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 per question 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 trends of social inequality in the course of socio-cultural evolution, and how successful have these predictions been?

2. This question is about Working Poverty. As the United States has reduced the number of families on welfare since the mid 1990s, an increasing percentage of the poor are “working poor”, i.e., poor families with a full time worker. (The increase is particularly large if we use 150% of the official poverty line as the definition of “poor”). The contrast with other industrial countries is, in some cases, striking. In Denmark, for instance, the minimum wage is around $17 per hour and there is low unemployment, and as a result there is virtually no “working poverty”.
To answer this question discuss the evidence on working poverty. You may either focus on trends, levels, and policies in the United States, or broaden your answer to incorporate a comparative discussion of other industrial countries.

3. In the course of its history the United States has been the theater of multiple encounters between racially and ethnically diverse groups originating in the native populations of America, in various waves of European immigration, and in largely African populations brought to the region in the context of slavery. Since 1965 high levels of immigration from non-European countries have further reshaped the race and ethnic makeup of the United States. The eventual fates of these different groups in American society have ranged from successful integration to continuing concern amidst persistent disparities in educational, occupational, and economic outcomes. Do the following:
   (a) Identify the different kinds of explanations that have been proposed for this variation in outcomes across groups (the persisting inequalities as well as the successful integration).
   (b) Evaluate the success of these explanations in accounting for the overall empirical patterns of group differences.

4. Major goals of research on social stratification and mobility from the middle of the 20th Century to the present have included
   (a) Understanding how individuals in society achieve occupations associated with various levels of status and economic rewards.
   (b) Understanding how the social origins of individuals (i.e. characteristics of their family of origin) affect the status they eventually achieve.
   (c) Understanding how the level of industrialization of a society and other structural characteristics of the society (e.g., different levels of emphasis on “meritocracy”, different configurations of mechanisms of “social reproduction”, different political institutions, etc.) affect the process of inter- and intra-generational achievement.

To answer this question analyze the main theoretical assumptions that have motivated the social stratification research on these issues; discuss the extent to which this research has succeeded, or failed to succeed, in reaching these goals; identify emerging perspectives (if any) that might help social scientists achieve these research goals.

5. Max Weber famously distinguished three aspects of the position of individuals in society that are usually translated as class, status and party. The concept of status inequality in particular has a long tradition in social stratification research. In contemporary societies, what role do you think status actually plays in overall social inequality, compared to income and wealth inequality (say class), and perhaps also to party (explaining along the way what the latter term means)?

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 our 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.