Modern European History

February 2014

Directions: Answer one question in each of the three sections below. Be sure that your essays have a clear line of argument, engage with both the relevant history and historiography, and discuss specific scholars and scholarly works.

Part One:

1) The subject of this examination is “Modern European History,” yet, as Christopher Bayly notes in the Introduction to The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914, the adjective “modern” has been used by historians in many different ways to denote a wide range of conditions and processes. From the totality of your reading in the field, what makes Modern European history modern? Likewise, when and where did European history become modern? What are the chief ways in which historians have deployed this term over the years? Finally, drawing on the precedents of Marshall Berman, Modris Eksteins, and Paul Fussell, discuss “the experience of modernity” among European men and women during the past two centuries or so.

2) Isaiah Berlin once famously characterized the twentieth century as “the most terrible of centuries.” Yet by far the greatest concentration of human crises and catastrophes of the past century occurred between 1914 and the early 1950s. Write an essay discussing the variety of ways in which historians have conceptualized, analyzed, and interpreted the forty-year period from the advent of World War One to the death of Joseph Stalin. From your reading list, the work of Fitzpatrick, Fritzsche, Geyer, Hobsbawm, Hilberg, Snyder, and Winter, among others, should figure in your essay.

Part Two:
3) Write an essay that reviews the historiography of European nationalism since the end of the Second World War up to the present. What consensus emerged in the years after 1945? What circumstances caused the dethroning of the previous paradigm of nationalism? In your view, what are the strengths and limitations of the modernist consensus, and how does it fare in light of recent challenges? Be sure to illustrate your arguments with appropriate historiographical examples drawn from as many countries as possible.

4) Karl Marx thought that socio-economic class was relatively uniform across countries and cultures, yet nearly all of the books on your reading list dealing with class and labor examine the subjects in individual countries. Write a wide-ranging essay on the historical intersection of class and nationalism that explores the myriad ways in which both sources of identity have reciprocally informed one another in Europe. Include but do not limit your discussion to working-class identity, and cite specific cases from as many nations and time periods as possible.

Part Three:

5) At the new tenure-track job you secure after completing your dissertation, you are tasked with teaching an upper-level undergraduate course on the history of the Balkans. Most Americans, however, could not locate the Balkans on a world map and know little or nothing about the history of this region of Europe, except perhaps that the First World War was triggered by events there. Write an introductory lecture for this course, which sketches out the course content and makes the case for the importance (and interest) of the subject. Keep your college student audience in mind.

6) In 1984, the scholarly team of Blackburn and Eley published *The Peculiarities of German History* in an attempt to ascertain the nature and dynamics of German historical exceptionalism. Based on a reading of the dozen or so books in your bibliography on the subject, what do you think are the principal peculiarities of modern French history?