

Good history essay example

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



1. Why was the term “ gilded” an accurate description for the last quarter of the 19th century?

Mark Twain is credited with using the term ‘ gilded’ to describe the last quarter of the 19th century America, particularly the years from 1870 to 1900. Twain had used the term ‘ gilded age’ in a satirical manner. He draws an analogy with the thin covering of gold on various artifacts that provides a shiny veneer to the object and hides the baseness of the material used to make it. This is an apt description because towards the end of the 19th century, United States of America was characterized by large - scale industrialization, rural-urban migration, political corruption, income inequalities and many other social vices that lay hidden beneath the images of opulence.

The end of Civil War proved disastrous for the African Americans living in the Southern States, which remained much poorer than the North and the West. The farmers had to share their farm produce with the land owners. They did not enjoy equal citizenship rights, and remained segregated in the matters of enjoying public facilities. Similarly, the discovery, exploration, and extraction of valuable minerals in the Western part of the country pronounced economic benefits for the miners, who were settling in the Far West. The expansion of railroads and more means of communication facilitated their settlement. To facilitate their settlement, the local and state bureaucrats cheated the Native Americans out of their land by means of treaties, negotiations, and violence. The Native Americans ended up losing their home, because of which their culture and population suffered immensely. The cities faced wide scale migration from the rural regions as well as

immigration from other countries. Because of rapid industrialization and increasing avenues of development, America was more prosperous than many other countries of the world. The income inequality expanded. While the rich and the economically affluent section of the population lived in posh neighborhoods and enjoyed different comforts of life, the poorer working class population lived in poor suburbs and even lacked basic amenities like water for bathing and clean environment for living. The high-rise apartments and departmental stores masked the slum dwellers and their conditions.

2. In what political realm did women participate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? What were their objectives and what was accomplished? The American women played important part during the American war of Independence and as a result enjoyed high political milieu in the years immediately following the revolution. However, by the 1830s, they had lost majority of their political clout, and were relegated to a more conservationist position in the society that confined their roles to domestic setups. At this juncture, the women organized themselves into groups and societies and demanded social reforms from the authorities. They organized regular meetings to discuss their unmet needs, fulfilling which will lend them greater recognition and confidence in the society, and also prove beneficial for the moral upheaval of the society. To use a political term, their agenda comprised matters of common welfare. For example, the African - American women prioritized anti-slavery laws, and even spoke publicly about them in a forum. They were active participants in the civic reforms and soon started working towards gaining citizenship and voting rights.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the first informal

meeting to discuss the issue of women suffrage at Seneca Falls, New York on July 18-19, 1848. Over the years, the women's rights activists worked tirelessly towards gaining economic, social and suffrage rights for women. In 1869, Susan B. Anthony and E. Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association and Lucy Stone from Massachusetts created the American Women Suffrage Association. The former demanded voting rights at the national level while the latter wanted to begin at the state level. Meanwhile, that year Wyoming became the first state to grant voting rights to the women. After almost 3/4th century (from Seneca Falls Declaration), the 19th Amendment came into force that granted equal voting right to the women. All this while, the women activists gained important achievement by way of property rights for women, separate identity from that of their husband, economic rights, among many others.

3. What do you think were the most significant cultural shifts of the 1920s and why?

The most significant cultural shifts of the 1920s involved emergence of an affluent middle-class that believed in individualism and celebrated freedom of expression like never before. Henry Ford made cars a household phenomenon with techniques of assembly line production and mass production. Mass consumption and advertising became the order of the day. People enjoyed higher purchasing power in comparison to other countries of the world and spent freely on articles of fashion and entertainment. Fashion, especially, had acquired new dimensions and became an expression of social values and identity of an individual. Women expressed their emancipated status by breaking out against their traditional roles. They sported short

chin-length hair, called ‘ bob’, wore short pants and skirts, and flaunted their sexuality publicly. This also had an impact on the level of interaction between the opposite sexes, which witnessed a new high during the ‘ roaring twenties.’

Products of mass media like radio and movies became highly popular amongst what came to be called as ‘ consumers of cultural products.’ With higher better paying jobs came the opportunity of enjoying great amount of leisure. People would take off time to watch movies and listen to radio programs. Traditional characteristics like hard work and value – laden lifestyle were fading from the fabric of American societies. The African – Americans discovered expression by way of music and their own literary and art movement, called ‘ Harlem Renaissance.’ There was huge demand for ‘ Jazz’ music that was native to New Orleans and became an important symbol of Black Identity. At the same time, the culture of organized violence also took roots in America, particularly after the 18th Amendment that prohibited liquor sale. The America of 1920s was considered characteristically different from that of the 18th and 19th century that was more conservative in nature and followed the ideals of propriety, family – oriented values, etc.

