

The American Yawp

VOLUME II: AFTER 1877

Essay 1

Understanding shifting meanings of freedom in the Gilded Age

As the Gilded Age remade social life in the United States, Americans struggled to define what freedom would mean amid their new industrial economy. “I am aware that you called yourselves free in the nineteenth century,” Dr. Leete says in Edward Bellamy’s bestselling 1888 novel, *Looking Backward*. He argues that Americans were anything but free: “The meaning of the word could not then, however, have been at all what it is at present, or you certainly would not have applied it to a society of which nearly every member was in a position of galling personal dependence upon others.”

In between 1,200 to 1,500 words, use Edward Bellamy’s novel *Looking Backward* to answer the question, “How did the Gilded Age force Americans to confront traditional understandings of freedom?”

Be sure to have a clear argument that you defend with relevant evidence. Organize your paper with a logical structure and use clear topic sentences and transitions to help your reader understand the logic of your organization. Edit your paper thoroughly to avoid errors and to improve readability. Give your paper a title that reflects your argument.

Grading criteria:

- **Argument: 25%** Does your paper have a clear, singular, specific argument that answers the question?
- **Evidence: 25%** Do you use all of the relevant evidence to defend your argument?
- **Organization: 25%** Does your paper have a logical structure and use clear topic sentences and transitions?
- **Clarity: 25%** Is your prose efficient, crisp and polished, free of excessive passive voice or distracting spelling or grammatical errors?

Formatting:

- 12-pt., Times New Roman font, double-spaced
- 1” margins
- 1200-1500 words (4-5 full, double-spaced pages)

Due **DATE** through **LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

* For this assignment, you may only use the Bellamy’s novel.