Modern US (post-1830)

Please answer at least one question from each section, and three questions in all, with essays that are clearly argued and well-supported by evidence.

SECTION ONE

1. The era of Reconstruction is often described as a revolution in social, economic, constitutional, and political terms. Is this a realistic way of viewing the period? How would you explain the limits of change during Reconstruction? What were its lasting effects? How does a close analysis of gender change our understanding of the period?

2. Discuss the changing ways that historians have understood racial and ethnic constructions in the United States throughout the 19th century. In answering this question, consider how these constructions have been shaped by land, labor, empire, gender, slavery, and class.

3. One historian has recently written, “Until about 40 years ago, most historians of slavery concentrated on the master-slave relationship as the center of their story, whether seeing that relationship as brutal or benign. Beginning in the late 1960s, a new history placed the slave-slave relationship, and the slave community, at the center of slavery’s story.” Do you agree with this characterization? Insofar as it has force, which historians might typify the older historiography? Which historians most tellingly changed the story by focusing on the slave community? What are the strengths and limitations of each approach and what are the prospects for combining them?

SECTION TWO

1. Who were the “Progressives” and what were they trying to do? Has paying more attention to race and gender changed our understanding of this period and this movement? What if any continuity do you see between the Populist and Progressive movements?

2. 1893 to 1898 and 1941-1945 are both considered watersheds in US history that set in motion long-term trends that transformed both the character of domestic society and the nation’s role in the world. Discuss the extent to which you find this generalization persuasive and why.
3. In each of three great eras of liberal reform in the US – 1900-1917, the 1933-1945, and the 1960s, social movements helped to produce reforms involving an expansion of federal government authority and involvement in social and economic problems. Discuss.