



History

Paper 1K (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 03 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 26/02/16

Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1K (AS): Specimen question paper

03 'It was mass immigration that brought about the rapid expansion of the American economy in the years c1880 to 1914.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

American economy was one of the fastest growing ones in the world in years 1865-1890. There were many reasons for it, and certainly one of them was the massive influx of immigrants. Rapid economic expansion was one of the major advances at the time and it was part of what was so attractive about the united states at the time. It was very unique to have an expansion of the scale it did, as that was not present in any other country.

Immigration was certainly one if the major reasons for rapid economic expansion. The second wave that was arriving at the time was mostly poor, illiterate and unskilled, which provided a massive pool of cheap labour force.

Taking into account the developing industries, including the expanding railroads, (where Chinese immigrat workers were a major force), education of costs of labour was one of the biggest reasons for economic expansion.

Despite they were unskilled, they often signed contracts they couldn't read and ended up tied to the company that was able to use them however they wanted.

Immigrants were also a solution to reade unions problem – since they were unusually ununionised, they were used as strike breakers” by companies. Whenever unions called a strike, immigrants were employed, and striking men lost jobs – hence, a lot less production was lost which caused further economic expansion.

The wages were so low, that even children had to work – in 1880 1 in 6 children under sixteen was working, which further expanded the already oversized labour force. Supply of labour was outstripping demand by so much, and unemployment was so massive, that effectively businesses could do what they wanted with their workers – they had no one to complain to, and if they did, they would lose their job, and they knew there was plenty more workers to replace them.

In San Fransisco, a half of all shoe manufacturing workers were Chinese, by 1890 New York had more Utalians than Naples, and more Irish than Dublin – which just impies how much the labour force extended. Moreover, new immigrants meant population growth and hence new consumers, which provoked a rise in demand which gave an incentive to suppliers to increase production, further extending the economy.

However, I do disagree with the view at points, as it was certainly not just the immigration that caused the rapid expansion of the American economy.

One of the other reasons was the government policy. The politicians at the time were quite corrupt and weak, and did not dare to take measures against the big businesses. Instead, they actively accepted bribes for doing the big businesses 'dirty work', like during the railroad strike of 1872, when the government sided with businesses and not the workers. Even Sir James Blaine of Maine, the leader of the Half Breeds, saw nothing wrong with accepting stick from the railroad company, which he helped win a congressment grant on land. Business funded politicians, so they did not take any action against the big business policy. For majority of the period, Republicans were in the white house, and they were very much pro-big business. Rapid economic expansion was partially caused by the businessmen ability to do whatever they wanted without government stopping them.

Another reason was trusts, which were a single entrepreneur gathering together companies to enable central administration, deeper pool of investment and pooling of talents. Trusts were effectively large corporations that focused on maximising efficiency – and with efficiency came higher production and hence – rapid economic expansion. Political machines like the Tammany Hall were pouring enormous sums of money in places like the NY Customs House due to politicians greed and lack of activity. Accumulation of such wealth boosted investment, which in turn was another factor leading to the rapid economic expansion.

What I would call one of the major reasons for economic expansion was the growth of the railroads. They themselves, while being built provided major employment place, but also once they were built and put together in one system, they allowed rapid and reliable transportation of goods and raw materials, which made it possible for manufacturers and retailers reliably plan ahead and minimise costs. Minimised costs increased efficiency and boosted production, which was one of the major reasons for rapid economic expansion. Not only that, however, but also railroads allowed labour to be delivered to any part of the country, which made further West expansion possible. Expansion meant new resources which increased production and hence caused economic expansion.

Another reason for it can be a political and economic doctrine of laissez-faire, which was very popular at that time, especially in mid 1870s due to rapid economic growth. It stated that economies function most efficiently with no government intervention, giving a right to the businesses to do what they wanted. This was part of a reason why economy expanded so much. The rise of industrial conglomerates of the 'industry titans' – Rockefeller, Carnegie, Vander Bilt and J.P Morgan, was another reason. They all entered developing industries and harshly created competition, effectively monopolising, but at the same time stabilises others. They liked modern methods of vertical and horizontal integration, reducing costs and increasing efficiency. They provided employment and kept prices low – hence there was cheap and reliable transportation, oil and steel. Raw materials hence made rapid economic expansion possible.

I definitely agree with the statement to some extent – mass immigration – 8.4 million in 1890s made the whole idea of reducing costs possible, as DS was unique to have such a massive labour supplies. Without the working force, such rapid economic expansion would not be possible. Nevertheless, other reasons, such as governmental policy, doubts, robber barons and railroads, were no less vital and it was only a combination of them that allowed the economic expansion of the same effect as it was present in the USA. However, it is very well possible that mass immigration was a single major factor of US Rapid economic expansion 1865 – 1890.

Commentary – Level 4

This is an effective response with detailed consideration of the various factors which explain the growth in the economy in this period. The answer demonstrates a sound understanding of a wide range of issues. There are two weaknesses, however. First, the nature of the economic growth could have been developed further and the assessment of whether there was change over the period is not considered. This is a Level 4 response.