Reviewing for the Midterm and the Final Exams

A. The Keys to this Course.

There are several essential pillars on which this course is built:

1. **Chronology is everything.** History is not simply about “the past” but about change over time, so it is essential to know not only what we are talking about, but also when. Think about the importance of the website timeline tool in our lectures; it reflects the emphasis we think there should be on chronology, and on keeping clear in our heads the relationship between the colonial period and those later periods which revisit the colonial period in order to reconstruct it.

2. **History is written in the space between Documentation and Imagination.** On one side, historians have an obligation to their evidence, an obligation to prove their arguments by showing the sources they have used and demonstrating the suitability of those sources. On the other side, historians must be able to connect seemingly unconnected pieces of evidence into a compelling argument by using their imagination, and by thinking about what explanation could make the most sense given the evidence available.

3. **History is a dialogue between past and present.** History is constantly being rewritten because as time passes, people with different agendas come along and ask new questions about the past, receiving new answers.

4. **History is about details and generalization.** History is storytelling, and is written on the grand scale. Close attention to tiny details is built into broad, supportable generalizations. Think of tiny details as evidence that you use to support your overall argument.

What’s more, this course goes further…..

This course stretches the boundaries of documentation to create a history that is more inclusive than traditional history-writing. We’re doing this by placing new emphasis on two fields:

1. **Memory.** How people tell stories about their past can tell us a lot about their own times.

2. **Objects.** Sometimes, the study of objects can provide insights that textual sources can’t reveal on their own. Studying objects can sometimes help us recover the stories of those people who haven’t left written texts about their lives. Objects also make good historical subjects because they often change hands and can last one from century into another, showing us
continuities but also showing us how different things have had different uses and values attached to them.

**B. What is an ID?**

ID questions could be terms such as a person’s name, a place, an event, an object or a concept. They could also be images or quotations. They will be drawn from lecture and the assigned readings. To answer an ID question, do three things.

1. **Get the basics down.** Tell us the facts: who, when, where, etc.

2. **Put it in context.** Tell us how this term fits into the society and period from which it originates. What did this person do, how was this object used, what happened at this place etc.

3. **Why does it matter?** Tell us the significance of this ID. Why is it important to this course? How does it illuminate important themes about the invention of New England?

**C. How do I write an exam essay?**

1. **Read the question carefully.**
   Make sure you understand all of the terms and know what the question is asking. Some essay questions have more than one step. Be sure you are prepared to respond to all of the parts of the question.

2. **Decide on an argument.**
   Answering an essay question involves more than regurgitating information from lecture and readings. Essay questions require you to take a stand and make an argument – in this respect they are not much different from the short papers you have written for this class. Generate a succinct answer to the question in the same way that you would develop a thesis statement for a short paper.

3. **Look for evidence and details.**
   Go back over both your lecture notes, the readings, and the website. Look for evidence which supports your argument. Make sure to note both large
ideas and details. If you do not find evidence to support your argument or if you find conflicting evidence, alter your argument.

4. **Think about points and subpoints, i.e. the building blocks for your argument.**
Consider issues such as change over time, responses of different people or groups of people to a particular incident or idea, or the opinions of different authors.

5. **Organize your points, make sure they are supported by your evidence, and construct an OUTLINE.**
This will serve two purposes. First it will require you to organize your essay and avoid tangents. This will make your answer more coherent and easier for your reader to understand. Second, it will help you to remember the evidence you have gathered and the arguments you want to make. You may actually want to practice writing the essay before the day of the exam.

6. **On the day of the exam**
   Before answering the essay question you should attempt to reconstruct your outline in your bluebook. This will help you make sure that you present your argument clearly and that you remember the evidence you collected beforehand. Should you run out of time before completing your essay, you can copy the end of your outline to the end of your essay for partial credit.

7. **Write a conclusion.**
The conclusion should sum up your argument to ensure that your reader understands your answer to the essay question.

*Following these steps should lead to better essays (and higher grades)!*