

PhD Program in History
Fall 2022, First Exam in
Literature of American History to 1865
December 19, 2022

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 Marilyn Weber (mweber@gc.cuny.edu).

Part I

1. What counts as revolution in American history? Evaluate at least two events or epochal changes. Should the concept of revolution be reserved for the American Revolution and/or the Civil War (which can serve as your examples, or not), or are there other – possibly better -- subjects that deserve parallel or even greater emphasis?
2. In 1981, Edward Pessen inaugurated the *Journal of the Early Republic* by calling for “a pox on stultifying periodizations.” Thirty-five years later, in the same journal, Jennifer L. Morgan observed that the journal’s revised ambit of 1776-1861 had little relevance to her work in women’s and African American history. Choose one or more periods that organize a part of pre-1865 US history (e.g. early or colonial, revolutionary era, early republic, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, antebellum, Civil War eras) and analyze how historians have confirmed, challenged, or refined its logic, scope, and meaning.

Part II

1. Johann Neem detects a deep divide among U.S. historians between what he calls “polity” and “exchange”-oriented scholarship, attempting to update and specify an older divide between political and social historians. Yet arguably the best work has always transcended those divisions. How have historians of the period before 1865 made the state speak to matters of society, culture, or what Neem might call “exchange,” and/or vice-versa?
2. Historians and non-historians cite Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom* as a touchstone for understanding U.S. history and its origins, perhaps more than ever. But where in 1990 Nathan Huggins could point to Morgan as a hopeful sign of change, there has been much more scholarship on slavery and race and its relationship to everything else since. How has the literature of US history to 1865 built on and/or departed from Morgan’s classic treatment of colonization, social and economic development, political struggles, different populations, and an evolution “toward slavery,” “toward racism,” “toward populism,” “toward the republic”?