

2021 Assessment resources

A-level History

7042 Component 1 Breadth study essay questions

Answers and commentaries

The purpose of this resource is to provide you with exemplification of one of the breadth study AO1 essay questions and to help you apply the generic levels of response mark scheme. Although the example question may not be from the option you are teaching, the marking criteria is applicable to all AO1 breadth study essay questions.

Question 02

1K The Making of a Superpower: USA, 1865—1975

June 2019 series

0 2 'Laissez-faire policies, in the years 1865 to 1890, were economically damaging.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student A

During the years 1865 to 1890, ~~American~~ the United States largely followed laissez-faire economic and political policies. ~~The~~ these policies led to the rise of corporation throughout America, industrialisation and urbanisation, whilst also profoundly affecting ~~the~~ agricultural America.

Firstly, Laissez-faire policies followed ideas of free competition, individualistic attitudes and self-reliance. This policy also seemed to go hand in hand with the idea of Social Darwinism, which was the idea that businesses followed 'survival of the fittest'. Consequently, these policies often meant lack of government regulation. Therefore, these conditions enabled the rise of the corporation, ~~at~~ such as Standard Oil and US Steel. The rise of such corporations could be viewed as economically damaging due to the fact that they dominated markets through vertical and ~~both~~ horizontal integration and dominated markets. For example, ~~at~~ by the 1880s ~~to~~ 1890s, Standard Oil was thought to have controlled 85% of the oil refining market. Also, these ~~are~~ in corporations, ~~such~~ such as railroad companies that were controlled by people

such as ~~Vanderbilt~~, also ~~domin~~ This often led to poor working conditions, long working hours and low wages for ~~they're~~ workers. Their workers. Economically, this meant that workers experienced hardship. as a result, ~~and~~ which often led to ~~an~~ opposition such as the Grange Movement and Knights of Labour. ~~Therefore, this shows how~~ However, even though these rise in corporations were economically damaging: for ~~the~~ workers for lower working class America, for the captains of industry such as Carnegie and Rockefeller, laissez-faire policies meant their businesses' economic growth was ~~un~~ unstoppable. This could have been advantageous for the economy as their wealth and growth of business that was enabled by laissez-faire, would have helped to ~~stimulate~~ the industry. ~~It's~~ Therefore, I think laissez-faire economically damaged the working class but was pivotal for the growth of upper-class America, ~~and~~ therefore industry as a whole.

to continue, due to the conditions of laissez-faire policies, that were created in the American economy 1865-1890, including the rise of the corporation, this meant that industrialisation could take place ~~in~~ throughout America, ~~due to growth~~ because of the rise of corporations through laissez-faire conditions, businesses such as Standard Oil and US Steel were able to grow to their maximum potential. This meant that industrialisation could take place across America as railroads expanded; expanded from 35000 miles in 1865 to 200000 miles by 1893, which would have been encouraged by the increase in ^{steel} iron production by US Steel, which were the materials used to build the railroad. ~~This industrialisation~~ This hugely benefited the economy as ~~because it helped the~~ by encouraged urbanisation in the South and West. Furthermore, therefore, this shows that the rise in corporation that happened in the conditions of laissez-faire, profoundly improved the economy through the industrialisation it triggered throughout the country.

Furthermore, as a direct result of the industrialisation, which was indirectly a result of laissez-faire, there ^{were} vast amounts of urbanisation around the country, but especially within the North East. For example, in New York in 1860-1866, the population was at 1.2 million, yet by 1890 it was 2.5 million. This rise in population in particular areas created urbanisation; and so provided vast

was forced to supply the rise in corporations, which led to industrialization. Also, urbanisation meant there were new business opportunities available and new markets, which further fed ^{the} corporations. ~~This shows that therefore, this shows again the~~ possible ~~a~~ impact that laissez-faire policies had on the economy.

