According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s National, State and Metropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, anesthesiologists earn the highest annual mean salary of $184,340. On the other hand, the American Journal of Economics and Sociology states justices of the U.S. Supreme Court remain at the top of society’s system of social stratification with an annual salary of $203,000. Users of these structure numbers should bear in mind that the salary of members of the U.S. Supreme Court will be about the maximum, whereas the anesthesiologists will be an average, which ranges much higher particularly in cities with large populations.

One defining measure separates these two members of the social structure – status. The over twenty-nine thousand anesthesiologists in the U.S. are a key factor in the successful operations to improve the quality of life. Yet, only nine men and women hold the highest social status to inevitably affect the rights, liberties, and privileges of the entire nation. Though Mills (1956) argues a “cohesive power elite” group consisted of the top leaders in corporate, military, and politics govern the U.S., I would argue the U.S. Supreme Court holds an equal or greater influence in our social structure and raises an even larger social issue of why status and income is not strictly correlated. Supreme Court justices are the final group of elites to decide all matters of law, the concept of our culture that establishes order. Their decisions, discussed in secrecy, create precedence on major social issues such as an integrated education system and abortion rights. The high social status of members of the U.S. Supreme Court are justified in society through the power and prestige this major institution holds to affect our nation’s social structure and founding principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Though anesthesiologists play a role in the continuation of an individual’s life through medicine, their influence and power within mainstream society does not reach that of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Though Davis and Moore (1945) have justly argued the functional necessity of stratification, the factors that are contingent upon social rank remain the key reason as to why status and income are not firmly correlated. The first factor, requiring the greatest training or talent, is the justification as to why men and women in these careers are in the top 10% income scale. Our society wants the best and the brightest in the fields of law and medicine. However, the second factor, having the greatest importance for the society, is the point where members of the U.S. Supreme Court exercise their high social rank by their influence upon our society’s national issues. Though anesthesiologists on average potentially will have a higher annual income than members of the U.S. Supreme Court, this small group of elites holds the power, social status, prestige, and rewards to impact our social structure on a grand scale. As Mills (1956) states in The Power Elite, “There are also men of power who in quite small groups make decisions of enormous consequence for the underlying population”.

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