

# Free-Response Essay Questions

## PART ONE: Founding the New Nation, c. 33,000 B.C.E.–C.E. 1783

1. From the perspective of Native Americans, the Spanish and English Empires in America had more similarities than differences. Assess the validity of this generalization.

**Response:** It is important to develop a clear thesis on the validity of this statement at the outset of the essay. A good essay could be developed on either side of the issue or in support of a middle-of-the-road position. Supporting paragraphs should be developed to build the position chosen. Both the Spanish and the English treated the Native Americans as inferiors, thought it important to bring them Christianity, sought to profit economically from relations with them, and forced some

of them into slavery. Both brought terrible diseases to the New World, although the Spanish impact was more devastating because of their earlier arrival. The Spanish attempted to integrate Native Americans into their colonial societies through intermarriage and through the establishment of agricultural communities with Native American workers. The English separated themselves from Native American life to a greater extent and relied mostly on trade for economic gain.

2. Evaluate the extent of settlement and influence of three of these groups of non-English settlers in North America before 1775: French, Dutch, Scots-Irish, German, and African.

**Response:** It is important to point out that English settlers were a definite majority of those in North America during the entire eighteenth century. However, the proportion declined from about twenty to one in 1700 to only about three to one by 1775, so a good essay should point out that the significance of non-English groups was increasing. The next task is to select three groups from the list and describe the influence of each. Of the non-English settlers, the largest group consisted of Africans, most of whom were enslaved and forced to immigrate. The laws and social customs that enabled the institution of slavery to exist were firmly in place by the 1700s. There were enslaved Africans in all of the colonies, although the practice was most prevalent in the South because of the labor-intensive export crops that were common there. The French had relatively small settlements in the St. Lawrence River valley, but exerted economic influence over vast expanses of the interior through trade and missionary activities. Be-

cause French economic power rivaled that of England, the English feared the French settlers more than those from other countries until the French colonies came under English rule in 1763. The Dutch originally controlled the Hudson River valley as a separate colony, but this had been absorbed by New York by the 1700s. Dutch names remained important there, and Dutch social customs were influential. The relative poverty and independent spirit of many of the Scots-Irish settlers are demonstrated by their tendency to settle along the western frontiers on both sides of the Appalachians from Pennsylvania southward. They maintained their Presbyterian religion, and a history of struggles with the Church of England meant that they were unlikely to respect the English colonial governments. German settlers located themselves mostly in Pennsylvania, where they were called “Pennsylvania Dutch.” They maintained relatively prosperous farming communities and tried to remain culturally separate from the English.

3. Explain the theory of mercantilism and the role it played in prompting Americans to rebel in 1776.

### Sample Student Essay

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the set of economic ideas that prevailed in the governments of several leading European nations came to be called mercantilism. Based on these ideas, English leaders

made decisions that were more advantageous to the mother country than they were to the colonies. While this resulted in some discontent among the colonists, mercantilism by itself was not responsible for the acts

of rebellion in 1776. Mercantilism played a role in American independence, but it was only one of a number of ideas and events that were important.

Mercantilist ideas emphasized that nations should strive toward economic self-sufficiency and that the power of a nation should be measured by the amount of its gold and silver reserves. Ultimately, a nation should arrange to produce everything it needed for its own citizens and sell surpluses for hard currency. This metal reserve, in turn, could be used in emergency situations to pay for wars or solve shortages. Colonies, like those England had in North America, played an important part in this economic equation. They could help England become self-sufficient by producing things that could not be made or grown there such as tobacco, sugar, and tall masts for ships. Colonists could also provide a market for British goods, particularly manufactured products, such as woolen cloth or beaver hats. This meant that the home economy in England could become more fully developed, while the colonial economies were relegated to a role of supplying raw materials.

To insure that the American colonies would contribute to this overall sense of British wealth, various Navigation Acts were passed beginning in 1650 to regulate trade between the colonies, England, and the rest of the world. In many cases, ships carrying American products to other European countries had to stop in England first to pay duties before continuing onward. Also, goods traveling to and from America had to be carried in English or American ships, not Dutch or French, regardless of the source or destination of the cargoes. Furthermore, the requirement that gold and silver be spent to purchase English goods meant that there was a great shortage of money in the colonies. They could only obtain these precious metals by illicit trade with the French and the Spanish colonies. The

British right to nullify colonial laws that conflicted with the mother country's objectives meant that efforts of colonies to issue paper money were sometimes halted because of concerns by English banks and merchants. The colonists often resented these intrusions by British authorities and the resulting limitations on economic opportunities.

