UIUC Department of History  
Graduate Preliminary Examination  
Modern European History  
April 2014

Directions: Please choose one question from each of the following three categories and answer in essay form. Be sure that your essays have a clear line of argument and engage with both the relevant history and historiography. Discuss specific scholars and texts. The time available for the examination is five hours.

Part I:

1. **Comparative Revolutions:** From the Glorious Revolution of 1688, to the French Revolution of 1789, to the Russian Revolution of 1917, revolutions in which existing governments were overthrown and replaced by new ruling bodies have long been a privileged topic of historical inquiry. And yet, revolutions are not uniquely associated with military conflict or political change. Indeed, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a slew of transformations in the cultural, economic, and social realms are also remembered as revolutions. In what ways does the idea of revolution produce specific understandings of historical change? How do historians utilize this analytic trope? What characteristics are central to its attribution? Write an essay in which you address these questions as you compare and contrast historical understandings of three revolutions that have shaped the history of modern Europe.

2. **Imperialism and Colonialism:** Today one of the most remarkable things about the phenomenon of European imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is that its practitioners managed to occupy, control, and subjugate countless countries in Africa and Asia with a good conscience. What ideas, arguments, and ideologies did European imperialists, especially in Britain and France, muster to rationalize their actions against foreign countries and in particular to reconcile the contradictions between colonial rule abroad and democratic government in their home countries? Conversely, what critical arguments did some European contemporaries marshal against empire building? Be sure to include in your essay a sketch of the main overseas European empires themselves--their location, chronology, nature, etc. Finally, as you do so, show how race, gender, and culture can be effective categories for analyzing power relations within historical empires.

Part II:

3. **Bourgeois Society:** There has been an explosion of literature in the past few decades treating bourgeois culture, display and consumerism throughout the modern era. To what extent were the practices of bourgeois culture over the course of the long nineteenth century liberating or disciplining and confining? What about the twentieth? Making reference to key works of scholarship on this subject, write an essay in which you discuss how the examination of bourgeois culture illuminates nineteenth century and twentieth
century European society as a whole. You might want to note the importance of such
issues as the public/private split, political economy, bourgeois political power, concepts of
cultural hegemony, or the role of institutions in your response.

4. **War in Gendered, Social, and Cultural Context:** In the past few decades, the historical
study of European warfare has been transformed from an old emphasis on great leaders
and major battles to a new focus on the social, cultural, and gendered aspects of war. Write
an essay describing the recent social, cultural, and gender historiography of war in Europe.
What sorts of subjects, sources, methods, and insights are distinctive of these new
historical approaches? Which books and articles from this scholarship do you find most
interesting, successful, and illuminating? Lastly, do you discern any limitations to these
new perspectives on military history?

**Part III:**

5. **What is Modern European History?** Since its emergence as an academic discipline,
Modern European history has been organized mainly in terms of national histories, and
weighted heavily towards the big three: Great Britain, France and Germany. In light of
the growing interest in transnationalism, Eastern Europe, the USSR and “the global” in
contemporary scholarship, it might be time to think about other ways to conceptualize
Modern European history. How would you go about this? Should Modern Europe move
east? Are there processes or events that transcend national boundaries around which a
new history could be written? Has the formation of the European Union affected how
historians think about Europe? Why or why not? You have been asked to develop a new
undergraduate course intended to introduce in-coming students to the major themes in
Modern European History. Write a brief opening lecture for this course. In so doing,
articulate the central aims of the course and the major historiographical arguments that
will inform your teaching. What nations and topics will you cover? What place does
Eastern Europe, Russia, the USSR and the global hold in your approach, if any? What
about cultural, intellectual, or gender history? Present an argument describing the
parameters and justifying the study of Modern European history at this time.

6. **Nationalism/National history:** You are developing an upper-level undergraduate course
on nationalism. Write a justification for the course. In so doing, articulate the central aims
of the course and the major historiographical arguments that will inform your teaching.
What are the national histories that you will be covering? What place does cultural,
intellectual, or gender history hold in your approach, if any? Specify at least six books
that you are including on the syllabus and say why. Given the current interest in
transnational and global history, what can be gained from histories of nationalism? If
there are gaps in the scholarship, be sure to address their significance and suggest
directions for future research.

**GOOD LUCK!**