United States Ph.D. Written Qualifying Examination  
Fall Quarter 2006  

Wednesday, September 20, 2006  
8:00 am-5:00 pm

You have eight hours to complete this examination. Answer one question from each of the three sections. Section I focuses on matters of broad interpretive synthesis. Answers in Section I should draw from the full sweep of American history, demonstrating your familiarity with all three periods into which the 246 series is divided. Section II focuses on more particular topics. Section III focuses on historiography. We recognize that the line between history and historiography is not exact, but we expect the emphases to be somewhat different in your three answers, the first two in addressing the themes of historical change itself, the third addressing the history of historical interpretation.

The answers should not cover similar material or repeat each other to any significant extent. Section I is worth 50 points; Sections II and III are worth 25 points each. You may not use any notes, books, articles or other reference materials during this exam. We suggest you take some time before you begin writing each answer to think through and outline in some detail how you will approach your answer; also, please leave time at the end to read over your answers, to correct errors of fact, egregious grammar and spelling errors, and to sharpen your prose.

Make sure that all pages are numbered and include your identification number and no other indication of your identity. Include a cover page specifying which questions you are answering. Your completed exam must be submitted to the history graduate office by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, September 20, 2006.

Good luck from your 246 teachers.

Part I. Three Centuries. [Broad interpretive synthesis. Answer one question. Time: approximately four hours. Worth: 50%]

1. During the past few decades there has been intense interest in the history of consumerism and of consumption, beginning with the "consumer revolution" of the eighteenth century and continuing through to the spread of "mass consumerism" in the twentieth century. To what extent do you think that "consumption" and/or "consumerism" provides the basis for a long-sought synthesis of American history.

2. Throughout American history, the notion of rights has served as a powerful ideological lever. Choose three or four pivotal events or movements from at least three different centuries. Use these historical examples to describe the variety of ways that "rights talk" has permeated American ideology conflict. Analyze the extent to which Americans' ideological commitment to rights can explain important social, economic and political changes.

3. The United States has often been called a nation of immigrants, but it could just as well have been called a nation hostile to immigrants. Discuss how these opposing tendencies have played out through three centuries of American history.
Part II. Topics. [Answer one question. Time: 2 hours, approximately. Worth 25%]

1. Provide an account of any 100 years of American religious history, explaining patterns of religious differences and instances of important religious transformation. Be sure to consider both religious institutions (laws, organizations) and religious beliefs.

2. To what extent did the political alignments of the 1790s have their roots in the period prior to Independence?

3. Historical writing about the mid-nineteenth century U.S. has coalesced around two main sets of topics. One, of course, is slavery, sectionalism, and the Civil War. The second is the emergence of a culturally hegemonic Protestant middle-class. Discuss the extent to which it is possible to link these two topics into a coherent synthesis of the history of this period.

4. Racism has always been a powerful force in American life. One hundred years after the Civil War African-Americans remained a disproportionately impoverished people. Despite the Civil Rights movement and the War on Poverty, they remain so. How would you account for the persistence of this problem?

5. The modern corporation has been an instrument of both order and disorder. Discuss how this tension has played out in American history.

6. “The historical status of American women has been largely determined by their reproductive and childrearing roles.” Assess the accuracy of this assertion for at least two social groups of women (defined by class, race, or region) through any two centuries of American history.

Part III. Historiography. [Answer one question. Time: 2 hours, approximately. Worth 25%]

1. Compare and contrast the historiography of the New South with the historiography of the West.

2. Discuss the utility of the borderlands framework for understanding the interaction of native and European peoples who occupied North America during the colonial era.

3. The recent push to study “America in the World” has been at least in part an effort to move beyond the ideas of American exceptionalism that have long dominated historical scholarship on the U.S. Discuss whether (or to what extent) this effort succeeded.

4. With the perspective of hindsight offered by fifty years of historical scholarship, critically assess the debate between progressive and consensus historians.

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