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. Although the Committee is not currently imposing a pages limitation on doctoral exams, we request that you try keeping the length of your answers within reasonable limits, such as the equivalent of 10 double-spaced pages at most. A bibliography or list of references is not needed. Instead identify cited literature informally in the text of your answers (e.g., Marx and Engels in *Communist Manifesto*, Hout and DiPrete (2006), Ganzeboom et al. in *ARS*, etc.).

2 Questions

1. 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.
   (a) What are the bases and the main categories of the typology of human societies that Lenski uses to explain the nature of stratification systems?
   (b) What are the main social mechanisms that Lenski evokes to explain the nature of the stratification systems in relation to the type of society?
   (c) 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?

2. Describe the patterns and changes in the distribution and composition of the middle class in the United States in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Discuss the evolution of the middle class during that period touching upon the following themes:
   (a) What are the various definitions and theoretical approaches to the middle class?
   (b) How are the changes in the distribution of the middle class related to gender and ethnicity?
(c) How has this evolution of the middle class (and similar trends in other industrial societies) been viewed within Marxist perspectives?

3. Describe what you consider to be three major “breakthroughs” (or at least notable advances) in social stratification over the past 20 years. You can choose to list among these advances that are only incipient but that you predict will be important in the future. For each breakthrough do the following:

(a) Describe the nature of the breakthrough.
(b) Explain why it is an important advance for social stratification research.
(c) Explain why the breakthrough took place in this particular area of social stratification research.

4. Following Bendix and Lipset, and Blau and Duncan in the second half of the 20th century, much research in comparative intergenerational mobility has been guided by some variant of a “modernization theory” under which more developed societies were expected to be characterized by more fluid mobility patterns, in which the role in individual achievement of ascription based on social origins would decrease and the role of achievement (such as education) would increase. By the turn of the 21st century, there seems to be a general feeling among students of comparative mobility that comparative mobility research among advanced industrial societies has failed to confirm the patterns predicted by modernization theory. In a recent article, Hout and DiPrete go so far as to declare “modernization theory is wrong”. Discuss the following:

(a) What kinds of empirical patterns (or lack thereof) have caused the disenchantment of mobility researchers with modernization theory?
(b) What is the problem with the application of modernization theory to intergenerational social mobility?
(c) What might be ways to look at intergenerational mobility (a.k.a. social reproduction) that would allow sociologists to resolve the apparent failure of modernization theory?

5. Despite over four decades of government efforts to promote racial and ethnic equality in the U.S., considerable inequalities in educational achievement, occupational achievement, and economic outcomes among racial and ethnic groups remain. Evaluate the success of sociological research (and the social sciences in general) in explaining these persistent inequalities. Do this by:

(a) Identifying the different kinds of explanations that have been proposed for these persistent inequalities
(b) Evaluating the overall empirical support for these explanations

6. In the 1997 science fiction film, Gattaca, employers are able to do genetic tests on tissue or blood samples to reveal complete genetic information about job applicants. This enables them to construct statistical profiles of mental ability, health, and psychological factors affecting workers’ productivity. In this society, a baby’s eventual position in the social hierarchy is largely determined the moment he/she is born, as the doctor takes a blood sample that
reveals mental and psychological competencies and predicts life expectancy. The genetic tests are not perfect – nurture still plays a role, after all – but they are good enough to reduce the traditional job interview to a pinprick on your finger.

(a) Putting aside the nurture/nature controversy for the moment, how closely does the United States of today resemble the anti-utopian meritocracy of Gattaca where birth (by social class or genes), not effort, determines success?

(b) Provided such a “genetic meritocracy” were actually plausible, how stable would such a society be?

(c) Would the genetically superior be the Brahmans of a new caste system or is a certain amount of intragenerational social mobility necessary to maintain support for the existence of inequality?