This list of readings is offered as a guide to the literature for the Inequality Comprehensive Exam. Students taking the exam should be familiar and conversant with this work. The list is not exhaustive, but rather presents some of the key works of the “Inequalities” domain, and much of it is drawn from pertinent courses taught in our department. We emphasize that this list is not exhaustive and only includes “some” of the key works because the literature relevant to inequalities is extraordinarily large and constantly expanding. It would be impossible to present a literally comprehensive list. We do feel, nevertheless, that these readings cover the key issues in the field and constitute a basic knowledge that a Ph.D. in Sociology should have. We encourage students studying for the Comprehensive Exam to consult with faculty members about how to approach this list and what other materials may be especially important given the student’s research interests. We also encourage students to work cooperatively with each other in preparing for this exam by having reading or discussion groups of the materials listed below.

In addition to the bibliography, the committee recommends two compendia of abridged classical and contemporary readings in stratification as useful guides to the field:


Grusky, David B. and Szelényi, Szonja 2007. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, overlaps considerably with Grusky (2008), but it does have a few other important articles.

The selections contained in these volumes are a representation of what may be considered, in broad terms, the scope of stratification in US sociology. A number of the articles and books contained in this reading guide appear in these readers in abridged form. While the excerpts may or may not be entirely adequate basis to build a reasonable grasp and command of the material, they a useful starting point. Many of the well-known books included in the list make be used selectively, and have adequate counterparts in briefer journal publications.

It is fairly typical for courses on inequality to be framed by two classic pieces of American sociology, and these are not a bad place to get started. They do not quite constitute a section, but they are listed in section 1.

The rest of Inequality Comp guide is divided into three main sections—class, race, and gender—and each section is in turn divided into two subsections: literature of a more conceptual and theoretical character, and what we’ve labeled empirical exemplars. A word on each of the recurring subsections:
Regarding the first part of each section, “Conceptual and Theoretical Building Blocks,” although the sections are not comprehensive, and doctoral students are not discouraged from reaching beyond the scope of work defined therein, the committee expects a strong command of this material, and moreover, feels confident that a strong command of that material alone will be sufficient grounds to prove proficiency in “concepts and theory.”

Regarding the second part of each section, “Empirical Examplars,” the list of readings represents a sample of empirical work that credibly deploys the concepts and theory germane to a dimension of stratification—e.g., class—in a number of substantive areas or institutional locations, for example, education, politics, immigration, housing and residence, etc. The list of exemplars is illustrative, but it is not complete. Our recommendation:

1. Be prepared to demonstrate how concepts and theories are deployed across two spheres (e.g., “class, in a Marxian sense, is clearly at work in education and in health (care?), and this is best illustrated in a discussion of [reference] and [reference].

2. Your knowledge must go considerably beyond the empirical exemplars in the list. Rather, you should “go deep” in two areas (e.g., education, health, political mobilization, criminal justice, public opinion, some range of attitudes, etc.).

3. It is acceptable, and probably a good idea, to “go deep” selectively into the same spheres of inequality (e.g., education, or income, or health, etc.) across the theoretically defined domains of class, race, and gender.

A note of caution: It is reasonable that you should consider “going deep” in the substantive area of your second comprehensive exam, health for instance. This is also fair and acceptable. However, you must ensure that your analysis and discussion of the empirical literature in that sphere—say health—really speak meaningfully to your conceptual and theoretical elaboration of the key variable(s) or factors(s) of class, race, gender. Here is an example where the match is not adequate. Imagine a two-part question that asks you (1) to review the pros and cons of different conceptualization of the class concept (and general causal paths that might be associated with them), and (2) review a range of empirical work where the advantages and disadvantages are borne out. If the empirical review simply reports on a consistent pattern that “class matters” to health outcomes, but class is no more than a variable in a regression, and not discussed as a specification of one or another conception of class, you have not provided a successful answer to the second part of the question. The data does not speak to the theory unless there is an effective bridge established between conception (on the theoretical side of your discussion) and operationalization (on the empirical side.)

Finally, adequate sociological explanations for inequality must comprehend, empirically and theoretically, the effects produced by “factor interactions” or what are sometimes called intersectionalities: interactions of class and race, class and gender, race and gender, etc. This is an important matter and, in point of fact, many of the works in the list grapple with intersections/interaction even though we understand their primary focus to be one “variable”
or another (e.g., Fredrickson’s account of the birth U.S. racism can only be understood as an interaction of class and status, and so on.)

1. CLASSICAL COORDINATES OF INEQUALITY DEBATE IN THE U.S.


2. CLASS

Class analysis, as Wright notes, in an effort to scale back grand claims associated especially with the marxist tradition, is still a very important “independent variable specialization” in social science. That “class matters” is not an issue much disputed. The scope of sociological work that weighs the significance of the class factor is more defined by disputes, disagreements, and exchanges on three issues: on varied conceptualizations of class, and their relative merits; methodological questions of how best to operationalize a given conception of class (e.g., how do you measure a Durkeimian class construct in the study of union densities), and empirical questions of the measured relationship of the class factor in relation to some measured outcome. Section 2.1 surveys the first issue, the varied conceptions of the class construct), and section 2.2 is a sampling of work that operationalizes one or another conceptualization of class in an empirical context.

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Building Blocks


The book is worth having, but the 2004 final manuscript is available online at: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ (including the chapters further below in this list)


2.2 Empirical Exemplars


3. RACE/ETHNICITY
Much like its counterpart, class analysis, the study of the race factor in US sociology has been shaped (somewhat parochially, which is typical of US sociology) by sharp disputes over the “continuing significance and of race” and the “relative weight of race” in the United States. Basic conceptual and definitional issues are fairly settled: race is a social construct, which implies that the significance, and even the presence of “racializing” conditions are a variable matter; and race is akin, but not quite reducible to a subtype of ethnicity. Weber’s offers a classical statement defining ethnicity, and some of its correlates that are still pertinent and sufficiently clearly stated to be a point of reference of enduring value. Theoretical questions tend to focus on finer points—e.g., is US racism today an array of conscious or largely unconscious factors; are the factors really unconscious, or a novel pattern of “colorblind” ruses, etc.—but there is a fair amount of agreement that at the institutional and macro-levels grasping the significance of the race factor requires some sort of “Marxian-Weberian” synthesis, with vicious loops where class interests continue blowing into the sail of status distinctions, but where status-based interests are no less real, certainly as a basis for salient identities, and comprise a social and cognitive buffer that protects the class structure of capitalism. The strand of recent immigration research included in this sample (mostly US-focused, but of recent, turning attention to Europe as well), has discovered fresh empirical material to enter the fray—does race still matter?—by examining the assimilation paths of “non-white” immigrants and their children.

3.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Building Blocks


### 3.2 Empirical Exemplars


### 4. GENDER

The emergence of gender as a category of sociological analysis is deeply embedded in feminist re-thinking of the discipline. Early feminist challenges involved identifying gender inequalities as such and developing theoretical frameworks that could account for the reproduction of and change in gender inequality over time. Later work in feminist sociology complicated thinking about gender through recognizing that race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender in shaping social experience as well as institutions and must be incorporated in any analysis that describes and accounts for gender inequality.
### 4.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Building Blocks


Beverley Skeggs, 1997 *Formations of Class & Gender* (New York: Sage), Chapters 1,2,5, & 7

### 4.2 Empirical Exemplars


