

Rural Americans Move to the Cities

This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents and is based on the accompanying documents 1 – 7. Some of the documents have been edited for the purposes of the question. As you analyze each document, take into account both the sources of the document and the point of view that may be presented in the document.

Directions: This document–based question consists of two parts. In Part A, you are to read each document and answer the question or questions that follow it. In part B, you are to write an essay based on the information in the document and your knowledge of United States history.

Historic Context:

After the Civil War, the United States economy expanded rapidly. Because large cities were centers of intense economic activity, people looking for work converged on them. The need for labor was so great that not only men, but also large numbers of young, unmarried women entered the work force.

This transformation depended not only upon the factory system and a labor force centralized in cities, but also on new technologies, improvement in communications and modern financial systems. Thousands of rural Americans moved to cities as the economy shifted from an agricultural to an industrial base.

Task:

Using information from the documents provided and your knowledge of United States history, write a well-organized essay in which you:

Discuss the reasons why rural Americans moved to the cities in the years between the Civil War and WWI. Include in your discussion what advantages and disadvantages such a move brought them.

Part A:

Directions: Analyze the documents and answer the question or questions that follow each document in the space provided. Your answers will help you write the essay.

Document 1: An excerpt from Russell Conwell's *Acres of Diamonds* 1870.

Baptist minister and founder of Temple University, Russell Conwell first delivered his sermon-lecture "Acres of Diamonds" in 1861 as an eighteen-year-old boy. The message was so well-received that he delivered it some 6,000 times over the next fifty years and received more than \$8 million in proceeds including royalties on the printed version.

The opportunity to get rich, to attain great wealth is here...now within the reach of almost every man and woman.... You have no right to be poor. It is your duty to be rich.... I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small... let us remember, there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings...

1. According to Russell Conwell, what was the primary cause of poverty?

Document 2: Chicago World's Fair 1893.

The World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, was the last and the greatest of the nineteenth century's World's Fairs - a showcase for technology, progress, consumer culture and life in modern America. The Fair was immensely popular and drew over 27 million visitors.



The Ferris Wheel was an engineering marvel and Chicago's answer to the Eiffel Tower, built a few years earlier.

Pittsburgh bridge builder George W. Ferris created the wheel. Its 45-foot axle was the largest single piece of forged steel at the time in the world. The wheel had a diameter of 250 feet and 36 wooden cars that could each hold 60 people.

For 50 cents, people were treated to a 20-minute ride and spectacular view of the fair and Chicago.



View of the fair from the top of the Ferris Wheel

2. Describe how a rural visitor to the Chicago World's Fair might feel about life in the city?

Document 3: Excerpt from a life history by Harry Reece.

Harry Reece grew up on a farm in Illinois during the late 1800s. In the following narrative, he recalls a trip to the city of Chicago - "the big town" - in the 1890's, and his first experience with the electric trolley. This history is one of a series of interviews that were written by the staff of the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers' Project in 1938.

"I was born in the middle west. Out in the state of Illinois...and it was quite a while before the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. We lived on a farm, and even telephones were curiosities to myself and the country boys of my age. Electric lights were something to marvel at...the old Edison phonograph with its wax cylinder records and earphones was positively ghostly...and trolley cars, well they too were past understanding!

Speaking of trolley cars reminds me of a trip to the 'city' once when I was about a dozen years old. My father and a neighbor, Old Uncle Bill Brandon, had to go up to the Big Town, which was Chicago, on some sort of business...and I suppose I'd been extra diligent at doing chores, weeding potatoes, killing worms on the tomato plants, or something...and Father rewarded me by taking me along.

You can imagine what a time I had seeing things I'd never seen before, in fact had only dreamed about or heard about. When I saw my first trolley car slipping along Cottage Grove Avenue in Chicago...slipping along without horses or engine or apparent motive power...well it was just too darned much for me. I didn't know what to think.

Uncle Bill could understand horses, hogs and cattle, steam engines, army mules and rowboats, and such thing--but that trolley car, with the little spinning wheel at the end of the pole, spinning along against the electric wire above it; was too much for him. Still, he didn't want to confess 'that there was any doggone thing on earth that he couldn't figure out!

I wasn't so anxious to conceal my own ignorance, so with legitimate curiosity asked my Father and Uncle Bill what made the thing go. My Father was a thoughtful man, and before answering studied for a moment. Uncle Bill was more spontaneous. Gosh a'mighty, can't you see what makes her go?' he exclaimed, 'It's that danged rod stickin' up out of the top of her. People's gettin' so cussed smart these days all they need to do to run a street car is to got a fish-pole and stick it up out of the roof of her!'"

3a. How does Harry Reece's group respond to the trolley car they saw in Chicago?

3b. What was his response to some of the other new technologies of the era?

Document 4: Laundry in a tenement yard: Park Ave and 107th St.
New York. 1900. Photo taken from an elevated railroad track.



