



Sample: History - American History Assignment

1. Expound upon the economic and social changes blacks in the South experienced during the Reconstruction era. Include within your discussion the topics of education, farming, family life, and the church.

Reconstruction is one of the most debatable and controversial periods in American history. Bitterly attacked by white Southerners, Reconstruction, however, “was a small but important first step in the effort by former slaves to secure civil rights and economic power” (Brinkley, 2011, p. 411). Despite desperate opposition of the white population, some institutions were founded to support the former slaves. The Freedman Bureau was the most important of them. It did not provide African Americans with the necessary legal mechanism of protecting their rights or with material resources for developing their equality. It distributed food and clothing; managed and supervised the abandoned lands and provided legal support for Afro-Americans. In 1866, the Congress adopted Civil Rights Bill that granted African Americans all the rights of US citizens (Faragher, Buhle, Czitrom, & Armitage, 2009, p. 438). The Freedman Bureau founded schools for Afro-Americans, and thousands became literate. They also established churches for blacks distrusting the racist white clergymen. The system of sharecropping developed in an attempt of the former plantation owners to find the workforce to work on their lands. They rented little plots (shares) to black families. The family looked after their crops on the rented plot in exchange and had to give back a share the annual crop yield. Although the majority of farmers in the South became sharecroppers their income was meager and they were often in debt.



2. Many Europeans settled the Great Plains in the 1860s and 1870s. However, these settlers often went to great lengths to preserve their native culture within their communities. What methods did they use to retain their cultural characteristics? Ultimately, were they successful in this endeavor?

The “land rush” was the most characteristic feature of the dramatic American settlement history that had different waves and trends of its development. The settlement of the Great Plains by farmers started after the Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862 (Faragher et al., p. 480). According to the law, people got the land into their ownership after living and working on it for five years. The Homestead Act attracted many immigrants to the Great Plains. The life of settlers was full of hardships. Harsh climate with cold and long winters and dry summers made farming harvests precarious. At first, settlers built primitive huts of sod bricks but later they constructed the houses according to their national traditions. In extremely trying conditions, settlers from Europe travelled and founded new settlements in close-knit groups trying to imitate, as much as possible, the features and traditions of their national lifestyle. Another way of preserving national and cultural identities was marrying a partner of the same nationality and raising children in the national cultural traditions. Church leaders took an active part in organizing new initial settlements. Therefore, settlements of new immigrants were often organized on a religious basis, which was a strong factor for preserving the national identity, in line with specific religious and cultural features.



3. Discuss the role of women in the Knights of Labor. What activities did the organization undertake on behalf of women?

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor was the largest US labor organization of the nineteenth century founded by a group of garment cutters in 1869 in Philadelphia (Faragher et al., p. 507). The goal of the organization was to unite earners regardless of their occupation. The Knights of Labor promoted various reforms including restrictions on child labor, larger land allotment for homesteads, a graduated income tax, etc. A special department was set up within the organization for women; it had to address the issues of gender inequality expressed in unequal payment for men and women for doing equal jobs, cases of abusive attitude to women and problems of child labor. The organization accepted women and African Americans as its members. It was of special significance at the time when “only the printers and cigar makers permitted female membership” (When Women were Knights, 2014). Women also were in the leadership of the Knights. For example, in Chicago, “Elizabeth Rogers served for a period as Master Workman of the District Assembly, presiding over its 600 delegates representing 40,000 Knights” (When Women were Knights, 2014). As many as about 3,000 women formed their special “ladies assemblies” or joined mixed local organizations (Faragher et al., p. 508).

4. Compare and contrast what is considered “the Rise of Consumer Society” in both the Upper and Middle classes.

The rapid growth of industry and urbanization facilitated by the growing networks of railways changes the economic profile of the country and nation. As a result, in the last decades of the nineteenth century the living standards were on the rise, prices were decreasing, real wages rose, and more products at lower prices became available for different social groups of the nation, with



the exception of the poorest layer. In this way, the Consumer Society developed. The wealthy citizens created the “conspicuous consumption” that tried to demonstrate, in various ways, the wealth of the 500 families that controlled most of the national assets (Faragher at al., p. 515). The most popular ways of highlighting the status and wealth were related to constructing rich mansions and ostensibly demonstrating its amazing grandeur. To this end, hotels like Waldorf-Astoria in New York were constructed with large windows, so that the interior could be seen from the outside. Jewelry, furs and very expensive dresses of women belonging to the higher class were also a characteristic feature (Faragher at al., p. 515). The middle class that changed considerably compared to its predecessor of the previous decades enjoyed peaceful households in the suburban areas, with men supporting this family lifestyles and women and children staying in their well-kept houses. The middle class used new gadgets in their homes and was focused on the overall improvement of their living, including various opportunities for leisure and education.

