Who Was America?

Politics, reform, and culture in the early nineteenth century

SS24.US1.6 "Evaluate the influence of American social and political reform on the emergence of a national identity from the early to mid-nineteenth century. 6a Describe the changes in political culture during the Age of Reform..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two changes in political life, circle one limit on participation, and write 1 and 2 beside two ways reform or culture shaped ideas about the nation.

A Nation Debates Itself

1 In the 1820s and 1830s, election days became noisy public events, with rallies, newspapers, and party organizers seeking voters. Many states dropped property requirements for white men, and participation among eligible voters rose. Supporters called this wider voice for ordinary white men Jacksonian democracy. Yet the word democracy hid sharp limits: women could not vote, many free Black men were barred, and President Andrew Jackson backed the 1830 Indian Removal Act, which forced Native peoples from their homelands.

2 Reformers also argued over what kind of people a republic should be. The Second Great Awakening encouraged many Protestants to believe that individuals could change themselves and society. Abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass used speeches and newspapers to demand an end to slavery, challenging the nation's claim to value liberty. Horace Mann urged public schools to prepare children for citizenship. These efforts spread shared ideals across state lines, even as fierce disagreements revealed that Americans did not agree on who deserved freedom.

3 Artists and writers gave those arguments a recognizable American setting. Hudson River School painters portrayed dramatic landscapes, inviting viewers to imagine a nation with a distinctive natural character. In essays, Ralph Waldo Emerson urged people to trust their own judgment, a message that appealed to readers seeking independence from inherited authority. These works did not create one united identity. Instead, alongside elections and reform campaigns, they offered competing answers to a growing question: What should it mean to be American?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Jacksonian democracy expand political participation, and why was that expansion limited?

2. How did abolitionists challenge a national ideal described in the passage?

3. How could Horace Mann's school reform help create a national identity?

4. What different ideas about American identity did Hudson River School painters and Emerson offer?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label with a title and three sentences. Compare one political change with one cultural or reform effort from the passage, judge which did more to shape national identity, and name a group that this identity could leave out.

ANSWER KEY

Who Was America?

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two changes in political life, circle one limit on participation, and write 1 and 2 beside two ways reform or culture shaped ideas about the nation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Jacksonian democracy expand political participation, and why was that expansion limited?	**Many states ended property requirements for white male voters, but women could not vote and many free Black men were barred.**
2	How did abolitionists challenge a national ideal described in the passage?	**They demanded an end to slavery and challenged the nation's claim to value liberty.**
3	How could Horace Mann's school reform help create a national identity?	**Public schools could prepare children for citizenship and spread shared ideals across state lines.**
4	What different ideas about American identity did Hudson River School painters and Emerson offer?	**The painters emphasized a distinctive American landscape; Emerson emphasized independent judgment.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Who Gets to Picture America?
Party organizers brought more eligible voters into public debate, while Hudson River School paintings offered a shared image of the land. The paintings may have shaped national identity more broadly because people could encounter that image beyond election campaigns. Yet this image could hide the forced removal of Native peoples from the land it celebrated.

Accept other supported comparisons and judgments. The label should explain a connection to national identity and identify an exclusion supported by the passage.