Despite the existence of the mercantilist policies, relations between Britain and its North American colonies were relatively good through most of the 1600s and 1700s. Partly this was because the Navigation Acts were not well enforced during the period of "salutary neglect" and the colonial economies grew. Also the Americans gained some advantages from the system such as the tobacco monopoly. Relations became strained to the point of rebellion only after 1763. The royal government began to impose taxes on the colonists, such as Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, and the Townshend Acts. While these new taxes bore some relationship to the mercantilist control of the colonial economies, they were primarily motivated by England's need to pay the expenses of an ongoing struggle with France. There was also a growing awareness among the colonists of the radical Whig ideas that liberties and economic livelihood could be lost to a corrupt government unless actively protected, so colonists were primed to rebel when England tried to increase its colonial revenue stream.

Mercantilist ideas set up a situation in which the economic interests of the American colonists were subordinated to those of England. However, this alone was not sufficient to cause the colonists to rebel. The situation tipped toward rebellion after 1763 because of England's war-related expenses and because the colonists were becoming more aware of their rights and the need to defend them.

## PART TWO: Building the Nation, 1776–1860

4. To what extent did European events influence the course of American development between 1795 and 1810? Assess with respect to three of the following: XYZ Affair, Alien and Sedition Acts, Louisiana Purchase, and Embargo of 1807.

**Response:** Start by observing that the French Revolution that began in 1789 and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars plunged Europe into a turbulent historical era. Many Americans hoped to stay out of the European struggles, and this goal was articulated in George Washington's Farewell Address. However, American merchants depended on free use of the seas for trade, and this brought them into contact with the warring European parties. Some Americans favored Britain, the former mother country and largest trading partner. Other Americans favored France, whose revolution seemed similar to their own. A good essay will develop a thesis demonstrating that European affairs extensively influenced the United States during this time period in both harmful and beneficial ways. When President Adams sent a delegation to France to negotiate fair treatment for American ships, bribes were demanded by unnamed officials labeled X, Y, and Z. This angered many Americans, including Alexander Hamilton, who wanted to raise an army to fight against France. In 1798, a ma-

majority of the new Congress was Federalist and very anti-French. The Federalists viewed the statements of many of the Democratic-Republicans (who often favored France) as treasonous. Therefore, they passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, allowing the deportation of aliens and imposing fines and imprisonment on those who criticized the president or Congress. By 1803, France was under the control of Napoleon, who needed funds to build the European empire that he envisioned. He was also soured on the idea of a French presence in the New World by the rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in Santo Domingo. These circumstances led to the French sale of Louisiana and a doubling of the size of the United States under Jefferson's presidency. Jefferson faced additional problems regarding shipping, as both the British and the French navies were seizing American ships. This led to the Embargo Act of 1807, which aimed to prevent trouble with European countries by stopping all Americans exports. This unpopular and economically disruptive law was repealed in 1809.

5. Analyze the social changes that gave rise to mass democracy in the United States between 1820 and 1840. Include the roles of three of the following in this process: John Marshall, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, and William Henry Harrison.

### Sample Student Essay

By 1840, the process for attaining high office, particularly the presidency, was significantly different than it had been in 1820. Those who controlled the major decisions in the government of the United States, for the most part, were still men of some wealth and experience. However, to gain and keep political power, these men had to win and keep the support of the common man. Suffrage was still limited to free, white males; however the increased interest in politics and the greater rate of participation in elections showed that some measure of mass democracy had emerged as ordinary citizens became more influential in the political process. This was something new on the world stage at that time, and the individuals listed played varying roles in inventing mass democracy.

The person who best symbolized this process was Andrew Jackson. He entered politics as a nationally known hero from the Battle of New Orleans at the con-

clusion of the War of 1812 and was the first president from the West. He first ran for president in 1824. No candidate that year received a majority in the Electoral College, and the House of Representatives had to choose the winner. Speaker of the House Henry Clay supported John Quincy Adams, who became President and named Clay as Secretary of State. Jackson and his supporters condemned Clay and began promoting the idea that Adams had become President because of a corrupt bargain. Though there is no definite evidence that this charge was true, the issue provided an important tool for whipping up partisan support, particularly in the West where rallies were held on the issue. They also used the cold and distant personality of John Quincy Adams to portray him to voters as an elitist who was out of touch with the needs of the people. By building up western enthusiasm and gaining the support of some political machines that were being developed to

recruit voters among the working class in the cities of the East, the Jackson campaign easily prevailed in the Election of 1828. Jackson reciprocated by holding an inaugural party at the White House to which all were invited. The resulting fracas was referred to as “King Mob”, but it showed that Jackson was in touch with common people.