However, ~~these~~ laissez-faire policies also led to damage within the economy. To begin with, laissez-faire policies meant that corp trusts and monopolies were often viewed as too powerful. For example, rail road companies held so much power, that they set ~~were~~ able to buy vast amounts of real estate and set freight rates at any rates they pleased. Therefore, this meant that the agriculture industry was reliant on rates imposed by corporations. Consequently, this meant that the crash of 1873 largely had detrimental impact on farmers economically as they struggled to make money on what they produced. Therefore, this shows that laissez-faire policies affected the economy adversely for some people.

~~Also, laissez-faire policies largely affected the economy bad damagingly due to the fact that it led to the panic of 1873. This is because, the laissez-faire attitude led to wild ~~uncontrolled~~ speculation around the railroad companies.~~

Therefore, overall, I think laissez-faire policies were positive rather than damaging due to the ~~or~~ impact they have had on the rise of the corporation, industrialization and urbanisation, which led to overall, huge growth in the economy - and ~~supersedes~~ ^{supersedes} any damaging effects on the economy such as on agriculture and workers.

Student B

Traditionally American government obtained a relaxed 'laissez-faire' approach to the economy, allowing limited government intervention in business. However, this relaxed approach has come under fire throughout history due to ~~the~~ economic instability that this minimal regulatory policy brings, in which many argue ~~that~~ was in fact 'economically damaging' following between 1865 and 1890.

On the one hand, it is easy to say that the policy of laissez-faire was in fact economically viable and helped structure America into the economic superpower it has become. Minimal regulation in ~~the~~ ^{industry} allowed for the rise in Big Business, whereby it's clear to see ~~that~~ the economy boomed as a result with there being over 400 millionaires in America by 1890. The domination of Big Business led by 'Robber Barons' such as Rockefeller and Carnegie ~~was~~

~~was~~ ^{was} a key factor in strengthening the industrialisation of the country due ~~to the lack of competition for American trade.~~ ^{to the lack of _{other} competition for American trade.}

However, the lack of regulation in business as a result of laissez faire policy was most arguably economically damaging. The ~~takeover~~ ^{takeover} of Big Business meant small companies and workers such as farmers became extremely susceptible to poverty and economic decline. ~~From~~ ^{From} the Agriculture industry suffered constantly ~~at~~

between 1865-1890 even though new technology such as barbed wire ~~increased~~ increased efficiency and productivity. The rise in Big Business resultant of laissez-faire policy led to the ~~populist~~ populism takeover in the late 1880's and 1890's due to a backlash against the power of cartels and trusts made possible by government non-intervention. The Grange Movement and Farmers active alliance fighting for regulation and government support ~~led to~~ due to the ~~massive~~ increase in farmers funding themselves bankrupt clearly demonstrating the negative impact

the policy of *laissez-faire* held on America, ~~was~~ especially those lower ~~and~~ socio-economically during the period. Moreover, a prime example of the *laissez-faire* policy being economically damaging is the fact that the Government became increasingly reliant ~~of~~ on Big Business. such as ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~low~~ demonstrated through John D Rockefeller having to loan the government over \$60 million to help prop up gold reserves ~~is the~~ during this period after yet another economic crisis, clearly showing the destructive power of these 'Robber Barons' due to weakening power of the government as a

result. Also, the 1872 'Cleveland Massacre' whereby Carnegie's standard oil corporation bought up 22/26 of its competitors, ~~that~~ definitively weakening the economy due to a horrendous loss of jobs increasing the already high unemployment rate, and leading to the fact that over 75% of the ~~nations~~ money in America was spread among the wealthiest in society.*

Overall, whilst it is true that during the late 1800's ~~the~~ America was a largely prosperous country due to the rise of Big Business made possible by laissez-faire policy, not all prospered during this time due to the unequal spread of wealth, the ~~little~~ ^{minimal} regulation present in business only helping the poor get poorer and the rich get richer, widening the ~~gap~~ ^{social-economic gap} which is of course ^{economically} ^{damaging}.

