

May, 2004

21A230J: THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FAMILY

Study Questions for Exam

1. Relate the literature we have read on the African-American family to the “family values” debate. Include Coontz, Stack, Gutman, Sudarkasa, plus two of the following: Collins, Edin, Kaplan, Rubin, Taylor, Luker, and Newman.
2. What are the major functions of the family in American society at present? Which of these were filled in the past by other institutions, and which can be provided only by the family? Discuss six articles or books, including Skolnick (“life course”) and Coontz.
3. Compare and contrast middle-class and working-class families. Discuss work, priorities, values, expectations. You must discuss Coontz, Rubin, Newman, Hayes, and Fuchs Epstein et al.
4. Discuss the literature we have read on dual-provider families. What changes in society led to the increase in numbers of mothers with young children working outside the home? What impact has this shift had on childrearing? Include Hayes, Hochschild, Gerson and Jacobs, Coontz, and two of the following: Cowan and Cowan, Hertz, Galinsky, Fuchs Epstein et al., Coltrane and Adams.
5. Define the word “family.” Using six readings, discuss why you would include or exclude within your definition: single-parent families, communes, group marriage, voluntarily childless marriages, homosexual marriage, cohabiting couples, and single people living alone (including the elderly). How does your definition reflect your attitudes toward the status of the American family at present?
6. What, in your opinion, are the most serious stresses on the nuclear family of the late 20th century? Discuss six readings relevant to your argument.
7. What are the main demographic changes (family size, age at marriage, family structure, fertility rates, mortality rates, and so on) that have taken place in the family in the last 300 years? What do these changes say about the future of the American family? You must discuss Skolnick and Skolnick (Introduction), Giddens, Hareven, Morgan, Hernandez, and Coontz . Gold stars if you discuss Cott, Welter, and Hutter (“Immigrant Families”).
8. Benkov and Dalton and Bielby discuss gay families. How do they differ from heterosexual nuclear families? Resemble them? Why do you think the issue of gay marriage is so controversial and polarizing?
9. Compare divorce in the past with divorce in the present, making sure to include Cott and

Coontz in your discussion. What are the main advantages to divorce laws today, and what are the problems remaining—for men, women, children, society? You must discuss Lawson and Thompson, Arendell, and Cherlin. Additional authors include Amato, Hackstaff, and Mason et al.

10. Marrying for love is only one of several possible criteria for marriage. Discuss some of these other criteria and their justifications, including those used by the rural Taiwanese peasants portrayed by Wolf and the South Asians discussed by Lessinger. You may include “Asian Heart” if you remember it well enough. Gold stars if you include Kamen.
11. How has the division of labor changed within families over the last 3 centuries? How does the division of labor differ with respect to social class today? Discuss Morgan, Demos, Coontz, Hareven, and Skolnick and Skolnick (Introduction). Other authors include Giddens and Skolnick (“Life Course”).
12. Discuss the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the American family. Include Hareven, Demos, Welter, and Coontz.
13. Has it become too easy to get a divorce? Does its availability encourage people to avoid trying to solve their marital problems? Document your discussion with references, especially to no-fault divorce, including Coontz, Sanchez et al., Furstenberg, Cherlin, and Hackstaff.
14. Some writers have suggested that the nuclear family has been given more responsibility than it can handle. Yet other theorists say that the nuclear family is falling apart because most of its functions have been stripped away. Discuss both positions, using six specific examples from six or more readings.
15. Discuss unwed mothers, using Coontz, Mannis, Schalet, Collins, Kaplan, Lucker, and Edin.
16. Why, with birth control available, are there so many teen-age pregnancies? What roles do the expectant mother and expectant father play? Their parents? Society? Discuss the following authors: Schalet, Edin, Rubin, Coontz, Kaplan, and Newman.
17. What are the dilemmas faced by a woman who has both a family and a career? By a father whose wife has a career? Discuss six of the following: Coontz, Coltrane and Adams, Hochschild, Giele, Hays, Gerson and Jacobs, Cowan and Cowan, Hertz, Galinsky, and Fuchs Epstein et al.
18. What have been the beneficial and the negative effects of the women’s movement on the family? Discuss the effects on men/women, husbands/wives, and children in this regard. You must include Coontz, and five of the following: Hochschild, Hernandez, Giele, Cowan and Cowan, Collins, Hays, Cancian, and Furstenberg.

