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 (I will be teaching the Social Stratification seminar from 9:30 to 11:50 on both days but I will try checking my email shortly before starting class and shortly afterwards.) 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. Most questions expect you to “cite relevant literature”, which means citing some works that are most relevant to the topic of the question, as one would do in a journal article. You are not expected to cite all the literature relevant to the topic! 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. Exploitation in Contemporary Market Economies. The concept of exploitation is central to the classic Marxist ideas of social class and inequality under capitalism. However, Marx’s definition of exploitation is derived from the labor theory of value, which turns out to be logically flawed because it attributes all of the value of a product to labor inputs (ignoring the role that capital plays in increasing labor productivity). Based on your readings, and citing relevant literature, can you provide an alternative definition of exploitation and discuss whether, in your analysis, exploitation exists in contemporary market economies?

2. The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s initiated at least two centuries of increasing divergence in average income (as might be measured as GDP per capita) between the early industrializing societies (essentially counties of Western Europe later joined by Japan and neo-European
societies such as the U.S.) and other societies in the World. On the other hand some scholars have conjectured that over the course of economic development income inequality within a society traces an inverted-U shape: inequality at first increases, then levels off, and finally declines as a society becomes fully industrial. Citing relevant literature, discuss the following points.

(a) What have been the trends in overall (or total) world income inequality – i.e., income inequality among all inhabitants of the world, as if they were members of a single world society. Is total world income inequality increasing or declining?

(b) What have been the relative contributions of trends in inequality within societies and trends in inequality between societies to trends in overall world inequality?

3. A popular cliche about the United States is that it is “a land of opportunity”. In view of relevant literature and empirical findings, discuss the veracity of that cliche. It might be useful to include a discussion of the meaning of “opportunity” and, whatever the definition of the concept that is chosen, comparison of opportunity in the United States relative to other industrial societies, and description of historical trends in opportunity in the United States from, say, the beginning of the 20th century to the present.

4. It has been noted by scholars of the French, Soviet, and Chinese revolutions, among others, that the leadership of revolutionary movements tends to be composed more often of members of the educated and privileged elite, rather than members of the industrial working class, the peasantry or other disadvantaged proletariat. Interpret this pattern in terms of the revolutionary scenario of Marx and Engels and later students within the Marxist tradition, in contrast with the account of social revolutions given by elite theorists, particularly Pareto.

5. On 14 Jan 2005 Lawrence H. Summers, then President of Harvard University, read remarks at the NBER Conference on Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce in Cambridge, MA, that included the following passages.

There are three broad hypotheses about the sources of the very substantial disparities that this conference's papers document and have been documented before with respect to the presence of women in high-end scientific professions. One is what I would call the – I’ll explain each of these in a few moments and comment on how important I think they are – the first is what I call the high-powered job hypothesis. The second is what I would call different availability of aptitude at the high end, and the third is what I would call different socialization and patterns of discrimination in a search. And in my own view, their importance probably ranks in exactly the order that I just described. . . .
So my best guess, to provoke you, of what's behind all of this is that the largest phenomenon, by far, is the general clash between people's legitimate family desires and employers' current desire for high power and high intensity, that in the special case of science and engineering, there are issues of intrinsic aptitude, and particularly of the variability of aptitude, and that those considerations are reinforced by what are in fact lesser factors involving socialization and continuing discrimination. I would like nothing better than to be proved wrong, because I would like nothing better than for these problems to be addressable simply by everybody understanding what they are, and working very hard to address them.

Evaluate Summers' three hypotheses about the relatively lower representation of women in high-end scientific professions in light of contemporary scholarship on gender inequalities by doing the following.

(a) Explicate the mechanisms underlying each of Summers' hypotheses.
(b) Evaluate the extent to which each hypothesis is supported or undermined by existing empirical research. To what extent does empirical research support the relative order of importance of the three mechanisms suggested by Summers?
(c) Are there additional mechanisms, not mentioned by Summers, that should also be considered in order to understand lower representation of women in top science and engineering departments?

6. 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?