Building on theories of prestige that recognize the institutional order as a proximate cause of status hierarchy, I propose a cultural account of global inequality and the rank ordering of nations into a global status hierarchy. In this framework, the global institutional order is structured by the world polity and the beliefs and values of world culture. Developmentalism is the unifying transnational cognitive framework, or worldview, that legitimizes and propagates a rigid global status hierarchy through the conferral of social honor to high status countries. I systematically evaluate four necessary conditions for such a theory, including a) consensus and b) stability of prestige judgements among world raters, c) agreement between subjective and objective indicators of national prestige, and d) long-run stability of objective status hierarchy. I conclude with formal, statistical tests of the theoretical model. Results provide strong, quantitative evidence for a taken-for-granted cultural model of development and hierarchy that is grounded in shared values among world citizens. This work both challenges and augments prior accounts of global inequality.