

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

STRATIFICATION

August 31, 2006

The doctoral preliminary examination in Stratification is organized into three components--theory, methods, and substantive problems and issues. The aim of the examination is to determine the student's command of this specialization within the constraints of time and space. No such examination can test exhaustively the extent of your knowledge but it should demonstrate your general familiarity with major theories and methods as well as contemporary issues in the specialization.

Please allocate your time over the next 24 hours as efficiently as possible. Each major section of the examination is weighted one-third and thus should be allocated approximately 5 double-spaced typed (printed) pages for a total of 15 pages for the entire examination. Make sure you write answers that will not be duplicated across examination questions. You should follow a journal format (e.g. American Sociological Review) for references and citations

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Part I. Theory

Select one of the two questions below and answer as thoroughly as time and space permit.

1. Stratification research has historically relied on survey questions dealing with occupation, educational attainment, income, wealth, and the like to index “class.” At the same time, several critics of this tradition, for example Bourdieu, have argued that this strategy ignores the always contingent nature of “class” (what Marxists call “class formation”). Based on the limits posed by this debate address the following things:

- a. What is class and how should we study it?
- b. Why should we study it the way you propose (and please be cognizant of potential alternatives to your suggestion)?
- c. Briefly, what would be the basic design of a study of class structure in Durham, N.C., based on your definition of class? Highlight how your definition and your proposed study design would help us understand not just class but other dimensions of inequality as well (race, gender, etc.).

2. Blacks in the USA still lag behind whites in almost every important socioeconomic, political, and health indicator. Other racial minorities, most notably, Asian Americans, seem to have done quite well in the same period. This state of racial affairs has been explained quite differently by analysts such as William J. Wilson, Douglas Massey, Richard Alba and Victor Nee, and Alejandro Portes among others. *First*, drawing on a variety of authors, articulate at least two major explanations for the persistent Black-White gaps in society (keeping in mind the progress of other ethnic groups). *Second*, make a case for one of these explanations and/or some hybrid combination of these explanations. *Last*, given the demographic changes of the country (e.g., Latinos as the largest minority, the role of immigration, etc.), predict what you believe will be the state of racial affairs in the next fifty years or so and suggest at least one policy strategy to handle the racial issues of the future.

Part II: Methods

Select one of your areas of sub-specialization and identify one unresolved problem that involves contrasting theoretical arguments in the literature. Briefly explain the main arguments and how they differ in accounting for the problem, citing and summarizing the key empirical literatures. What hypotheses can you formulate? Then, propose a study

that can empirically adjudicate between the contrasting arguments. Be sure to make clear what sort of evidence would be necessary to support or refute the contrasting arguments. Offer a feasible research design including the operationalization of key concepts, the primary or secondary data to be collected, and analytical techniques or methods to be deployed.

Part III. Substantive Areas

Select one question below and answer as thoroughly as time and space permit.

1. Workers of the world, UNITE!” urged Marx and Engels at the end of *The Communist Manifesto*. But a hundred and fifty years later, unionization rates are extremely low in many advanced industrial nations and so-called “identity politics” seem to have more salience than class-based politics. Why? Use the ideas of several authors to explain the decline of class-based politics in advanced industrial nations and the rise of gender- and race-based politics.
2. In what specialty area of stratification research do you find Weberian theory still vital, that is still motivating research and generating new questions? Justify your selection with citations to recent literature in this area.
3. How has cross-national comparative research extended our understanding of stratification systems? Identify one area of stratification research that has benefited significantly by a comparative approach and summarize the benefits and challenges of this research, citing and summarizing key empirical studies.