

First Midterm: Essay Questions

Writing an effective short essay

For the essay question on the first midterm, you will choose **one** of two questions. These are questions that allow you to talk about a lot of information from various periods of the course; you should use them as spurs **not** to do any additional research outside the textbook, but just to pull together a number of strands from lecture and readings. (Don't overestimate how much time half an hour is to write an essay, either. You'll only be writing about three times as much as on a typical response.)

You'll notice that each of the questions asks you to deal with counterarguments. The reason for this is twofold. First, you can't make a good argument without understanding what the likely objections will be. Second, you should not omit basic information just because it's contrary to the point you are trying to make.

In addition to dealing with counterarguments, good answers to these essays will

1. Address the major points in the prompt
2. Take a clear and well-reasoned stance on the questions asked
3. Integrate evidence *with specifics* from various units of the course that are relevant to the topic. Some of the sentences you write will probably be almost identical to ones you might in a short ID on a person.
4. Have some sense of chronology. You needn't give precise years for every detail, but there should be general signposts when you move across big periods of time.

The two questions on the exam will be selected from the following three:

1. Trace back the major elements of Franklin Roosevelt's actions in office (both during the New Deal and the Second World War) to the presidents and political actors who preceded him. What parts of the New Deal were truly "New," and what parts built on movements from before? Be sure to consider the party affiliations of those you write about in your response.
2. Consider the plight of four groups that felt oppressed between 1876 and 1945:
 1. Farmers
 2. African Americans
 3. Immigrants
 4. Working-class laborers

Each felt oppressed; but each also had some form of power of their own. What kinds of power to shape events did they have? Was it evenly distributed among the groups? Which group used the power it had most effectively, and which least?

3. Politicians and the public were taken by the problem of monopoly and corporate power between 1877 and 1945. Why did the new companies appear so threatening to American values? Who proposed the most sensible plans for dealing with the new organizations?
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