1 Instructions

Answer a total of 4 questions among the following 6. If you have any question during the exam you may contact François Nielsen at francois_nielsen@unc.edu (in class Friday 12:00–2:30).

2 Questions

1. This question is about inequality trends in the United States and advanced industrial societies. Discuss the following, citing the relevant literature as needed.

   (1) Describe the trends in income or wage inequality in the United States since the end of World War II.
   (2) How do these trends compare with those over the same time span in other advanced industrial societies?
   (3) What are competing explanations of these inequality trends in the United States, and how successful are these explanations in accounting for differences between the United States and other advanced industrial countries?

2. This question is about the evolution of the Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective on social stratification (i.e., with respects to the roots of social inequality, the formation of social classes, the process of social revolutions, etc.). Citing the relevant literature as needed, you are to outline the evolution of Marxist thought by putting this evolution in relation with the social transformations experienced by industrial societies from the conditions of mid-19th Century England that Marx was describing to those of contemporary (post-)industrial societies that neo-Marxists are describing, and in relation to the rise and fall of the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Leninist regimes. Specifically:
(1) To what extent (if any) and how did the contemporary social conditions in industrial societies, and the fortunes of Marxist-Leninist societies, affect the thinking of Marx and the thinking of neo-Marxists theorists?

(2) To what extent (if any) did Marxist and neo-Marxist theories affect the evolution of the structure of industrial societies and the fortunes of Marxist-Leninist societies?

3. This question is about poverty in the United States. Discuss the following issues, citing the relevant literature as necessary.

   (1) What have been the principal trends in poverty in the United States over the last half century? What processes of social change might be behind these trends?

   (2) Ten years ago, in 1996, President Clinton “ended welfare as we know it” by eliminating Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). With the benefit of ten years’ hindsight, critically review the effect of this change in our welfare policies on poverty rates and its impact on poor families.

   (3) Briefly discuss the way in which the United States is similar to, or different from, other industrial societies in their approach to poverty and welfare.

4. This question is about how gender stratification is affected by the dynamics of families and labor markets. Discuss the following topics, citing the relevant literature as needed.

   (1) Describe in broad outline changes in gender stratification that have taken place in industrial societies in the course of the 20th Century.

   (2) Contrast various sociological theories of gender stratification, explaining how these theories might explain such aspects of stratification as the level of women’s labor force participation, access to post-secondary education (including choice of major), occupational distribution, political power, and the gender division of housework and care work.

5. Despite four decades of governmental efforts in the United States to increase racial and ethnic equality in educational and labor market outcomes, considerable inequalities and differences remain. Among explanations for the continuing inequalities are innate differences in abilities and preferences, problems with access to education, training, and other resources, structural barriers to those not seen as “usual” employees, and failure of policy design or enforcement. Focusing on one type of labor market inequality (e.g., education, wages, authority, advancement) or for one broad group (e.g., a specific racial/ethnic minority, immigrants from different regional origins), evaluate the various types of explanations for their usefulness in explaining the current situation. If you are talking about one particular kind of labor market outcome, be sure to discuss how there may be differences in processes disadvantaging (or perhaps advantaging) members of different groups. If you are focusing on a particular
group, be sure to mention crosscutting dimensions that may cause variation in the process within it (e.g., discuss women of different races or different citizenship status). (However, if you are also answering Question 4, please avoid excessive overlap with that question in discussing the gender dimension.)

6. One of the most comprehensive attempts to understand the nature of stratification systems over the full range of human societies is the ecological-evolutionary theory of Gerhard Lenski. Discuss the following points.

   (1) What are the bases and the main categories of the typology of human societies that Lenski uses to explain the nature of stratification systems?

   (2) What are the main social mechanisms that Lenski evokes to explain the nature of the stratification systems in relation to the type of society?

   (3) What predictions does Lenski make regarding the evolution of social inequality in the course of socio-cultural evolution, and how successful have these predictions been?