Prelim Exam: African American History

Spring 2009

Answer one question from Part I and two questions from Part II. You must do a total of three (3) questions. Be sure each essay has a clear line of argument, addresses as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offers relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate. Good luck!

Part I: Please answer one of the two questions below.

**Question 1:** The *journal of American history* is publishing a forum on periodizing the African American experience and has asked you to submit an essay. The editor sends you an email with the following questions and asks that your essay provide answers to them. The questions are as follows: In your estimation, what is the importance of historical periodization to the African American experience? Discuss the historical periodization schema/schemas you would employ to frame the African American experience from the 17th Century to the first decade of the 21st. Identify major watershed events and historical turning points through which African American history has transitioned or transformed from one moment or period to another.

**Question 2:** Among the many important arguments made by Sterling Stuckey in *Slave Culture: The Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* is that the colonial period comprised the longest period of time not only in the slave experience, but in the African American experience overall. Stuckey and later Michael Gomex in *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* and Gwendolyn Mildo Hall in *Slavery and African Ethnicities: Restoring the Links* all argue that the colonial period was the major formative moment in the creation of African Americans as a distinct people. Discuss this processes by which various African ethnicities which different cultures were transformed into a single people with a single culture. Pay close attention to processes generated by slave masters and enslavement as well as those arising from internal African initiative. Also be attentive to the roles of women and gender, and to the themes of Black agency and resistance, community building, and Black Nationalism.

Part II: Please answer two of the three questions below.

**Question 3:** Drawing on your knowledge of the extant literature, critically discuss the major themes, debates and trends in the field of “Black Freedom Studies” over the past several decades. Pay particular attention to issues of periodization, place, gender, class, and internationalism.

**Question 4:** African American urban history when combined with urban studies is perhaps the largest single area of scholarship in African American Studies. Black Urban history represents over twenty percent of historical research on African Americans, so
In 1985, Joe William Trotter published *Black Milwaukee* which posited the “proletarianization thesis” as the interpretative lens through which African American 20th century urban history should be viewed. Discuss the contributions and challenges of the new paradigm. Describe the state of the field on African American urban history since the publication of *Black Milwaukee*. Be sure to highlight the dialogue between scholars and schools of thought, chart the seminal works, major historiographic trends, dominant paradigms, and leading theories.

**Question 5:** Discuss your own developing dissertation research interests, situating them in the relevant body or bodies of African American historiography. Refer to both seminal and recent works in your response. What scholarly questions will your dissertation pursue, and how will your project contribute overall to the field of African American history?