U.S. National Preliminary Exam, April 2012
Answer a total of THREE questions, including at least one from Part A and one from Part B. Your responses to the questions should be anchored in a clearly-defined argument, while engaging relevant historiography and directing specific historical examples/evidence to each issue raised by the question.

Part A

A1. Consider three aspects of the historiography of slavery: the master/slave relationship, slave community, and slave resistance. Citing key works, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the scholarship on each theme. What difference has attention to gender made in our understanding of the experience of slavery?

A2. The years from 1865-1877 are often considered a key period in American “nation-building” and as a “revolution” in social, economic, constitutional, and political terms. Do you agree? How would you explain the limits of change in this period? What were its lasting effects?

A3. In what areas did the decade of the 1890s represent a turning point in the history of the United States? What was the relationship between the crises of that decade and the reforms of the early twentieth century?

Part B:

B1. “...[P]ublic officials not only respond to the demands of a fearful public but sometimes deliberately manipulate the public in order to create national hysteria. History teaches that it is the interaction of ‘ordinary’ war fever with cynical efforts by opportunistic political leaders that is most likely to result in what Jefferson called ‘the reign of witches.’... Laws punishing dissent are especially appealing to public officials in wartime because they are relatively inexpensive, cater to the public’s witch-hunt mentality, create the illusion of decisive action, burden only those who already are viewed with contempt, and enable public officials to silence their critics in the guise of serving the national interest.”

Geoffrey Stone, Perilous Times, 2004, pp. 535 and 545

Consider Stone’s claims above by assessing and comparing the civil liberties record of at least three “war decades” (any ten-year period that includes a war between the Civil War and the post-9/11 years). Where does this quotation fall short of capturing the dynamics that can turn wars and “immigration panics” into “witch hunts”?

B2. What main differences do you see in patterns of political and military relationships—and the cultural and racial assumptions underlying them—between the United States and the rest of the world during the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars (1898-1903); the first years of the Cold War (1945-1950); the Vietnam War; and the “War on Terror”? How did U.S. leaders’ foreign policy objectives (defensive, strategic, ideological, economic, and cultural) evolve?

B3. Eric Foner contends that by the early 21st century, “the dominant definition of freedom” was one of “freedom grounded in access to the consumer marketplace” and “individual advancement” instead of “freedom as economic security” and freedom through “public engagement” in extending “social welfare.” Compare how “freedom” was defined and contested in three of the following periods: Reconstruction (1865-1877), the New Deal/WWII era, the 1960s/1970s “rights revolution”; and the first decade of the 21st century.