4. Class conflict is arguably the basis for the rise of the labor movement.

How did the Populist’s demands reflect these tensions?

The Populist movement traces its root to the formation of Farmer’s Alliance in the 1880s and reached its zenith with the creation of the Populist Party. It has its origins in the agrarian conflicts against the landowners and the capitalists of those days who owned the means of production and left almost nothing for the workers. Their demands reflected the class struggle as all of

them called for controlling the powers of the ‘ plutocrats’ and ensuring well-being of the workers.

For example, they demanded a gradual income tax that taxed the rich and used that money for the welfare of the poor. They were tired of the gold standard and demanded that the country must create its own national currency, and the government only must control the issuance. They also demanded that more money be put into circulation to control the rising prices.

On the side of the public amenities, the Populists demanded that the railroad networks must be owned and operated by the government. The corporations charge a high price which the farmers and workers are not able to afford. This deprives them of the most basic medium of transportation, communication, and exchange. They demanded government ownership for telegraph services as well.

Another radical demand put forth by them was the direct election of the senators by means of a secret ballot, and equal voting rights for the women. The direct election and secret ballot would ensure that nobody would be able to exercise his economic dominance in matters of governmental election. The farmers and wage earners would enjoy equal and real voting power vis-à-vis the landowners and corporation owners.

5. How successful were the Progressive Era movements? In what ways was Progressivism actually “ progressive”? From a modern perspective, in what ways was the movement prejudiced?

The Progressive Era Movements were moderate to highly successful as their accomplishments include legislation of the three most enduring laws of the

20th century. The 19th Amendment granted the voting rights to the women making them at par with the men, 18th Amendment prohibited the sale of liquor in America and the 17th Amendment of 1913 called for direct election of the Senators. Though their respective interest groups were lobbying for these rights and demands, the final seal came with the intervention of the progressivists. The establishments of income tax laws is also attributed to the Progressive Era.

The Progressivism was 'progressive' in the sense that it envisaged wise use of technological and economical resources and called for governmental intervention at various levels to curb the menaces and vices that are generally associated with the creation of a modern society. The progressivists were neither in favor of doing away with industrial means of production nor did they concede to leave all the problems to be solved by the free market dynamism. They were in favor of reforms that ensured prosperity, social welfare, and societal values at the same time.

The movement was prejudiced if the stature of the reformers and activists is taken into consideration. Unlike the Populists, the Progressivists belonged to middle and upper-middle class, were college educated and well established in life. Their demands and opinions seemed to carry political clout, because of which they were able to accomplish so much. Many of their demands were previously taken up by the populists as well; however, because the Populists were not educated and did not enjoy social status, their demands were not approved.

6. What event contributed to the growing power of the United States as a global power?

Economic success and prosperity came to the United States early on, so much so that within 100 years of the Declaration of Independence, the US had visionaries like Ford, Morgan, Rockefeller who were planning the development and proliferation of automobile, steel, and chemical industries and devising ways to consolidate the financial position. The per capita income in the country in the late 19th century was higher than that of many European nations. As a result, it attracted immigrants from across the Atlantic. The discovery and exploration of rich minerals in the Far West also contributed to the opulence of the nation and made it economically sound. While the country was riding on economic affluence, the administrators and diplomats paid attention to strengthening the country's borders and tightening the security measures. They also formulated strategic alliances and negotiated trade treaties with other countries. The interventionist approach in diplomatic relations ensured the powerful authority of the US in the North American region quite early. Spain's defeat in 1898 and subsequent eviction from Cuba further paved the way for US becoming a world military power.

The country was not untouched by Scientific Revolution and soon became a hub of technological innovations. These innovations sparked the development of modern means of transportation and communication in the country that further contributed to economic development. Soon, the US was able to gain entry to the Chinese market and the Panama Canal consolidated US's economic and military power in the region.

The final act came with the US's successful deployment of forces in the World War I, towards the end of which the US President Woodrow Wilson

pronounced his Fourteen Points to Germany, which was forced to accept it. The other nations incurred heavy losses during the war but US was able to prevent that and enter yet another era of economic prosperity in the 1920s.