

**Department of Sociology**  
*College of Arts and Sciences*  
**American University**

**Comprehensive Exam in Sociological Theory**

**January 2003**

Please answer a total of four questions, one each from the four sections. Read the whole exam first, identify the question you wish to answer from each section, outline your answer and then proceed to answer each question fully. All four answers will be considered equally, so allocate your time accordingly.

Section I: Classical Sociological Theory. Answer only **one** question from the following.

1. Classical theorists all tried to create general explanations of the social problems produced by “modernity,” that is, the process of industrialization and urbanization. Compare and contrast the ideas of TWO of the following: Marx’s concept of *alienation*, Durkheim’s concept of *anomie*, Weber’s concept of *rationalization*, Addams’s concept of *ethical belatedness*.
2. Discuss the sources and patterns of social change in the theories of two of the following: Marx, Weber and Durkheim.
3. One part of the “debate with Marx’s ghost” thesis is that Sociological theory developed partially as an attempt to create a non-Marxist alternative answer to the same social issues and social problems that Marx theorized about. Assess this claim as it applies to TWO of the following classical theorists: Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Simmel.

Section II: Modern Sociological Theory. Answer only **one** of the following questions.

1. Compare and contrast the understanding of the individual human being as a social actor in TWO of the following: World System Theory, Structural Functionalism, Modern Interpretive Theory (Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology), and Modern Feminist Theory.
2. What are the defining characteristics of “post-modernism” in sociological theory? What do post-modern sociologists mean when they use that label to describe their theory?
3. Compare and contrast the core idea of “Social Construction of Reality” theory with the core idea of ONE of the following contemporary theories: Symbolic Interaction, Post-structuralism, or Deconstruction.

Section III. Comparative and Sociology of Knowledge. Answer only **one** question from the following.

1. Discuss how Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons and a Feminist theorist of your choice would respond to contemporary post-modern sociological theory.
2. Some sociological theories have taken as their central unit of analysis the “social action”, some the “social relation”, and some the “social structure”. What difference does it make? In your answer, be sure to refer to more than one example of each approach.
3. Define the concept of Globalization, making sure you go beyond the “economic linkages” that has been overly explained in many circles. Why has the concept gained more scholarly attention in the last ten years? Do you see any connection between those theorizing on Globalization and those who did the same for “World Systems theory?” Discuss your answer fully.

Section IV. Theoretical Applications. Answer only **one** question from the following.

1. Offer a theoretical interpretation of the current politicization of traditional religions worldwide.
2. Offer a theoretical interpretation of the contemporary anti-globalization movements.
3. Offer a theoretical interpretation of international terrorism. Which theories or theoretical framework best explain(s) the rise of terrorism, and the American response to it.