5. Identify and thoroughly describe the factors that led to American involvement in World War I.

WWI was a great disaster for mankind and, first and foremost, for European countries. It started in August 1914 and no one could imagine then what a long and horrible ordeal it would turn into. The USA tried to maintain its neutrality, with President Wilson issuing a formal declaration and asking US citizens to be impartial, both in their actions and thoughts (Faragher at al., p. 598). However, tensions that ultimately resulted in American involvement in War were tightening. The USA recognized the priority in maintaining its trade with the UK, which was not only politically important but also highly profitable. Meanwhile, Germany declared neutral waters around Britain a war zone and sank Louisiana, the British liner, with 128 American citizens on board



(Faragher et al., p. 599). The movement supporting the involvement in war was spreading, and a military buildup was underway. At the beginning of 1917, Germany declared a relentless submarine warfare and later sank seven US merchant ships. An intercepted coded message of Germany's ambassador to Mexico suggesting an alliance in case of war with the USA and urging Mexico to annex some of Southwestern territories came as a shock. The combined political and commercial interest of the USA ultimately led to signing, on April 6, 1917, the declaration of war.

6. Who were the muckrakers, and what contributions did they make? Overall, what impact did these contributions have on the Progressive movement at large?

The term "muckrakers" referred to journalists who were focused on reforms and raised the public awareness of urgent social and economic issues including urban poverty, political corruption, unfair business practices, and other challenging issues. These journalists published their articles mostly in popular magazines and developed the trend of investigative reporting to reveal social disparities and other negative aspects of social life. S.S. McClure, a young journalist from Midwest, was the founder of this journalistic trend and movement. He also started McClure's, a popular magazine with wide circulation, actively read by middle class that, together with other popular magazines exposed the social ills and unfair social practices. Muckrakers addressed a large range of issues across the country, for example, I.B. Wells, a young African American journalist, studied the rising rates of lynching accidents in the areas around Memphis and exposed the myths about black men spread by the white population supporting lynching. Muckrakers' journalism was essential for the Progressive movement due to its focus on the social problems that had to be addressed by reforms in different spheres. For these reforms to be



successful, monitoring of current events was needed, and new trends of journalism contributed it to the Progressive movement. In social studies of the period, progressive journalists' coverage of various events was used.

7. Discuss how the New Deal affected gender roles in American society. Did it do more to challenge or to reinforce these roles? Why?

For centuries people believed that women had to stay at home or, if they went to work, they had to be paid less than men for the same work. Men used to be heads of households; however, the situation changed during WWI when men went to the front and women took their places at the factories. Ever more often women were becoming the main or sole breadwinner for various reasons. When the Great Depression began, it first had mostly "the male image": steel mills and factories shut down and men beginning in the streets (Bernikow, 2009). However, women were hit by the crisis even harder than men. They had to find ways to feed their families, lay-offs at all social levels affected education, which meant closing down many school closures having teachers, predominantly women, lose their work. In such a situation, married women were most likely to become unemployed. In addition, married women who used to husbands as breadwinners were not ever looked upon as the work force. Women's domestic work was not looked upon as any kind of real work. Roosevelt's reforms, important as they were in the context of the Great Depression, did not assure fair policies toward women. By regulating of wages and hours, the government only made stronger the system where men's jobs paid more. Investment into the economy took the form of the government subsidizing great construction projects, which meant jobs mostly for men. The relegation of work for women was not the priority; it was in the



context of sewing projects or household work (Bernikow, 2009). For decades to follow, women were left in the socially inferior position.

8. Compare and contrast the First and Second New Deals. Be sure to examine the problems they sought to address as well as their goals, opposition, and results.

