

Race and Ethnicity Area Exam

Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame

Fall 2018

Part 1 (Day 1).

Answer **one** of the following two questions.

1. For more than a century, American sociologists have been interested in studying and explaining assimilation processes. Use the literature to develop a good working definition of the assimilation concept. What have we learned about conditions that have, historically, either facilitated or impeded assimilation for different racial or ethnic groups? Do you anticipate that sociologists will continue studying assimilation, as you have defined the term? Or, are there reasons to expect that such a focus will have (or currently has) limited utility in scholarly research?
2. William Julius Wilson demonstrated that race has declined in significance as a predictor of life chances in the United States. In reaction to Wilson's work, several scholars misinterpreted Wilson's argument and his evidence, even characterizing Wilson as a neo-conservative who was reinforcing colorblind racism. In time, however, more thoughtful scholarship began to identify important ways in which race continues to shape life chances of African Americans and other people of color. Briefly summarize Wilson's core argument and then discuss the most important ways in which recent scholarship has supplemented Wilson's work by identifying ways that race continues to matter in the United States.

Answer **one** of the following two questions.

1. Although black and Latino Americans believe racism is a significant problem in the United States, white Americans believe that racism is a relic of the past. What accounts for these varying perspectives? Compare and contrast the main sociological perspectives proposed to explain prejudice and racism. Which do you think is most appropriate for understanding prejudice and racism in America today? Why do you think this is the most appropriate?
2. When constructing your reading list, you created a section for "Critical Whiteness Studies" and a section for "Mixed-Race Studies, Multiracials, Interracial Marriage, and Family." Draw on both of these literatures to make predictions about the nature of race relations and racial inequality at the turn of the next century (e.g., the year 2100).

Part 2 (Day 2).

Answer **one** of the following two questions.

1. While some scholars believe that researchers can identify the independent effects of gender, social class, or race on particular outcomes (an additive approach), others argue that these identities must be considered together (an intersectional approach). Elaborate on the main differences between intersectional and additive approaches to social stratification, using empirical examples of each approach. Using an empirical example, describe how the “linear” thinkers of the past could have benefited by using an intersectional approach. Are there any other dimensions of stratification that researchers should consider when conducting intersectional analyses of social inequality?
2. Many scholars have developed theoretical approaches that they use to explain interracial or interethnic conflict. Drawing on the literature, discuss what we can infer about intergroup relations when groups are engaged in conflict and when groups are not engaged in conflict. Does the absence of intergroup conflict mean that intergroup relations are harmonious? Explain why this question is important for scholars interested in providing deeper understanding of durable inequality.

Answer **one** of the following two questions.

1. After having read thousands of pages of scholarship in preparation for this exam, describe an area of inquiry that you think sociologists now understand very well. Describe another important area of inquiry that you think sociologists’ understanding is weak. After thinking about your answer to these two questions, discuss how the work that you will be doing over the next thirty years will help us to better understand race and ethnicity.
2. Use the literature to define race and to define ethnicity. How important are these distinctions (between race and ethnicity) for sociologists seeking to explain important outcomes of interest such as inequality in educational attainment and the labor force? In other words, do we need different theoretical tools to think about inequality in outcomes based on racial differences and inequality in outcomes based on ethnic differences?