1. Evaluate the social science literature on the urban underclass. In the course of your answer please address the following points:
   a. What are the key studies on the urban underclass?
   b. What are the major lines of debate about the urban underclass?
   c. What have these studies shown concerning the origins and persistence of an urban underclass?
   d. What have these studies shown about the intended and unintended impact of social policy on inequality?
   e. What directions (if any) should be pursued in future work on this topic?

2. Since 1980, the average U.S. female-male earnings ratio has made considerable progress, going from a fairly constant 60% in the 1960s and 1970s to a high of 76.3% in 1999 for full time workers (http://www.cls.dk/workingpapers/docfiles/85.pdf).
   [The female-male earnings ratio was 76.3% in 2001, the same as in 1999 http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/p38.html]
   Based on your readings, how do you evaluate this recent trend in gender stratification in the U.S.? Does it mean that gender stratification will gradually disappear in the U.S., or does this trend towards earnings parity mask significant barriers to socioeconomic gender equality? How does the female-male earnings ratio in the U.S. compare to that in other advanced industrial societies, and what are the implications of this comparison for understanding the U.S. trend?

3. One of the most comprehensive attempts to understand the nature of stratification systems over the full range of human societies is the ecological-evolutionary theory of Gerhard Lenski. Discuss the following points.
   a. What are the bases and the main categories of the typology of human societies that Lenski uses to explain the nature of stratification systems?
   b. What are the main social mechanisms that Lenski evokes to explain the nature of the stratification systems in relation to the type of society?
   c. What predictions does Lenski make regarding the evolution of social inequality in the course of socio-cultural evolution, and how successful have these predictions been?

4. Major goals of research on social stratification and mobility have included
a. Understanding how individuals in society achieve occupations associated with various levels of status and economic rewards.

b. Understanding how the social origins of individuals (i.e. characteristics of their family of origin) affect the status they eventually achieve.

c. Understanding how the level of industrialization of a society and other structural characteristics of the society (e.g., different levels of emphasis on "meritocracy", different configurations of mechanisms of “social reproduction”, etc.) affect the process of inter- and intra-generational achievement.

Provide a capsule assessment of the extent to which the social stratification literature has succeeded, or failed to succeed, in reaching these goals.

5. Descriptions of income inequality trends during the past two centuries have focused on two major "icons": the "Kuznets curve" and the "Great U-Turn". Discuss the following points.

a. What is the nature of each of these two icons (i.e., what trajectories of inequality do they describe)?

b. What is the scope of application of each trend (i.e., what are the kinds of societies affected by each trend and the time frame or phase of development in which each is said to take place)?

c. Citing relevant literature, discuss the state of knowledge concerning social and economic causal mechanisms underlying each of these trends in income inequality.

6. Affirmative action is one of the most controversial policy innovations in the history of American efforts to reduce group inequalities. Part of the controversy likely exists because of confusion as to what affirmative action is and is not and because there are several disparate policies that go by the label “affirmative action.” For this question discuss the following three sets of issues:

a. Define affirmative action generally and delineate the disparate ways that "affirmative action" has been implemented. Do these policy innovations differ in substantial ways according to whether the purpose behind their use is to reduce racial vs. gender inequalities? Discuss two studies that show how affirmative action programs actually work in a real employment or educational setting.

b. What are the most important criticisms of affirmative action programs? What does the literature suggest about why such criticisms exist? Again, are there important differences in “gender” vs. “racial” affirmative action programs?

c. What are the most important historical and sociological reasons supporting the existence and use of affirmative action for both (i) racial minorities and (ii) women?