



February 1998

**Preliminary Examination: American Intellectual and Cultural History**

Part I

Write well-organized, thoughtful, and persuasive essays on any **TWO** of the following. Where appropriate, your essays should reveal a familiarity with historiographic issues, without becoming mere listings of bibliographic references.

1. "Progressivism," one writer has stated, "was born at that moment in our history when a moral and righteous minority began to observe the social ravages produced by the industrial age and to protest against what they felt was the betrayal of the republican ideal." Many historians of American culture and reform have placed this "moment" in the late 1880s and 1890s. In your essay, address this view, showing the extent to which these late nineteenth-century years may be regarded as the seed-bed for progressive reform in the early twentieth century.
2. Write an essay on **immediatism** in the abolition movement, including its meaning or meanings, its impact on the strategy and direction of the abolition movement, its success or lack of it, and its relation to the "perfectionism" that influenced so much of American reform thought of the time.
3. "No era of American history," it has been said, "better demonstrates the influence of **religion** on public life than the nineteenth century, particularly the antebellum period." In your essay, discuss the validity of this statement, including the various manifestations of this influence as well as their treatment by historians.
4. In 1845, a reviewer wrote, "No man is better adapted than Emerson to comprehend the **spirit of the age** and to interpret its mission." In your essay, discuss and evaluate this statement. What was the spirit of the age, and what was its mission? How does Emerson "comprehend" and "interpret" this spirit and mission? Do you think the reviewer was correct in suggesting Emerson as the principal spokesman of the period?

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1. In "The American Scholar," Emerson said, "Perhaps the time is already come when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close." To Oliver Wendell Holmes, this oration was America's "intellectual declaration of independence." What did Emerson mean? What was the cultural context in which his call was uttered? How did he expect his hope to be fulfilled? Was it indeed achieved?
2. Write an essay on "immediatism" in the abolition movement, including its meaning or meanings, its impact on the strategy and direction of the abolition movement, its success or lack of it, and its relation to the "perfectionism" that influenced so much of American reform thought of the time.
3. "Progressivism," one writer has stated, "was born at that moment in our history when a moral and righteous minority began to observe the social ravages produced by the industrial age and to protest against what they felt was the betrayal of the republican ideal." Many historians of American culture and reform have placed this "moment" in the late 1880s and 1890s. Address this view in your essay.
4. "One of the most striking common denominators in otherwise often diverse interpretations of the American mind is that of romantic individualism—that is, a pervasive and widespread faith in the validity of the individual experience and mind as a source of knowledge and a guide to action." While some scholars have viewed "romantic individualism" as a constant theme throughout American intellectual and literary history, its expression in the transcendentalist movement of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be sufficient for your essay.

