

Study Questions, Week 8

Topic for the Week:

Stratification and Social Inequality

Readings for the Week:

Macionis text, Chapter 8

Reader, Chapters 20 (Kerbo) and 22 (Gans)

Questions:

- (1) What is meant by *social stratification*? What evidence supports the contention that stratification is a *social* (not individual) phenomenon?
- (2) Explain the relationship between *ascribed* and/or *achieved* status and systems of stratification. Provide examples of statuses that may form the bases of a *caste* system, a *class* system, and an *estate* system. What is the *rationale* for each system? What *ideologies* support each system?
- (3) What is meant by *status consistency*? Across what factors is consistency measured? What conditions are more likely to produce a higher degree of status consistency?
- (4) Compare the arguments made by *evolutionary*, *functionalist* and *conflict* explanations of stratification.
- (5) According to the explanation developed by Davis and Moore, why do we observe stratification in all societies? What are the benefits provided by stratification? What are the critiques of this approach?
- (6) Compare the theories of stratification provided by Karl Marx and Max Weber. What do the theories have in common, and how do they differ?
- (7) What is the difference between *income* and *wealth*? Which offers a better indicator of stratification? Why?
- (8) What are the bases of inequality in the United States? Are these primarily ascribed or achieved statuses?
- (9) What characterizes the *class structure* in the United States? Identify the important characteristics of the *upper*, *middle*, *working*, and *lower* classes. What are some problems that this class structure produces?
- (10) What is meant by *social mobility*? Distinguish *structural*, *intragenerational*, and *intergenerational* mobility. Which has a greater effect on mobility in the United States, ascribed or achieved characteristics? Is the American Dream still a reality?

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(11) What is the difference between *relative* and *absolute* definitions of poverty? What is life like for those living in poverty? Why does poverty exist, even in rich societies like the United States?

(12) What is meant by *welfare*? What are the goals of welfare programs? Who receive most welfare? Does this change if we define welfare as *all* assistance distributed by the government? What are the advantages and costs of state-distributed welfare assistance?

(13) Which sociological paradigm best describes the approach of Herbert Gans' in "No, Poverty Has Not Disappeared?" What passages from the article give you clues as to his approach?

(14) Does Kerbo's portrait of the U.S. class system more closely agree with the Marxist or the Weberian notion of stratification? By what means do the elite rule in the U.S.?

(15) Does poverty have to exist in society? Why or why not?