

AP UNITED STATES HISTORY
SECTION II, Part B
Time—55 minutes
DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

Prompt: Some historians have characterized the industrial and business leaders of 1865 to 1900 as “robber barons” who used methods to control and concentrate wealth and power. To what extent is that characterization justified?

Directions: This question is based on the accompanying documents. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise. You are advised to spend 15 minutes planning and 45 minutes writing your answer.

In your response you should do the following.

- *State a relevant thesis that directly addresses all parts of the question.*
- *Support the thesis or a relevant argument with evidence from all, or all but one, of the documents.*
- *Incorporate analysis of all, or all but one, of the documents into your argument.*
- *Focus your analysis of each document on at least one of the following: intended audience, purpose, historical context, and/or point of view.*
- *Support your argument with analysis of historical examples outside the documents.*
- *Connect historical phenomena relevant to your argument to broader events or processes.*
- *Synthesize the elements above into a persuasive essay.*

Document 1

Interview with William H. Vanderbilt *Chicago Daily News*, October 9, 1882

Q: How is the freight and passenger pool working?

W.V.: Very satisfactorily. I don't like that expression "pool," however, that's common construction applied by the people to a combination which the leading roads have entered into to keep rates at a point where they will pay dividends to the stockholders. The railroads are not run for the benefit of the "dear public" – that cry is all nonsense – they are built by men who invest their money and expect to get a fair percentage on the same.

Q: Does your limited express pay?

W.V.: No; not a bit of it. We only run it because we are forced to do so by the action of the Pennsylvania road. It doesn't pay expenses. We would abandon it if it was not for our competitor keeping its train on.

Q: But don't you run for the public benefit?

W.V.: The Public be damned. What does the public care for the railroads except to get as much out of them for as small consideration as possible? I don't take any stock in this silly nonsense about working for anybody's good but our own....

Document 2

Source: 'Monster Monopoly' 1884



Document 3

Letter from Thomas Alva Edison , Edison Laboratory , November 14, 1887

My laboratory will soon be completed....I will have the best equipped and largest Laboratory extant, and the facilities incomparably superior to any other for rapid and cheap development of an invention, and working it up into Commercial shape with models, patterns and special machinery. In fact there is no similar institution in Existence. We do our own castings and forgings. Can build anything from a ladys watch to a Locomotive.

The Machine shop is sufficiently large to employ 50 men and 30 men can be worked in other parts of the works. Invention that formerly took months and cost a large sum can now be done in 2 or 3 days with very small expense, as I shall carry a stock of almost every conceivable material of every size, and with the latest machinery a man will produce 10 times as much as in a laboratory which has but little material, not of a size, delays of days waiting for castings and machinery not universal or modern....

You are aware from your long acquaintance with me that I do not fly any financial Kites, or speculate, and that the works I control are well managed. In the early days of the shops it was necessary that I should largely manage them (alone), first because the art had to be created, 2nd, because I could get no men who were competent in such a new business. But soon as soon as it was possible I put other persons in charge. I am perfectly well aware of the fact that my place is in the Laboratory; but I think you will admit that I know how a shop should be managed and also know how to select men to manage them.

Document 4**Andrew Carnegie "Wealth," *North American Review*, 1889**

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmony. The conditions of human life have been revolutionized within the past few hundred years. The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us today measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is essential for the progress of the race that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, rather than none should be so. Much better this great inequity than universal squalor.

The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still. For it is to this law that we owe out wonderful material development which brings improved conditions. While the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department. We welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial in the hands of the few; and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race.

Document 5

James Weaver *A Call to Action*, 1892

It is clear that trusts are contrary to public policy and hence in conflict with the common law. They are monopolies organized to destroy competition and restrain trade....

It is contended by those interested in trusts that they tend to cheapen production and diminish the price of the article to the consumer....Trusts are speculative in their purpose and formed to make money. Once they secure control of a given line of business, they are masters of the situation and can dictate to the two great classes with which they deal – the producer of the raw material and the consumer of the finished product. They limit the price of the raw material so as to impoverish the producer, drive him to a single market, reduce the price of every class of labor connected with the trade, throw out of employment large numbers of persons who had before been engaged in a meritorious calling and finally...they increase the price to the consumer....

The main weapons of the trust are threats, intimidation, bribery, fraud, wreck, and pillage. Take one well-authenticated instance in the history of the Oat Meal Trust as an example. In 1887 this trust decided that part of their mills should stand idle. They were accordingly closed. This resulted in the discharge of a large number of laborers who had to suffer in consequence. The mills which continued in operation would produce seven million barrels of meal during the year. Shortly after shutting down, the trust advanced the price of meal one dollar per barrel, and the public was forced to stand the assessment. The mills were more profitable when idle than when in operation.

Document 6

William Graham Sumner, Forum, March 1894

The captains of industry and the capitalists...if they are successful, win, in these days, great fortunes in a short time. There are no earnings which are more legitimate or for which greater services are rendered to the industrial body. The popular notions about this matter really assume that all the wealth accumulated by these classes of persons would be here just the same if they had not existed. They are supposed to have appropriated it out of the common stock. This is so far from being the truth that, on the contrary, their own wealth would be but for themselves; and besides that, millions more of wealth, manifold greater than their own, scattered in the hands of thousands, would not exist but for them.

Document 7

Russell H. Conwell *Acres of Diamonds*, 1900

I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich. How many of my pious brethren say to me, "Do you, a Christian minister, spend your time going up and down the country advising young people to get rich, to get money?" "Yes, of course I do." They say "Isn't that awful! Why don't you preach the gospel instead of preaching about man's making money?" "Because to make money honestly is to preach the gospel." The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community....

Let me say here clearly, and say it briefly...that ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men in America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they are trusted with money. That is why they carry on great enterprises and find plenty of people to work with them. It is because they are honest men....