United States Ph.D. Written Qualifying Examination
Fall 2011
Wednesday, September 12, 8:00am-5:00pm

This exam is designed to take eight hours to complete. Answer one question from each section (three questions in all). You may not use any notes, books, articles or other reference materials during the eight hour period.

Remember

- Make sure that all pages are numbered and that your student identification number is on each page
- Please include a cover page that indicates which questions you are answering
- You are expected to demonstrate that you have a familiarity with a range of topics and periods. It is important that you keep this in mind as you select your questions and formulate your answers. Avoid answering questions that cover the same material.
- Your completed exam must be returned to the history graduate office by 5:00 PM on September 12.

Part I: Three Centuries. Broad interpretive synthesis. Select ONE out of the following three questions. Time: approx. four hours. Worth: 50%

In answering the question please be certain that you draw upon at least one example from each of the three basic periods of American History covered in the 246 series. We recognize that you will choose your examples—please do so with care.

1. Discuss the relative importance of political democracy versus market capitalism in defining the American experience. Advance your own narrative over three different centuries, discussing causes and consequences, linking them across space and time.

2. A new textbook on U.S. history would certainly integrate a global perspective that emphasizes immigration streams, a shift toward economic expansion and imperialist conquest. What themes and issues would you emphasize in this textbook that would illuminate American history from the 17th to the 21st centuries?

3. Eric Foner has explored freedom as a central theme in U.S. history. But freedom, and the struggle for freedom, has always existed in a tension with systems, ideologies, and practices of “unfreedom.” Explore the relationship between Freedom and “Unfreedom” in American History from the 17th to the 21st Century.

Part II: Topics. Select ONE out of the following four questions. Time: approx. two hours. Worth 25%

1. One of the central questions for early American Historians remains the place of the American Revolution within the larger context of Early American History.
Write an essay that situates the Revolution within the larger context of colonial, imperial, and Atlantic history. To what extent was the Revolution a radical break from 18c colonial society? To what extent did it continue trends already well advanced? Did it found a new American Society? Or was it really a political event that had limited effects on culture and society? Be sure to support your larger claims with concrete discussion of individual issues or events.

2. The degree to which the Civil War and Reconstruction era improved the lives of African Americans has been much disputed by historians. Be certain to (a) provide concrete examples of improvement or lack of improvement and (b) address the question of whether you believe there was a “lost moment” of great promise at any time between 1860 and 1890.

3. In recent years, historians have pushed for a redefinition of the Civil Rights Movement by reaching back in time to find deeper origins to 1960s social movement. Their work has upset the traditional 1954 to 1965 chronology of the civil rights movement while inserting new players, places, and politics into the story. For this question, you must use the new literature to define the origins and chart the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Remember that this is not a historiographical question. Your task is to use what you know to chronicle the making of the Civil Rights Movement. Be sure to include local, national, and international dimensions of the Civil Rights Movement.

Part III: Historiography. Select ONE question out of the following four questions. Time: approx. two hours. Worth 25%.

1. Discuss how the concept of “political culture” has affected the scholarship of two of the following areas: gender, race and ethnicity, religion, or social reform.

2. The “holy trinity” of race, class, and gender has framed a standard and prevailing line of analysis for historical works since the rise of social history during the 1960s. What do you think might emerge as the next required line of analysis for U.S. history and how would it change the stories that we tell. Please be give concrete examples of the changes you would anticipate.

3. As historians we offer particular interventions within larger historiographical debates. As such, our “impact” is determined largely by the extent to which we alter existing controversies or introduce new ones. Pick ONE historian who you have read this year and who you have found compelling. Evaluate the way that s/he made their argument and make an argument on their historiographical importance. We realize that in some cases you may choose to write on an author because of one significant book. In that case, you need to attend carefully to the book and to its impact.