African American History

Preliminary Examination

Spring, 2013

Answer one question from Part I and two from Part II. You must complete a total of three questions. Please be sure each essay has a clear line of argument, addresses as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offer relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate. Best of luck!

Part I: Choose one

1. Historian Rayford Logan termed the period from 1877 to 1917 the Nadir of the African American experience. He used that concept to signify that the era was one in which Blacks were incorporated into the southern plantation economy as super-exploited sharecroppers, experienced a revocation of their recently won constitutional rights, became the subject of ridicule and contempt in the popular culture and were subjected to racial terrorism in the form of urban pogroms and lynching. In discussing the Nadir, it is important that you identify the role of racial violence in structuring the African American experience during this era. You should also explicate Black agency and resistance to both urban pogroms and lynching during the Nadir. Be sure to identify the major events of urban racial terror and the key years and critical lynching episodes during the sociohistorical period.

2. Divide the African American experience into historical periods and discuss the historical development of African Americans from the 17th Century to the first decade of the 21st. Your discussion should highlight major themes such as Black agency, women and gender, and community building. To distinguish agency from community building, you should stress resistance to racial oppression during your discussion. Also, it is important that you identify different ideologies used by African American activists, however, for this examination, you should specifically tease out the particularities of Black radicalism in African American history. Your discussion of community building should emphasize the internal development of Black civil society, the construction of Black social and cultural capital. Be sure to identify and explore major watershed events and historical turning points, i.e., from slavery to freedom, that is, the processes by which African American history transitions and/or transforms from one moment or historical period to another.

Part II: Choose two

3. Racial violence has been an essential part of racial oppression in the United States. Although racial violence has been ubiquitous throughout the African
American experience, the type of racial violence deployed, the site of its deployment, and its particular causes and rationalizations have changed over time and space. Of the range of possibilities, e.g., whipping, race riots, etc, please narrow your focus to the history of lynching. Drawing on the literature answer four subsets of questions: (1) explain why lynching became the dominant form of racial violence during the nadir, 1877-1917; (2) explain why 95 percent of all lynching occurred in the South; (2) address the justifications used to rationalize this form of racial violence; and (4) examine African Americans response to lynching and its justifications. Finally, explore the contradiction between the percentage of lynching in which rape or attempted rape were alleged and the place of the rape myth in the historical literature. In your opinion what accounts to this disparity?

4. Historians of late have begun reconceptualizing the “Civil Rights” and “Black Power” movements. Critically assess six recent trends (locality, women and gender, Black class relations, the focus on northern struggles, periodization, and internationalism) in the literature on post-World War II Black social movements. How has historians’ use of the term “Black Freedom Movement” affected scholars’ understanding of the scope of Black social movements in the 20th Century? How would you situate your own developing research interests within these recent historiographical debates? Refer to examples of both seminal and recent literature in your response.

5. Develop a reading list for a “Women and Gender in African American Resistance” for a 16 week course. Your reading list should highlight classic and new debates on the topic. You should include a rationale for why you chose particular readings. You should also include and introductory statement that frames the goals of the course. Be mindful that “gender” includes both men and women. Thus, this is not a syllabus for a women’s history course, per se. It can also be used in an undergraduate course. Discuss the extant and contemporary literature of the urban disturbances (riots) of the 1960s. What are the prevalent theories regarding these events and how has the literature changed in the past thirty years?