Doctoral Exam in Social Stratification
Spring 2008

February–March 2008

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.

2 Questions

1. The 1848 Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels gave a central role to the concept of social class developed earlier by French socialist writers. Do the following:
   (a) Outline the evolution of the notion of social class as used by social scientists from the time of Marx and Engels to today.
   (b) Relate this evolution in the notion of social class to (1) the social transformations that have taken place in industrial societies and (2) the varying fortunes of Marxist-Leninist societies.
   (c) Finally discuss briefly the question: Are there social classes in industrial societies today?

2. Wallerstein’s World System Theory has had a large impact on generations of sociologists. It is one of the sociological theories that are routinely taught in graduate programs of sociology in the United States today. Do the following:
   (a) Describe the World System Theory in some details.
   (b) What were the historical conditions under which the theory came into existence and gained popularity?
   (c) Summarize the key historical evidence that supports the theory.
   (d) Evaluate the theory against the recent tremendous economic development in India, China, Vietnam, . . . . Is the theory supported or not supported by these new developments? Why?
3. Both Marx and Lenski emphasized the influence of technology on social systems. Both argued that technology or productivity is the ultimate force that drives social change.

(a) Provide evidence for or against the role of technology in social change in the United States since World War II.
(b) What aspects of the US stratification systems (if any) have been changed by the development of technology? What might be the specific mechanisms behind the changes?
(c) What changes in the US social stratification system (if any) might take place in the next decades because of continuing technological change? Why?

4. Although analysis of race-class-gender intersections became more common in the 1990s, some recent studies—for example, studies of inequality among families by Kathryn Edin and Annette Lareau—have reasserted the centrality of class differences in processes of stratification.

(a) Using these or other examples, describe how recent research has updated the debate between intersectionality and single-axis (e.g., class or race or gender) approaches to inequality.
(b) Then, describe in your own terms the best way to handle intersecting axes or dimensions of inequality, substantively and/or methodologically, using empirical evidence to justify your position.

5. Despite almost 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 social-scientific research 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. The so-called elite theorists are sometimes treated as a footnote in the study of social stratification. This question asks you to evaluate the contributions (if any) of elite theorists to the understanding of mechanisms of social stratification. To do this, discuss the following:

(a) Who are the elite theorists?
(b) What did they say about social stratification that was distinctive compared with other approaches?
(c) In what ways (if any) did the work of elite theorists affect the current understanding of stratification mechanisms?
(d) What parts (if any) of the work of elite theorists might be worth reviving or extending to enlighten contemporary studies of social stratification? If you argue there is nothing to revive or extend, elaborate on why not.