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Introductory to Sociology

Take Home Exam

Examine the United States today in terms of Marx's model of class-stratification. To what extent can one explain the social relationships between social classes as "determined" by class-conflict or class antagonism. You may consider such issues as: (1) the primitive accumulation, (2) the industrial reserve army, (3) the labor theory of value, (4) James Gilligan's thesis, (5) the war on drugs, (6) the Wall Street "bailout" and its controversies, (7) the Employee Free Choice Act, (8) Emigration policy, (9) unionizing efforts, (10) wages vs. profits, (11) ideologies, (12) pharmaceutical companies and public health, (13) global class conflict (I.e.e Iraq, etc.), (14) the NAFTA and FTA treaties, (15) conflict of interest(?) in the selection of the new President's economic team and government officers. How does "False consciousness" or the lack of "class consciousness" mitigate against the awareness of class-conflict? ON the other hand, you may hypothesize that the functionalist thesis of a harmony of interest between classes trumps Marx's analysis of "class warfare." You must Provide Evidence for your assertions.

"Stratification refers to the division of society into layers. These layers are distinguished by unequal rewards and life chances. Most sociologists see stratification as involving a classification not only of the groups, but also of the relationships that exist between them" (social stratification class, race, and gender in sociological perspective)

In briefly evaluating the classical and modern explanations of social stratification in the United States, it's important to understand class position, and discard assumptions based on the nature of inequality. With this in mind, "it seems that most of these theories come from fairly elite class perspectives and, in turn, tend to be more pessimistic about bringing change to the inequalities that are being evaluated". (social stratification class, race, and gender in sociological perspective) Class stratification in the United States causes social antagonism of the lower classes, class conflict as the political Elite is the class body that holds the power. Class stratification can be seen amongst examples such as The Wall Street "bailout", situations where society a dual-labor market thesis exist portraying wages vs. profits. Class stratification is a layered effect where the lower class is separated from the higher class and among the lower class a false consciousness is perceived causing a class conflict leading to "class warfare".

Of the classical (elite) explanations of inequality, Max Weber's seemed to be most accepted within the domain of sociology and other social sciences dealing with modes of inequality. "Weber, who believes that we are living within a sort of "iron cage" which cannot allow us to look beyond the rules and regulations of our capitalist system" (social stratification class, race, and gender in sociological perspective), emphasizes the importance of power relationships in society. Those who are in class

positions at the top of the apex are the people who, one, hold most of the power in society, and two, make the choices for the direction and reproduction of society.

When referring to the Wall Street Bailout, this was a crisis in the United States where the political elites (corporate businesses) needed to be granted money from the American Government in order to avoid destruction of the foundation of the businesses built upon those who sit among the top of the apex. The Wall Street Bailout was influenced from multiple factors such as "borrowers who reached too far, mortgage brokers who pocketed big commissions on loans they knew were bad and Wall Street banks that packaged those bad loans, applied a little alchemy and sold them to investors, who didn't bother to check carefully what they were buying and relied on rating agencies who gave their unfounded blessing on the investments." (Schoen, John W. "Impact of Wall Street bailout becoming clearer") Now following this the government agreed to take from the "Federal Reserve" which would be sufficient for these types of causes, but after reviewing the amount of money the federal reserve had, it was clear that money would be needed from the American tax payers as well to pay for the bailout. This causes class conflict, as the working class (capitalists) are paying more money to keep the political elite (upper class) in power, because of bad investments, etc. to causing the wall street bailout to happen in the first place.

"The core attributes of the economic system are alienation and the bureaucracy, which create a dehumanizing effect on the characters within the system. The bureaucracy, with its rational legal authority, clear division of labor, career systems, and impersonality, is technologically more perfect than any other system (according to Weber)." (*Social stratification, class, race, and gender in sociological perspective*) Within this structure, Weber describes there being three dimensions of inequality, class which correlates with the economy, status which correlates with the social aspects of society, and party; which correlates with the political aspects of society.

