1 Instructions

Answer any 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 MWF 10:00–10:50 & 2:00–2:50).

2 Questions

1. Based on your knowledge of stratification systems and concepts such as exploitation and meritocracy, and citing the relevant literature as appropriate, answer the question: Is inequality unfair?

2. Two of the most influential theories of social stratification are Karl Marx’s historical materialism and Gerhard Lenski’s ecological-evolutionary theory. Citing relevant literature as needed, answer the following questions:
   (1) What are the main similarities between the two theories?
   (2) What are the main differences between the two theories?
   (3) What is the historical and intellectual background behind each of the two theories, and how is each theory shaped by its background.

3. This question is about inequality trends in the U.S. (Note that the scope of the question is broader than the issue of racial inequality in the U.S.) Answer the following questions, citing relevant literature as appropriate.
   (1) What is the basic story of trends in inequality in America since 1950?
   (2) Can the story be told as one narrative, or is it necessary to distinguish fundamentally among different groups (e.g., men versus women, whites versus others) to explain this history?
   (3) Describe and evaluate the competing theories regarding the trends in inequality. Which theory or theories do you believe best account for the empirical evidence?
4. Consider the two propositions:
   a. Ascriptive inequalities, such as gender inequality, are anathema to modernity and its institutions; they will wither away.
   b. The capitalist system requires ascriptive inequalities for its survival and for the enrichment of its elites; they will not only survive, but help capitalism survive, too.

Do the following:
   (1) describe the theoretical basis for each of these propositions, focusing on whichever ascriptive qualities you think are most germane; and
   (2) evaluate both propositions for their overall validity, drawing on empirical evidence to justify your argument.

5. Based on your readings, and citing the relevant literature, answer the following questions:
   (1) Do social classes exist in the United States?
   (2) What empirical information would you need in order to answer this question definitively?

6. This question is about the role of schools in social mobility and status achievement in modern industrial societies. Consider the following alternative descriptions of the educational process in modern industrial societies:
   a. Through the combined effects of tracking, ability grouping, Pygmalion effects, differential drop-out rates and other sorting mechanisms, the educational system inexorably directs some children (typically from advantaged socio-economic classes) toward high levels of educational and occupational achievement, and others (typically from lower-class background and disadvantaged minorities) toward school failure and low occupational achievement, even though these children do not initially differ in achievement-relevant native abilities.
   b. The educational system of modern industrial societies sorts children into a range of educational and occupational achievement. However, these outcomes largely reflect initial ability differences among children; the schooling system does not create the differences in educational or occupational achievement.

Compare and contrast these two views of the educational process, bringing to bear relevant theoretical and empirical literature.