The New Deal is closely associated with Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was the main figure implementing it at all the stages of the plan's design and progress. Roosevelt's structural economic reforms started as with the First Hundred Days, from March to June 1933, when the President "pushed through the Congress an extraordinary amount of depression-fighting legislation" of the First New Deal (Faragher et al., p. 669). The Congress, at Roosevelt's initiative, established many special New Deal agencies. The New Deal, although it was not a unified system of reforms but, rather, special measures and steps targeting specific goals, was highly effective, due to its concentrating on relief, reforms, and economic recovery. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) played a significant role, for it provided jobs across the country for unemployed young men who worked on restoration and conservation projects important for the restoration of the country. However, Roosevelt's policies were severely criticized by different political groups. Attacks came not only from Republicans who saw their candidate A. Landon as the next President but also from the labor upsurge (Faragher et al., p. 673). The Second New Deal, which was the legislation implemented between 1935 and 1938, was different from the First New Deal in a number of ways. The Second New Deal legislation relied more on the Keynesian style of deficit spending as the economic model of the government policies. Roosevelt altered his policy not only because of complaints from critics but also because it became clear that federal relief assistance to people was needed. Roosevelt saw the Second New Deal programs as long-



term reforms. The New Deal brought more limited gains than Roosevelt planned. It failed to address some important social and racial issues, and in 1937 and 1938 negative trends in economy started to pick up. However, New Deal reforms were of great importance for the country.

9. Describe the American family following World War II. Specifically, did the role of women change in this conversion to peace? If so, how?

WW II triggered major changes in all spheres of human life. The role of women was no exception, and the major changes took place not only during the war but after it as well. At the time of war an array of new possibilities opened up for women. However, these started shrinking as soon as the war ended. There was no more employment for women in “men’s jobs” while many women already had gotten used to work outside their home. Married women did not give up their work places and continued to be paid labor force, even in increasing numbers. Demographic and cultural changes were no less important, as the ideal of domesticity were seen by people as “an impregnable bulwark” against anxieties of the outward world (Faragher at al., p. 774). Americans rushed into marriages and parenthood. The main trends, which were the baby boom and high rates of consumer spending, dramatically changed American society and primarily its middle class. In this setting, even more women than before wanted to have a job. Two million wives more were employed by 1952 compared to the period of war (Faragher at al., p. 774). However, unlike in the war period, they had mostly low-paid jobs in the service sector. These new trends could not discourage women from their ambitions of having a more fulfilled professional and social life outside their households.



10. Examine the effects of World War II on the American family. Assess not only the improvements the war brought to American quality of life but also the negative effects the war produced.

After the long-awaited end of WWII life started to get back to normal. Soldiers coming back home were getting peace-time jobs and returning to peaceful life. Industry switched to the production of basically other goods needed by people's rising consumer needs. Economy was on the rise, and that factor also triggered important social and demographic changes. Millions of people moved to live in the suburbs of large cities; they found this environment most suitable for them and their children. Many women wanted to have better opportunities for their social and cultural progress by combining their family duties with employment. However, conservative trends in women's employment and education were persistent and even became stronger. The demographic profile of the nation was changing as more immigrants started coming to the USA. In the past, most of them came from Northern and Western Europe. After the war, there was a growing influx of people coming from Latin America, Asia, and Southern and Eastern European countries badly affected by war where the Cold War was posing new hazards to many of the people who had survived WWII. The baby boom and rise of consumerism as the ideals sought by Americans in the peaceful could not, however, overshadow the harsh realities of the Cold War that soon brought about new political, ideological, and social tension.

11. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X were both leaders in the Civil Rights Movement.

Compare and contrast these two leaders. Be sure to address their goals and methods. The civil rights movement of African Americans after WWII incorporated all their aspirations and ambitions that were suppressed for centuries by racial and economic injustice and



mistreatment of black Americans over the slavery and post-slavery periods. With the wartime boom of African American relocation to the north many northern and western cities saw their black population double in the 1940s (Faragher at al., p. 791). African Americans' civil rights issues had to be addressed, and while the federal government was reluctant to assure any changes to secure the constitutional right of black Americans segregation was tightening up, especially in the southern states. These factors facilitated the development of the Albany Movement that launched large-scale protest campaigns (Faragher at al., p. 791). Martin Luther King took part in the Albany Movement but finding it ineffective launched a new movement in Birmingham, Alabama (Faragher at al., p. 805). The growth of black activism culminated in the March on Washington led by King who, true to his Baptist background upheld only non-violent methods of struggling for equal human rights for the blacks. Malcolm X, unlike King, did not rely on non-violent methods (Faragher at al., p. 810). Being part of the militant faction of the nationalist movement, he had the aim of creating a black "nation", which was contrary to King's idea of an integrated American nation free of racial policies and stereotypes.

12. What was the ideal female image projected by mass media in the 1950s? Was this ideal also the reality? Why, or why not?