Though Jackson’s Democratic Party had mass support, there were various groups that opposed it, particularly among the social and economic elite. Included were businessmen of the northeast, many of whom favored the Bank of the United States that had been attacked by Jackson. Also there were the anti-Masons who believed that the secret societies conspired to keep power and that the government should be used to promote the moral reforms favored by the preachers of the Second Great Awakening. There were also southerners and westerners who wanted federal money to be spent on internal improvements, as had been proposed by Henry Clay’s American System. These diverse groups were very disorganized in the Election of 1832, in which Jackson easily won reelection. However, by 1836, they had organized themselves into the Whig Party, and the second political party system in U.S. history was born. Political parties were beginning to be seen as important parts of mass democracy rather than as harmful threats to national unity. Henry Clay became the Whig candidate in the Election of 1836, but the Jacksonian influence was still too strong to overcome. Even though Clay had a strong record as a national leader in the Senate, the Presidency went to Martin Van Buren, Jackson’s Vice-President and chosen successor.

By 1840, the Whigs were well aware of what they had to do to win the Presidency. They needed a candi-

date who could be portrayed as a hero and a commoner to appeal to the voting masses in the West. This candidate was William Henry Harrison. He had won some battles fighting Indians much earlier in his long life, one of which was the Battle of Tippecanoe. An opposing newspaper said that Harrison should stay home in his log cabin and drink hard cider. This validated the approach of Harrison’s supporters who held rallies and marches to promote the image of the frontier hero who lived in a log cabin. This was a deliberate use of a social class status symbol to identify Harrison with a large western voting bloc. That his actual dwelling was much nicer did not seem to make much difference as the Whigs used the same tactics to arouse mass voter support that the Jacksonians had initiated earlier. The economic downturn that had occurred under Van Buren helped the Whig cause as well. The slogan, “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” carried the day and put Harrison in the White House.

Between 1820 and 1840, the ways in which large numbers of white male voters were mobilized altered the U.S. political process was forever. The idea of deference to a natural aristocracy had weakened and white men of all social classes expected to be able to vote. By 1840, the percentage of eligible voters who participated in the election had grown to a record 78 percent. The Jacksonians developed techniques of mass campaigning in the West as well as in the eastern cities. Those who opposed Jackson had no choice but to adopt similar strategies themselves to appeal to the greatly increased number of men who were now interested in politics. Through this process, the two-party system of mass democracy was developed for the first time.

#### 6. Analyze the ways in which the “transportation revolution” (1820–1860) affected economic relationships among the Northeast, the South, and the West.

**Response:** A successful essay should begin by analyzing the components of the transportation revolution. Road-building techniques were improved, and travelers on the National Road could go as far west as Illinois. The steamboat increased the importance of river transportation, as travelers and freight could now easily go upstream as well as downstream. River transportation was especially important in the South. There was a boom in canal building; the most famous of these canals was the Erie Canal in upstate New York. Railroad construction exploded in the 1850s, especially in the North. The next task is to analyze the resulting economic relationships. A good approach would be to observe that the transportation revolution was closely linked to the

market revolution, which meant that people were making fewer things for themselves and buying more things from far away. The Northeast provided manufactured goods to the South and the West. The South provided cotton as a raw material to factories located primarily in the Northeast. The West provided grain and livestock to feed the East. Earlier, the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers had joined the South with the West, as westerners depended on the port of New Orleans for imports and exports. However, the Erie Canal allowed goods to be shipped to the East Coast via the Great Lakes. This, together with railroad expansion, increased economic ties between the Northeast and the West and weakened western economic ties with the South.

## PART THREE: Testing the New Nation, 1820–1877

### 7. Explain popular sovereignty. How and why was it proposed as a political doctrine? How well did it work in Kansas in the 1850s?

**Response:** The three distinct parts of this question should prove useful in structuring a good answer. Begin with an overall introductory thesis on popular sovereignty, perhaps including the definition in the introduction. Popular sovereignty was designed to give the inhabitants of new territories the opportunity to decide whether slavery would be allowed in those territories. It was proposed as a political doctrine in the 1840s, probably by Senator Lewis Cass, the Democratic nominee for president in 1848. This was an effort to keep the northern and southern sections of that party united by making it unnecessary for them to take a stand for or against the expansion of slavery. The flaw in this logic was that the doctrine transferred a highly charged moral issue to a local context. In answering the third part of the question, be sure to mention the

Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which allowed slaveowners to settle in Kansas. Abolitionists hated this. Then it is important to summarize the essential events of the contest that has been labeled “Bleeding Kansas.” Lawlessness prevailed on both sides, with raids and killings. Rival constitutions and capitals were established. As a result, the national government was forced to face the issue it had hoped to avoid when President Buchanan asked Congress to accept the Lecompton Constitution as the basis for Kansas’s admission to the Union. Stephen Douglas, the leader of the northern Democrats and author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, believed that the vote in Kansas to approve this constitution had been fraudulent. A split in the Democratic party resulted. So it seems fair to label popular sovereignty a failure.

