



AP[®] United States History 2003 Sample Student Responses

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Within a span of only 30 yrs., the United States had gone through many changes, including the Great Depression & WWII. Specifically, women and race relations, in the 1920s and 1950s were different in many ways, while still similar.

The 1920s brought about a cultural revolution for women. The emergence of flappers and bob haircuts fed into the new sexual roles of women. In general, more women were drinking, smoking, having sex, and an overall good time. Viewed by conservatives as "hussies" or "sluts," these women were merely breaking free of the gender stereotype bestowed upon them by society. Fewer women were getting married and settling down, and birth control became a hot topic.

WWII brought about a completely new woman though. After the war women were expected to return from the workplace to the home, once again submitting to the cult of domesticity. TV shows like "Leave It To Beaver" emphasized the woman's role as a mother, cook, and cleaner. With women back in the home with families, the 1950s saw the "Baby Boom" with lots & lots of children being born. However, similar to the 1920s, 1959 saw the birth of Barbie. Barbie encapsulated what a woman should be suddenly making women a little sexier again. Small waists, big breasts, long legs, and high heels were what every little girl aspired to be.

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Race relations in the 1920s were not particularly favorable, but the Af-Am community was busy empowering itself through the Harlem Renaissance. The emergence of jazz music (Scott Holin, Duke Ellington), poetry readings, and dance focused on African Americans as beautiful people. The Harlem Renaissance was a celebration of the Af-Am culture that was, for so long, suppressed.

The 1950s had a lot more racial tension, but at the same time things were happening to improve it all. The desegregation of the armed forces proved a milestone in Af-Am rights. Many whites were opposed to black integration into "their" society, forming groups like the KKK popular. In Little Rock, Arkansas, while black children attempted to go to school (which was now desegregated), white people rioted, forcing the 101st Airborne to come in and keep order. Black people were uniting to become a force to be reckoned with. Rosa Park and the Montgomery Bus boycott highlighted Martin Luther King's peaceful rebellion approach. MLK would very soon be nationally known. Stokely Carmichael, leader of the SNCC and later the Black Panthers, advocated "Black Power" claiming what was said in the 1920s that black is beautiful. The major court case of the decade, pertaining to race relations, was

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Brown v. Board of Education. It declared the "separate but equal" ruling ~~is~~ Plessy v. Ferguson unconstitutional. This meant public facilities, including schools, had to be desegregated. Overall, race relations in the 1920s were fairly mild, but once the 1950s came around it all began to boil over. The 1950s hold major milestones in Af-Am search for equality.

While the 2 ~~eras~~ decades are different when it comes to both women and race relations, there are common threads ~~that~~ present in both.

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The 1920s and 50s share many characteristics; anti-communism, ^{and} conservatism, for example, however, they also share similarities and differences in the ~~course~~ societal role of women and the race relations of their respective times.

The 1920s embraced the notion of the "flapper" a drinking, smoking, independent woman. The flapper cut her hair, wore makeup, and showed an indecent amount of skin in her modern clothes. The flapper might have a job, and drive herself around ~~the~~ town. This ideal challenged the conventional upbringing of the older generation. ~~For~~ For all ~~the~~ the attention that the flapper may ~~have~~ have received, the majority of women in the 1920s were conventional ~~housewives~~ housewives that did not as brazenly challenge the social conventions.

The 1950s embraced the idea of the housewife, a woman who kept her home in a state of perfection, whose children exemplified the American ideal, and who never contradicted the conformist society of the time. This banishment to suburbia created a discontent expressed in Friedan's The Feminist

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Mystique: Although women went to college far more often than they had in the 1920s, they were expected to be married or engaged by graduation and then settle into a suburban lifestyle and never drop the mask of perfect contentment. The birth control movement begun in the 1920s had made very little progress by the 1950s, and many women still gave birth to large families.

In the 1920s, the idea of "race relations" was nonexistent. Segregation was the norm, and few challenged that policy. The NAACP gained power in the 1920s, ~~by~~ continuing its policy of using lawsuits to achieve equality. The KKK grew to massive numbers, and many African Americans lived lives of perpetual fear. The Harlem Renaissance and the acceptance of jazz made African American culture mainstream, as well as exemplifying a growing sense of pride in African American heritage and culture. In the South, African Americans were chained to the sharecropping system through the Jim Crow laws.

