

Hist. 80010-01 Literature of American History to 1865
Fall 2024: Essay Examination
December 18, 2024

Please answer **TWO** of the questions from those listed below, one from Part I and one from Part II. Both parts of the exam are weighted equally. Your answers should be in essay form. Each essay should make a clear, coherent, and persuasive argument that is supported with specific historical evidence and/or discussions of differing historiographical interpretations. Citations are not necessary unless quoting, and can be informal for any work on the course syllabus.

You have eight hours (from 9am to 5pm) to write your essays and submit them as e-mail attachments to Amanda Rajnauth [arajnauth@gc.cuny.edu].

Part 1:

1. “Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development,” wrote Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. In what ways have recent historians confirmed, revised, and/or overturned this statement of what is known as the Turner Thesis by attending to colonialism and the politics of land, or in other ways?
2. Gregory P. Downs has proposed to rewrite the “second American Revolution” as “bloody constitutionalism.” Can his idea of yoking fundamental political change (“revolution”) to both constitutionalism and to violence be sustained for earlier periods as well as for the civil war era? How have historians balanced the two important, but usually seen as distinct, American phenomena of violence and of constitutionalism?

Part 2:

1. While some theorists have urged broader perspectives on early American history (imperial, Continental, transnational, Atlantic, or a return to the nation), other scholars have best explored historical change from a microhistorical perspective, grounded in a particular locale. Using several examples from the course readings, what are the advantages and disadvantages of broader and narrower approaches? Is it possible to combine the approaches? Is there a particular book that best exemplifies either approach, or perhaps both at once?
2. The authors of the 2016 *Journal of the Early Republic* roundtable on “the politics in and of women’s history” in the early republic disagreed on what has been achieved and what may be possible in changing “the narrative.” Eight years later, has there been more progress on incorporating women, or in gendering the narrative? Have historians of women and gender made contributions that could change the narrative?