Potential Thematic Essay Questions

1. Theme: Foreign Policy- Latin America and Caribbean

**During the 19th and 20th centuries, the foreign policy goals of the United States led to many diplomatic and/or military actions involving nations in Latin America and the Caribbean.**

Task:

**Select two United States diplomatic and/or military actions involving nations in Latin America and the Caribbean and for each**

**A• Describe the historical circumstances that led to the United States action**

**B• Describe a goal the United States had in pursuing this action**

**C• Discuss the success and/or failure of the United States in achieving this goal**

Answer

Monroe Doctrine

1. The European powers stopped interfering with Western Hemisphere while they dealt with Napoleon conquering land in Europe. Napoleon was defeated and the European powers were trying to gain back their power. President James Monroe was afraid that the European powers would start back up their interference and colonies in Latin America.
2. Monroe set forth the Monroe doctrine which stated that the United States would not interfere with European affairs. Monroe also stated that if the European powers interfered with any nation in the Western hemisphere the United States would intervene or get involved. The goal of the United States was to keep the European powers out of the Western Hemisphere to lessen the threat on the United States.
3. For the most part the United States was successful in keeping the European powers out of the Western Hemisphere. It was not until the Spanish American War, when the United States intervened to help free the Cubans from the Spanish treatment in 1898 did the United States have to intervene because of a European Power in the Western Hemisphere.

Blockade of Cuba 1962

1. The United States and the Soviet Union were in the middle of the Cold War. The United States, behind the Truman Doctrine of financial and military support, gained allies in Greece and Turkey. The United States put missiles in Turkey which threatened the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro successfully overthrow the Cuban government and turned Cuba into a Communist country. The Soviet Union moved missiles into Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of Florida, which the United States detected.
2. The United States goal was to prevent the Soviet Union from having missiles in Cuba. The United states knew that if they went into Cuba to remove the missiles a war would occur and with both superpowers have nuclear capabilities a war could be the most destructive the world had ever seen. The United States decided to create a blockade around Cuba to prevent the Soviet Union from bringing in anymore missiles.
3. The United States was successful with its mission, forcing the Soviet Union to reroute it ships that were trying to make its way into Cuba because of the blockade. The United States and the Soviet Union used diplomacy to end the conflict by the United states agreeing to remove missiles from Turkey if the Soviet Union removed missiles from Cuba.

2. Theme: Foreign Policy

**Throughout United States history, presidents have made foreign policy decisions that have been opposed by individuals and groups. These decisions have had an impact on both the United States and on other countries and regions.**

Task:

**Select two foreign policy decisions that have been opposed by individuals and groups and for each**

**A • Describe the historical circumstances that led the president to make the decision**

**B• Discuss why an individual and/or group opposed the decision**

**C• Discuss the impact of this foreign policy decision on the United States and/or on another country or region**

Woodrow WIlson Support of the Treaty of Versailles

1. WWI had just ended and the French, British and United States were trying to formulate a Treaty that would end the war. President Wilson came up with the idea of creating a League of Nations, which would work together to ensure that there would be no more war after WWI. Even though President Wilson came up with the idea he still needed Congress's approval to accept the terms of the Treaty and become members of the League of Nation. Congress opposed the Treaty and membership into the League of nations.
2. Congress opposed the League of Nations because it was concerned that the United States would be dragged into European affairs that they had no part being involved. Congress pointed out that the buffer zone of the Atlantic Ocean allows for the United States to not become involved in issues in Europe.
3. The League of Nations was created without the membership of the United States and was not able to prevent the spread of Adolf Hitler. The United States would enter the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor causing the United States to send American troops into battle.

Lyndon B Johnson sent troops into Vietnam

1. The United States was in the middle of the cold War with the Soviet Union. The main goal of the United States during this war was to maintain communism. North Vietnam was a communist country and it wanted to spread its communist ideas into South Vietnam. The United States had sent advisors over to the South Vietnamese to assist them in their planning. An incident that occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin, Viet Cong (North Vietnamese) torpedoed American boats, led to President Johnson to send in troops into Vietnam
2. Vietnam was the first war that was “televised”, so American families saw what was going on in Vietnam each night on the news. The government was telling the United States people that the U.S. was willing the war in Vietnam but what the people saw on television was a different story. Opposition for the war grew as more images and reporting came back to the United States. Protesters filled the streets of Washington D.C. demanding that Johnson end the war but instead of ending the war he continued to send American troops over to South East Asia.
3. The United States lost 58,000 troops during the war and another 300,000 troops were wounded. The United States pulled out of Vietnam during President Richard Nixon’s term. South Vietnam did not become communist as the United States feared but Cambodia and Laos two countries next to Vietnam did indeed become communist so the fear of communism spreading became a reality for the United States

