

**STRATIFICATION AREA EXAM
SPRING 2017**

Committee: David Hachen (Chair), Mark Berends, Bill Carbonaro

PART ONE

Instructions:

This exam will evaluate knowledge and expertise in the area of social stratification. The committee and the examinee agreed to the following conditions:

- The examinee would prepare broadly for the stratification area exam, just as students in prior semester have done.
- The examinee would focus in greater depth in two areas within the field of stratification: poverty/mobility, and race/ethnic inequality.
- The exam format would be similar to past years. However, the exam will reflect the preparations (as described above), and include questions that cover the "broad" topics (which are represented on past exams), and also questions that address topics in the two areas of specialization.

Please answer question one in Section A and question two in Section B. Answer all parts of each question as thoroughly as possible given the time allotted. Your answers should include reasoned arguments and be informed by empirical research. You have four hours to answer these two questions. Make sure to allocate your time wisely so that you answer each question adequately. Some students find it helpful to make an outline before answering each question. Please make sure to include references to the literature – authors' last names and when necessary to distinguish multiple works by the same author, relevant years of publication. You can include titles of articles or books if you want.

SECTION A: YOU MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

QUESTION ONE: *Social Class and Inequality*

Social class is a central concept in the study of social stratification. Marx, Weber, and Durkheim each offer a specific argument about the role that social class plays in producing social stratification and inequalities.

- A. Discuss how each theorist conceptualizes social class and use their conceptualization to explain how social class produces and maintains social stratification and inequalities.
- B. How are these sociological approaches different from neoclassical (human capital) economic perspectives in their explanations of social stratification and inequalities?
- C. Imagine that you were asked to teach a class on social stratification. How would you describe the impact of each classical theorist on “modern” theory and research on stratification and inequality? Give specific examples of each theorist's impact on current theorizing and research.

SECTION B: YOU MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

QUESTION TWO: *Black-White Inequality in the U.S.*

Black-White inequality continues to be an important topic of social stratification research. After describing what *you think* are the important race-based inequalities and trends in these inequalities (e.g., in schooling, income, wealth, occupation, or intergenerational mobility) answer the following three questions about theories that attempt to explain these inequalities.

- A. What does research indicate regarding the importance of human capital (e.g., cognitive and noncognitive skills, educational attainment) for black-white differences in occupational attainment and earnings?
- B. To what extent can we attribute black-white inequality in America to discrimination against black Americans? Be sure to discuss different theories about discrimination, as well as the research literature on its prevalence and effects on outcomes for black Americans.
- C. To what extent can we attribute black-white inequality in America to residential segregation? Again, please be sure to highlight specific research studies on this topic.

**STRATIFICATION AREA EXAM
SPRING 2017**

Committee: David Hachen (Chair), Mark Berends, Bill Carbonaro

Examinee: Deanna Childress

PART TWO

Instructions:

This exam will evaluate knowledge and expertise in the area of social stratification. The committee and the examinee agreed to the following conditions:

- The examinee would prepare broadly for the stratification area exam, just as students in prior semester have done.
- The examinee would focus in greater depth in two areas within the field of stratification: poverty/mobility, and race/ethnic inequality.
- The exam format would be similar to past years. However, the exam will reflect the preparations (as described above), and include questions that cover the "broad" topics (which are represented on past exams), and also questions that address topics in the two areas of specialization.

Please answer the three components of question 1 in Section A and then **one** question from Section B. Answer all parts of each question as thoroughly as possible given the time allotted. Your answers should include reasoned arguments and be informed by empirical research. You have four hours to answer these two questions. Make sure to allocate your time wisely so that you answer each question adequately. Some students find it helpful to make an outline before answering each question. Please make sure to include references to the literature – authors' last names and when necessary to distinguish multiple works by the same author, relevant years of publication. You can include titles of articles or books if you want.

SECTION A: You *must* answer the following question.

Question 1

Pick two items from each category and identify their importance and main contribution to the field of social stratification. In total, you will discuss **six items** in answering this question. Remember you have two hours to write two to three solid paragraphs for each of the six terms/books/scholars that you select. That comes out to about twenty minutes for each of your six answers.

CONCEPTS (2 of 4)

Cultural Capital

Internal Labor Market

Mass Incarceration

Screening

BOOKS (2 of 4)

Inequality, Christopher Jencks.

Marked, Devah Pager.

American Apartheid, Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton.

When Work Disappears, William Julius Wilson.

SCHOLARS (2 of 4)

Paula England

Annette Lareau

Mark Granovetter

Robert Hauser

SECTION B: You *must* answer *either* question 2 or 3.

Question 2

Almost fifty years ago, Sewell, Haller and Portes developed the status attainment model in order to identify the mediating mechanisms (aspirations, influence of significant others) through which family background (SES) affects educational and occupational attainment. In the last 10-20 years, stratification theorists and researchers appear to have shifted the focus from social-psychological process to the role that culture plays in shaping how family background impacts educational and occupational attainment (including explanations for the intergenerational persistence of poverty).

- A. Compare and contrast the status attainment approach to the cultural stratification approach. In what ways are they similar, and in what ways do they diverge in their understanding of how family background impacts attainment?
- B. Why do you think cultural approaches have gained prominence relative to social psychological models of attainment? Are there aspects of the attainment process identified in social-psychological models that are being ignored in cultural models that you think should be brought back into our modeling of status attainment? If so, what are they and why do you think they are important? If not, discuss how cultural models incorporate the important insights in the status attainment model.

Question 3

It is well known that those with more years of schooling earn more and work in better occupations. Yet there remains a good deal of debate on how and why educational attainment impacts earnings and shapes inequality.

- A. Compare and contrast at least two explanations for the relationship between education and income attainment. Be sure to discuss the empirical evidence for each perspective.
- B. How has the expansion of higher education impacted both the level of income inequality and the relationship between education and income? Which of the perspectives that you discussed in (A) is most useful in understanding the impact of educational expansion?
- C. From a policy perspective, what policies pertaining to education and training do you think would have the greatest impact on reducing inequality? Be sure to link your discussion of policies to your analysis of the relationship between education and income, and the impact of educational expansion.