### 8. What geographic and strategic advantages did the South possess at the outset of the Civil War? Why were these not sufficient for it to prevail in the struggle?

**Response:** This question can best be answered by a quick review of the early advantages of the South and then a more detailed analysis of the advantages possessed by the North. Some attention could be given to the military events of the war, but this is not necessary to answer the question well. The South had extensive territory, about the size of western Europe. It also had a very long coastline that could be used to access outside help. This made it very difficult to conquer militarily. The South could adopt a defensive strategy, making the North bring the war to it. The North had to conquer the South and win military victories, but the South could maintain its independence by defending its interior lines and retaining at least the heart of its terri-

tory. These advantages prevented a quick Northern victory, but they did not prevail in the end. Demographics favored the North, which had a larger population and continued to attract new immigrants during the war. Economic advantages overwhelmingly favored the North, which had far more factories and financial institutions. The North already had an organized and functioning national government, something that the Confederacy was never entirely successful at establishing. There was also the moral issue of slavery, which made foreign nations reluctant to aid the South. In the end, the North proved able to sustain the long war of attrition that was needed to overcome the Southern geographic advantages.

### 9. To what extent did the constitutional amendments ratified during Reconstruction (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth) bring political and economic equality to the former slaves by 1900?

#### Sample Student Essay

Unlike the earlier amendments to the Constitution, which were designed to limit the powers of the federal government, the Reconstruction amendments asserted federal power into new situations. The victorious Union government, heavily influenced by the so-called Radical Republicans, wanted to insure the end of the South’s

system of slavery and aimed to assure that the former slaves had the rights and privileges of United States citizens. While a measure of success was achieved, attitudes embedded in American society prevented full political and economic equality for the former slaves. Regrettably, the political and economic institutions of



the nation evolved ways that kept most African Americans in positions of subordination, limiting their political and economic power.

During the Reconstruction period, the U.S. government ended up treating most of the former Confederacy as conquered territory that had to be readmitted to the Union. Part of the process of readmission was to ratify three Constitutional Amendments designed to give rights to the former slaves. The 13th, ratified in 1865, prohibited slavery. The 14th, ratified in 1868, defined American citizenship in a way that included the former slaves and required all states to respect the rights of citizens. The 15th (1870) required that states give adult males had the right to vote regardless of race or former status as slaves. These amendments, together with a number of federal laws and agencies created to enforce them, appear on their face to be sufficient to create political and economic equality for the former slaves. However, entrenched attitudes and customs kept these ideals from becoming a reality in the period before 1900.

Freedom was a life-transforming experience for many former slaves. In the knowledge that their former masters had no legal hold over them, people traveled widely looking for lost friends and relatives. Many chose to settle in new locations or to exchange legally binding marriage vows. The Freedman's Bureau and various private agencies set up schools to provide literacy training. The Union League provided a vehicle for many African Americans to participate in forming new constitutions for the former Confederate states. Blacks served in state legislatures and held offices at the local level. There were 14 African Americans in the U.S. House of Representatives and two in the Senate. After the deadlocked Election of 1876, however, a compromise ended what was left of federal efforts to guarantee

the political rights of the former slaves. Most white Americans still considered blacks to be inferior and had little interest in continuing Reconstruction efforts. Redeemer governments passed laws requiring literacy tests and poll taxes that served as barriers to black political participation. The hostility of some whites manifested itself in a system of terror carried out by the Ku Klux Klan and lynch mobs. Former slaves who tried to exercise political rights had to fear for their lives. African Americans who held political office or even exercised the right to vote were very few by 1900.

Right after the Civil War, many former slaves hoped that they would be given plots of land as had been done in the few Union occupied areas. This rarely happened. It would have required that private property be confiscated, a practice that goes against American traditions. Instead Black Codes were passed, which usually required the former slaves to sign labor contracts with landowners. Those who did not sign, or who broke their contracts, could be arrested as vagrants. Even organizations such as the Freedman's Bureau acquiesced in this arrangement. In time, many former slaves were able to maintain their own homes and work land as sharecroppers. However, they had to buy supplies on credit from white merchants and give a substantial percentage of each crop to the owners of the land. Very few individuals were able to make economic progress under such conditions. While there were African Americans who owned plots of land or small businesses in the period before 1900, this was quite unusual. Most of the former slaves were very poor.

