

AMERICAN HISTORY RESEARCH TOPICS

Constitutional Issues

1. First Amendment: What have been the issues surrounding freedom of speech, press, and/or religion?
2. Second Amendment: Why is there controversy surrounding gun control?
3. Fourth Amendment: How has the Supreme Court, through its interpretation of the Fourth Amendment, balanced the right to privacy with the need for public safety?
4. Thirteenth Amendment: Although the Thirteenth Amendment freed the slaves, how were African American still denied their freedom?
5. Fourteenth Amendment: How did the Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, and Plessy v. Ferguson take away the rights guaranteed to African Americans by the Fourteenth Amendment?
6. Fifteenth Amendment: Although the Fifteenth Amendment was supposed to guarantee African Americans the right to vote, what obstacles were put in the way to keep them from voting for 100 years?
7. Nineteenth Amendment: What struggles did women have to go through to get the Nineteenth Amendment, women's right to vote?
8. Eighteenth and Twenty-First Amendments: What were the reasons for the Eighteenth Amendment—Prohibition—and why was it repealed by the Twenty-First Amendment?
9. John Marshall is considered one of our nation's most influential Supreme Court Chief Justices. What impact did three of his most important decisions have on the United States?

The Origins of a Nation, 1300-1776

10. Some European settlers used the term "savage" to describe the indigenous peoples of North America. Choose three different American Indian peoples and show how this label is untrue and unjust.
11. How did the Quakers stand up for their convictions despite prevailing attitudes?
12. Despite the challenges, how did the Jamestown colony survive?
13. What do the Salem Witch Trials reflect about the social, political, and religious tensions of the day?

- 14 .How did Roger Williams, Anne Hutchison, Peter Zenger, and Nathaniel Bacon embody the spirit of rebellion?
15. How did the French-Indian War create tensions that led to the Revolution? (Consider fighting experience, the Proclamation of 1763, war debt.)
16. What three events were most important in building tensions between the Colonists and the British leading to the American Revolutionary War?
17. How did George Washington's leadership at Trenton, Valley Forge, and Yorktown bring about the victory of the American Patriots over the British in the Revolutionary War?
18. In what ways might the American Revolution be characterized as a rebellious act of ungrateful children against a caring and concerned parent?

An Expanding Nation, 1790-1850

19. In what ways can the War of 1812 be considered a coming of age story for the United States?
20. How did the United States justify and achieve Manifest Destiny?
21. What were the positive and negative effects of the Transcontinental Railroad?
22. How did the Gold Rush impact the miners, entrepreneurs, and Chinese who all came to California to find gold, and which group was most successful?
23. How did the Oklahoma Land Rush of the 1890's affect white settlers and Native Americans?
24. What role did the Alamo play in the Texas Revolution?
25. How did the cowboy experience help define the culture of the West? (work, lifestyle, experience of the cattle drive, conflict with farmers)
26. How did Mormons overcome the challenges they faced?
27. What was the impact of the Silver Rush on the West?
28. What was the importance of the Lewis and Clark expedition as defined by the challenges they faced, the encounters they had with Native Americans, and the knowledge gained about the newly acquired Louisiana Territory?
29. What significance did the development of roads and canals have on the growth of specific regions of the United States?

30. How did living conditions, working conditions, and religion affect the lives of slaves in the Antebellum South?

31. How can Eli Whitney be blamed for the Civil War?

A Nation Breaks Apart, 1840-1877

32. How successful were Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, and Denmark Vesey's attempts at slave rebellion?

33. What were the various forms of slave resistance and rebellion, and in what ways were they effective?

34. What was Harriet Tubman's role in the Underground Railroad?

35. How did African Americans help the Union cause in the Civil War?

36. What role did Frederick Douglass play in the struggle for African American rights?

37. How did Radical Reconstruction impact the lives of African Americans?

38. Was John Brown a hero or a terrorist?

39. What were the economic, political, and moral issues that caused the Civil War?

40. How did compromises postpone conflict between North and South before the Civil War?

41. What were the goals of Reconstruction, how were they implemented, and why was it given up in 1877?

42. Why could Mexicans claim that the Mexican War was a "Yankee war of aggression", and what did the United States gain from this war?

43. How did women contribute to the war effort during the Civil War?

44. What was the typical soldier's life like during the Civil War in terms of training, weaponry, camp life, and access to medical treatment?

45. Compare the leadership of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Which was the superior military leader?

