United States Ph.D. Written Qualifying Examination
Fall 2001
Wednesday, September 19, 2001 8:00am-5:00 pm

You have eight (8) hours to complete this examination. Answer one question from each section (three questions in all). Each question in Part I and Part II should require about three hours to answer. The question in Part III, dealing with historiography, requires about two hours. You may not use any notes, books, articles or other reference materials during the eight hour period.

Part I: Select one question. Answer either Question 1, 2 or 3 (three hours)

1. The ideological conflicts surrounding the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the 1960s all hinged on the concept of rights. Analyze the major political debates in each of these periods, using them to highlight changes and continuities in the understanding of rights over time. Be sure to distinguish among kinds of rights (e.g. voting, property, expression) and different holders of rights (e.g. the people, individuals, subgroups) when relevant to your comparisons.

2. Analyze the role of market capitalism in promoting or hindering political equality, social mobility and class formation.

3. How would you write the history of the nation from a regional point of view? Choose either the south or west, and justify your approach in the face of critics who charge you with abandoning a synthetic narrative that would unify, and not further compartmentalize, American history.

Part II: Select one question. Answer either Question 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5

1. In colloquial speech, the “puritanism” typically refers to individual and collective repression, intolerance, asceticism, and hard work. How “puritan” were the American Puritans? Would they themselves have joined in this characterization?

2. Consider the period 1680 to 1860. How and why did slave owners change their treatment of slaves over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Weigh the relative importance that racial and class identity played in this change.

3. “What is man (or woman!) born for,” asked Ralph Waldo Emerson, “but to be a Reformer, A Remaker of what man had made; a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good?” Consider this classic statement on the infinite capacities of humans to change their world for the better in your evaluation of two of the following reform movements: abolitionism, anti-slavery, temperance, diet, suffrage, purity, mission, social welfare, labor.