3. Organizations

Theme: **Throughout United States history, individuals and groups have formed organizations to achieve specific reforms. The reform efforts of these organizations have met with varying degrees of success**

Task: **Identify two organizations that were formed to achieve a specific reform and for each**

**A • Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the formation of the organization**

**B • Discuss the degree to which the organization’s reform efforts were successful**

National Women’s Suffrage Association

1. Women in the United States were not given the right to vote, A group of women lead by Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton pushed for women to gain this right to vote. They created a convention, Seneca Falls Convention where women expressed their grievances and their desires to gain the right to vote. The suffrage, right to vote, movement spread throughout the country with women marching in parades to voice their desire to gain voting rights.
2. The movement was successful because the 19th Amendment was added to the constitution which gave women the right to vote

Anti-Slavery Society

1. The sectional differences in the United States led to differing viewpoints on the idea of slavery. The north, which was mostly an industrial way of life , did not have the need for slaves but the South an agricultural way of life needed the slaves in order to work the fields. There was a number of movements that led to the ending of slavery but nothing bigger than Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book Uncle Tom’s Cabin. In this book the horrors of slavery were exposed to everyone around the country so the Anti-Slavery movement, abolitionist, had an increase in supporters.
2. During the Civil War President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which stated that if the Union won the war then Slavery would be abolished throughout the United States. When the war was over the 13th Amendment was issued and slavery ended in the United States. Unfortunately this new freedom came with a lot of issues that would plague the African Americans for years to come.

4. Government (Congressional legislation)

Theme:

**Throughout United States history, Congress has passed legislation to address important social and economic issues. These laws have often had a significant impact on the United States and/or on American society**

Task:

**Select two pieces of legislation passed by the United States Congress and for each**

**A• Describe the historical circumstances that led to the passage of the legislation**

**B• Discuss the impact of the law on the United States and/or on American society**

Meat Inspection Act (1906)

1. The United States government followed a policy of laissez-faire, hands-off approach, when it came to businesses within the United States. During the Progressive Era a group of writers called Muckrakers uncovered some social issues that they wanted the government to change. Upton Sinclair was a Muckraker, who spent time in a meat packing plant. Sinclair wrote about the horrible conditions he uncovered in the plant and the unsanitary handling of the meat in a book called *The Jungle.* Sinclair’s book made people aware that the food inside the can was more than likely not the food that is on the label.
2. The people and the United States were horrified by the unsanitary conditions of the meat packing plants. The United States government created standards for meat packing plants including inspections to make sure the meat was not being contaminated. The United States created the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to check the quality of food and drugs the consumers were purchasing.

Civil Rights Act (1964)

1. After African Americans were freed from slavery they faced harsh conditions and laws in the Southern states. Some of these laws, Jim Crow Laws, called for the segregation in public places, meaning that African Americans and whites could not use the same bathroom, movie theater and restaurants.Schools were also segregated and not equal when it came to facilities and supplies. African Americans also faced obstacles when it came to registering to vote including being beaten and sometimes killed on their way to register. President Lyndon B Johnson became president after the assassination of President Kennedy and one of their goals was to improve the lives of the African Americans. President Johnson was able to take what President Kennedy started and create the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to help African Americans gain equality in the United States.
2. The law helped African Americans gain equally registration steps as whites but later a new law had to be created called the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because local police and governments would arrest African Americans who were waiting to register.The Civil Rights Act also ended segregation in public places and those private and public programs that did not follow this law would have their funding taking away from them. The law also banned discrimination on the basis of race, sex and religion by employers and unions. These laws helped lead African Americans to equal ground to the whites in America.

5. Technology

Theme:

**Throughout United States history, technological developments have played an important role in transforming American society. These developments have had both positive and negative effects on the United States and on American society.**

Task:

Choose two technological developments that have transformed American society and for each

**A• Describe the change brought about by the technological development**

**B• Discuss the positive and/or negative effects this technological development has had on the United States and/or on American society**

Answer:

Cotton Gin

1. Cleaning cotton was a long laboring process of removing seeds from the cotton fiber. Eli Whitney created a machine, the cotton gin, that made this process faster. After the cotton gin the profit from cotton rose incredibly and southern farmers raced to purchase more land so that they could plant more cotton.
2. The cotton gin was a positive for the Southern Plantation owners since they saw their profits rise and this helped the economy of the Southern states and the United States. From a social point of view the creation of the cotton gin was a negative because the need for slaves doubled during this time because more slaves were needed to pick the new cotton lands so that the plantation owners could make more of a profit.

