DOCTORAL EXAMINATION IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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Answer 4 questions, one from each pair of questions below. Rmember that you don’t need to forget race/ethnicity*gender in answering general questions.

A. Choose one.

A. 1. Select some major question or problem (or general problem area) of social inequality. Compare and contrast the usefulness of Marxism and one other theory in answering the question or dealing with the problem. (You may use Amodern@ as well as classic Marxism.) Point out major strengths and limitations of each theory or approach. (Assume that a theory is useful if it generates significant questions or ideas, apart from whether it leads its proponents to the right or wrong answers to all the questions they address with it.)

A. 2. A non-sociologist might argue that in today's mass consumer society, non-monetary measures of social stratification are not very important. After all, they argue, people can choose of which "life-style" they wish to be a part; the only constraint is money. Apart from visible racial and gender differences, they continue, income is the only barrier to choosing to which social group you want to belong. Therefore, studying things such as prestige, honor, or other psychosocial aspects of class are a waste of time better spent studying fundamental inequalities in wealth and income.

(a) Do you agree or disagree with this non-sociologist?

(b) If you agree that social stratification is really just about inequality in income and wealth, what distinguishes sociological concepts of inequality from those of economists?

B. Choose one.

B. 1. Answer either (a) or (b) about the concept of the Aunderclass.@

(a) Discuss to what extent you think the concept of Aunderclass.@ which implies that people either are in it or are not in it--i.e., that it is something Areal.@ rather than just a handy but imprecise word--is useful.

or

(b) According to W.J. Wilson, what are some major factors that, in recent decades, have made it even harder than before to escape the urban underclass? Then, select one such factor and assess how well Wilson’s analysis of it has stood up in research by people other than Wilson.

B.2. In a recent 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? Would the genetically superior be the Brahmans of a new caste system or is a certain amount of intra-generational social mobility necessary to maintain support for the existence of inequality?

C. Choose one.

C. 1. How does comparative research (in the sense of comparing different countries or types of societies) give us insight into social stratification processes? Give at least 3 examples of comparative research or theories, comparing and contrasting advantages and short-comings of such approaches. Conclude with general thoughts about the extent of benefit from doing comparative research.

C. 2. One hears a lot about *globalization* as affecting the U.S. economy. What sociological (or more generally social science) theories would help you understand the long- and short-term impact of this phenomenon. Be sure to give your definition of *globalization*, as well as the impacts you wish to understand.

D. Choose one.

D. 1. In the 1980s, sociologist borrowed and elaborated the *structural* models of institutional and radical economists. These models were said to be an advance over the *individual* status attainment and social mobility models of the 1970s. To what extent do structural, labor market, and dual economy types of models and theories explain race/ethnicity and gender inequality? What might one want to keep from status attainment and social mobility models? (You may think of status attainment and social mobility models rather broadly, rather than in their early forms.)

D. 2. How well does the assimilation model work today with respect to new immigrants, as compared with immigrants from earlier in the century and before? (Be sure to specify the time periods and groups you are discussing.) What is behind these similarities and/or differences?