

Work, Wealth, Power

Assess how different groups built the U.S. economy and shared its rewards.

SS.8.E.2.3 "Assess the role of Africans and other minority groups in the economic development of the United States."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each example of work, skills, or knowledge that helped the economy grow. Circle each phrase that shows who gained wealth or faced limits, then use your marks to assess whether the benefits were shared fairly.

Building an Economy, Unequal Rewards

- ① From the colonial era through the Civil War, enslaved Africans and their descendants supplied forced labor on tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton plantations. Their knowledge of rice growing helped Lowcountry planters build a profitable export trade. Cotton picked by enslaved workers fed textile mills in the United States and Britain. Plantation profits enriched owners, merchants, banks, and shipping companies. This growth came through violence and stolen labor, not equal opportunity or fair wages. African Americans created wealth while being denied control over much of it.
- ② During the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants became essential workers on the western part of the transcontinental railroad. Railroad companies hired them for dangerous jobs, including blasting tunnels and laying track through the Sierra Nevada. The completed railroad lowered travel time and moved goods between western farms, mines, and eastern markets. Chinese workers received lower pay than many white workers and faced discrimination. Congress later passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, limiting Chinese immigration. Their labor helped build a transportation system that supported national trade and settlement.
- ③ Indigenous peoples shaped regional economies long before the United States existed and continued to contribute afterward. They developed farming methods, trade networks, and knowledge of local lands that settlers often used. In the Southwest, Mexican American ranchers, farmers, and laborers supported cattle, agriculture, and trade after the U.S. gained that region in 1848. Yet land loss, unequal laws, and discrimination limited both groups' economic choices. To assess economic development, ask two questions: What work or knowledge did a group provide, and who gained the wealth and power?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

- 1** How did enslaved African Americans help connect plantation agriculture to the wider economy? Include one product and one type of business that gained from it.

- 2** Explain how Chinese immigrant labor on the transcontinental railroad supported economic development.

- 3** Compare the economic treatment of enslaved African Americans and Chinese railroad workers. What unfair condition did each group face?

- 4** For Mexican Americans, name one contribution to the regional economy and one limit on economic choices.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a 4-5 sentence assessment comparing the economic role of two groups from the passage. Include a contribution from each group, a limit or unfair condition, and an explanation of who received most of the wealth or power.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each example of work, skills, or knowledge that helped the economy grow. Circle each phrase that shows who gained wealth or faced limits, then use your marks to assess whether the benefits were shared fairly. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did enslaved African Americans help connect plantation agriculture to the wider economy? Include one product and one type of business that gained from it.	They produced crops such as cotton, which supplied textile mills. Plantation profits also enriched merchants, banks, and shipping companies.
2	Explain how Chinese immigrant labor on the transcontinental railroad supported economic development.	Chinese workers built the western railroad, which lowered travel time and moved goods between western farms and mines and eastern markets.
3	Compare the economic treatment of enslaved African Americans and Chinese railroad workers. What unfair condition did each group face?	Enslaved African Americans were forced to work and denied control over much of the wealth they created. Chinese workers were paid less than many white workers and faced discrimination.
4	For Mexican Americans, name one contribution to the regional economy and one limit on economic choices.	Mexican American ranchers, farmers, and laborers supported cattle, agriculture, and trade. Land loss, unequal laws, and discrimination limited their choices.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Enslaved African Americans and Chinese immigrants both strengthened the United States economy, but they did not receive equal rewards. Enslaved workers produced cotton that supplied mills and enriched businesses, while Chinese workers built railroad tracks that carried goods to markets. Both groups faced unfair treatment, including stolen labor or lower pay. Their work expanded trade, yet much of the wealth and power went to owners and companies.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations that connect a group's labor or knowledge to economic growth and identify unequal access to wages, land, wealth, or power. For the open response, require two groups, accurate contributions, an unfair condition, and a reasoned statement about who benefited.