U.S. National Preliminary Exam 2/2010

Answer a total of three questions, including at least one from Part A and one from Part B. Good luck!

Part A

1. 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? How does a sensitivity to issues of gender change our understanding of the period?

2. How did the decade of the 1890s represent a turning point in the history of the United States in the areas of immigration, class and race relations, economy, foreign relations, and politics? What was the relationship between the various crises of that decade and the reforms of the early twentieth century? What are some of the most important competing analyses of why and for whom the 1890s was a period of crisis in the US, and how do their different emphases affect periodization and major themes in narrating the history of the era?

3. How has greater focus on the role of empire affected histories of class, race, ethnicity and gender identities nineteenth-century US History? How does a focus on empire affect the periodization of nineteenth-century US history and why? Give specific examples.

Part B

4. When and why did the Cold War begin and how did it shape US foreign policy? When it how did it end and how did its end change US policy? Be sure to supply specific situations and events to illustrate your generalizations.

5. Compare and contrast cultures of reform in the US in during, the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the post-WWII era with regard to the sources and consequences or outcomes of reform for the groups whose lives such reform aimed to transform. In which cases are reforms generated “from below,” and how do these compare to reforms generated by relative elites, experts, or federal agencies? What are the sources—social, institutional, cultural etc.—of the limits to reform?

6. While many influential social histories locate class formation in the politics of production, many recent interpretations of class identities and the categories of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality that complicate them look to the realms of consumption and leisure to recover and explain these identities. How do class relations, everyday life, politics, and identity in the 20th century look different from the perspective of consumption?