

May 2002

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
Department of History

Senior Comprehensive Exam

THE UNITED STATES

Please answer each question separately. Your answer to each question must not exceed five double-spaced typewritten pages. **On the cover of each answer, be certain to indicate your name, the appropriate comprehensive field (i.e., The United States), as well as the number of the question you have answered.** Your answer should be written in your own words and include correct citations for any sources you use, as in any paper or final exercise. Be sure to include at the end of your essay the statement "This represents my own work in accordance with University regulations" and sign your name.

All answers must be turned in at the History Department office by **3:00 p.m. Wednesday May 15th.** **There will be no extensions.** For further explanation of the Grading of Departmental Comprehensive Exams, see page 5 of "Information for Majors."

Answer **ONE** question from Part I and **ONE** question from Part II

PART I

1. The historians Charles and Mary Beard once described the events of 1861-1868 as "the second American Revolution," while Carl Degler asserted that 1933-1938 represented a "third American Revolution." Do you agree or disagree with these assessments? Were the changes wrought by the Civil War and New Deal as fundamental as those that followed 1776? Discuss.
2. While the First Amendment erects a "wall of separation" between Church and State, American political culture has been one of the most religious in the western world. Trace the importance of religion in shaping political behavior and beliefs of Americans in three of the following: the settlement of New England, the expansion westward, the antislavery movements, Populism, Progressivism, the civil rights movement, and the modern "religious right."
3. "The chief business of America," President Calvin Coolidge once asserted famously, "is business." Choose three of the following eras and discuss the centrality of capitalism in America's domestic politics and foreign policy -- 1765-1789, 1815-1848, 1890-1912, 1920-1938, 1980-present.

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4. The use and abuse of "the land" has been a central theme in American expansion. Using two distinct regions -- the West, the Southwest, the South or the Great Plains -- discuss the ways in which the land impacted the lives of American settlers, and vice versa.

5. "War, in American history, has not, as a rule, had a shattering effect on society, as it so often has elsewhere. Rather, it has served to strengthen and consolidate the social forces -- economic, cultural and political -- already dominant at the war's outbreak." Assess the validity of this statement with reference to two of the following: the colonial era and the American Revolution, Jacksonian democracy and the Mexican War, the Gilded Age and the Spanish-American War, the Progressive Era and World War I, the New Deal and World War II, or the pluralist politics of the 1950s and 1960s and Vietnam. (Note: Only one of your choices may come from the 20th century.)

PART II

6. Questions of who is an "American" have repeatedly been asked and answered in action, writing, and law across the course of American history. Often, these questions become acute during periods of racial conflict or change, heavy immigration, or foreign war. Choose three of the following eras and write an essay analyzing the changing ideas about who is an "American": 1845-1855, 1863-1877, 1890-1914, 1919-1929, and 1940-1954.

7. In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., argued that there was "a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." Choose two of the following eras in American history -- 1770-1798, 1848-1860, 1890-1912, and 1950-1970 - - and discuss the ways in which multiple groups of Americans in that era refused to obey laws or legal authorities they considered unjust. How did they protest, and how did they use a language of rights to present their cause?

8. The antislavery community of the antebellum era and the feminist movement of the mid-twentieth century commonly equated the social and economic status of women and African Americans. To what degree did this equation hold true in each era, and what were its shortcomings, again, in each era?

9. American history has often been portrayed as one of movement, both immigration from other countries to America and internal migration within it. Discuss the importance of both immigration and internal migrations in two of the following eras: 1830-1860, 1890-1924, 1965-present.

10. The connection between racial thought and racial restrictions is a complicated one. How have legal and political restrictions shaped ideas about the relative superiority or inferiority of different racial and ethnic groups? Conversely, how has racism in turn sparked the creation of such legal and political restrictions? Use two of the following issues -- citizenship, slavery, Native American policy, immigration restriction, and segregation.

