

Fall, 1987

Preliminary Examination

Afro-American History

The total time available for this exam is five hours. Pertinent bibliography should be included in the discussion, especially with regard to unresolved problems and the development of historical debates. Answer 6 out of the following 10.

1. In White Over Black, Winthrop Jordan raised the question, "Did racism precede slavery, did slavery precede racism; or, did both develop simultaneously, mutually reinforcing each other?" What does the evidence say in response to Jordan's question, particularly with reference to Virginia? And, also discuss the impact of economic factors as they relate to the origin of racism and slavery.
2. "History is more than the sum of human facts," seemed to summarize criticisms of Fogel and Engerman's Time on the Cross, particularly since some critics view their findings in much the same way as U. B. Phillips' American Negro Slavery. Given several important studies in the historiography of Afro-American slavery, Elkins, Blassingame, Genovese, Gutman, Wade, Starobin, Walker, White, and others, does Time on the Cross represent a pivotal point in the reconstruction of Afro-American antebellum slavery?
3. While the free black population from 1790 to 1860 never comprised more than ten percent of the black population, its history provides, perhaps more insight on the extent to which socio-economic conditions have or have not changed for blacks than does an analysis of antebellum slavery. Discuss either of the positions or both, as you review the history of Free Blacks from the 1780s to 1860.
4. Within a thirty year period, from 1865 to 1896, Afro-Americans experienced momentous changes in their lives, particularly in the political and economic spheres. Identify those changes, especially in response to Constitutional Amendments, statutory enactments, and judicial changes.
5. In what ways, if any, did the Age of Booker T. Washington represent a transformation in the history of Afro-Americans?
6. To some social and intellectual historians, the Harlem Renaissance represents the maturity of black cultural expressions. Others have seen it as a reflection of the "New Negro," while others view that literary movement within the context of the American Literary tradition and Black Nationalism in the post WWI period. Which of those assessments is most inclusive?
7. Discuss the extent to which violence has been used as a form of social and economic control in the history of Afro-Americans.
8. What insights can be gained in reconstructing the history of Black Americans from the perspective of the rise, formation, and transformation of the Black working class from 1790 to 1970?

9. Discuss Black Land Settlement Patterns from colonial America to the origin of the urban ghetto.

10. With the Brown Decision, the reinterpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment precipitated a massive social reform movement which within a decade changed membership, emphasis and direction. What was that reform movement, how did it change, who were the leaders, their success, failures. And, within the broader context, how did American life and thought change, if at all.