

## First-Year Examination in American History Spring 2023

Please choose two of the questions from those listed below, one from Part I and one from Part II. Answer with coherent and well-organized essays, using *specific* historiographical interpretations and historical examples to make your own argument. You may use informal citations for any text on the syllabus. Please indicate which question you are answering. You will have eight hours to complete the exam. Please remove your name from the exam and email it as an attachment to [mweber@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:mweber@gc.cuny.edu).

### Part I (choose one)

A. In “Power and Connection,” a review essay on imperial histories of the United States, Paul A. Kramer urges historians to adopt an expansive conception of the imperial, one that goes beyond “commands issued, enforced, or obeyed.” Thinking about U.S. history since Reconstruction using a more capacious understanding of empire, as Kramer urges, can a story of the United States’ role in the world be told as one of empire-building, despite historians’ reluctance to use the terms “empire” and “imperialism?” Use at least three examples to illustrate your argument.

B. Historians have accounted for the consolidation and endurance of a powerful centralized American state in the twentieth century in exceptionalist terms (it came late and haltingly compared to many European countries) or, alternatively, as part of a broader process of modernization across the globe (one of many variations on a larger theme). Is either of these arguments convincing, or are there better ways to explain the forging of such a state? How were the new forms of national intervention in the economy and society justified? Is it possible to generalize about the impact of the national government, or has it depended on time and place, or some other variable(s)? Choose three decades or periods in which to address these questions.

### Part II (choose one)

A. Gender and sexuality have been afterthoughts in many of the texts we read this semester. Meanwhile, gender, in particular, is arguably better-integrated in Richard White’s synthesis of post-Civil War history. Why might gender be more visible to historians of White’s period compared to much of the twentieth century? Or is the treatment (or lack thereof) of gender and sexuality better explained by the structure of the syllabus for our class? How much should culture matter in the historical analysis of these categories? Be sure to be specific in your answer and to cover at least three distinct periods of time.

B. Does centering race and racism in the history of American citizenship from Reconstruction onward capture the essence of the struggles for and barriers to achieving a full measure of national membership and citizenship in the United States? To what extent ought the story of citizenship during this period be characterized as one of progress? Please be specific in your answer and cover at least three distinct periods of time.