

Duke University

Department of Sociology

**GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

August 27, 2007 – August 28, 2007

This examination has three sections. You must answer ONE question from each of the three sections. Your answers should be as complete as possible. Each answer should be approximately five pages long (double-spaced, 1" margins, 12 point font) and the complete exam should be about 15 pages long (excluding the references). Please follow a journal format for references and citations (e.g. American Sociological Review). Avoid excessive duplication of material across answers.

You have 24 hours from the time you receive your exam to return it to Claudette Parker as an email attachment.

No discussion about any Qualifying Examination with any other person is permitted until after the exams are completed.

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SECTION I (this question is required):

1. 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 formulate hypotheses where appropriate. 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.

SECTION II (choose one of these two questions):

1. A general fault-line between neoliberal and structural approaches to inequality centers on the extent to which human agency can account for stratification. Discuss the limits of both structure and agency approaches for explaining stratification. Is there a structural explanation for stratification that can simultaneously allow actors to affect their own well-being? If so, what? If not, why not?

2. The concept social closure (and Tilly's closely related concept "opportunity hoarding") has gained momentum in recent years. Explain the concept closure, its theoretical origins, and its impact in two sub-areas. Can most sociological explanations of inequality be subsumed within closure accounts? Does closure have limitations that prevent it from becoming an encompassing explanation within sociology?

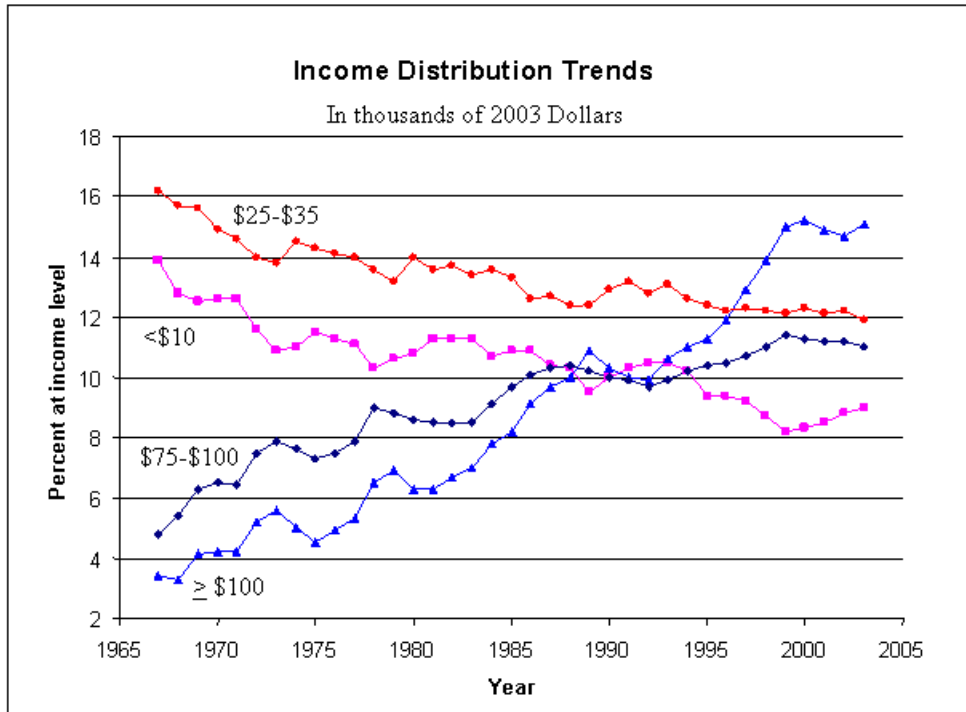
SECTION III (choose one of the following):

1. Is poverty's nature a universal phenomenon? Do its meaningfulness and measurement raise challenges for the study of poverty? Thus, does deprivation always share some common elements?

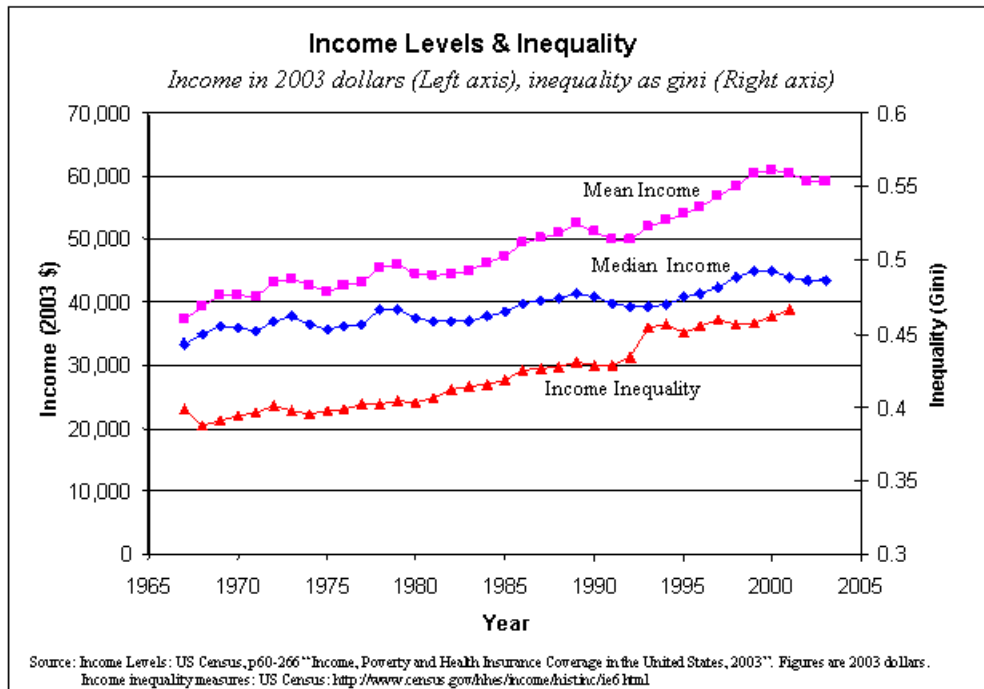
2. Has there been a declining significance of gender for social inequality? Relate both theoretical and empirical debates on this question.

3. Research on social capital suggests that people have a lot to gain from social networks and that differential access to these networks likely contributes to inequality. Identify one or more clear theoretical mechanisms that link networks to inequality. To what extent can these arguments be used to explain racial inequality?

4. Consider the charts below, constructed from the U.S. Statistical Abstract. There has been a lot of talk about rising inequality in U.S. society. What story can these charts tell? And, what stories can't they tell? Integrate your arguments with the reading list.



Source: US Census, p60-266 "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2003". Figures are in 1000s of 2003 dollars.



Source: Income Levels: US Census, p60-266 "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2003". Figures are 2003 dollars.
 Income inequality measures: US Census: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histc/in6.html>