Automobile

1. Automobiles were a sign of wealth in early american history because they cost a lot of money and the upper class were the only ones that could afford these cars. Henry Ford created a process called the assembly line which made making automobiles faster which in turn made the cost of the automobiles decline. With the decline of prices the automobile became more affordable for all of American society. More Americans started to purchase cars. With the new source of transportation more people started to move to the suburbs and leaving the city.
2. The creation of the assembly line and the affordability of the automobile greatly impacted American society in a positive way. The automobile helped the economy rise because new homes needed to be build in the suburbs, new roads needed to be paved, new schools needed to be built which all lead to more jobs for Americans during this period of time. After WWII and the passing of the G.I. Bill the suburbs exploded with growth which the automobile helped pave the way.

6. Supreme Court

Theme:

**Throughout United States history, the Supreme Court has dealt with many controversial issues. The Court’s decisions in these cases have had a significant impact on the United States and/or on American society.**

Task:

**Select two United States Supreme Court decisions that have had a significant impact on American society and for each**

**A• Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the case**

**B• Explain the Court’s decision in the case**

**C• Discuss the impact of the decision on the United States and/or on American society**

Dred Scott v Sanford

1. Slavery was a big issue throughout the United States. The United States was divided between those states that wanted slavery and those who were indifferent and/or wanted to end slavery all together. With the addition of new territory to the United States new debate arose about which territory would be free and which would be slave.
2. Dred Scott a slave sued for his right to be a free slave because his master brought him to a free state. The decision showed that a master could bring his slave, his property, to free territory without the slave becoming free. The Supreme Court pointed out that slaves were not citizens of the United States but rather property.
3. This decision took the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and stated that it was unconstitutional because it deprived a slave owner of the right to a master’s property without just compensation.

*Korematsu v United States*

1. Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor because the United States refused to continue their trade of scrap metal and oil to Japan after japan attacked Manchuria China and disrupted business interest of the United States. The United States was afraid that there may be some Japanese spies living on the West coast so President Roosevelt put an executive order into action that would put people of Japanese descent into an internment camp. Japanese had to leave behind their property and move to these camps. Korematsu refused to report and was arrested for not reporting to the camp.
2. Korematsu felt as though his civil rights were being denied because he was being singled out because of his race. The Supreme Court ruled that in a time of “pressing public necessity” (WWII) civil rights of citizens can be limited.
3. Over 100,000 Japanese were moved to these camps and lost their property they left behind. Many years later the United States government paid the remaining living family members who were put in the camp money to compensate for their lost of property.

7. Geography-Territorial Acquisition

Theme:

**Throughout the nation’s history, the United States has expanded through the acquisition of new territories. These acquisitions have had both positive and negative effects on the United States.**

Task:

**Select two territories acquired by the United States and for each**

**A• Describe the historical circumstances that led the United States to acquire the territory**

**B• Discuss positive and/or negative effects of the acquisition of this territory on the United States**

Louisiana Purchase

1. The United States was using the Mississippi River as a mode of transportation of goods from the Mid-West to the East Coast. The Mississippi River dumped out into the Gulf of Mexico at the port of New Orleans. Spain had control of the Port of New Orleans and gave the United States a difficult time about using the Port which hindered the United States trade. France acquired the port and territory from Spain. Napoleon was looking for money to support his war efforts in Europe so he offered the territory along with the port of New Orleans to the United States. President Thomas Jefferson followed a strict Interpretation of the Constitution and he did not think a President could not acquire land because it does not mention that they can in the constitution. After being persuaded of the great opportunity Jefferson agreed to purchase the land.
2. The Louisiana Purchase had a positive impact on the United States because it gave the United States control of the Mississippi River as well as the Port of New Orleans. The territory also gave the United States land that doubled the size of the United States. This purchase would help lead to the feeling that the United States should control land between the Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean, Manifest Destiny.

California Gold Rush

1. The United States acquired land out west but there was not a great push of people leaving the East Coast to travel out west. In California gold was found and word spread of moe gold being found each day. The idea of getting rich quick lead to a rush of people to California in hopes of finding gold. People who went out west to find gold stayed out in California, so new businesses started to emerge out west to meet the needs of the people living there.
2. This was a positive impact on the United States because it started to move people from the east coast to the west coast. People started to realize the possibilities out west beyond just the hope of discovering gold like the climate that allowed for farming and a new coast where fishing industry could flourish. The gold rush lead to more opportunities for people not just in California but in the other Western territories and states.

