

EXAM QUESTIONS FOR FIRST EXAM History 100

Instructions: Below you will find two essay questions. Choose **ONE** of these questions and answer it in an essay of three pages. Make sure that your essay actually answers the question posed. Do your best to articulate a clear thesis or argument in the first paragraph. Use the body of the essay to develop that thesis and to provide **specific evidence** from the **wide range** of materials at your disposal – that is, the required readings for this class. Do not restrict yourself to one or two sources when a wider range of materials will allow you to compose a much better and more comprehensive answer. Remember that instructors will have to read many of these essays, so clarity of organization and expression is essential for success, and proofreading is so important that the future of humanity depends on it.

1. The Problem of American unity. A central problem for Americans as they broke away from Britain was the task of establishing an ideal balance between the states and a central government. Contemplating the states' experience as colonies of the British crown, write an essay analyzing the process by which Americans sought to solve this problem. How did Americans regard the ideal balance between states and the central government or larger union? What sorts of specific projects or ideas were proposed in this regard? What were the perceived advantages and disadvantages of union? To what extent did Americans at different points regard union as being essential or even natural? And how were these different visions reflected in documents like the Declaration of Independence, state constitutions, the Articles of the Confederation, arguments of Federalists and Anti-federalists, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights?

2. The question of popular sovereignty. Among the most important innovations to come out of the American Revolution was the idea of popular sovereignty. Indeed, Wood remarks that this was "one of the most creative moments in the history of political thought" (159). Write an essay explaining the roots of this idea and the specific ways that it was incorporated into American constitutional documents and thinking. What ideas about sovereignty did England offer, and how did those ideas both differ from and help to produce American ideas about popular sovereignty? Where, specifically, do we see the idea of popular sovereignty in American political thought and constitutional documents? Did the Articles of Confederation incorporate ideas of popular sovereignty, or did those ideas appear fully only in the US Constitution of 1787?

Advice: In approaching either of these questions, I would strive first of all to identify which sources are indispensable for providing a proper answer. Reviewing the course readings would thus be step number one. For example, it would be utterly bizarre to answer question #1 without at least some effort to address The Federalist or the Articles of Confederation, just as it would be strange to answer question #2 without some reference to the thought of John Locke. I would then look through my lecture notes and think about the central points where these issues emerged in the lectures. I would also devote a great deal of energy and attention to the matter of organization, thinking hard about which points are sufficiently important to serve as the foundation for separate paragraphs, and which represent supporting evidence for such larger, more important statements. I would also be certain to provide **concrete and specific evidence**, with reference to particular texts (especially primary sources), in support of any significant claim or assertion. It is **crucial** that you **not** attempt simply to tell what happened in a narrative fashion, since that – almost surely – will not answer the question. Make sure that every paragraph has a point that contributes to the larger task of addressing the question. This kind of argumentation needs to be clear and explicit. In writing the essay, I would exhibit a **fanatical** devotion to the idea of having a clear topic sentence in each paragraph, one that flows logically from the preceding paragraph and also summarizes the main idea of the paragraph at the head of which it stands. I would always keep in mind that these issues of organization

and logical expression will determine what grade I receive on the exercise. Finally, I would recognize the revising and proofreading represent **absolutely essential** aspects of writing a good paper. A paper written the night before the exam will almost surely be deficient.

Resources: Your TA, the course instructor, and the Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>) all represent valuable resources for you in your work. Use them!

Formal Requirements: Make sure that your essay fulfills all the formal requirements listed below. Violations of these technical requirements will be penalized *ruthlessly and mercilessly* in the assessment of your exam.

