

**AMER1050 American Studies, Foundations I**

**Final Exam**

**Due Friday, 12 December by 5 pm; please submit a paper copy to the main office of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC), 5.01 Run Run Shaw Tower**

**Choose one of the following four and write *one* short essay of 4 to 5 pages for a total of 1600-2000 words. The following are broad-based topics that are meant to get you thinking. It would be impossible to answer all the questions that they ask in a short space. You are encouraged to narrow your interpretation in any way that you see fit.**

- A. Do you think Mary Rowlandson and Harriet Jacobs share a common definition of "purity"? Choose a quote from each that allows you to compare their views on purity. How would each define it? How do their definitions of purity imply different understandings of God. How do their definitions imply different audiences for their books?**
- B. In the *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin writes about his secret society of the "junto." In your essay, consider the political implications of Franklin's organization (junto)-- please cite quotes from Franklin's text to back up your argument. Do you think that such groups have a positive or negative effect on democracy? How would you compare Franklin's "junto" to the principles James Madison offers in "Federalist 10" when defining a "republic"?**

**Please note: some quotes about the junto appear below; citations are from the on-line version of Franklin's *Autobiography*:**

[www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=franklin\\_autobiography.xml&action=show](http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=franklin_autobiography.xml&action=show)  
(available from the website)

I should have mentioned before, that, in the autumn of the preceding year, I had form'd most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club of mutual improvement, which we called the JUNTO; we met on Friday evenings. The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company; and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased. Our debates were to be under the direction of a president, and to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory; and, to prevent warmth, all expressions of positiveness in opinions, or direct contradiction, were after some time made contraband, and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties. (119)

[...]

Our friendship continued without interruption to his death, upward of forty years; and the club continued almost as long, and was the best school of philosophy, morality, and politics that then existed in the province; for our queries, which were read the week preceding their discussion, put us upon reading with attention upon the several subjects, that we might speak more to the purpose; and here, too, we acquired better habits of conversation, every thing being studied in our rules which might prevent our disgusting each other. From hence the long continuance of the club, which I shall have frequent occasion to speak further of hereafter. (127)

[...]

I considered my newspaper, also, as another means of communicating instruction, and in that view frequently reprinted in it extracts from the Spectator, and other moral writers; and sometimes publish'd little pieces of my own, which had been first compos'd for reading in our Junto. (216)

[...]

Our club, the Junto, was found so useful, and afforded such satisfaction to the members, that several were desirous of introducing their friends, which could not well be done without exceeding what we had settled as a convenient number, viz., twelve. We had from the beginning made it a rule to keep our institution a secret, which was pretty well observ'd; the intention was to avoid applications of improper persons for admittance, some of whom, perhaps, we might find it difficult to refuse. I was one of those who were against any addition to our number, but, instead of it, made in writing a proposal, that every member separately should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules respecting queries, etc., and without informing them of the connection with the Junto. The advantages proposed were, the improvement of so many more young citizens by the use of our institutions; our better acquaintance with the general sentiments of the inhabitants on any occasion, as the Junto member might propose what queries we should desire, and was to report to the Junto what pass'd in his separate club; the promotion of our particular interests in business by more extensive recommendation, and the increase of our influence in public affairs, and our power of doing good by spreading thro' the several clubs the sentiments of the Junto. (227)

[...]

On the whole, I proposed as a more effectual watch, the hiring of proper men to serve constantly in that business; and as a more equitable way of supporting the charge the levying a tax that should be proportion'd to the property. This idea, being approv'd by the Junto, was communicated to the other clubs, but as arising in each of them; and though the plan was not immediately carried into execution, yet, by preparing the minds of people for the change, it paved the way for the law obtained a few years after, when the members of our clubs were grown into more influence. (233)

**C. Read the essay "What is a Nation" by Ernest Renan**

[http://www.hku.hk/amstudy/PDF/eng155\\_kj\\_renan\\_nation.pdf](http://www.hku.hk/amstudy/PDF/eng155_kj_renan_nation.pdf)

**Based on "When Lilac Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" you think that Whitman would agree or disagree with Renan when he says that "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle" (19)? Be sure to define what you think Renan means by "a soul" as you imagine Whitman's opinions.**

**E. At the beginning of Chapter 3 of *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave ...* (1845), Douglass writes:**

COLONEL LLOYD kept a large and finely cultivated garden, which afforded almost constant employment for four men, besides the chief gardener, (Mr. M'Durmond.) This garden was probably the greatest attraction of the place. During the summer months, people came from far and near from Baltimore, Easton, and Annapolis to see it. It abounded in fruits of almost every description, from the hardy apple of the north to the delicate orange of the south. This garden was not the least source of trouble on the plantation. Its excellent fruit was quite a temptation to the hungry swarms of boys, as well as the older slaves, belonging to the colonel, few of whom had the virtue or the vice to resist it. Scarcely a day passed, during the summer, but that some slave had to take the lash for stealing fruit. The colonel had to resort to all kinds of stratagems to keep his slaves out of the garden. The last and most successful one was that of tarring his fence all around ; after which, if a slave was caught with any tar upon his person, it was deemed sufficient proof that he had either been into the garden, or had tried to get in. In either case, he was severely whipped by the chief gardener. This plan worked well ; the slaves became as fearful of tar as of the lash. They seemed to realize the impossibility of touching tar without being defiled. (16-17; the online edition, linked from the website)

By paying careful attention to Douglass's language, consider this description as an allegory or as multi-layered story-- what does it tell us about how power works in slavery; what is the fantasy of control that this garden suggests? In your essay, you might consider the symbolic meaning of the "garden" and/or of the "tar".

- F. This semester we have considered ways in which gender and race are important to the colonial history of the United States and to the formation of the nation. Choose a passage from a text that we discussed in lecture this semester (Harriot's *Briefe and True Report*, Bradford's *On Plymouth Plantation*, John Locke's *Second Treatise*, Emerson's "Nature," Rowlandson's captivity narrative, *The Coquette*, Franklin's Autobiography, Douglass's *Narrative of the Life...*, Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life*, The Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, etc.), and use it to interpret \*one\* of the following three videos.

Lady Gaga, "Telephone" (2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVBsypHzF3U>

-or-

MIA "Bad Girls" (2012):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uYs0gJD-LE&list=RD2uYs0gJD-LE>

-or-

Beyonce's "Formation" (2016):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMea1UNtdI8>

In formulating your interpretation, please treat these videos as multi-layered cultural texts. The visual imagery and style, the lyrics, the editing techniques are all potentially important to what the video means. Furthermore, their distribution in the world market and reception by various audiences may or may not be important to your interpretation. Finally, basic techniques of literary analysis—such as description of the setting (where are these taking place?), character (or lack of character), plot (or lack thereof), generic qualities (satire, romance, parody, realism), questions of reliable narration, metaphors and symbols—are all in play. Of course you cannot cover all of these elements (nor should you try)—but keep them in mind as you consider how to focus your analysis of the videos and as you put them into conversation with the text from this semester.

Finally, remember the focus of your interpretation is important and it will begin with the selection of a quote that you think the video echoes and reworks. In writing your paper, you might keep in mind a couple questions: What does the quote allow you to analyze in the video? How does your quote highlight similarities and differences between the texts that you are putting into conversation? What term or phrase might you define as a "keyword" that allows you to focus your analysis and formulate a clear thesis that explains why you are comparing the video to the text that you have chosen.