In the 1950s, little had changed. The policy of segregation was still deep entrenched into American Society. However, the NAACP's use

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of the court system to attempt change had begun to achieve its goals. In 1954, the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas reversed *Plessy v. Ferguson* and ~~declared~~ declared the segregation of schools to be illegal. When ~~the~~ the Governor of Arkansas refused to comply with the ruling and ordered the National Guard to prevent the integration of Little Rock High School, President Eisenhower ordered the Military to enforce the Brown Court decision. This sparked the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, as African Americans in the South began to follow the peaceful protests advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr.

The 1970s and the 1950s shared many societal pressures and issues. The 1970s might have made more progress with women's freedom, but the 1950s more firmly addressed the needs of the Civil rights of African Americans.

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The 1920s and 1950s have ~~historically~~ socially been known for the ~~same~~ superficiality in cultures, but despite ~~the~~ common characteristics of consumerism and having fun, women's roles greatly differed. In the 1920s, women acquired a great leap of freedom while in the 1950s women were pushed back into an era of suppression and conformity similar to the Victorian Age. And although consumer cultures were evident in both decades, each focused on a different commodity.

In 1919, the 19th Amendment was passed to give the women the right to vote as ~~a~~ a reward for their patriotic efforts in World War I homefront. With the end of war, ~~a~~ a decade of prosperity flourished as middle-class people enjoyed greater wealth in the Roaring 20's. Specifically, women broke free of the corset-bound society of the Victorian age to achieve greater freedom. With the acquirement of the vote, women became radical and daring. ^{flappers} They bobbed their hair instead of traditionally wearing it long, wore revealing and corset-less dresses, bared their chests for a more "masculine" look, and indulged in what would have been considered unbecoming behavior to their elders. They danced nights

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away in the Charleston dance, showed their ankles, and drank prohibited alcohol. Some women even opened their own "speakeasies" which were saloons that sold illegal liquor and presented ~~you~~^{social} with sources of entertainment. In the 1920s, women were equivalent to men or, at least acted that way, which was a major contrast to the 1950s.

In the 1950's women ended the progressive trend of female liberation when they returned to the positions as homemakers. During the 1940's / World War II, women became extremely liberal in taking over the jobs of the males in factories of the homefront. They became known as " Rosie-Riveters" for working on machinery, but when the war ended and men returned, women were chased back into the kitchen to give back ~~to~~ the jobs to the men. Females became housewives who were supposed to be content in rearing the children and keeping the household running. In reality they were suppressed creatures bound by family and children like the Victorian Edna of the novel The Awakening. In contrast, the 1920's Daisy of The Great Gatsby experienced in greater freedom in being able to go out

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and do whatever she wanted like the typical flapper. Young girls were educated in school with film strips that glorified housewifery and television shows like "Harriet and Ozzie" advocated society's beliefs about a good ~~women~~ woman. These beliefs were carried on through the 1960s until "The Feminine Mystique" was published and Betty Friedan complained nationally about the drudgery and conformity women underwent.

Both decades were known for their consumerism, societies and both ~~focused~~ focused on cars. With the mass production and assembly line process of Ford's Model T's, these cars became affordable in the 20's so that every one in the nation had one. In the 1950's multiple cars also became a household commodity. The basis of both these cultures is based on post-war prosperity. With the end of WWI and WWII, people in the 1920s and 1950s were able to experience economic boom and as a result, middle-class prosperity. Conformity was also evident in both decades as everyone owned the same Model T car in the 1920s and everyone lived in a similar during the suburban

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growth of Levittown and its cascade of identical, mass produced houses in the 1950s. Besides cars, there was also a difference in emphasis of both consumer decades. With the prohibition of alcohol ~~the~~ from the 18th Amendment, alcohol became the most sought after commodity. Smuggling and gangsters made it readily available, but only the wealthy were able to enjoy it. In the 1950's, the object of everyone's affections was the television set. With the invention of that small box, people were able to watch television shows like "I Love Lucy" and other classics while being bombarded by television ads. In the 1920s, people were attracted to purchasing items through the mass usage of billboards and other large/mass forms of advertisement in the world that would capture the attention of consumers. In contrast, in the 1950's the people could see the world and its mechanisms, like advertising, in the comfort of their own homes. ~~Unfortunately,~~ each ~~to~~

Unfortunately each would leave a different mark on society. The unlimited credit-card spending of the 1920s would lead America

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to the pit of the great depression while the conformist consumer culture of the 1950s would cause the reaction of the counter-culture, Beatniks, and hippies to erupt in the 1960s and 70s and the generation of baby-boomers would leave their own mark on American society. Meanwhile as roles of women ~~continued to~~ ^{moved} forward in the 1920s and then reversed in the 1950s; afterwards female liberation began to solidly move forward in the 70s and 80s with the idea of the Equal Rights Amendment.