- The essay should be around 3 pages in length. That means substantially longer than 2 pages, but not more than 4. You may feel that there is so much information to address, but this is precisely the problem I deal with each and every time I prepare a lecture for you. This simply means that you have to use your judgment to make difficult choices and have to *think very hard* about what you are trying to say and what is necessary in order to make your case.
- The text should be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides and 12-point font. Attempts to inflate the size of the essay artificially with triple-space, large margins, huge font, etc., will be regarded as an affront to the instructors' intelligence and will be treated accordingly – i.e. *brutally, ruthlessly, and mercilessly*.
- Pages must be **numbered**.
- Your name, the name of your TA, and the number of your section **must** appear in the upper right-hand corner of the essay. The date and the course number are not necessary to include.
- Your essay **must** have a title – and NOT "Exam" or "Constitution." There is no need for a title page.
- Your essay must be typed or computer-printed. Handwritten documents will not be accepted.
- Page references to sources should take the shortest form possible, for example: (Wood, 75). When you refer to material in the textbook that I authored, give the page reference but also an indication to the original text. Here's an example: "James Madison made clear in Federalist #41 that geopolitical issues were an important part of the proposed constitution" (Werth, 20-21)." Finally, if you wish to make specific reference to a piece of information related in lecture, you may write (lecture, 2/16) = lecture of February 16. The idea here is to keep citations clear but concise.
- Your exam essay should reflect your own thinking and writing. Discussing the issues in the question(s) with others in the class is perfectly acceptable, but the final written product should be your own. Please bear in mind that the instructors of this course take the issue of academic honesty very seriously and will keep vigilant watch for examples of plagiarism. In the case of a violation of academic honesty, you will be failed in the course and formal proceedings against you will be initiated. If you have *any* doubts, you should consult with the instructor or TA.
- It would be best to avoid any recourse to the internet for this exercise. Ultimately you will be graded on the basis on how you deploy the required readings for the course in answering the question. Consulting external sources – whether internet or print – is likely to distract you from this task and may lead you astray. Any paper that quotes text from an internet source or other source without attribution will be treated for what it is: a heinous and despicable example of plagiarism.

Grading Standards

Each essay will be graded on a 50-point scale (as the essay comprises 50% of the exam grade). Those 50 points will be granted based on the following standards:

Argument & evidence (25 points): Your main propositions or argument should be clearly stated and should be supported with concrete and specific evidence. Do not simply narrate or summarize the material. Show that there is thought behind your argument. If you make a claim, find an example from the readings that supports it. Next, either paraphrase or take a short quote, and cite your source properly. Often a few words or a phrase can be quoted more effectively than an entire sentence. Quotations that neither support nor advance the argument are detrimental to the essay, as are quotations unrelated to the issue at hand. Block quotes take up a lot of space and cannot replace your own analysis; avoid them altogether. A paper that contains no references to course readings is not acceptable. **THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR SOURCES ANSWER THE QUESTION EXPLICITLY.**

Accuracy/plausibility of ideas (10 pts): You cannot build a good argument with inaccurate information, so check the ideas/facts you are using to ensure they are accurate. By no means is the essay a matter of simply reciting a series of facts, but factual accuracy nonetheless remains the foundation for a good interpretive essay.

Organization and coherence (10 pts): Proper organization is monumental to any essay, at the level of both individual paragraphs and the essay as a whole. You should have a clear thesis, proper paragraph structure (topic sentence first, then supporting details, possibly with a transition sentence at the end), and a clear conclusion – not a *summary*, but a *conclusion* that articulates the vision of the issue that the reader should have at the end. What insights have you provided? How is your argument important? For a very good web page on this topic, see <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/conclusions/>. If you need a refresher on organization: go to your TA's office hours or go to the writing center (both of which are free).

Grammar and Style (5 pts): Relatively minor and infrequent grammatical mistakes will not affect your grade substantially (though instructors are likely to draw your attention to them). Egregious and frequent errors – especially ones that erode the reader's ability to understand your ideas – will have more serious consequences. For example, a grammatically incomplete sentence is almost impossible to interpret precisely because it is not complete. It needs to be stressed that your ideas are only as good as the language in which they are presented. If you need assistance with grammar issues (for example, if you do not know or understand proper comma usage) you can see your TA during office hours or go to the writing center. All the formal requirements listed above concerning length, font, margins, etc. must also be met. **DO NOT** write in colloquial language, using contractions, slang, and sports metaphors; adhere to academic standards.