

April 9, 1999

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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Answer 4 questions, one from each pair of questions below.

A. Choose one.

A. 1. (a) Is there a **Aruling class** in the United States? (Be sure to define **Aruling class**.) What alternatives to this idea have social scientists proposed? What is evidence for and against the existence of a **Aruling class**? How do different theories and research methods make it more or less likely that a researcher will find a ruling class? (b) In term of social inequality, what difference would it make in the US if there *were* a **Aruling class**?

A. 2. Say that you are teaching an undergraduate stratification class. You want to have coherence in discussing classical theories (up to and including Davis and Moore). You choose one theory as the **Abest** with which to understand modern US society. Then you bring in other theories as they would modify this one or as defective to the one on which you focus. (a) What would your **Abest** theory be? Why? (b) What other theories would you compare and contrast with this theory? In what ways would you say these other theories are inferior to the one you chose? Modifications of your **Abest** theory?

B. Choose one.

B. 1. To what extent is a global perspective necessary to understand inequality within a given country? Is it necessary to take this perspective only for developing countries? only for advanced industrialized countries? for neither type of country? for both types? Explain your choice. Be sure to be clear about the theory/ies that you use to justify your answer.

B. 2. In the US, women still earn less than men and racial/ethnic minorities earn less than whites. How would you explain this? To what extent are explanations different when talking about different types of comparisons (other groups compared with white men, women compared with men of their same racial/ethnic group [e.g., African American women with African American men], the same gender compared across race/ethnic groups [e.g., African American men and white men])? Think in terms of broad theories rather than just lists of variables.

C. Choose one.

C. 1. Despite US laws and government programs aimed at getting people out of the underclass of the truly disadvantaged, it is still there. (a) What are some factors that have made it *easier* than in times past to escape the underclass? (b) What are some factors that make it *harder* than in times past?

C. 2. The United States can be characterized as a liberal welfare state. What effect does being a liberal welfare state have on the ways in which we try to reduce inequality of various types? (a) Take one group that is relatively disadvantaged in this society (e.g., minority women, white women, minority men, the poor, rural residents, inner city residents, recent immigrants). (b) Discuss how this inequality might be reduced in different ways by liberal (in this case US), conservative, and social democratic welfare states. Don't worry about exact legislation. Rather give a sense of how the different welfare regimes respond to inequality in their societies.

D. Choose one.

D. 1. Early students of social mobility were captivated by the idea that modern industrial society is inherently less rigid and/or more open and meritocratic than traditional societies. (a) Provide a broad overview of the evolution of social mobility studies in past decades, paying particular attention to the effects of:

- (i) the evolution of methods for measurement of mobility;
- (ii) the evolution of theories of social mobility;
- (iii) changes in the conceptualizations of what constitutes social mobility;
- (iv) expansion of data to include information on state socialist countries, as well as just democracies.

(b) How would a sociologist today, then, evaluate the belief of early students of social mobility?

D. 2. Status attainment research tried to separate out how ascribed and achieved characteristics contributed to social inequality. One criticism of this approach was that it did not look at structure, that it examined purely individual and family characteristics. The labor market research of the late 1970s and 1980s was hailed as bringing structure back in. (a) In the context of social stratification research, how would you evaluate these arguments? (b) How do you define the concept of structure for social stratification research? (c) How would you study this? (d) To what extent would you find the concepts of ascribed and achieved useful in your approach?