Preliminary Examination
Modern United States

DIRECTIONS: Choose one question from each of the different parts of the examination and write an essay that thoroughly responds to all aspects of the question.

PART A
In the United States, the history of race relations—and the construction of racial difference—have always involved processes of movement. From the slave trade to Irish immigration to the importation of Asian laborers, and into the twentieth century, the movement of people has impacted communities, especially cities, and in turn sparked powerful racializing discourses. Drawing on both historiographies and major themes in immigration, Asian American, and African American histories, discuss the role of movement in the U.S. racial formation.

How have transnational methods influenced the history of U.S. migration in the twentieth century? Discuss the reservations of those who believe that transnationalism is not a salutary development in U.S. national history and examine the works of those for whom a transnational methodology has been central. Finally, provide your opinion as to the future of transnationalism in American history.

PART B
Too often historians have conceived of their research and writing in terms of singular categories: as working class history, as women’s or gender history, as Asian American or Latino/a. Given your research interests, and reading in the relevant fields, how might one locate intersections of difference in the past? Which books and articles have achieved an intersectional approach? Where might one infer intersections in the historiography—intersections of masculinity with race, class, and gender, for example-- that otherwise presents a more homogenous narrative?

Amy Kaplan’s essay “Left Alone In America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture” is now considered a foundational/seminal text in the study of U.S. Empire. Using Kaplan as your jumping off point, examine how both the approaches and understandings of empire have changed since. Be sure to also discuss what the field of U.S Empire looked like before Kaplan’s intervention.

PART C
In recent times, a number of historians and public intellectuals have questioned the centrality of race in the operation of social inequality. Of course such arguments go back to the early 1980s, and the classic article by the historian, Barbara Fields, but they have taken on a neo-liberal rightward slant in recent times. In either case, however, such a claim has broad, revisionist implications not only for scholarship
but also for our understanding of mobilizations for social change. How ought historians of the racial formation respond claims that appear to signal the end of race and the arrival colorblindness? In your answer, consider the following topics or categories in historical perspective: African American women, social movements, nationalism, stereotypes, and sexuality.

In considering the process of nation-state building and territorial expansion in US history, examine the ways in which citizenship has been as much about exclusion as inclusion. Analyze the construction of difference as it pertains to the national attempt to define citizenship and through the ways groups have sought to claim/obtain citizenship.