

American Political Development

Research Essay Prompt

In a 10-12+ page essay, written in 12 point Times New Roman font, write a research essay on a major trend or development in American political history in a specific period of time. You can follow the general outline or structure it in your own way, but be sure to submit it in phases, which will be due on Moodle.

General Outline. Here is a general outline for the essay, which will due in phases, each one a part of the overall essay. You may follow this outline, or structure it in your own way.

Topic Selected – Due Monday, September 16

- Write a brief summary of a single development or event in American political history that you find interesting. If you're unsure, maybe list some general topics or possibilities. (See suggestions below.)

Phase I – Due Friday, September 27

- **Introduction.** Give a general overview of topic. Why is it important to American life? Why is it important for American politics or law? (1-2 paragraphs). Then include:
 - A review of the current scholarship. What have at least *two* recent scholars in academic books and journals said? What are their theses? (1 paragraph each)
 - Your thesis (or possible theses, if you're unsure) in one short paragraph.

Phase II – Due Friday, November 1

- **The Cause.** What started it all – an incident, a movement, an idea, etc.? Who were the key people involved – federal or state government, interest groups, or individuals? How was it interpreted at the time, whether by the media, academics, or public officials, etc.? (2-3 paragraphs based on primary sources)

Final Draft – Due Friday, December 6

- **The Effect.** What was the outcome or impact on American life? Who was most impacted? How was it interpreted at the time, whether by the media, academics, or public officials, etc.? (2-3 paragraphs based on primary sources)
- **Conclusion.** Sum everything up and restate your thesis. What might other causes be that explain the effect? How did this development shape American life today, or what lesson does it teach us? Ultimately, in your opinion, was this development a good or bad thing in American life? What should have happened? (1-2 paragraphs)

Sources. Since this is a historical research essay, be sure to support your arguments with original sources – official documents, reports, court cases, speeches, letters, memoirs, or clippings from newspapers and magazines, etc. Here are some online databases where you can find these things:

Free Online

- Google Books Advanced Search (books.google.com)
- Library of Congress Collections (loc.gov/collections)
- TeachingAmericanHistory.org
- UCSB's American Presidency Project (presidency.ucsb.edu)

Through the Library

- JSTOR (jstor.org)
- Adam Matthew Digital (amdigital.co.uk)
- ProQuest (search.proquest.com)

Suggested Topics. Here are some general suggestions on what to write about, but feel free to pursue whatever you're interested in.

- **The Presidency.** How did the presidency change because of a certain president? How did a certain president respond to a development or crisis in political life (or maybe cause one)? How did perceptions of presidential leadership evolve?
- **Congress.** How did Congress adapt (or refuse to adapt) to changes in society? How did it influence and shape American life? Why did congressional views of the extent of government change?
- **Race and Ethnicity.** How did a certain ethnicity adapt to American life over time? What were the origins of certain attitudes of one race toward another?
- **Women and Gender.** How did women understand themselves and their place in American life at a certain point? How did attitudes toward women develop at a certain time?
- **Religion.** How did the influence of religion either grow or decline in American politics? What was a certain religious movement or cause in the past? What was a certain political or legal view of religion in the past?
- **Other Topics.** What was the development of a major public policy (economy, education, environment, energy, etc.)? What was the development of a certain social or cultural movement – or even an idea? Or what was the intersection of two things (e.g., presidential and congressional power, or religion and race)?

Research Essay Rubric

Content (60%). Engagement with the research.

- **Thesis.** The main argument is clearly stated, ideally in a single-sentence paragraph. (E.g., "In this essay, I argue...")
- **Academic Sources.** There is an adequate discussion of at least two academic sources in the introduction.
- **Primary Sources.** All claims are supported with well-integrated quotes from the primary source research.

Writing (30%). The essay is well-written.

- **Grammar.** It shows correct use of grammar, punctuation, and word-choice.
- **Logic.** The thesis is clearly supported with persuasive logical arguments based on quotes from the sources.
- **Rhetoric.** The essay is written in a clear and persuasive style that conveys the author's meaning.

Form (10%). The essay is organized, and follows all citation methods.

- **Structure.** The essay is well-structured and orderly.
- **Citations.** All quotes are cited using MLA format. (Turabian or APA are acceptable if it's consistent.)
- **Bibliography.** All academic sources are listed in bibliographic form. (No need to list primary sources, e.g., newspaper clippings, speeches, letters, etc.)