

TOPICS FOR THE MA EXAM

For the Class of 2016-2017 and later classes

1. What is the role of media in democracy? Has this role change with the rise of the New Media? Discuss using three examples.
2. What are the major genres of American movies? What are their major features, conventions? Name representative films for each genre, and discuss one genre in some depth.
3. Discuss what is specifically American about American literature. Please name and discuss three works to illustrate your claim.
4. On the basis of three significant works – novels, poems, essays, movies, songs, visual art from different historical moments – discuss the theme of slavery, racial segregation and racism in U.S. culture. How do these themes intersect with gender and sexuality?
5. On the basis of three significant works of your choice – they can be novels, poems, essays, movies, songs, visual art – discuss the theme of ethnicity and immigration in U.S. culture. How do these themes intersect with gender and sexuality?
6. What is (was) postmodernism? Discuss briefly three ideas associated with postmodern theory as well as typical features of postmodernism in literature and film. Choose two texts as representative examples (one theoretical and one a piece of fiction).
7. Discuss a major current of American thought, preferably one born in the U.S. Name its main ideas, representatives, and its intellectual and cultural contribution.
8. Discuss race relations in the United States from the colonial times until today. What have been the turning points in the history of the race relations? What have been the regional differences? What have been the models/patterns suggested by scholars to describe them? Pick three of the major ethno-racial groups in the U.S. and discuss how their legal status and social standing have evolved in the U.S. regions typical for their residence.
9. Discuss sexuality, gender relations, marriage, and family in the United States in from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century. Think about turning points, and social and religious movements that changed the way in which Americans imagine proper sexuality, gender relations and family life.
10. Discuss the development of the U.S. economy between the nineteenth century and nowadays. What has been the role of technology, ideology, social movements and symbolic culture in the way in which Americans perceive business activities and employment, the role of the state and trade unions, attitudes toward cities, suburbs and rural areas.

11. Describe the ways social stratification in the United States has changed over the course of American history. What have been the turning points that changed social relations? What have been the main regional differences? What have been the models/patterns/interpretations suggested by scholars to describe them, and ideologies to legitimize them? How has American capitalism been different from other models of capitalism in the modern world and what main social classes has it shaped in the U.S.? How have the characteristics, and statistical and ideological significance of the major social classes changed in the course of the U.S. history?
12. Discuss the history of American attitudes toward religion between colonial times and the present. What has been the role of religion in shaping U.S. society? Think about turning points, and social and religious movements that have influenced American religiosity. What have been the main religious groups in the United States? How has their significance evolved in the course of the American history?
13. “A nation made by war” – this phrase has been used to describe the development of America. Do you agree? To what extent and in what ways did military conflicts shape the political and social development of America from 1600 through 2010? Be sure to include in your answer discussions about the particular effects of specific wars.
14. Discuss the role of social movements in the long period between colonial times and nowadays. What has been the role of social movements in shaping American public opinion and debates? What have been the means of doing this? Think about the most important and long lasting American social movements. What have been the turning points in their activities, influence on the mainstream society and changes in legal system?
15. Discuss the origins and dynamics of the American Constitution: the reasons for its adoption, the conflicts which shaped it, reasons why it has lasted so long, and the way it has evolved since 1787 including “incorporating” clauses of the Bill of Rights through the Fourteenth Amendment. Think about the causes and consequences of major changes.
16. How is power distributed among the branches of government and levels of government in America? What factors determine as well as legitimize the scope of power of major institutions and actors in the system?
17. American political philosophy has many forms: discuss major ideas and ideologies which have shaped (and still shape today) the thinking about American democracy.
18. Talk about the political behavior of Americans: their motivations, beliefs and values, sometimes referred to as the “American Creed.” Identify key actors on the political scene who have made strong contributions to America’s “Core Values.”

19. Government regulation of business and attitudes to social problems have evolved through the decades. How are these reflected in the different postures of the major parties (Democrats and Republicans in particular)?
20. American neutrality, isolationism, interventionism and expansionism from Presidents Washington through Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan to the present time.
21. American national interest, foreign policy, and the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy as seen through the prism of major international relations theories.