different economic class, but that possibility does not mean everyone starts with the same chances.

3 Consider what it took to gain power in each society. In medieval Western Europe, inheriting an estate could bring a noble both land and authority over tenants. A talented peasant could acquire property or enter a trade, but moving into the nobility was rare. In the United States, a person can gain wealth through work or business without inheriting a legal title. Even so, inherited money can fund education or a business, and wealth can increase a person's political influence. Both societies link family resources to opportunity, but the rules that preserve unequal rank differ.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does family background shape access to power in both societies? What differs about how that power is passed on?

2. Compare how land in medieval Western Europe and family property or savings in the United States can cause unequal opportunities.

3. How could a child from a farming household in medieval Western Europe and a child from a family with few resources in the United States face different limits on changing social position?

4. Compare one effect of unequal resources on people's choices in each society. What feature of each society helps produce that effect?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that college became free for every student in the United States. In 5 or 6 sentences, compare opportunities before and after this change, explain how it might affect inequality, and identify one limit it would not remove.

# Paths to Power



## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways family resources shape opportunity in each society. Circle one difference in how people can change their social position. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How does family background shape access to power in both societies? What differs about how that power is passed on? | **In both societies, family resources can give children an advantage. Medieval heirs could inherit estates and authority over tenants, while Americans may inherit money that helps them gain education, wealth, or political influence without a legal title.** |
| 2 | Compare how land in medieval Western Europe and family property or savings in the United States can cause unequal opportunities. | **Medieval landholding gave noble families authority and made it hard for many peasants to gain power. In the United States, property and savings can pay for housing and education that open paths to higher-paying work.** |
| 3 | How could a child from a farming household in medieval Western Europe and a child from a family with few resources in the United States face different limits on changing social position? | **The medieval child was unlikely to become a lord, although peasants could gain property or enter trades. The American child can move into another economic class but may have fewer choices about housing and education.** |
| 4 | Compare one effect of unequal resources on people's choices in each society. What feature of each society helps produce that effect? | **Many medieval peasants had little say in local decisions because lords controlled the land they farmed. In the United States, families with fewer resources may have fewer choices about where to live or study because housing and education cost money.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the United States described in the passage, family money can help pay for college. If college were free for every student, families with fewer resources would face one less barrier to education. That change could give more people a chance to qualify for higher-paying work. Wealthy families could still provide stable housing and help start businesses. Free college might narrow unequal opportunity, but it would not erase differences in inherited wealth.

Accept comparisons that distinguish inherited land and authority from economic advantages that operate without hereditary legal rank. For Part 3, accept plausible effects and limits supported by the passage, not claims that free college would end inequality.