

STRATIFICATION AREA EXAM

FALL 2016

Committee: Bill Carbonaro (Chair), Megan Andrew, Mark Berends

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:

Sociologists have traditionally studied intergenerational mobility through the lens of occupational attainment and social class. Indeed, research in this area was the mainstay of stratification research for many years and remains an important focus in the field. More recently, however, sociologists (and economists) have become much more interested in intergenerational *income* mobility.

- A. Describe the main contours of sociological research on intergenerational mobility in the U.S., by focusing on *occupational attainment* and *social class*. Based on this research, what should we conclude about whether the U.S. is an open or closed society?
- B. Some research has distinguished between structural and circulation mobility. Explain the difference between these two measures of mobility, and describe what research tells us about how patterns of mobility have changed over time in the U.S.
- C. Describe how research (largely by economists) on intergenerational mobility in *income* has supplemented, complemented, or supplanted sociological research on mobility.
- D. Finally, discuss cross-national research on intergenerational mobility by both sociologists and economists. What are the key similarities and differences across industrialized nations that have emerged from the study of mobility patterns?

SECTION B: YOU MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

QUESTION TWO:

Racial inequality in American society predates the founding of our Republic. In 2013, many people commemorated the 50th anniversary of the “March on Washington,” where Martin Luther King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. In this essay, please describe the main theories and findings by stratification researchers regarding black-white inequality in the United States.

- A. Describe the main contours of black-white inequality in America. How much do Blacks and Whites differ on key dimensions of social stratification, such as schooling, income, wealth, intergenerational mobility, and any other dimension(s) that you think are important to describe? In addition, please be sure to describe any important trends in black-white inequality on these dimensions over the past fifty years.
- 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 has “mass incarceration” affected black-white inequality in status attainment and mobility? Be sure to highlight studies that have examined different dimensions of the impact of mass incarceration on black-white inequality.
- D. Finally, 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.

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FALL 2016

Committee: Bill Carbonaro (Chair), Megan Andrew, Mark Berends

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 three 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 ONE

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/concepts that you select. That comes out to about twenty minutes for each of your six answers.

CONCEPTS (2 of 4)

Assortative Mating

Cumulative Advantage

Social Class

“Strength of Weak Ties”

BOOKS (2 of 4)

Inequality by Design, Claude Fisher, Michael Hout, Martin Sanchez Jankowski, Samuel Lucas, Ann Swidler, Kim Voss.

The American Occupational Structure, Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan.

The Truly Disadvantaged, William Julius Wilson.

Stuck in Place, Patrick Sharkey.

SCHOLARS (2 of 4)

Elijah Anderson

Kathryn Edin

Paula England

Max Weber

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

QUESTION TWO

Research on poverty is a surprisingly small area within the subfield of social stratification. Regardless, what have sociologists (as well as scholars in other disciplines) learned about the prevalence and nature of poverty in the U.S.?

- A. Explain the difference between “absolute” and “relative” definitions and measures of poverty. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each measure when studying poverty?
- B. What are leading theories that explain why some individuals (and some social groups) in the U.S. are more likely to be poor than others?
- C. Which groups in the U.S. are at highest risk for poverty? For each group that you identify, please indicate which theory (if any) in the above question best explains the increased risk of poverty for this group?
- D. Describe research on the following: (1) the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and (2) the duration of poverty spells. What does this research suggest regarding what types of social policies might be most effective at reducing the poverty rate in the U.S.?

QUESTION THREE

There are many theories that seek to explain why gender remains an enduring source of inequality in modern industrialized societies. Please address the following questions about gender inequality:

- A. How do economists and sociologists differ in their explanations of wage inequality between men and women? Be sure to identify both competing theories and relevant research that explains the gender gap in wages. Which perspective do you think is better supported by the evidence?
- B. The male-to-female ratio in wages is currently lower than ever before in the United States. In fact, the male-female gap in wages has steadily declined at the same time that wage and income inequality in the U.S. has increased dramatically. What theories and research can help us explain these divergent trends in inequality? Do you think that gender inequality in earnings will continue to decline in the next few decades? Explain.
- C. We consistently observe that female dominated occupations tend to be low paying occupations, and sociologists have debated why this so. What are the leading

theories to explain this pattern of occupational inequality? Please describe any research that can help explain this pattern.