Preliminary Examination
Colonialism/Postcolonialism

Answer one question from each section. 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

A. Frantz Fanon and Edward Said set the stage for thinking through race, colonialism, anti-colonialism, and postcolonialism. How have ideas of identity, power, and nation developed in scholarship from the 1960s and 70s to the present? How has post-colonial thinking changed the ways in which US historians conceptualize the relationship between race and space?

B. According to Frantz Fanon, “Europe is . . . the creation of the Third World.” Has the making of the United States as a nation been similarly contingent? Discuss models of the nation on offer in the historiography of the last quarter century with a view to their applicability across diverse geographical spaces and temporal frames. What is at stake in theorizing the nation as fragment, as processual, as fluid, as in-the-making? Is that a sufficient challenge to claims of US exceptionalism and universalism?

Part II

A. In 1983, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote that “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item.” How has her work responded to the scholarship of “Third World Feminists” and the Subaltern Studies group? How has gender as a category of analysis been important to the development of postcolonial theory? How have embodiment and affect been read along geographies of scale?

B. What is the right and proper weight to give analyses of the body when historicizing imperial, global and/or transnational histories in the context of post/colonial modernity? What proportionate role does structural/material analysis play in shaping such sweeping histories? And what obligation if any do we have to the question of agency as an embodied phenomenon when rethinking global and local narratives?

Part III

A. If you were to base a World History survey from 1890 to the present on postcolonial theories, around which issues would you structure your syllabus? Which postcolonial writings would influence the construction of your course?
and your analysis of events? What texts would you choose to teach? What would be the rationale for your pedagogical choices?

B. What is valuable about a specifically historical—as opposed to sociological, ethnographic or literary—approach to postcoloniality? Or are historical methods perforce intersectional and/or interdisciplinary? What is at stake in the application of historical method however you define it for postcolonial studies?