

**The Graduate Center -- Ph.D. Program in History**

**First-Year Examination in American History**

**May 22, 2018 (9:00 am to 5:00 pm)**

Answer one question from Part I and one from Part II.

Be certain that you address the questions as they are posed. The discussion and analysis in each essay should, of course, be clearly expressed and coherently organized. Your essays should include sufficient historical detail to build a persuasive argument. You should avoid the use of unsupported generalizations, as well as material that does not fortify your argument. The essays should draw on (and cite) those works and authors that have enriched your understanding of the argument you wish to advance.

Part I.

1. "Social and political change flows from the work of determined reformers and the movements of which they are a part, and also from the support of broad-minded political leaders." In an essay that examines three eras marked by significant change—Reconstruction, the Progressive era, and the struggle for racial justice from World War II (including the war years) to the 1960s—consider how persuasive you find this framework for understanding what drives change in American history. You should, of course, keep in mind that you may reject or modify this formulation for any (or all) of these three eras. If you choose to do that, you should offer an alternative explanation for understanding change during that period.

2. How "new" was the New Deal? In considering this question, you should explore two crucial eras of American reform, the Progressive era and the age of FDR. The aim is to write a comprehensive essay that examines reform in each of the two eras and that also considers the relationship between reform in the Progressive era and reform in the era of Franklin Roosevelt (i.e., was the New Deal "new"?). In composing the essay, you should consider the following: What catalyzed reform in each period? What reforms were implemented in each era and what specific problems did those reforms seek to address? Finally, in reflecting broadly on the twentieth century, what, in your view, is the significance of both the Progressive era and the New Deal?

Part II:

1. According to one scholar, “nations lie enmeshed in each others’ history. Even the most isolated of nation-states is a semi-permeable container, washed over by forces originating far beyond its shores.” With this observation in mind, write an essay that considers the recent move to globalize the study of U.S. history. In your estimation, does this approach enrich our understanding of U.S. history, or does it promise more than it delivers? Your answer should consider aspects of U.S. history from the final decades of the nineteenth century up to and including the Cold War.

2. “In order to understand the history of twentieth-century America, one must grapple with the subject of war. Over the course of many decades, from 1914 on, the domestic landscape (political, social, cultural, and economic) has been shaped by wars hot and cold. It is not an overstatement to assert that America’s overseas conflicts have been the single most important factor informing the contours of the country’s domestic life.” Does this statement offer a convincing framework for understanding the history of twentieth-century America? Your essay does not need to consider every war the United States fought in the last century, but it should examine some of the key domestic implications of at least two conflicts. If you wish to consider America’s wars in the early years of the twenty-first century, feel free to do so, but you should still include two conflicts from the twentieth century.