As Frederick Douglass pointed out, the former slaves no longer had individual masters; but they were the slaves of society. The prevailing political and economic attitudes and institutions kept them from true equality.

## PART FOUR: Forging an Industrial Society, 1869–1909

10. Analyze the part played by immigration in transforming the urban social fabric of the United States between 1870 and 1900.

### Sample Student Essay

In the early days of the American union, Thomas Jefferson envisioned a nation peopled mostly by yeoman farmers, each owning his own land and enjoying a relatively equal status as a citizen. While the United States never really approached this ideal, the nation was mostly rural throughout the nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1900, however, this began to change. America's overall population doubled in those decades while the urban population tripled. The biggest transformation in U.S. cities of the era was that of sheer size. Several cities such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia had more than one million residents. However, new waves of immigrants composed an ever-larger percentage of the people building the way of life in these and other cities. The ethnic makeup and residential settlement patterns of these groups shaped the face of cities. Economic and cultural obstacles had to be confronted and overcome. In the end, the assimilation of various ethnic groups meant that the American cities of 1900 were forming a way of life that would typify American society in the twentieth century.

While the tradition of welcoming newcomers had been a fundamental part of American life from the beginning, the sources of immigration were changing by the late 1800s. Before the 1880s, most non-English immigrants had been of northern European stock such as German and Scandinavian. Now more and more immigrants were from southern and eastern Europe. There were many Italians, Slovaks, Greeks, Poles, and Russians. These groups tended to be poorer and less educated than earlier groups of immigrants. Also, they often had religions such as Orthodox or Jewish, unlike the Protestant Christianity that had been considered the norm in earlier America. Although many who arrived in this “new immigration” had been farm workers in their home countries, they rarely had the means to leave the cities to take up farming in the United States. They naturally gravitated toward neighborhoods where they understood the language and customs. So cities developed many crowded enclaves populated by single ethnic groups—Little Italy, Little Poland, and the like. Each new group of arrivals seemed to settle in some of the worst housing in a particular city. Those displaced by newcomers headed toward slightly better neighborhoods. The descendants of the original White Anglo-

Saxon Protestant settlers moved to more attractive park-like districts or to less crowded communities away from the congestion. In the end, the urban geography of late nineteenth century America displayed considerable segregation based on socio-economic class.

Economic opportunity had been the prime motivator for immigration to the United States through most of its history. This continued to be true. Jobs were available for immigrants in a wide variety of manufacturing, transportation, service, and construction occupations. Since the labor supply was so great, working-class jobs tended to be poorly paid, requiring entire families to be employed. The ready-to-wear garment business was booming, and sweatshop jobs or home piecework jobs were readily available for women and children. Dangerous and difficult construction labor was often the lot of the men as sanitation and transportation networks were belatedly expanded. Each ethnic community had individuals of higher status, often political bosses or labor recruiters who could speak both English and the immigrant language and link newcomers with available positions.

Relative social isolation and a high degree of economic exploitation gave rise to tensions among various ethnic groups as well as between immigrants and the more settled groups. Customs regarding drinking and the observation of the Sabbath caused many older Americans to regard new immigrants with disdain. The common practice of establishing newspapers, businesses, and even schools that used only the immigrant language, not English, caused many to despair that the southern and eastern European newcomers would never become part of what they regarded as the American way of life. Groups such as the American Protective Association and various labor unions placed pressure on the government to restrict immigration. Gradually, beginning in 1882, immigration laws became somewhat more restrictive. However, immigration numbers continued to increase even after 1900, and cities grew ever larger.

On the other hand, American cities also saw considerable efforts to improve and assimilate the new wave of immigrants. The national government of the era had an aversion to meddling in social issues. Rural interests, by and large, dominated state governments.

This left it up to city governments and private agencies to deal with the immigrants. The urban political machines were often criticized for corruption. However, they did provide a network of ward bosses who could link immigrants with needed jobs and services in return for votes. The Social Gospel movement, led by Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, brought the needs of the immigrants to the attention of many Christian churches. One outgrowth of this was the opening of settlement houses, such as Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, to provide social services and cultural education to newcomers. The profession of social work was born in this era, and often appealed to reform-minded middle-class women. Also the rapid expansion of public school system in the cities meant

that many of the younger immigrants learned the English language and American customs that were the gateway to upward social mobility.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, American cities were still crowded and chaotic. However, immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe were gaining a foothold in American society. The opportunities to work hard, gain a living, and send youngsters to school meant that most immigrants remained in the United States rather than returning to Europe. In the end, American cities were more successful economically and had a more varied cultural textures because of their presence. They helped construct the type of urban social fabric that became the norm for Americans during the twentieth century.

