

HIST 1302: Essay Option A: *Looking Backward*

REQUIRED READING

- Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (Boston: Ticknor, 1888). [LICENSE: PUBLIC DOMAIN; LINK: https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_nRMZAAAAYAAJ.]

ESSAY PROMPT

- As the Gilded Age remade social life in the United States, Americans struggled to define what freedom would mean amid their new industrial economy. “I am aware that you called yourselves free in the nineteenth century,” Dr. Leete says in Edward Bellamy’s bestselling 1888 novel, *Looking Backward*. He argues that Americans were anything but free: “The meaning of the word could not then, however, have been at all what it is at present, or you certainly would not have applied it to a society of which nearly every member was in a position of galling personal dependence upon others.” Using your reading of *Looking Backward* and your historical understanding of the Gilded Age, answer the following prompt: How did the Gilded Age force Americans to confront traditional understandings of freedom?

BASIC FORMATTING & GUIDELINES

- Font: 12-pt., Times New Roman, double-spaced
- Margins: 1”
- Words: 1200-1500 (4-5 full, double-spaced pages)

GRADING RUBRIC

- **Argument: 25%:** A thesis is readily apparent. The essay makes a coherent and thought-provoking argument that is articulated clearly.
- **Evidence: 25%:** Thesis is supported with relevant material that reveals a strong understanding of the subject matter.
- **Clarity: 25%:** Student communicates his/her thoughts effectively. Prose is crisp and free of distracting misspellings or grammatical errors.
- **Organization & Guidelines: 25%:** The paper is focused, balanced, and its components follow a logical progression. The paper is formatted correctly and follows assignment guidelines.

GRADING CRITERIA

“A” paper:

- The essay demonstrates a sophisticated mastery of the material that may exceed the expectations established in the assignment guidelines. The central argument is supported by and developed through appropriate and convincing evidence, and the student clearly explains the relevance of

that evidence. The student includes insights that reveal that he or she recognizes the complexity of the topic or problem.

- Writing on the sentence level is clear and concise without persistent problems in grammar or mechanics. Sentences are well balanced—at times eloquent—and varied in structure. There are few if any moments in the paper troubled by awkward phrasing or imprecise word choice.
- The essay is organized logically according to the needs of audience, purpose, and discipline. The introduction engages the reader's interest, provides a clear framework for the paper, and includes a clear announcement of the thesis. Paragraphs are coherent and connected with strong and logical transitions. The conclusion provides a clear sense of closure.

“B” paper:

- The B essay meets most of the criteria listed above. It demonstrates a good comprehension of the material and responds appropriately to the assignment. While the essay's exploration of the topic or problem at hand may not be as nuanced as the “A” paper, and while the student may demonstrate one or two lapses in logic or knowledge, the essay still develops and substantiates a central argument through appropriate evidence.
- Writing on the sentence level is for the most part clear, and the paper demonstrates few problems in grammar or mechanics. However, some word choices or phrasing may be awkward, over-general, or imprecise.
- The essay is organized logically but could be improved. For example, the student could possibly improve the clarity of the introduction and thesis, the focus of paragraphs, the strength of transitions between ideas and sentences, or the effectiveness of the conclusion.

“C” paper:

- The essay may demonstrate a satisfactory grasp of the material. However, the central argument or conclusion of the paper is problematic. It may be over-general or unsophisticated; it might not respond appropriately to the prompt; or, it might demonstrate a lack of thoughtfulness or effort. The paper may be a simple repetition of ideas discussed in class, or the paper's main ideas might not be substantiated by adequate or appropriate evidence. In a C paper, evidence often is insufficiently explained.
- Writing on the sentence level is weak, troubled by persistent problems in style, word choice, and/or issues in grammar and mechanics. The essay may include many typos or other careless errors.
- The effectiveness of the essay is undermined by multiple problems in organization, which may include an ineffective introduction, an unclear or unidentifiable thesis, incoherent paragraphs, weak or missing transitions between ideas and/or paragraphs, and an insubstantial or ineffective conclusion.

“D” paper:

- The essay does not demonstrate a satisfactory grasp of the material. Its argument is missing or incomplete. It may not respond to the prompt. Evidence is missing or misused. The paper may contain serious errors of fact or logic.
- Writing on the sentence level is very problematic. The writer has made basic, serious, and repeated mechanical errors.
- The paper displays serious problems with organization at the level of the paragraph and of the overall structure.

“F” paper:

- The essay is turned in very late or not at all.
- The essay has little or no relation to the prompt.
- The essay seems to constitute deliberate plagiarism.