

Name _____

Period _____ Date _____

A.M.D.G.

American History 8 – Mr. Ruppert
Introductory Assignment (20 points)

Assignment Instructions:

The title of the essay you will read is “Bridging the Past and Present.” It is about the incredible and fascinating story behind the building of the Brooklyn Bridge in the late 1800s. The story is also used to illustrate several reasons why it is important and interesting to study American History as a whole. You will use the knowledge you gain from reading this essay to construct a 1 to 1 ½ page essay. This essay will have two parts, each approximately ½ to ¾ page long.

Part A: In your own words, use key points from the article and any others you can come up with on your own to answer the following question: “Why Study American History?”

Part B: In your own words, write a reflective response entitled “What History Means to Me.” You may also use the attached award winning essay of that same title to give you some ideas of what shape your essay may take.

THIS ESSAY MUST BE TYPED. PUT FORTH YOUR BEST EFFORT...AS I PROMISE THIS PIECE OF WRITING WILL, IF DONE WELL, COME IN HANDY BIGTIME AT THE END OF THE YEAR.



Bridging Past and Present

The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge between 1869 and 1883 is one of America's great stories. The story of this bridge also tells us a lot about the subject of history and why this subject is so fascinating and important.



Because other, shorter suspension bridges had failed before the Brooklyn Bridge was begun, the outcome of this project remained in doubt until its completion. Two engineers check the progress of the bridge's construction in 1881 (above), and workers cut and tie cables in 1882 (right).

HISTORY IS FULL OF UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

John A. Roebling designed the Brooklyn Bridge and began its construction. He never knew the results of his effort, however. At the very beginning of the construction in 1869, a boat crushed his foot, and two weeks later he died from tetanus.

John Roebling's unfortunate story illustrates something about history that we may overlook. We know what John Roebling never knew—that his plan succeeded and that the Brooklyn Bridge still stands today. When we read about the events of the past, we can easily forget that the participants in the drama did not know how things would turn out. They had no more idea about the outcome of events than you now have about the outcome of today's events.

HISTORY REVEALS THE CAUSES OF EVENTS

People knew they needed a bridge to connect Manhattan Island with Brooklyn for more than half a century. Why was the bridge not begun until 1869, and why was it begun by John Roebling? History does not always give one sure answer about how and why an event took place. But historians can tell us about important earlier incidents that led to the event.

The East River, which the Brooklyn Bridge would eventually cross, flows swiftly and runs deep. The river served as a major route

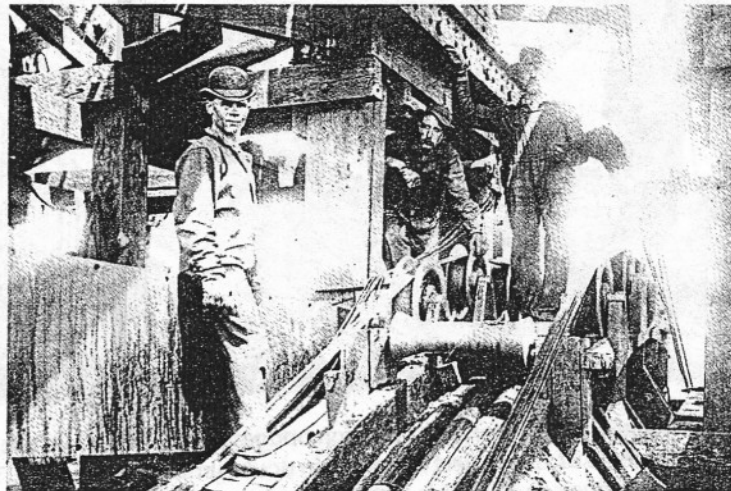
for large ocean-going ships and could not be blocked with a low bridge. The best type of bridge to span this river would be a suspension bridge, and it had to be almost 1,600 feet long. No one had ever constructed a long-span suspension bridge until John Roebling built one in 1846 across the Ohio River at Wheeling, West Virginia. The bridge that made him famous and captured the public's imagination, however, was the one that stretched more than 1,000 feet across Niagara Falls.

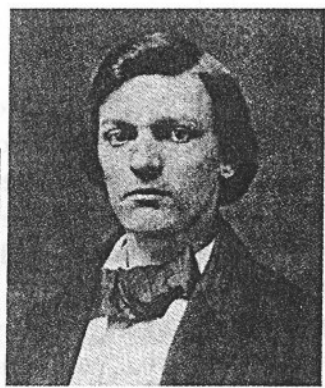
Roebling's technical success was not the only reason the Brooklyn Bridge got built when it did. Residents of Manhattan had used ferry boats to travel back and forth between Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Although traveling by ferry took much longer than crossing a bridge, a bridge would cost the taxpayers more money than they wished to invest. In the winter of 1866 to 1867, however, the cold weather halted ferry service and isolated Manhattan. The residents now were ready to pay for their bridge.

