U.S. National Preliminary Exam 4/09

Answer a total of three questions in pointed and well-supported essays. Choose at least one question from each part.

Part A

1. The history of slavery was, until the 1960s, written with the master/slave relationship at its center. Since the 1960s, it has often been written with slave/slave social relations as the focus. Citing key works, assess the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Do any studies especially effectively consider both master (and perhaps mistress)/slave relationships and slave/slave ones in the same work?

2. The era of Reconstruction is often described as a revolution in social, economic, constitutional, and political terms. Is this a realistic way of viewing the period? How would you explain the limits of change during Reconstruction? What were its lasting effects?

3. In his celebrated article on work culture and industrialization, Herbert Gutman suggested a periodization of U.S. history around successive remakings of the working class through waves of immigration and industrial growth. On this view, the Civil War, and emancipation, are seen as less than pivotal moments in that they do not herald a new historical period. Assess the virtues and drawbacks of Gutman's view versus more traditional ones centering the Civil War. Is the history of slavery central to periodizing working class, and national, history more generally? Did (and/or, how did) the Civil War broadly matter for all workers?

Part B

4. Compare and contrast the New Deal and the Great Society in terms of the following: the role of various social movements in producing federal reforms, the motivations and the short and long term effects of these reforms on American society, and the impact of the reforms in these two eras on the following groups: African Americans, industrial and agricultural workers, and women from various social classes.

5. Discuss the roots, the periodization, and the decline of the Cold War. Did US policy aims in this era have more to do with investments or ideology? Discuss two periods in which Cold War international politics shaped domestic politics in the US.

6. The modern civil rights movement is sometimes characterized as unfolding onto a “second Reconstruction.” What points of comparison might make such a comparison compelling and useful? Are there areas, within or beyond the South, where the comparisons must emphasize contrast more than similarity?