Preliminary Examination:
Comparative Gender in the US and Europe,
1750 to the Present

Answer three of the six questions below, making sure to comment on similarities and differences between the US and Europe, as appropriate. Good luck, relax, and try to enjoy!

1. Joan Scott inaugurated the field of gender history by insisting on gender as a “persistent and recurrent way of enabling the signification of power in the West”. How have studies since Scott demonstrated the role of representations of masculinity and femininity in the exercise of power and its legitimation? Are there limitations to this approach to politics and political culture?

2. Religion and gender studies have become an entire sub-literature within gender studies. Write a historiographical essay reviewing all the ways in which gender and religion are projected to have interacted in the past. Be sure to discuss the historical scholarship pertaining to as many cultures and periods as possible as well as to issues of both femininity and masculinity. Finally, how do you see your own dissertation contributing to this new area of inquiry?

3. Deeply embedded in historical gender studies is a set of conceptual dichotomies: male/female, public/private, active/passive, hetero/homo, crisis/stability, working class/middle class, East/West, and so on. In your analysis what explains the appeal and power of these polarities? What work of interpretation do they accomplish in the scholarship on gender? What are the values and the limitations of these dichotomized concepts? And can you propose ways to transcend them in the future?

4. What role did women and representations of gender play in the rise of a class-based consumer society from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1950s? To what extent were women active agents in these processes and how would you evaluate the impact of class formation and consumer revolution on their lives?

5. In a classic study, two historians of women and gender in eighteenth-century England argue that the meanings of private and public were "constantly shifting, being made and remade". In what ways has scholarship demonstrated this contention for Europe and the United States from 1750-1950? How did shifting boundaries of public and private interact with evolving ideas about gender, sexuality and labor?

6. “Be a Man!” is the title of an early, pioneering book on the history of masculinity written in 1979 by the social historian Peter Stearns. A foundational insight of historical masculinity studies, however, is that models of masculinity have varied greatly over time and place. Write a fast-paced, wide-ranging essay describing what it has meant to “be a
man” in as many of the following settings and to as many of the following individuals as possible. Feel free to add other figures and societies derived from your list of reading:

Socrates; Achilles; Jesus Christ; a knight in shining armor; an Italian Renaissance courtier; Martin Luther; a bachelor gentleman living in eighteenth-century London; a male poet of the Romantic era; Queen Victoria; the father of a middle-class Victorian family; Karl Marx; Otto von Bismarck; the American poet Walt Whitman; a New England abolitionist in the 1850s; Theodore Roosevelt; a member of the Klu Klux Klan in the days of Jim Crow; Captain Alfred Dreyfus; Oscar Wilde; a German veteran of the First World War; a French shell shock victim; Virginia Woolf; Sigmund Freud; Thomas Mann’s character Gustave Aschenbach; Benito Mussolini; a Pittsburgh steelworker during the American Depression; a Nazi Stormtrooper; a Soviet man in Stalinist times; the American Evangelist Billy Graham; a gay employee of the US government in the 1950s; Malcolm X; Elvis Presley; Martin Luther King; a Vietnam War POW; Pope John Paul II; the black American hip hop icon Tupac Shakur; a male cast member of the television show *Mad Men*; the CNN anchorman Anderson Cooper.