**11. Assess the roles played by three of the following in the social-class conflicts that characterized the late nineteenth century: Tom Watson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, and Ida B. Wells.**

**Response:** Begin by developing an overall thesis on the nature of class conflict in the late 1800s. The most obvious areas on which to concentrate are the conflicts between labor and industry and those that occurred as the rights of African Americans were suppressed by the Jim Crow laws. But urban-rural conflicts, conflicts over immigration, and moral conflicts over issues such as prohibition could also have a place in this essay. Once an overall theme is established, go on to select three of the individuals named, identify them well, and establish their relationship to the theme of social-class conflict. At first, Tom Watson tried to organize both black and white

farmers to gain economic fairness. Later, as racial segregation became more firmly entrenched, he appealed to white racism as a tactic for getting political support. A Harvard-educated intellectual, Du Bois wrote and argued for immediate black equality and helped to found the NAACP. Jones was an organizer with the Knights of Labor who tried to unite all workers, both black and white, to get better wages and working conditions in mines and factories. Wells led antilynching protests and helped bring African American women into an organization to seek equal rights at a time when the leading woman suffrage organizations admitted only whites.

**12. Analyze and explain the role played by railroads in the rapid economic growth of late-nineteenth-century America.**

**Response:** Begin with a thesis emphasizing the fundamental role that railroads played in the economic growth of the United States in this time period. Railroads were both a major purchaser of the products of mines and factories (coal and steel) and a network that linked an immense national market. Then go on to develop several lines of analysis on the importance of railroads. The list of possibilities is almost endless. Mass production and consumption were encouraged. Various areas could specialize in goods and ship them to the entire country. A more uniform national culture was encouraged through the creation of time zones

and opportunities for travel. Public-private partnerships were arranged through government land grants. Railroads recruited immigrants both to work on railroad construction and to occupy the lands made accessible by the new railroads. Railroads were among the first large stockholder-owned corporations with professional management. The nationwide nature of railroads necessitated some of the first federal laws regulating commerce. Hazardous working conditions on the railroads brought calls for greater protection of workers' rights in cases of accident or injury, resulting in some of the first legislation in this field.



## PART FIVE: Struggling for Justice at Home and Abroad, 1901–1945

13. Explain how the presidential candidates in the election of 1912 demonstrated the contrasting political interests and ideas of the early 1900s.

**Response:** Two key pieces of information are essential for answering this question. The first is that the year 1912 marked a high point in the influence of the set of reform-minded political ideas labeled progressivism. The second is that there was a split in the Republican party, which allowed the Democrats to take control of the White House for the first time since Cleveland left office in 1897. William Howard Taft had been elected in 1908 with the blessing of his predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt. Progressives had grown disenchanted with Taft, in part because of issues related to tariffs and conservation. With their support, Roosevelt challenged Taft for the nomination, only to have his challenge thwarted because Taft controlled the Republican party machinery that made the convention rules. Roosevelt and many of his followers bolted to form the Progressive party, which ran TR as a third-party candidate. Meanwhile, on the Democratic side, the progressives eventually prevailed in a drawn-out convention and nominated Woodrow Wilson. In the election, Taft represented the more conservative forces that favored less regulation of business

and fewer reforms. Both Roosevelt and Wilson emphasized progressive ideas, such as the direct election of senators and the lowering of the tariff. Wilson, however, also had many conservative supporters in the South. To emphasize his differences from Roosevelt, he called his proposals the New Freedom and called for reforms to weaken monopolies, help small business, and promote competition. Roosevelt's New Nationalism proposals called for a stronger role for the federal government in regulating and shaping large businesses. The election results showed that most voters favored progressive candidates. With the Republican vote split, however, Wilson captured the most states and easily won in the Electoral College. However, he took only 41 percent of the popular vote. An answer to this question also could point out that the Socialist party, which favored government ownership of major industries, received 6 percent of the vote in this election, higher than in any other presidential election. The Socialist candidate, Eugene Debs, argued that progressives were proposing only stopgap measures that would delay radical reform.