The ideal female image of the projected by mass media in 1950s was founded on the values of the post-war period Mass consumerism with television and various gadgets changed the typical American household, influenced education and other typical people's activities, and developed new types of leisure and entertainment. With the lifestyle of the period centered on the family it was important to develop the ideals and images of the family that could serve as model for the nation. The ideal families represented by mass media was traditionally Christian, predominantly



Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, living in the well-kept house in the suburbs, with separate gender roles defined by realities of the time. The household had to incorporate the new gadgets, television in the first place, and the family had to represent a “typical” middle-class standard. The surge of religion was another typical feature of the families living in the suburbs, and this concept was also promoted by mass media and popular literature as the sense of belonging to a community and through it to the entire nation. However, the Cold War realities and the need for more women to go to work, as well as a rapidly increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of the nation due to changes in immigrant influxes made the picture of an ideal American family in its “pure environment” a far cry from the real conditions and developing social and economic trends.

13. Describe the make-up of American soldiers during Vietnam. As the antiwar movement deepened, how did soldiers protest the war? Evaluate the conditions soldiers returned to in America following their service.

The Vietnam War started as the realization of Truman’s major doctrine of containing communism during the Cold War (Faragher et al., p. 825). Typical American soldiers in Vietnam were young men, with completed high-school education, from poorer or rural families that could not avoid the draft. However, many young Americans from families with a higher socio-economic status were also sent to Vietnam as officers. As a result, the American troops in Vietnam were an adequate representation of the overall profile of the nation. With the war continued far beyond the time limits it seemed to fit from its start and President Johnson’s policies developing it into the Quagmire that seemed to last for an indefinite period of time a powerful antiwar movement developed. The mass antiwar rallies echoed with soldiers’ protests in



Vietnam, when entire companies sometimes refused to carry out their duties. African Americans claimed they were fighting a white men's war (Faragher et al., p. 825). Vietnam War veterans returned home quietly, many of them deeply affected, both physically and mentally. Their re-integration with society was a long, painful and controversial process. They were divided in their opinion as to the values and cause that fought for, and post-traumatic stress disorder was a typical diagnosis for many of them. In addition, some of them developed a drug addiction (Faragher et al., p. 830). Another serious challenge was finding a job in the shrinking national economy of 1970s. This was the price for the war these young men had to pay.

14. Watergate became one of the worst political scandals in U.S. history. What events led to the Watergate crisis? What role did Nixon play in the scandal? What were the consequences of the scandal?

The Watergate scandal was the result of President Nixon's unsavory methods of exercising foreign and domestic policies. In foreign policies he pursued the methods of dealing with strategies within a close circle. Nixon deceived the Congress and public about American policies in Southeast Asia (Faragher et al., p. 849). In domestic policies, he thought he could afford more drastic methods to achieve the desired outcomes. These views and practices resulted in his involvement in Watergate scandal, which resulted in his impeachment in 1974. In the course of Nixon's reelection campaign, listening devices were installed in the headquarters of the Democratic Party in Watergate building. On June 17, 1972, security found intruders in the building and arrested several men on charges of conspiracy and burglary. President Nixon denied any involvement in the case; however, journalistic investigation traced the offence back to the highest person in power. When the evidence from the secret tapes was revealed during the public



Senate hearing, it showed that President Nixon not only knew about Watergate plans but actually ordered the operation. The results of the Watergate scandal were a severe blow for the authority of the federal power and brought about serious disillusionment in the fairness of the central power and its abilities to be up to its mission.

15. This course has covered American history from the presidency of Andrew Johnson to George W. Bush. In this period, 26 men served as president. In an essay of 500-600 words, which president do you think left the boldest mark on American History? Why? Your essay should present the events that serve as a hallmark to his career and a clear explanation of not only the events but also their impact upon the course of American history.

Roosevelt had to respond to these new challenges in foreign policies by taking, again and again, decisions that shaped the fate of the American nation. Roosevelt had to mobilize the nation for war and organize the war economy. After the Japanese attacked on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Roosevelt directed organization of the Nation's manpower and resources for global war. Leading the nation through almost the entire period of the war, from December 1941 to his death in April 1945, Roosevelt demonstrated his insightful and balanced policies, both in cooperating with the Western allies and the Soviet Union, which required great efforts and the skills, as well as the opportunity to predict the future course of events. Realizing that the post-war peace in the world would very much depend on relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, he devoted many efforts to planning the United Nations as the most important global instrument of resolving international difficulties and regulating international affairs.



Roosevelt's decisions and actions in various spheres of national policies throughout his longest career as US President demonstrate the best features the leader of the world's greatest power should possess.



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