

Graduate Preliminary Examination

Stratification, Mobility, and Labor Force Behavior

August 19, 2002

PART I

Answer each of the following two questions:

1. In recent decades, comparative approaches to the study of stratification have proliferated. What does a comparative perspective contribute to the study of stratification processes? Identify some challenges or disadvantages that a comparative approach brings. Demonstrate your argument by contrasting an area of stratification research that you feel has benefited from a comparative focus with an area that generally lacks a comparative focus. Finally, discuss what role (e.g., paradigmatic, supplementary, complementary, etc.) comparative research should have in the study of stratification.
2. Select a specific area in social stratification and mobility research (it should be different from the area you address in Part II). Identify one unsolved problem that involves competing theoretical arguments in the literature. Explain the main theoretical perspectives and derive their empirical implications. Then, briefly propose a study that can empirically adjudicate between the competing arguments. For your proposal, please be sure to focus your discussion on:
 - a. formulating hypotheses that can be empirically verified;
 - b. operationalizing the key concepts;
 - c. describing the evidence/data to be collected;
 - d. explaining the methods used to conduct the research.

The research design can utilize qualitative and/or quantitative methods and you should justify your choice of methods.

PART II

Answer one of the following questions:

3. Nearly 25 years ago, William Julius Wilson argued that class had become more important than race in explaining variation in stratification outcomes for U.S. minorities. After briefly summarizing Wilson's argument and evidence, utilize your knowledge of: (1) sociological research that has been published since Wilson and (2) features of contemporary U.S. society in a discussion that either defends or refutes Wilson's argument. Expand the discussion and analysis beyond African-Americans to include other racial minorities in the United States. Finally, discuss analytical or theoretical developments that could best advance the debate on the role of race and class in determining the life chances of Americans.
4. It is commonly assumed that increased access to education results in greater equality of educational outcomes and overall social equality. Evaluate this assumption for a specific social group or within a specific social context of your choosing, using empirical examples from the literature. In your view, what theoretical perspective is most suitable to explain the substantive findings?

