

## First Midterm Description

The first midterm for this class is on Wednesday, October 11.

## What's on the test

The test is cumulative, including almost everything we have covered to date. The only material explicitly excluded are the items from the map quiz. Otherwise, items from readings, discussions, and lecture are all fair game.

## Format

The test will be in three parts.

1. First will be **short identifications** of individuals or events. You will be presented with the name of a person, event, or organization: you will identify it and put it into context. See below for more information.
2. Second will be identifications of *passages* or *images*. The passages will be taken from the assigned readings for the course (not the textbook). They may come from anywhere in any reading, but will generally be central to the themes of the reading itself. (If, for instance, I choose a passage from Turner's *Significance of the Frontier*, it will almost certainly be talking about the frontier and/or the American character.) Any images will be from lecture.
3. Finally, there will be a **short essay**. This should take about 30 minutes of time. The essay will ask you to respond to question that synthesizes themes from various portions of the course.

## Choice

For all of three sections, you will have a choice of what to answer. For example, you might pick 4 of 6 short ids, 3 of 4 passage/image ids, and one of two essays. We will pre-circulate three essay questions on the Thursday before the test; the ones that appear on the test will be drawn from those.

## Resources

The most important resource will be your own notes from class and readings. The course website ([benschmidt.org/US2017](http://benschmidt.org/US2017)) has all slides we have looked at and copies of the outlines from lecture. In cases where things were not discussed in lecture, I have usually removed them from the outline; if I did not, that is an indication that they are the sort of thing you should be ensuring you know from the textbook.

## Writing an identification

The purpose of an identification, of either a person or of a passage or image, is twofold:

1. To have the knowledge of who or what the ID is;
2. To be able to describe why the ID is **important**.

In general, the first is basic recall; the second is the ability to situate something within the themes and context of the course (and US history more broadly).

For example, suppose that the item to be identified is **James Madison**.

Usually an ID will be two or three sentences.

A **description** of Madison might look like this; any response should include something along these lines.

James Madison was an author of the Constitution and of the Federalist papers; he was president after Thomas Jefferson.

Be clear and to the point in this. There's a lot of information we talked about in class or in the textbook that's *not* here; Madison was also a member of the first House of Representatives. If you have already described the three most important things someone did (and many people will only have *one*, not three) you don't need to keep piling on.

A good **contextualization** of Madison could take a few different approaches.

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Madison example approach 1: You might want to approach the ways his writings talk about politics and how that relates to reality.

James Madison was an author of the Constitution and of the Federalist papers; he was president after Thomas Jefferson. In the Federalist papers he argued that a strong federal union would help avoid faction and sectional strife; in office, he helped usher in the Era of Good Feelings before the political strife of the Jacksonian era helped show that his belief in the impossibility of factions was overconfident.

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Madison example approach 2: maybe you'd want to look back to some of the themes of the unit on citizenship and self-government.

James Madison was a founding father, president, and one of the principal architects of the constitution. His writings in the Federalist papers argued that democratic *institutions* could be perfected through checks and balances, even if individuals weren't themselves perfect. This stands in contrast to the hopes of the United States as an uncorrupted model of self government that goes back to John Winthrop and the Puritans, and which—through the idea of republicanism—spurred the revolution.

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To be clear, you wouldn't write *both* of these; either would get full credit. Note that these connections should be real and substantive.

**Passage IDs**

The process of writing a passage ID is similar; first you should identify the author and the work; then give a sentence that talks about its relevance to themes of the course.

**An incomplete list of some major themes to date**

Here are *some* of the themes we've talked about in various lectures and readings. Part of your preparation for both essays and ids is figuring out what these are.

**1. The American land**

- The way the land shapes the course of American life (through the “frontier experience,” through the crops that can be grown, etc.)
- The different ways of treating native peoples by various colonial powers.
- Cycles of land appropriation from natives.
- Patterns of western expansion.

**2. Self Government**

- “Republican” and Enlightenment ideals of government.
- The fear of corruption of leaders.
- Idealization of the farmer.
- The splits between Federalists and Jeffersonians, Jacksonian Democrats and Whigs, and Republicans and Democrats.

**3. Slavery**

- The connection between westward expansion and the expansion of slavery
- The ways people became radicalized in their support or opposition to slavery.
- The use of violence to resolve political differences.