Qualifying Examination in the Family

Answer any two of the following three questions:

1. It has become commonplace to note that since World War II, and especially in the past 25 years, the American family has undergone a number of important alterations, including changes in size, composition, and stability. What is less clear is whether these changes have affected all groups in the same way and to the same degree. For example, little is known concerning trends in Hispanic populations, but there is a growing literature focused on Mexican-Americans. Select two major trends of the sort mentioned above and briefly outline the nature of the changes as they pertain to American families in general. Then discuss how the Mexican American family differs or is similar to the general population with respect to these same trends and suggest possible explanations for the differences observed.

2. Why is it theoretically and methodologically important to study family life in comparative (i.e., cross-national or cross-societal) perspective? What can we learn about contemporary family life in the United States from such an effort?

3. Although there is considerable agreement about trends in the composition and stability of American families, there is a great deal of disagreement about what these trends mean in terms of the health and viability of the family as an institution. Describe the different meanings that have been attributed to the trends, citing the appropriate authors (but not specific publications). Then give your own view and your reasons for adhering to it.