Questions for Discussion.

1. From the perspective of class analysis, some people are poor because power elites benefit from their poverty by maintaining exploitation and domination. However, keeping the working poor in poverty does not help maximize capitalists’ interests since they could be more exploitable if better off. In addition, keeping the underclass unexploitable does not benefit capitalists either, not to mention poverty-related social risks. So, an alternative explanation may be a theory of conspiracy: keeping a part of people in poverty serves as a punishment system. Or, poverty may be attributed to failed political actions. If not, is it plausible to claim that the high incidence of poverty (including that of working poor and underclass) just signals the failure/decline of the capitalist system so that it cannot maximize available labor power? Further, how is the unexploitable group of a large scale generated in the current capitalist system? Is it possible to convert it into an exploitable group in order to reduce poverty? Or, is it better for them to remain an "empty class"?

2. The Marxist view of exploitation and class relations rests on a straightforward causal linkage between the exploited and the exploiter, generating two distinct classes: the capitalist class and the proletariat class. The existence of the “middle class” in advanced capitalist societies complicates this polarized model: individuals can occupy “contradictory locations” i.e. they can both exploit and be exploited. Does this suggest that there are more than two distinct classes in capitalist societies, or is it more useful to understand these contradictory locations as representing strata/segments within classes?

3. The inductive approach to class analysis. Scholars that take the “inductive” approach to class analysis (e.g. David Grusky) argue that class matters for a variety of outcomes: it shapes people’s political preferences, their economic interests, their access to education, the strategies that they put forward to protect their economic position in the market, etc. They also argue that it is in “small” – rather than “big” – class categories where people acquire a certain class identity. Occupations, for instance, are appropriate ways to think of class categories because people in the same occupation have broadly similar everyday experiences and occupy a broadly similar position in the labor market. Do you think this is a good way to address the question of how people acquire class identities, establish solidarity and engage in common strategies to protect their interests? While it is true that different approaches to class analysis serve different empirical purposes, the question here is whether you think that occupations – as opposed to, for example, the notion of “life chances” or the notion of “exploitation” – are useful reference categories to explain, specifically, the way that people adhere to a particular class identity.

4. In Approaches to Class Analysis various authors approach class analysis using a Marxian, Weberian or Bourdieuan theoretical lens. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches? In your own research, which approach might you use and why?