19. To what extent should government be involved in the life of the family? What services should it provide? What role should it play in the lives of poor families with children under 18? Include Coontz, Vanderstaay, Stack, and Newman.
20. Discuss marital abuse within the family, relating it to ideologies about the male gender role, in particular male power and authority. Discuss Goodrum et al., and Johnson and Ferraro.
21. Why do people get married today? How do these reasons differ from those of people who lived 150, 250 years ago? Discuss Demos, Morgan, Cott, and Coontz, and choose two from the following: Giddens, Hernandez, Welter, Mannis, Kamen, Edin, Sanchez et al., and Jackson.
22. What are the dangers of speaking of “the American family” as though it were a single type of entity? Discuss variation by social class and ethnicity. You must include Gutman, Stack, Edin, Zinn and Wells, and Rubin ; it’s nice to include Sudarkasa, Sherif, Pyke, Hernandez and Coontz.
23. Discuss immigrant and first-generation families in the U.S. today and in the past, including six of the following: Pyke, Coontz, Toro-Morn, Hutter, Pardo, Rubin, Zinn & Wells.
24. Discuss the current debate on “family values.” Include Coontz, Giele, Hays, Hackstaff, and Collins.
25. How have notions about masculinity and the male role changed in U.S. society? Include ethnic differences in such notions in your discussion. You must discuss Giddens, Demos, and Welter, and four of the following: Cancian, Coontz, Arendell, Coltrane & Adams, Cowan & Cowan, Lawson and Thompson.
26. Discuss ethnicity and attitudes toward kinship in present-day U.S. You must include Sherif, di Leonardo, Zinn and Wells, Pyke, Lessinger, Luker, Stack and Collins.
26. Discuss the issue of child care in this country. What are the controversies? How does the U.S. compare to European countries? You must discuss Coontz, Schwartz, Hertz, Hays, Epstein et al., and Galinsky.
27. Compare “traditional family values” in today’s society to “traditional family values” in the Taiwanese village the Lims live in.
28. Discuss the literature we have read on the stereotypes of African-American families and on the reality. Include six of the following: Stack, Collins, Edin, Kaplan, Sudarkasa, Coontz, Luker, Taylor, and Gutman.

29. Discuss the literature we have read on changing notions about sexuality over time. You must include Morgan, Welter, Clark, Kaplan, Cancian, and Coontz.
30. Discuss the interaction between changes in the economy and in gender roles during the past 50 years. Include five of the following: Arendell, Jackson, Coltrane & Adams, Cancian, Hertz, Fuchs Epstein et al., Hochschild, Arditti.
31. What is family structure? Discuss different family structures, comparing them with one another with respect to function and adaptability. You should include in your discussion the structure of the U.S. colonial family, the U.S. family structure after the Industrial Revolution, the post-industrial U.S. family of the late 20th century, and the peasant Taiwanese family of the 1960s.
32. How have values shifted in this country with respect to child-rearing? Include in your discussion six of the following: Coontz, Hays, Giele, Gerson, Coltrane and Adams, Cowan & Cowan, Hertz, Cherlin, Galinsky, Hochschild, Gerson and Jacobs, and Amato.
33. American families at every socio-economic level speak of wanting to provide their children with enough autonomy; and that this is a shift from earlier times when much more emphasis was placed on discipline and obedience. Why do you think such a shift in child-rearing goals has taken place? What other evidence is available demonstrating the high value presently being placed on autonomy? You must discuss Giele, Cowan & Cowan, Cancian, and Coontz.
34. Discuss the new economy and its impact on U.S. family. You must include Coontz, Rubin, Collins, Newman, and Vanderstaay.
35. How has motherhood changed in the past 300 years—a mother's functions (duties, obligations), the ideal mother, the representation of mother in the culture? How have actual mothers resembled this ideal? Differed from it? You must include Welter, Coontz, and four other authors.

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