



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

US History and Government  
Regents Review

Laissez-Faire and Social Darwinism

**LAISSEZ-FAIRE** Many supporters of late 1800s business growth restated the older principle of **laissez-faire**, or noninterference. Economist Adam Smith, in his 1776 book, *The Wealth of Nations*, and many other writers had supported this principle, which holds that government should not interfere in the economic workings of a nation. They believed that a **free enterprise system**, in which private individuals make the economic decisions, is most efficient.

During the late 1800s, economists restated the importance of laissez-faire policies to economic growth. Government interference with business was minimal for much of this period, and entrepreneurs expanded their businesses and earned great wealth.

**SOCIAL DARWINISM** Laissez-faire capitalists found justification for their beliefs in new scientific theories being developed at that time. Naturalist Charles Darwin had developed a theory of evolution that described how animal species live or die by a process of natural selection. Other writers simplified Darwin's theories and created a philosophy called Social Darwinism.

Social Darwinists held that life was a struggle for the "survival of the fittest." Unregulated business competition would see weak businesses fail and healthy businesses thrive. Government action regulating business practices would interfere with the process of natural selection. Likewise, any government programs to aid the poor or workers would also violate natural "laws."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Social Darwinism promoted the idea that
  - 1) the poor should be protected by government action
  - 2) stronger businesses would succeed at the expense of weaker businesses
  - 3) natural selection is contrary to democratic principles
  - 4) new immigrants were equal to native-born Americans
  
- 2) Which factor most influenced the growth of the United States economy between 1865 and 1900?
  - 1) restrictions on immigration
  - 2) development of the sharecropping system
  - 3) success of organized labor
  - 4) governmental policy of laissez faire
  
- 3) According to the theory of laissez-faire capitalism, prices of products are determined by the
  - 1) government
  - 2) interaction of supply and demand
  - 3) cost of producing the products
  - 4) bankers
  
- During the second half of the 19th century, *government commitment to the principles of laissez-faire capitalism* contributed to
  - 1) the growth of small business firms
  - 2) economic domination by business trusts
  - 3) friendly working relationships between labor and management
  - 4) healthy and positive competition between businesses
  
- 5) Which two philosophies dominated the thinking of most political and business leaders during the late 19th century in the United States?
  - 1) populism and pragmatism
  - 2) social Darwinism and laissez faire
  - 3) communism and anarchism
  - 4) utopian socialism and the social gospel

- 6) A person who believes in the Social Darwinist theory of survival of the fittest would agree that
  - 1) rich nations should give substantial aid to help poor nations
  - 2) individuals should succeed through their own efforts
  - 3) government should tax the rich to help the poor
  - 4) poor people should get help from the government
  
- 7) "[Accumulating] immense profits is only an indicator. Profits indicate how well the most intelligent and capable people are able to survive in our society. Ultimately people who possess none of these clever qualities are weeded out."

Which philosophy of the Gilded Age is illustrated in this quotation?

  - 1) Utopian socialism
  - 2) social Darwinism
  - 3) White Man's Burden
  - 4) Christian charity
  
- 8) During the late 1800's, the theories of Social Darwinism were often used to justify the efforts of
  - 1) Southern farmers to increase cotton exports
  - 2) big business to destroy its competitors
  - 3) Federal officials to control state governments
  - 4) Northern liberals to pass civil rights legislation
  
- 9) Many wealthy American industrialists of the late 19th century used the theory of Social Darwinism to
  - 1) promote legislation establishing a minimum wage
  - 2) support the labor union movement
  - 3) encourage charitable organizations to help the poor
  - 4) justify monopolistic actions

- 10) The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest.... The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.

The ideas expressed in the passage are most similar to those of which philosophy?

- 1) progressivism
  - 2) populism
  - 3) humanitarianism
  - 4) social Darwinism
- 11) **Statement A:** The best way to economic recovery is to subsidize industry so that it will hire more workers and expand production.
- Statement B:** If jobs are not available, the government must create jobs for those who are unemployed.
- Statement C:** According to human nature, the most talented people will always come out on top.
- Statement D:** Our government is responsible for the nation's economic well-being.

Which statement is *closest* to the philosophy of Social Darwinism?

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|------|------|
| 1) A | 3) C |
| 2) B | 4) D |
- 12) Which term *best* describes United States economic policy during the era of the rise of big business (1865-1900)?
- 1) welfare-state capitalism
  - 2) laissez-faire capitalism
  - 3) mercantilism
  - 4) Marxism

- 13) Many reformers who opposed the laissez-faire attitude of the late 19th century argued that
- 1) government should protect society through the regulation of business
  - 2) the idea of rugged individualism is vital to the nation's economic growth
  - 3) the National Government should not interfere in the activities of big business
  - 4) national wealth could best be assured by the accumulation of gold

- 14) The United States Government economic policy shifted away from laissez faire in the early 1900's. The *main* reason for this shift was the desire to
- 1) reduce the abuses of big business
  - 2) make the United States more competitive with foreign economies
  - 3) coordinate the economy for a war effort
  - 4) increase government ownership of major industries

- 15) "Combinations in industry are the result of an... economic law which cannot be repealed by political legislation."

The author of this quotation would probably favor which economic policy?

- 1) antitrust laws
  - 2) laissez-faire capitalism
  - 3) mercantilism
  - 4) social security laws
- 16) "Prices and wages should be determined by the marketplace."

The author of this statement would most probably support

- 1) government ownership of utilities
  - 2) laissez-faire capitalism
  - 3) minimum-wage laws
  - 4) wage and price controls
- 17) During the period 1865-1900, government contributed to the growth of corporations mainly by
- 1) buying large amounts of corporate stocks
  - 2) providing low-cost housing for their workers
  - 3) giving them direct aid when they went bankrupt
  - 4) allowing them to develop with few restrictions

- 18) According to the theory of laissez-faire economics, prices should be determined chiefly by
- 1) negotiations between labor and management
  - 2) supply and demand
  - 3) leaders of business and industry
  - 4) government regulations