Race and Ethnicity Spring 2016

Directions: Select three questions below and write a clear and thorough essay for each of them. Make sure to select at least one question from each part and to read the questions carefully.

PART A
1. On the heels of the emergence of new critical perspectives on the American past that emphasize the role of race and racism in the formation of US institutions has arisen the idea that what motivated American national expansion was not the dream of a “white man's country” or a desire to ethnically "cleanse" North America. Instead, these scholars have suggested that the American project was a colonial one, driven by a rapacious desire on the part of settlers for land ownership and a rapidly expanding international market for agricultural commodities. America became a settler nation and it was settler colonialism that made it that way. How does this new perspective alter or challenge those who argue for the role of race in the formation of the United States? Or are there ways to bridge the racial and colonial versions of the American story? Use examples to illustrate your essay, citing those who might emphasize the conflict between these interpretations and those who would not.

2. In the modern era, racial, cultural and ethnic identities were forged through historical experience. That historical experience varies enormously, however. Some groups developed a self-conscious identity through experiences of oppression; others by inhabiting liminal, borderland spaces that opened new opportunities for social and cultural organization. Still others inhabited legal regimes that constrained them, but which also triggered a focus on institutions (legal, religious, cultural) or physical spaces that enabled them to draw a community together and bring it into visibility. Discuss the validity of this proposition with specific reference to three racial or ethnic groups in the United States.

PART B
1. How has the emergence of scholarship on U.S. Empire impacted work on racial formations within the United States? Has the addition of the concept of empire produced new understandings of U.S. racial ideologies, situated them more deeply in a global context, or created new ways of seeing racial developments once seen as simply “domestic”?

2. Understanding race as largely defined by a binary opposition between black and white has been commonplace in U.S. culture as well as among many historians. How effective have recent historians been in challenging this binary? How successful have they been in integrating the histories of people of color outside the black community into their narratives? Has this work largely supplanted or altered the binary view of race common amongst scholars? Should it?

3. According to recent scholarship, how has citizenship been defined, shaped and applied to racialized groups in the U.S. past? How have the boundaries of citizenship expanded and contracted over time? And what role did racialized groups themselves play in demarcating, challenging, or accommodating to these boundaries?