The Significance of the Frontier

Discuss the significance of the frontier in American History. In your discussion, you must give an example of both the landed and industrial frontiers. Also discuss the Germ theory, Americanization by mixture, and ethnicity as a means of developing an identity in today’s society.

Concept # 1 Discuss and demonstrate the Big Six values that developed in the frontier.

A. The frontier was not so much a section of the country as it was a state of mind for the American people. It produced a new set of values which reinforced the worth of the individual within society.

B. The state of mind represents American values and attitudes which came out of America's experience on the frontier. There are SIX major values that came out of this experience:

1. **Opportunity = frontier.** Up until 1890, the frontier was mostly landed, which gave opportunity to those who had the will and ability to survive.

2. **Social Mobility.** The frontier gave people the opportunity to change class. Our society encourages people to make this change if they HAVE THE ABILITY. THIS IS WHAT MADE THE UNITED STATES UNIQUE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE CLASS HAS BEEN THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT.

3. **Social Darwinism.** Is having the ability to adjust to the environment; survival of the fittest. To survive in the frontier one needed the ability to physically adjust to the harshness of the environment whether that is the landed frontier or the business opportunities of the industrial frontier.

4. **Pragmatism (practical).** To adjust to the environment you have to be practical, flexible, do what works, etc.

5. **Rugged Individual.** The rugged individual or a self made man was self reliant and had the inner strength that allowed him to survive.
6. **Laissez Faire.** In the landed frontier there was no structured society to regulate or protect the individual. Thus, with the available land there was opportunity for those rugged individuals who were pragmatic enough to adjust to the environment.

**Concept #2** Discuss the two types of frontiers and the patterns found in each frontier.

1. The landed frontier 1600's-1890

2. Industrial frontier
   a. Primary
   b. Secondary

**Concept #3** What makes the development of American institutions and values unique and what is an American.

1. Discuss the evolutionary development of our political, economic and social institutions from simple to complex.

2. Discuss Frederick Nietzsche: How the relative values which support the position of the ruling aristocracies are made into absolute values by the ruling aristocracies during the formative periods in their society's development.

3. John Adams–Hearts and minds of the American Revolution. Its important to keep in mind that the American Revolution is a PROCESS where by European institutions and people interact with the American environment to produce new values and new ways of redefining old values.

4. The American war for independence was fought to preserve what the American Revolution as a process completed by 1776.

5. American IDEALISM developed by 1776.

6. Dr. Ben Rush—described the American Revolution process as the FIRST ACT. He expanded upon the Revolution process and said the SECOND ACT was carrying out what the FIRST ACT had created.

   A. American Idealism is not a reality for most people in 1776.

   B. The SECOND ACT moves society towards making the Idealism a reality.
7. The defining ideologies of the American system are freedom, opportunity, and social mobility.

8. For FDR Americanism are a matter of the MIND and HEART—loyalty to country and our creed of liberty and Democracy.


10. **American values are unique because** anyone can enjoy them.

11. Idealism is not based on everyone being socially or economically equal, BUT on the fact they have the opportunity for social mobility and success.

**Concept #4** Discuss ethnicity as a means of developing an identity in today’s society.

1. **Two Theories:**
   A. Germ theory
   B. Americanization by mixture

2. The Germ theory—American is land of opportunity, thus they want to bring their old culture values to America and plant seeds—they will live a better life and their life style and cultural values will remain the same.

3. Thus, our early history is one of European institutions developing in an American environment.

4. **Our current history is quite different as the CHART on IMMIGRATION we used in class demonstrated.** Today 50% Latin / 35% Asian.

5. Germ theory failed—THUS Americanization by mixture develops. In the extra credit film *This is America* Elaine Chad from the Peace Corp explains:
   (1) *You don’t have to sacrifice your identity to be an American.*
   (2) *However; trying to maintain your culture heritage is very hard, because Americanization by mixture sets in:* Elaine Chad—a Taiwanese American who was Director of the Peace Corp.

   Elaine states: “The longer I’m here the further I go from my own culture—and sometimes I wonder if I can ever go back.”

   But again the closing theme is: “America says yes I can!” America represents: freedom, opportunity, and a chance for a better life. **Thus the uniqueness of American institutions and values.**
6. Up until the late 1980's Americanization by Mixture has been the dominate theme; but since then and up to present their has been an emphasis by many minorities on ethnicity as the defining element of identity in America

7. The question you must answer is: **What should be the defining element of American society – ethnicity or American ideology?**

   
   A. True curse of racism was the great failure of the American melting pot experiment.
   
   B. Cult of ethnicity has arisen by people of color to denounce the idea of the melting pot.
   
   C. Positive aspects to the eruption of ethnicity has Schlesinger calls it:
      
      1. Overdue recognition of achievements of minorities.
      
      2. American education is expanding the mind of students.

   **Summary**

   D. U.S. solution– was to create a new national identity – the point of America was NOT to **preserve old cultures** BUT to create a **new one**.
   
   E. Multiculture dogma abandons historic purpose – replacing assimilation by fragmentation.
   
   F. Education is an area of great dispute. The debate about curriculum is a debate about what it means to be an American – militants of ethnicity contend that the main objective of public education should be to perpetuate ethnic origins and identities. However, separation nourishes prejudices. This raises the question; Should we have classes taught in English only? What do you think?
   
   G. Ethnic gospel rejects unifying vision of all nations melted into a new race. Its underlying philosophy is that American is a nation of group and that ethnicity is the defining experience.
In SUMMARY; What is an America-- America represents a set of values which has allowed the most diverse culture in the history of the world to develop.

While other countries have wars over religion and between ethnic groups we have debate and some conflict that at times has seemed like war, but nothing like what is found in other countries around the world.

Diversity has developed because America’s values have attracted people from around the world and make them want to be a part of our unique culture. The answer however, to the final question is yours.