* clearly displaying the weakness present in the economy during the period, ^{helped} made worse by laissez-faire policy.

Commentary

The stems for the 7042 Component 1 (breadth) essay questions are variable, but all are designed to elicit an analytical and balanced response to a question ranging across 20 years or more. In assessing breadth essays, the following elements need to be considered:

- the understanding of the question
- the development of the argument, the degree of analytical comment and the degree of balance achieved
- the knowledge displayed in the response; its range across the breadth period and how effectively it is deployed
- the convincingness of the judgements made
- the overall depth of understanding shown, particularly in relation to developments over time and any key concepts relevant to the period under discussion.

Student A

This response shows a very good understanding of the question. Although the introduction is not fully developed insofar as it does not put forward a particular viewpoint, it nevertheless outlines the main areas affected by laissez-faire policies. These are given as the rise of corporation, industrialisation, urbanisation - together with 'agricultural America', and these areas provide a well-thought out thematic basis for the response.

The essay is analytical in style and an argument is developed that laissez-faire policies were primarily economically beneficial. Nevertheless, the ways in which they might be considered damaging, particularly in relation to the power of the corporations and the damaging effects on agriculture, are also considered and evaluated, providing balance. Among the balancing factors is the observation that policies affected workers adversely, although, without further explanation, this might be considered more a social than an economic downside.

The knowledge displayed is very good and wide-ranging. All the analytical comments are backed by relevant examples and these show a good appreciation of this breadth period. As a consequence, the judgements made in relation to the question are well-substantiated, making this a convincing response overall.

The essay is placed in level 5 because of the depth of understanding shown. The concept of laissez-faire, for example is well understood and together with related Social Darwinism, is explained at the beginning of the essay, after the introduction. There is also a good awareness of the rise of corporation and the implications of trusts and monopolies. Although the answer's slight limitations, as mentioned above, have led to it being placed slightly below the mid-level, it is clearly better than Level 4 in terms of the high-level development of argument, the substantiated judgement and overall grasp of the key features of the period.

22 marks (slightly lower level 5)

Student B

Student B's response also shows a good understanding of what is asked in the main body of the answer, but the introduction is rather weak. It suggests some understanding of laissez-faire as 'minimal regulatory policy', but falls back on rather bland statements such as, 'this approach has come under fire throughout history' and 'many argue...' rather than offering a particular view in response to the question.

Nevertheless, the ensuing response is well balanced. The benefits of laissez-faire policies are considered first and the rest of the answer is given to examining the policies' damaging effects, although some of these may be considered more political and social than economic consequences. Nevertheless, the approach is predominantly analytical.

A good knowledge of the period is demonstrated in the supporting evidence and some reasonable judgements are advanced in the course of the answer. The conclusion, however, remains rather ambivalent with the student struggling to provide a full judgement on the question. It is alleged that America was a 'largely prosperous country' as a result of laissez-faire policies but that the policies had a downside in that they lead to greater social division. Although there is an attempt to link this with economic damage -'the socio-economic gap which is of course economically damaging', this is a far from convincing final statement.

This answer does not have the same overall depth of understanding as demonstrated in Student A's, particularly in relation to economic growth. The 'robber barons' are referred to twice without any real development of this concept, and there is certainly some mixing of economic and social damage. It was consequently awarded a low Level 4. It is marginally better than level 3 because of its analytical style, but it does not fully meet the Level 4 criteria for more developed understanding with some conceptual awareness.

Student B's response is better than a level 3 response because it analyses and balances rather than merely links to the question in the style of a 'running commentary'. Its judgements are also slightly stronger than will normally be found in level 3 answers. Obviously this response is considerably better than one awarded level 2 where there would be more partial understanding and where the writing might be largely descriptive or the analysis limited. Most level 2 responses show some limited knowledge but it is not effectively used. Level 1 responses, on the other hand, are limited in both knowledge and understanding and may be vague and generalist, with inaccuracy and irrelevance.

16 marks (low level 4)