US Since 1815 Preliminary Examination

Choose at least ONE question from each of the following TWO sections for a total of THREE questions (note that there are a total of SIX questions to choose from, divided between the two sections). Write THREE essays, one answering each of the questions you choose.

SECTION ONE

1. Discuss the importance of race, gender, and ethnicity shaped working-class formation in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. In what ways has attention to these intersectional dimensions of class identity also shaped the historiography of working-class history?

2. In what sense did the Reconstruction period represent a revolutionary change in government power, citizenship, race relations, and economic conditions and structures? To what degree did federal policy shape these changes? How successful or unsuccessful were those policies, and how have different historians understood there success? How does a consideration of gender shape historical understandings of Reconstruction?

SECTION TWO

3. The United States is celebrated (or vilified) as a nation of newcomers, fueled by successive waves of immigration. As Mae Ngai points out, however, the state has responded differently to various groups at various times, sometimes positively and sometimes with repression. How would you conceptualize the history of immigration since the 1890s? In terms of old and new immigrants? In terms of the Melting Pot or as one of whitening? In terms predominantly of an integrationist opening or one of nativist closing? In other words, drawing on your reading in the scholarship on immigration, including concomitant patterns of urbanization, unionization, and mobilization, construct your own periodization and explain how and why the immigrant experience has changed over the past century.

4. Compare and contrast what you see has the most significant contributions to historical understanding of the cultural, social, environmental and political impact of a growing consumer economy in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whom did this economy draw in as consumers, and how? What lines of exclusion do historians identify, and how do they explain them? How have they understood consumption’s role in the construction of identities of class, race, ethnicity and gender?

5. How did divergent visions of domestic space, public space and urban culture shape reformist and radical approaches to urban “crises” over the course of the twentieth century? How have historians interpreted the sources of urban spatial production in different ways, with regard to the role of reformers, policymakers, and urban residents differing across lines of class, race, ethnicity and gender?
6. Too often historians have conceived of histories in terms of singular categories: as working-class history, as women’s or gender history, as African 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?