8. Change- Constitutional Amendments

Theme:

**When the Founding Fathers wrote the United States Constitution, they included the amendment process. The amendments that have been passed brought political, social, and economic changes to American society.**

Task

**Select two constitutional amendments that have changed American society and for each**

**A• Describe the historical circumstances that led to the adoption of the amendment**

**B• Discuss the political, social, and/or economic changes the amendment brought to American society**

**13th Amendment**

1. Throughout the early history of the United States slaves were needed to work the plantations in the south. With the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney more slaves were needed to pick cotton in the South. Slavery was a sectional issue, the North a more industrial and trading economy while the South lived off of agriculture. A book written by Harriet Beecher Stowe exposed the horrors of the life of a slaves. This book forced the Northerners to take notice about slave lives in the south and a the Abolitionist movement, movement to end slavery increased. One of the main issues of the Civil War was slavery along with the election of Abraham Lincoln. During the war Abraham Lincoln made the Emancipation Proclamation, stating that if the Union won the war southern slaves would become free from slavery. After the Civil War ended and the Union won Lincoln stayed true to his word and the 13th Amendment was passed to end slavery in the United States.
2. The 13th Amendment had changed a number of areas in the United States. The social impact was that slaves were now free and in need of new jobs and support to get themselves assimilated into the United States society. The government helped the freedmen with basic support but jobs and homes were two areas that the new freedmen struggled with. Many slaves returned to the farms and lived on plantation under the idea of sharecropping which would allow freedmen to live and work on the plantation but were essentially tied to the land because of the rent/expenses that the African Americans had to pay. The economy in the South struggled because of the need to find workers to replace the jobs of the slaves and this is where the idea of employing the newly freed slaves was needed for Southern farm owners. Political issues emerged as well because many laws were passed in the South to restrict the African Americans from voting like making poll taxes, literacy test and grandfather clauses to hold back votes of African Americans.

**19th Amendment**

1. Women were denied their right to vote since the beginning of the United States. Men were the only members of the United States that were able to vote and run for political office. I movement occurred called the Suffrage Movement which lead gathering supporters of women being able to gain the right to vote. Susan B Anthony, Lucretia Mott and and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were three of many women who pushed for women to gain the right to vote. A convention at Seneca Falls gathered supporters for the suffrage movement as well as spelling out what the women wanted out of this movement. Besides the Seneca Falls Convention the Suffrage movement supporters also protested through marches to gather more exposure and supporters for the movement.
2. The 19th Amendment passed and women now had the right to vote in elections, This gave the women of the United States a voice that has been denied since the birth of the United States. Even with this voting power it would not be for many more years later that women would hold positions in Congress or Governorship. Even though it took many years for women to be elected to political office it set the stage for women having more of a voice in their community as well as in the work force. During WWII when men went off to war it was the women who stepped into the factories and built planes, tanks, ships and ammunition to support the men in the war. The 19th Amendment lead to Geraldine Ferraro becoming the first women to run for Vice President on one of the two major parties, Sandra Day O’Connor being nominated to Supreme Court and Hillary Clinton running fo President of the United States.

9. Presidential Actions

Theme:

**United States presidents have taken actions that have had a significant effect on United States foreign or domestic policies.**

Task:

**Identify two presidential actions that have had significant effects on United States history and for each**

**• Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the action**

**• Discuss the impact of the presidential action on United States foreign policy or on American society**

**Franklin D Roosevelt’s New Deal**

1. The United States had just entered the Great Depression when FDR was elected President of the United States. The stock market crash set the stage for the Great Depression, people were buying stocks on margin or purchasing a portion of the stock and borrowing money from lender to cover the rest of the stock cost.Banks also lost people’s money because they invested in the stock market and lost money.The trust in the government and the banking system was at an all time low for the citizens of the United States. Millions of people were out of a job and struggling to provide for the basic needs of their family.
2. FDR created the New Deal to get Americans back to work. He created jobs like improving the infrastructure of the United States like roads, bridges and tunnels. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created to help one of the poorer areas of the country create jobs. The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) created jobs in rural areas planting trees and improving environmental condition. FDR also tried to gain the people’s trust in the Banks by creating the FDIC which would guarantee, up to a certain amount of money, that money that you put in the will be there when you go to take it out.

**Harry Truman Atomic Bomb**

1. The United States was drawn into World War II when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor because the United States stopped trading scrap metal and oil to Japan. The United States sent troops to the Pacific and to Europe to fight Japan and Hitler respectively. The first objective of the Americans was to stop Hitler from gaining more territory in Europe. The United States spent a lot of time, resources and lives to defeat Hitler in Europe. After defeating HItler with the help of the British and Soviets the United States turned their attention to Japan. A choice had to be made by President Truman, send troops into Japan and risk losing a million American soldiers or drop an Atomic Bomb that would kill many innocent civilians of Japan.
2. After great consideration Truman thought it was in the best interest of the United States to drop the atomic bomb. The United States dropped two Atomic Bombs on Japan which lead to Japan surrendering. The bombs ended World War II but it started the next war, “The Cold War”. Showing the force and technology of the atomic bomb other countries seeked the same technology like the Soviet Union. The technology/arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union lasted until the late 1980’s. During this race both sides showed off their power by testing close to 200 atomic bombs between the two countries.