Race and Ethnicity
Spring 2014

Please answer at least one question from each section with responses featuring both clear argument and abundant evidence. For the full exam you will write on three questions.

SECTION ONE

1. To what extent are caste and race comparable concepts? Discuss some of the various attempts at comparative history of race in American and caste in India. What are some of the contributions of this historiography? Its flaws? Ultimately, is a comparison between caste and race useful or obfuscating? What are some heretofore unexamined parallels that you think would be useful for a comparative history of race and caste?

2. Much of the recent work on race in America has looked at groups that do not fall within the racial binary of black and white, such as Mexican-Americans or Asian-Americans. How have scholars gotten away from the black-white binary in their approach to race in American history? How have such studies changed our approach to the study of race in general?

3. One of the great debates about the origins of race and racism in the U.S. is, simply put, “Which came first, slavery or racism?” Did racism cause whites to enslave Africans or did seeing Africans in the conditions of slavery produce racism? Discuss this debate and also explain why historians believe that it is so important.

SECTION TWO

1. Discuss the ways in which the concepts of race and caste have been exported to other regions other than North America and India (East Asia in particular). How have scholars adapted race and caste to fit other contexts? Have their efforts been successful? How has the use of race or caste affected the historiography of East Asia?

2. Trace the development of caste as an analytical concept from Dumont’s Homo Hierarchicus to more recent work such as Dirks’ Castes of Mind. What have been the different methodological approaches to the study of caste? To what extent can we speak of a single caste system for all of India?

3. How would you structure a comparative study of caste, race, and other forms of inequality in disparate regions (North America, India, and Japan) in order to teach undergraduate students? Design an upper-level undergraduate course based around the themes of this reading list.