Chapter 12

Prestigious College Courses and Race/Skin Color: Some Thoughts about Higher Education in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The discussion promoted in this text is part of the inquiry of PhD in Education in progress since 2012 at Fluminense Federal University (Niterói, Brazil). The above-mentioned doctoral research is dedicated to the study of educational trajectories of prestigious black professionals in Brazil. The main objective of this text is to bring up a reflection on the studies about the relation between prestigious college courses and race/skin color in Brazil carried out in the contemporaneousness. For this purpose, it is necessary to analyze the process of selection of the professional careers that demand the ownership of the bachelor's degree (higher education). This text is supported by studies about social stratification, such as Wright (1978), Goldthorpe (1987), Januzzi (2003) and Queiroz (2004). Bibliographical inquiry was the methodology elected for the development of the present text.

INTRODUCTION

How can we define what a prestigious profession is? This was one of the issues that appeared in the doctoral research of the author of this text. Based on studies that show that a larger number of blacks is inserted in the careers of lesser status and social prestige, the question raised has become more important in face of the need to discuss the prestige scale in which the claim is based. There are several ways to establish prestigious levels of hierarchy of professions, such as wages and position offers. Each study presents a particular type of hierarchy of courses and therefore the prestige scale.

The aim of this chapter is to bring up a reflection on contemporary studies about the participation of blacks in prestigious professions in Brazil. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the process of selection/choice of the careers that require a college degree ownership. Recently, some academic studies show...
that white men have predominance in the careers of higher prestige and social status; on the other hand, the number of blacks in the university is restricted to certain areas of knowledge that have less social prestige and, consequently, more easily accessed, such as Library and Social Work. It is noticed that the social hierarchy of professions reflects the provision of courses in the power structures of the university campuses.

Interest in this subject arose from the fact that both women and blacks are present in the university unevenly white men with respect to carriers. Everything indicates that white men dominate careers of higher prestige and social status. Thus, it aims to verify to what point this university market puts women and blacks in next levels of choice and possibilities.

BACKGROUND

The Prestigious Scale of Professions in Brazil

A priori, it is important to say that there is correspondence between the social inclusion of one in society and one’s possession or not of means of production. The occupation exercised, the insertion in the production process, the position in the labor market and the possession or not of means of production would be some of the most classic criteria of the stratification of individuals (Januzzi, 2003).

According to Januzzi (2003), numerous methodologies have been dedicated to the construction of a socioeconomic index for occupations and their socio-occupational classifications. Often used in Anglo-Saxon studies, a way to classify occupations is to group them according to their salary level and required education. The occupations are grouped and prioritized in groups or categories of different socioeconomic status. It is called this methodology of socioeconomic scales occupations or socio-occupational scales. In this methodology, socioeconomic status matches the social prestige conferred by population to the occupations or the relative position of employment in a qualifying ranking ruled by some simple socioeconomic indicator or compound as provided income, typical skill level occupations, education of the workforce allocated them or even a combination of these dimensions (Valle Silva, 1978, 1985; Jorrat And Acosta, 1992; Bukstein, 1997 apud Januzzi, 2003, p. 249).

Januzzi (Ibid) proposed the classification of occupations in five Brazilian strata. The author argues that the construction of socioeconomic status concept involves pragmatic choices and subjective preferences. The author of the proposal is supported by a wide Anglo-Saxon tradition, as Wright (1978) and Goldthorpe (1987), which reflected empirically the significant socioeconomic differentials in earnings, schooling, quality and safety in the workplace. Jannuzzi proposition (op. cit.) ranks occupations in strata through an index based on socioeconomic distance between the occupations, which can be measured by different methods. A methodology proposed by the author considers the differences and similarities of occupations in relation to its urban/rural character, manual/non-manual, to activity groups, skill level, control and autonomy. The author based his conclusions also on data from the National Survey of Household Sample (PNAD), to propose their socio-occupational scale aggregation of Brazilian occupations in five major groups:

1. **High**: Doctor, engineer, university professor, entrepreneurs, top managers and posts in public administration (judges, prosecutors, sheriffs, military officers, etc.);