Directions: Respond to one question under Part I and two questions from Part II, for a total of three essay responses. Each essay should have a clear line of argument, address as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offer relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate. Good luck!

Part I: Respond to one of the following:

1. Beginning with the work of Oscar and Mary Handlin, and Carl Degler, scholars in the field of colonial African American history have debated the origins of racialized slavery in the British North American colonies. In addressing the origins of slavery and racism, scholars have tended to fall into two schools of thought. The first emphasized the primacy of economic imperatives, with racialized slavery as a byproduct. The second focused on the ways in which prejudices against black people antedated slavery and dictated its racist character. More recent scholarship has tended to emphasize the interplay between racial constructions and economic imperatives, pointing to new lines of inquiry, including the role of gender in the racialization of slavery and the agency of African peoples themselves in the processes of African American racial formation during the colonial period. Critically assess the historical evolution of this “origins debate” and the seminal scholarly works in this exchange, elaborating on the key historiographical and interpretative trends. Be specific in your references to key texts and authors.

2. Divide the African American experience into historical periods and discuss the evolution of African American people from the 17th Century to the early 21st Century. Your discussion should highlight major themes such as black agency, women and gender, and the building of black community and civil society. In your response, be sure to identify and explore major watershed events and turning points (e.g., the First World War and the Great Migration) around which African American history has transitioned and/or transformed from one moment or period to another.

3. Enslaved Africans came from an extremely large geographical area, and they were very diverse in terms of ethnicity and culture. In Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America, Sterling Stuckey posed two questions that penetrate to the heart of what it means to be African American. He asked, “How were a single people formed out of many African ethnic groups on the plantations of the south?” In the same vein, he queried, “How was a single culture formed out of the interaction of African ethnic groups in North American slavery?” The transformation of various African ethnicities into one people, African Americans, is a key theme and the subject of a rich historiographical debate in colonial and antebellum African American history. As the Moynihan Report, conflicts around African American Vernacular English, and recent discussion about Hip-Hop all demonstrate, this debate has important implications for contemporary African American society. Beginning with the debate between Melville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier, survey the literature on the transformation of various African ethnicities into African Americans and the survival of African cultural traits,
including the contemporary work of Michael Gomez and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. In
your discussion, explore the contributions of both enslaved and quasi-free Blacks to the
creation of African American identity and community. Be sure to keep in mind law and
agency, and connect the creolization process to various modes of resistance. Further,
provide a thorough discussion of the creolization process, Africanisms or cultural
retentions, and the role that gender played in the making of African Americans.

Part II: Respond to two of the following:

4. Black urban history is perhaps the single largest subfield in the historical literature on the
African American experience. Identify and trace the development of the main conceptual
paradigms and historiographic trends (e.g., Ghetto Synthesis, Proletarianization, Black
Agency) in the evolution of African American urban history from the publication of
W.E.B. DuBois’s The Philadelphia Negro to the contemporary moment. In your
response, critically discuss the dialogue among the different schools of thought that have
influenced the development of the field, as well as those that may be considered as falling
on the margins or outside the field’s main conceptual paradigms. Using the subfield’s
central concept, space, explore how scholars have conceptualized the relationship
between space and race in your research area on the built environment, planning,
recreation, and environmental racism. How will your own work on this topic potentially
contribute to the new scholarly focus on these aspects of the African American urban
experience? Be specific in your references to key texts and authors.

5. Historians of late have begun reconceptualizing the “Civil Rights” and “Black Power”
movements. Critically assess recent trends (e.g., locality, women and gender, black class
relations, the focus on northern struggles, etc.) in the scholarship of post-World War II
black social movements. In your response, discuss how using the term “Black Freedom
Movement,” and referring to the existence of a “long” movement, affect scholars’
understanding of the scope of black social insurgency in the 20th Century. Critically
discuss, also, how the recent reconceptualization of the early Cold War has conditioned
the popularity of the “long” movement paradigm. How does the introduction of the
concepts “human rights” and African American sociopolitical consciousness trouble the
“long” movement thesis? Be specific in your references to key texts and authors,
drawing from both seminal and recent works.

6. Some historians have argued that the U.S. domestic politics of the early Cold War
worked in favor of black freedom activists, given the desire within the State Department
and White House to strengthen the nation’s image as a model of democracy, vis-à-vis the
Soviet Union, among the independent nations emerging from colonialism. In contrast,
other scholars have maintained that domestic anticomunism harmed black freedom
struggles more than it helped by forcing organizations to moderate their demands and
agendas, and marginalizing other African American protest organizations and leaders
with radical or leftist affinities. Critically evaluate this historical dispute, and offer an
assessment of which group of scholars makes the more compelling case – and why.
Refer to key texts and authors in your response.