4. By 1900, many rural American found themselves living in city tenement apartments. How does this photograph depict the changes they found in the city?

Document 6: Excerpt from *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser, 1900

Theodore Dreiser was a journalist before he became a novelist; he published *Sister Carrie* in 1900. It has come to be regarded as an American classic and many consider it the first “modern” American novel. Through its characters and their story, it illustrates the effects of the changing economic structure on American culture. *Sister Carrie* tells the story of eighteen-year-old Carrie Meeber who leaves her small town, drawn to the excitement of promise of the Chicago. She is one of thousands of wage seekers converging on Chicago during the economic boom that followed the Civil War. This passage describes Carrie’s first day of work at a shoe factory.

“Carrie at last could scarcely sit still. Her legs began to tire and she wanted to get up and stretch. Would noon never come? It seemed as if she had worked an entire day. She was not hungry at all, but weak, and her eyes were tired, straining at the one point where the eye-punch came down. The girl at the right noticed her squirmings and felt sorry for her. She was concentrating herself too thoroughly--what she did really required less mental and physical strain. There was nothing to be done, however. The halves of the uppers came piling steadily down. Her hands began to ache at the wrists and then in the fingers, and towards the last she seemed one mass of dull, complaining muscles, fixed in an eternal position and performing a single mechanical movement, which became more and more distasteful, until at last it was absolutely nauseating.

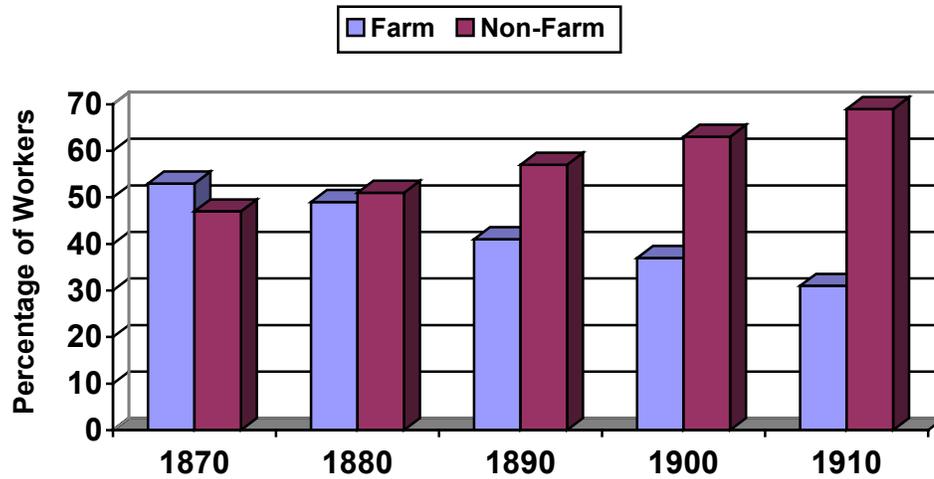
The place smelled of the oil of the machines and the new leather-- a combination which, added to the stale odors of the building, was not pleasant even in cold weather. The floor, though regularly swept every evening, presented a littered surface. Not the slightest provision had been made for the comfort of the employees, the idea being that something was gained by giving them as little and making the work as hard as possible. What we know of foot-rests, swivel-back chairs, dining-rooms for the girls, clean aprons and curling irons supplied free, and a decent cloak room, were unthought of. The washrooms were disagreeable, crude, if not foul places, and the whole atmosphere was sordid.

Carrie said nothing, but bent over her work. She felt as though she could hardly endure such a life. Her idea of work had been so entirely different. All during the long afternoon she thought of the city outside and its imposing show, crowds, and fine buildings. The Chicago World’s Fair and the better side of her home life came back. By three o’clock she was sure it must be six, and by four it seemed as if they had forgotten to note the hour and were letting all work overtime. The foreman became a true ogre, prowling constantly about, keeping her tied down to her miserable task. What she heard of the conversation about her only made her feel sure that she did not want to make friends with any of these. When six o’clock came she hurried eagerly away, her arms aching and her limbs stiff from sitting in one position. “

