Week 10. Weber: Class, Stratification, Socialism

1. For Weber, social status or prestige is at least as enduring a basis of group formation and collective action as class position. Clarify Weber's concept of “status group” and the distinction he makes between status and class. What arguments can be made for and against the autonomy of status from class position?

2. How appropriate is the concept of “status group” for analyzing social identities and collective action based on nation, race, or ethnicity? What are the implications of viewing racial and ethnic conflicts as a form of status group competition? What are the limitations of this view? Are there better theoretical alternatives?

3. Burris (p. 67) says that “without always acknowledging the fact (or even necessarily being aware of it), contemporary Marxists have drawn heavily upon Weberian concepts in their effort to adapt classical Marxism to the conditions of late twentieth century capitalism.” Identify and defend one instance of the incorporation of Weberian themes into Marxist class analysis that you think has been most positive and provides an advance over either Marxist or Weberian theory alone. Or, alternatively, identify and criticize one effort to achieve a synthesis between Marxist and Weberian theories of class that you think has been least successful and where you believe that either an unadulterated Marxist or Weberian theory provides a superior alternative.

4. Mommsen (p. 242) comments that “Weber saw the roots of alienation, not in property relations, but in omnipotent structures of bureaucratic domination.” Critically evaluate Weber's thesis of the “omnipotence” of bureaucratic domination. What role does this thesis play in Weber's assessment of the prospects for socialism? How might an advocate of democratic socialism respond to Weber’s claims concerning the futility of socialist reform?