14. Explain the role of new ideas and technologies in creating political and social tension during the 1920s.

**Response:** This is a broad question that can be taken in many directions. It is not possible to cover all of the new ideas and technologies in an answer that can be written in the thirty-five-minute time limit. Select several topics that you can cover well and build your answer. Bolshevism and prohibition were not really new ideas, but the communist takeover of Russia and the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment gave them a new impact. Other ideas that could be discussed would include evolution, cultural pluralism, religious modernism, and cultural liberation in literature. The flowering of black culture in the Harlem Renaissance could be contrasted with the increase in repression evident in

the growth of the KKK. The automobile, radio, and the motion picture were new technologies that became common in the 1920s. With a 50-50 split between urban and rural population for the first time, the tension between older and newer ways of life was keenly felt. Also, the jazz age youth culture made generational conflicts apparent. While the national government seemed firmly in the hands of conservatives, there were still pockets of progressivism at work, particularly at the state and local levels. Develop a thesis that links social and political tensions with the new ideas and inventions of the 1920s, then use appropriate examples of your choice to support and illustrate that concept.

15. Analyze the long-term significance of the New Deal for three of the following groups: industrial workers, retired workers, women, and farmers and farm workers.

### Sample Student Essay

The nation's economy reached the lowest level of the Great Depression in 1933, just as Franklin D. Roosevelt took office as president. His confident speeches and call for a "New Deal" for Americans boosted the morale

of a discouraged nation. Critics correctly point out that FDR's programs were improvisational, bureaucratic, and failed to cure the Great Depression. Nonetheless, it is true that the New Deal changed the relationship

between the American people and their national government in many ways that have had long-term significance. The U.S. government took responsibility for protecting its citizens from many of the economic vicissitudes of life. Many of the basic New Deal policies set in place for industrial workers, retired workers, farmers, and farm workers have remained in force in the ensuing decades.

For industrial workers, the basic issues were job security and just compensation. A major early program of the New Deal was the National Recovery Administration (NRA). This government program required various industries to set up codes regulating many business practices including wages to be paid and hours to be worked. For the first time, the right of workers to be represented by labor unions was guaranteed by the federal government. When the Supreme Court declared this complex and intrusive program unconstitutional in 1935, new laws were passed to maintain many of the protections workers had received. The National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) of 1935 renewed the right of labor union representation; and unions, including the CIO, grew rapidly. Also in 1935, the Social Security Act included provisions for unemployment compensation and disability payments for those injured at work. Then in 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed. It established the minimum wage, the 40-hour workweek, and restrictions on child labor. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and several other laws and economic changes have weakened the role of labor unions somewhat since the New Deal. However, the basic changes made by the Social Security Act and Fair Labor Standards Act have stood the test of time and are generally part of workers' expectations today.

Though it had the provisions mentioned above for active workers, the Social Security Act today is associated in most peoples' minds with retired workers. In the 1930s, many families had become so poor that they were unable to care for their elderly relatives as had been expected in the past. Radicals like Dr. Francis Townsend proposed that all people over 60 be given good incomes by the government. Partly to reduce the appeal of radicals, FDR signed the Social Security Act into law in 1935. A program of modest pensions was set up to be paid for by a tax on the incomes of people still working and their employers. Over time, this helped to transform the nature of old age in the United States by assuring the retired workers would have at least a basic income. Over

the years, the level of payments and the number of people covered have expanded greatly. Medical benefits have been added to the program. Though there are concerns about how the nation will continue to pay for them, these benefits for retired workers are now viewed as an entitlement by most Americans.

Farmers, for the most part, did not share in the economic prosperity of the 1920s; and their lot continued to decline as the United States plunged into the Great Depression. A variety of New Deal programs aimed at making farming more economically secure. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 paid farmers to cut production of certain products so that surpluses would not drive down prices. When this law was declared unconstitutional, it was replaced by a similar law that also emphasized soil conservation and gave payments to farmers who limited production by conserving land for the future. Special laws were passed to help specific poverty pockets, such as the Dust Bowl victims who had resettled in California and the residents of the Tennessee River Valley who got hydroelectric plants in their region of the country. Electricity made life easier for farmers in many other areas as well after the REA was launched to provide loans for the construction of electric power lines. Federal programs to construct major dams in the West also had the effect of making power and more irrigation water available for farmers in that region. Overall, the tradition of government involvement in agriculture has continued. The exact extent and nature of the restrictions and subsidies has changed over time. However, they are still part of the national policy aimed at assuring a plentiful good supply. Little was done during the New Deal to help tenant farmers or farm laborers, however. Many landless farm workers are still on the lowest rungs of the American economy.

