

2022 AP UNITED STATES HISTORY DBQ SAMPLE RESPONSES

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MY RESPONSE (Note: I would not expect an essay to be of this caliber to earn full credit):

RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM (and Westward Expansion)	War of 1812 as a (Fleeting) Nationalist Moment	Excluded Women and Ethnic Minorities
<i>Doc 1 - Property Qual. Map</i> <i>Doc 6 - Emerson</i> <i>OE - Louisiana Purchase</i>	<i>Doc 2 - Congress</i> <i>Doc 3 - Madison Annual Message (HC)</i> <i>OE - Jackson's Vetoes (NB and Internal Improvements)</i>	<i>Doc 4 - Cherokee Constitution</i> <i>Doc 5 - Free People of Color</i> <i>Doc 7 - Women's Education</i> <i>OE - Seneca Falls</i>

In 1776, the American Declaration of Independence asserted that all men are created equal and are endowed with natural rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The unanimous declaration also named George III as a tyrant. The American Revolution united the former colonies as “United States,” but other than their common hatred for the British and their need to defend themselves, they were not all that united. The Articles and the Constitution both formed a federal form of government that left a lot of powers with the states. Between 1800 and 1855, Americans developed a national identity to a limited extent due to a widespread belief in rugged individualism and because of the unifying moment presented by the War of 1812, but failed to include women and ethnic minorities in this national identity that catered largely to white men.

A widespread belief in rugged individualism was prevalent in early 19th century America – and this belief was deeply rooted in the westward expansion of the United States. The West was instrumental in establishing a democratic political culture in the United States, can be seen by nearly every Western state (with the exception of Arkansas) rejecting the idea of property requirements for voting (Doc 1). This progress of democracy from West to East is reminiscent of Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis, which claimed that the experience of the frontier made America what it was – not the European ancestry of the majority of its inhabitants. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a Transcendentalist and famous writer, told Harvard students that “we have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,” meaning that Americans should not try to copy Europe but embrace their own unique belief in individualism (Doc 6). Emerson, as a Transcendentalist, was hyper-individualistic, as were other Transcendentalists, like Henry David Thoreau, the noted abolitionist. Thomas Jefferson embraced the frontier as the soul of America when he signed the Louisiana Purchase, adding acres upon acres of undeveloped frontier farmland to the United States.

The War of 1812, served as a unifying moment for the United States, resulting in a brief surge of nationalism. Congress claimed that Americans were united against British attacks on their commerce (Doc 2). What Congress was referring to was impressment of

American sailors, and the British blockade of Europe, which kept American ships from trading with Europe. After the war, James Madison called for federal internal improvements to connect the United States through a network of bridges, roads, and canals (Doc 3). However, Madison went on to veto a bill that did exactly that when he vetoed Calhoun's Bonus Bill. On his way out of office, he went back to 1790s Jeffersonian strict constructionism, which does not show the development of a national identity after 1800. Andrew Jackson also stood against the unifying principles of Henry Clay's American System when he vetoed the rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States and Clay's Maysville Road project. The unifying moment of the War of 1812 ultimately proved fleeting and short-lived.

Although Americans were unified around principles of individualism and had some moments of unity during and after the War of 1812, no one ever seemed able to figure out how to integrate women and minorities into that national identity. Although the Cherokees borrowed language from the United States Constitution in their tribal constitution, they made clear efforts to assert their own identity, banning their citizens from selling land to the United States (Doc 4). This became a non-issue after the United States government forced the Cherokees off their land after the passage of the Indian Removal Act. Thousands of Indians died on the Trail of Tears, which removed them across the Mississippi River so white Americans could mine gold on their ancestral lands. A free person of color told members of the New England Antislavery Society that while free blacks were not bought or sold, they seldom had the opportunity to become wealthy or rise in society (Doc 5). This was at the same time that the American Colonization Society raised money to send free black back to Africa (a position that Abraham Lincoln endorsed as late as 1862). To be a rugged American individual was to be white and male. Reverend Samuel Fisher's essay, "Female Education," shows that as late as 1850, the idea of women getting an equal education with men was still controversial, noting that there were still disputes concerning women's level of intelligence (Doc 7). However, things were changing on that front. In 1848, women's rights activists gathered at Seneca Falls to sign the Seneca Falls Declaration, which stated that women should have the right to vote. Also, women on the frontier contributed to equality by sharing the demands of frontier life. Decades later, Wyoming and other Western states would legislate women's suffrage. This idea would move from west to east, just like the end of property qualifications for voting.

Although Americans grew to embrace the idea of rugged individualism and were very unified for a moment around the War of 1812, the development of a national identity was limited between 1800 and 1855 due to sectionalism, disagreements about the Constitution, and the failure to expand the rights of full citizenship to women, black Americans, and American Indians.