A Growing Nation, 1850-1900

46. How successful were the Shawnee, Sioux and Apache at resisting the Westward Expansion of the United States?
47. Why have critics called Indian reservations “America’s concentration camps?”
48. What were John Muir’s contributions to the National Park Movement?
49. What pushed immigrants from their homelands and pulled them to the United States, and what was their experience once they got here? Choose one of the following immigrant groups to investigate: Irish, German, Mexican, Filipino, Italian, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Jewish, Japanese, Eastern European, Scandinavian, Arab, Greek, Vietnamese, other.
50. What impact did immigration have on cities of the United States at the turn of the century?
51. What were the causes and effects of the Great Chicago Fire?
52. What impact did Nellie Bly have on journalism and the image of women?
53. Choose three “rebels in petticoats,” women who went against the conventions of their times, and explain the impact of their actions. (Possible choices: Susan B. Anthony, Prudence Crandall, Elizabeth Blackwell, Alice Paul, Cary Nation, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Elizabeth Cady Stanton)
54. What were conditions like for the free laborers in the North?

An Evolving Nation, 1870-1920

55. How was the massacre at Wounded Knee a culmination of efforts by the U.S. government to move Native Americans off their land?
56. During the 19th century, how effective were Native American attempts at assimilation, revitalization, and resistance?
57. What role did specific Native American leaders play in the relations between the United States government and the Indian nations? Were some more successful than others? (Choose three on which to focus: Sequoyah, Tecumseh, Quannah Parker, John Ross, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, or Cochise.)
58. Who was the most effective in resisting the taking of Indian land: Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull or Geronimo?

59. What were the effects of discriminatory laws, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, that specifically targeted Asian immigrants?
60. Was “yellow journalism” responsible for the Spanish American War?
61. Should John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Cornelius Vanderbilt best be remembered as clever entrepreneurs or unethical “robber barons?”
62. How do John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Bill Gates embody the Gospel of Wealth, the principle of corporate social responsibility?
63. How did inventions of the late nineteenth century (1800s) change American life?
64. How did the Haymarket Riot, the Pullman Strike and the Homestead strike illustrate labor’s struggle to gain fair and equitable treatment during the late 1800s and early 1900s?
65. How did the 1911 Triangle Fire become the catalyst for social reform and the growth of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union?
66. For what reasons and under what conditions did children work during the nineteenth century, and what efforts were made to bring about reform?
67. How successful were the early labor unions such as the Knights of Columbus, the American Federation of Labor, and the International Workers of the World?
68. Why was Eugene Debs the “most dangerous man in America?”
69. Investigate the growth of monopoly in the oil industry, the steel industry, and one other industry, and consider whether or not this is fair business practice.
70. In what ways was the Gilded Age an era of opulence and extravagance yet also a time of hardship and struggle?
71. How did the muckrakers impact business and politics?
72. How did the United States overcome obstacles in order to build the Panama Canal and affect world trade?
73. What were the immediate and long-term effects for the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906?
74. What was the impact of advanced weapons technology in World War I?
75. What pushed the United States to enter World War I, and how did its entry affect the outcome of the war?

76. What caused the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, what was done to control it, and what was its impact on the United States?

77. Compare the ideas and goals of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois and determine whose ideas were the most successful in gaining advancement for African Americans.

78. What have been the short and long-term effects of the United States involvement in the Philippines?

79. As reformers, how did Dorothea Dix, Jane Addams, Francis Willard, Helen Hunt Jackson, or Ida B. Wells (choose any three) strive to make the world a better place?

80. What roles did Emma Goldman, Mother Jones, and Frances Perkins play in the Labor Movement? (You may choose to substitute Bessie of Calumet for any one of the above three women.)

81. Did the Children's Aid Society accomplish what they hoped for with the orphan trains?

82. What was the impact on the United States of the Populists' economic, social and political reform ideas?

83. How did the media bring down Boss Tweed?

84. In what ways can Theodore Roosevelt be considered one of the best leaders of his time?

A Nation in Transition, 1920-1939

85. In what ways did the Scopes' Trial fundamentally challenge the conventions of its day?

86. In what ways can the 1920s be considered both the best of times and worst of times?

87. In what ways were the fears of the 1920s reflected by the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Palmer Raids?

88. What changes did the 1920s bring about for women?

89. What impact did the Negro Leagues have on baseball and society?

90. What role did government-sponsored Indian schools play in the assimilation of Native Americans?

91. What was the impact on California of the migration of people from Oklahoma to California during the Dust Bowl?
92. What was life like for the children of the Dust Bowl in terms of work, living conditions, and education?
93. How did the Harlem Renaissance introduce African American culture and experience to white America?
94. How did the New Deal bring America out of the Depression?

A Nation Faces Conflict, 1939-1960

95. Why were Japanese Americans interned during World War II, and what impact did internment have on their lives?
96. How did the cases of Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Sakai challenge the legality of Japanese internment?
97. What effect did the 442nd Battalion have on the Allied success in World War II?
98. What does the short history of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League reveal about the position of women in the United States in the mid-twentieth century?
99. How did women find opportunity, liberation, but ultimate betrayal in World War II industry (Rosie the Riveter)?
100. What military roles did women play in World War II?