Preliminary Exam questions for Heidi Dodson, 9/2/10

Please answer a total of three questions, including at least one from Part A and one from Part B. Good luck!

PART A:
“Race and Space” (Questions written by Professor Dianne Harris)

1. Much of the literature that examines the relationships that exist between racial formation and the built environment takes urban space as its focus. Yet space plays an equally important role in racial identity formation in rural areas. As you note in your dissertation proposal, studies that focus on the rural in this context are fewer in number than those that focus on the urban, yet some key precedents exist. What are they, what do they contribute, and how do they intersect with studies in the fields of environmental history and environmental justice? You need not list every source, but your answer should include five or six of the sources you consider most important for your future work.

2. Evidence of the influence of a “spatial turn” in the field of History has been apparent for some time, yet definitions of spatial history remain somewhat disparate. What is/are spatial history(ies)? What can we learn by studying space(s) that we simply cannot learn from any other sources? Your answer should provide examples of several different approaches to spatial history, and it should explain the impact of each author’s work.

3. Scholars who study the built environment have tended to ask questions about race when they have examined barrios, ghettos, ethnic enclaves, or reservations. They have presumed, in essence, that all spaces are white spaces unless labeled otherwise. Yet in recent years, an increasing number of scholars have begun to examine the whiteness of everyday spaces to understand the ways in which whiteness asserts its dominance in the built environment. Please discuss some key publications in this somewhat newer area of inquiry. What are the theoretical underpinnings for understanding the whiteness of the built environment? Who are the key authors? What have they so far accomplished, and what work yet remains to be done in this realm?

PART B:
Atlantic Slave Trade (Questions written by Professor Rebecca Ginsburg)

1) Systems of human slavery and trade in humans to support those systems have existed in many places around the world in historically-specific conditions. In this question, please discuss the factors that were involved in the rise of the Atlantic trade. Historians of the Atlantic trade have debated the relative importance of cultural and material dimensions in the rise of the trade. Review their arguments, citing major works (two or three is sufficient) that have been most influential in these debates. Your answer should include, but not be limited to, the role of European territorial expansion, labor demand, religion, conceptions of “other,”
environment, and technology. Finally, present your own answer to the question of which factors were most important in the development of the Atlantic system.

2) Early histories of the Atlantic slave trade treated Africans as passive victims of European dominance. More recent interpretations have stressed the agency and active role of Africans. Discuss how the Atlantic slave trade was organized in Africa (including geographically), the different roles Africans played in the trade (directly and indirectly), and how these roles changed over time.

3) You have been invited to develop and teach an undergraduate History course on the Atlantic slave trade. You have flexibility in how it is structured, but it must cover a range of geographic areas. What would you choose as the central organizing principles and themes? What are some of the readings you would choose?