The dual-labor market thesis "contends that there are two labor markets in terms of income, in which the higher income market is of primary importance and the lower income market is of secondary importance." ("Dual labour market: Definition from Answers.com.") This tries to justify those people within high power positions trying to prove that our system is objectively rewarding higher incomes to professions that have higher social importance than lower income professions. Dual-labor market ultimately leads to a battle of "wages vs profits". Political elite are among a status of where they receive "profit" which in this case profit has no limit. Where the lower working class receive a "wage" where a wage is limited and employees essentially are the working horse and backbone to a hierarchy of businesses that generate a higher rate of profit by limiting the wages of employees, or hiring employees who will work for lower wages. Examples of this can be seen from situations such as the "The changes of the 1942 and 1943 tax laws caught many people off guard. With many additional people suddenly faced with a tax bill never previously experienced, war or not, legislators and executives feared a tax revolt. Legislators realized that many people tended to ignore the total debt in any bill if they could pay in installments rather than lump sum. Therefore withholding was and is a psychological ploy such that people do not realize the total tax bill." (Franklin, Benjamin. "The American Income Tax - Chapter 13 - Wages vs. Income - The Camel's Nose Grows.") Installment payments through withholding not only solved the problem of quashing a possible tax revolt, but circulated more currency treasury. The taxes that those who work for profit (political elite) and those for wages (working class) are essentially

going back to the political elite with situations such as the bailout. The working class Americans are essentially furthering the rate of profit for the political elite!

Similarly, the functionalist theory of stratification "views societies as social systems that have certain basic problems to solve or functions that have to be performed if the society is to survive". (*Social stratification class, race, and gender in sociological perspective*) So the reason for inequality, for functionalists, is because our system must reward (with significantly higher incomes) those individuals who are motivated enough to yield the stresses of such functionally important positions. The fact that our system reproduces classes into the same class assumes the classical labor-market theory is correct, in which we have a perfect system based on an equal opportunity playing field. So, according to these elite theories, the problem of inequality is an "individual" problem. If an individual is not motivated enough, then someone else will be, in so that the crucial functions of society can be carried out by the most competent, talented individuals. Clearly, I think, these theories are poor analysis of inequality. This produces a "false consciousness" where Americans have a misconception (or the working class so to speak) that them being among the bottom of the apex is their own individual problem of low success rates, and limited ability that the person has to offer. This is the destruction of human integrity, and motivates competition in which sense "class warfare". Always, it seems however the power elite will be the ones who really have the control of class stratification in the end (as previously mentioned) due to a cycle of the working class "working" for the political elite furthering the rate of profit. Also, these theories assume that we are all equal in opportunity, when, in fact, "there is no such thing as equality in a system which needs to reproduce itself in every aspect of the social realm" (*Social stratification class, race, and gender in sociological perspective*). By reproducing itself as it does, it generally maintains control to be held by those who have made, and have been born into money while those without struggle to simply survive, let alone profit. Though few theories of inequality made by non-elitists have been acknowledged, the works of Karl Marx have sustained itself over a century in time.

Marx believed that capital produces profit-which accounts for why we have inequality. Because capitalism produces both wealth and poverty, society creates the stratification of social classes. "Marx believed there to be two types of classes: the bourgeoisie (the power elite) and the proletariat (the working class). Though about 90% of the people in a capitalist society are working class, most believe that they are able to become part of the class of capitalists (and are, of course, encouraged to believe this by the capitalists)." ("Marx on Social Class.") This can be seen today by all of the people pouring their income into the stock market, which ultimately gives the capitalists much greater proportions of wealth than the working class receives. "The whole basis of class, Marx believed, is through exploitation-those who have the money, have the control to exploit those who have little or nothing." ("Marx on Social Class.") From this, the capitalists decide what, when, and how the conditions of labor are to be performed. The working class, on the other hand, are trading their labor for wages making them basically products for capitalists to exploit.

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