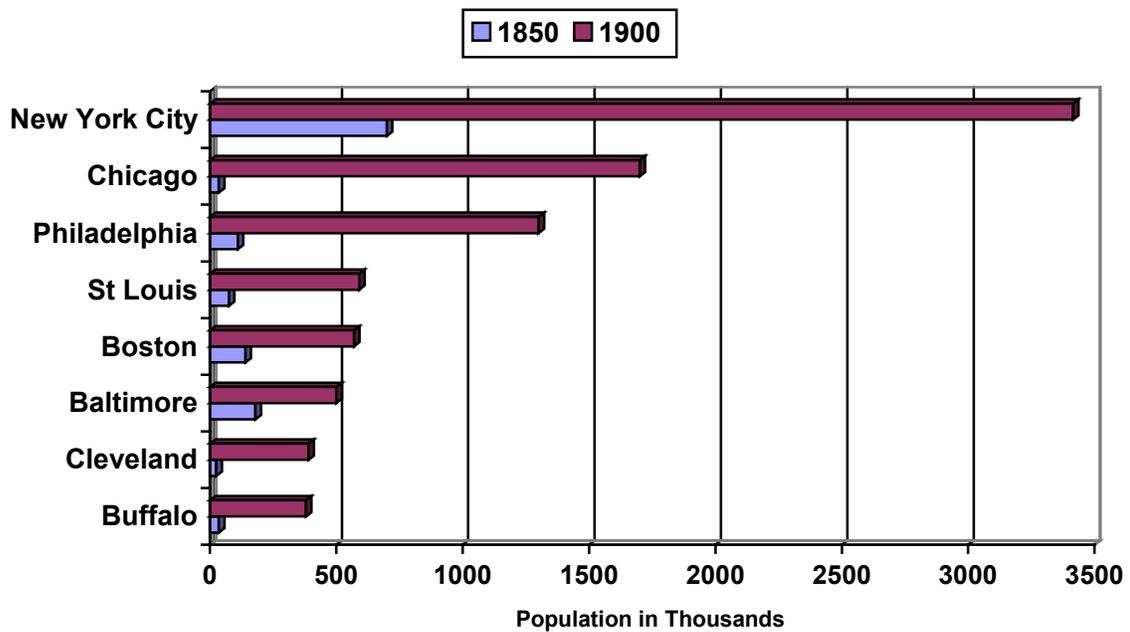
6. Describe the working conditions that Carrie experienced at her first day of work.

Document 7: Statistics on Urban Growth

Occupation of American Workers 1870 - 1920



Population of largest US Cities 1850 - 1900



7. Identify two population trends indicated by these graphs.

Part B Directions:

Using information from the documents provided and your knowledge of United States history, write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs and a conclusion.

Historic Context:

After the Civil War, the United States economy expanded rapidly. Because large cities were centers of intense economic activity, people looking for work converged on them. The need for labor was so great that not only men, but also large numbers of young, unmarried women entered the work force.

This transformation depended not only upon the factory system and a labor force centralized in cities, but also on new technologies, improvement in communications and modern financial systems. Thousands of rural Americans moved to cities as the economy shifted from an agricultural to an industrial base.

Task:

Using information from the documents provided and your knowledge of United States history, write a well-organized essay in which you:

Discuss the reasons why rural Americans moved to the cities in the years between the Civil War and WWI. Include in your discussion what advantages and disadvantages such a move brought them.

Be sure to:

1. Address all parts of the task by analyzing and interpreting at least 4 documents.
2. Incorporate information from the documents in the body of the essay.
3. Incorporate relevant information throughout the essay.
4. Support the theme with relevant facts and examples.
5. Write a well-developed essay that consistently demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization.
6. Introduce the theme by establishing a framework beyond a simple restatement of the task or historical context, and conclude the essay with a summation of the theme.

Document-Based Question - Essay Scoring Rubric

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- Thoroughly addresses all aspects of the *Task* by accurately analyzing and interpreting at least four documents Incorporates information from the documents in the body of the essay
- Incorporates relevant outside information
- Richly supports the theme or problem with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Is a well-developed essay, consistently demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization
- Introduces the theme or problem by establishing a framework that is beyond a simple restatement of the *Task* or *Historical Context* and concludes with a summation of the theme or problem

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- Addresses all aspects of the *Task* by accurately analyzing and interpreting at least four documents
- Incorporates information from the documents in the body of the essay
- Incorporates relevant outside information
- Includes relevant facts, examples, and details, but discussion may be more descriptive than analytical
- Is a well-developed essay, demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization
- Introduces the theme or problem by establishing a framework that is beyond a simple restatement of the *Task* or *Historical Context* and concludes with a summation of the theme or problem

3

- Addresses most aspects of the *Task* or *Historical Context* and concludes by simply repeating the theme or problem or addresses all aspects of the *Task* in a limited way, using some of the documents
- Incorporates some information from the documents in the body of the essay
- Incorporates limited or no relevant outside information
- Includes some facts, examples, and details, but discussion is more descriptive than analytical
- Is a satisfactorily developed essay, demonstrating a general plan of organization
- Introduces the theme or problem by repeating

2

- Attempts to address some aspects of the *Task*, making limited use of the documents
- Presents no relevant outside information
- Includes few facts, examples, and details; discussion restates contents of the documents
- Is a poorly organized essay, lacking focus
- Fails to introduce or summarize the theme or problem

1

- Shows limited understanding of the *Task* with vague, unclear references to the documents
- Presents no relevant outside information
- Includes little or no accurate or relevant facts, details, or examples
- Attempts to complete the *Task*, but demonstrates a major weakness in organization
Fails to introduce or summarize the theme or problem

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- Fails to address the *Task*, is illegible, or is a blank paper