The New Deal represented a basic change in how the United States government involved itself in the national economy. The economic desperation of many people during the Great Depression made them willing and even eager to embrace more government authority and control. Industrial workers, retired workers, and farmers welcomed the increased economic security many of them received. The years since have seen some efforts to reduce the level of government involvement in economic life; however the basic expectations and structures established by the New Deal remain in place.

## PART SIX: Making Modern America, 1945 to the Present

16. Explain how the domestic impact of World War II affected American home and family life between 1942 and 1950.

**Response:** The United States became involved in World War II after the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, and the war ended after the atomic bombings in Japan during August 1945. Therefore, it is best to divide the essay into wartime and postwar sections. The most dramatic wartime impact on family life was forced separation. More than 15 million people served in the armed forces, most of them leaving behind parents, siblings, spouses, and/or children. The War Production Board stopped the production of nonessential goods such as passenger cars and appliances. Meat, butter, gasoline, and various other products were rationed, so families had to limit their use of these things. Though most women maintained their traditional roles in the home, more than 6 million took jobs. Many of these were factory jobs in war industries. Families often moved to new parts of the country as populations in the South and West boomed. Black families frequently

left the South for better opportunities, while Japanese families from the West Coast were forcibly removed to camps in the interior. As World War II ended, hundreds of thousands of families had to adjust to the death or disability of a loved one. Many other families were reunited, and a wave of marriages created millions of new families. In general, home and family life improved markedly. The baby boom quickly began. The peacetime production of consumer goods resumed. Families had a growing variety of consumer goods, with the new prosperity being partially funded by wartime savings. The middle-class suburban lifestyle was born as the Levitt brothers created the first tracts of mass-produced homes on Long Island. The GI Bill had provisions that helped veterans purchase many of these homes, as well as providing funds for the college educations that enabled many veterans to qualify for higher-status occupations.

17. Assess the role played by television in shaping political events between 1950 and 1965. Include analysis of its significance in at least three of the following events: “Checkers” speech (1952), Army-McCarthy hearings (1954), presidential election debates (1960), and Birmingham civil rights protest (1963).

**Response:** Television went from being a novelty to an almost universal home accessory during this time period. Though it was mostly a vehicle for entertainment, television also presented public events with an immediacy that had not been possible before. This, in turn, shaped public attitudes. When these attitudes were then measured by opinion polls, the results often affected the events themselves. First, develop an overall thesis emphasizing the ideas just mentioned. You may also want to address the topic of political advertising during elections, although this became a bigger issue after 1963. Once you have established the direction of your essay, analyze three of these specific cases. Checkers was the cocker spaniel owned by Richard Nixon. When running for vice president with Eisenhower in 1952, Nixon was accused of corrupt financial dealings. He diverted attention from this issue with a televised speech about his dog and his family, attracting public sympathy and voter support. Senator Joseph McCarthy

had built a huge national political following during the Cold War by alleging that there were communist conspiracies to undermine the U.S. government. A long series of televised hearings, in which McCarthy made reckless charges and behaved rudely to army officials, made the public aware of his personality and tactics. It cost him most of his support, and the Senate formally condemned him. In the 1960 presidential election, Nixon was leading in the polls and had more political experience than Kennedy. But a series of face-to-face debates on television changed perceptions, since Kennedy’s appearance and way of speaking had greater viewer appeal. Kennedy narrowly won the election. In 1963, during a demonstration being led by Martin Luther King in Birmingham, TV viewers saw vivid pictures of protesters being attacked by dogs and bowled over by high-pressure fire hoses. The resulting nationwide indignation helped to create a climate for the passage of new civil rights laws.

18. “A rising tide lifts all boats.” Assess the relevance and accuracy of this metaphor as it relates to American society and the American economy between 1980 and 2005.

**Response:** A good answer should recognize that the United States became more prosperous during this time period as the old industrial economy faded and the new information age economy grew. In general, Americans were well off. Even those who were below the poverty line had a higher standard of living than two-thirds of those in the rest of the world. However, the economic growth of this twenty-five-year period was shared unevenly, not at all like the even rising of an ocean tide. The income gap between the richest and poorest Americans increased throughout this period. For the first time, during the Reagan years of the 1980s, the rich became richer, the poor became poorer, and

middle-class incomes largely stagnated. This trend continued into the twenty-first century. Salaries paid to CEOs of corporations increased sharply. Welfare reforms made it more difficult for the poorest Americans to get government assistance. The poverty rate among African Americans and Latinos remained about twice as high as that among other Americans. The decline of well-paid unionized manufacturing jobs and the increase of temporary and part-time work was partially responsible for these inequalities. So was the nature of the global economic competition, which rewarded highly educated workers at a time when educational opportunities were not equal.