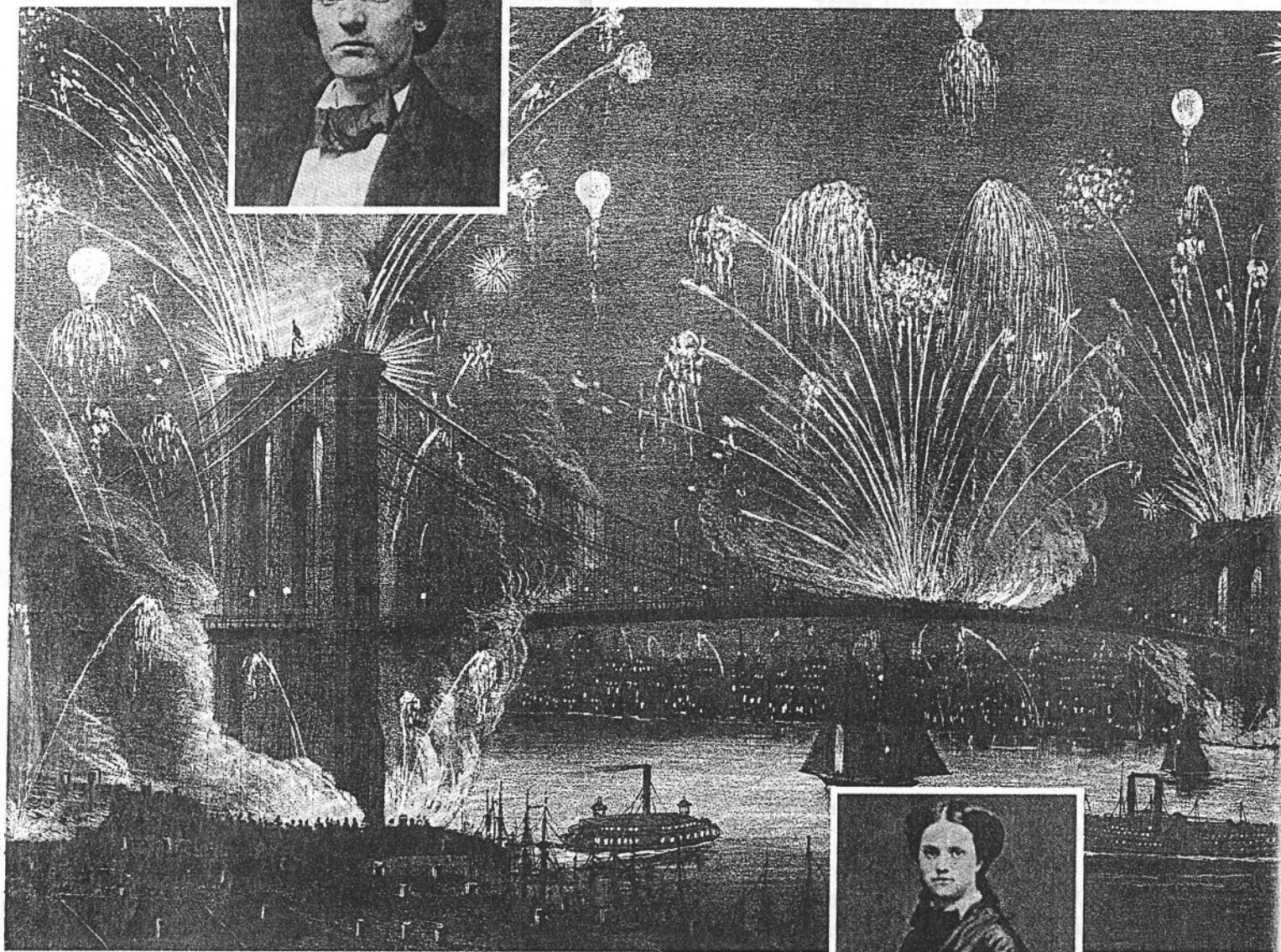


John A. Roebling





Fireworks mark the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge on May 24, 1883 (below). The bridge, which was completed by Washington Roebling (inset) after his father's death, marked a turning point in history. It began an era of bridge building that greatly improved transportation in the United States.



History reveals that many key events of the past have had a lasting impact on the present.



Emily Roebling, Washington Roebling's wife, carried his instructions to work crews at the bridge when an accident disabled Washington.

HISTORY MIGHT NOT HAVE HAPPENED THIS WAY

What happened when John Roebling died only a few weeks after beginning the bridge? Was only one outcome possible? When you turn the pages of a history book, you may feel that historical events were destined to turn out a certain way; in other words, history had to have happened the way that it did. But, if people had made different decisions and taken different actions, history might not have happened that way. Historians examine the options people had and the reasons they chose a certain path. From the study of history, we learn that many individuals, making personal choices and selecting among options, determine the course of events.

With the sudden death of the most-respected bridge builder of the time, the fate of the bridge—which many doubted could be built—was in question. The project might have been abandoned, or the corrupt political leader of New York, Boss Tweed, might have put one of his cronies in charge. Instead, John Roebling's son, Washington Roebling, carried on after his father's death.

Washington Roebling proved an able successor to his father, although an 1872 accident disabled him physically. Washington Roebling spent the last eleven years of the project confined to his apartment in a wheelchair. He watched the progress of the construction through his apartment window, while his wife, Emily Roebling, carried his instructions to the work crews at the bridge.

HISTORY IS EVERYONE'S STORY

The Roeblings did not build the bridge alone. The muscle, sweat, and skill of hundreds of

laborers, many of them foreign born, were crucial. These workers toiled under hard and dangerous conditions. Some died in the process. Bankers and financiers, together with national and city politicians, also played major roles in building the bridge.

Historians, however, cannot tell everyone's story. They must focus on the people and events they feel are most important. Some historians choose to tell the story of a few famous people—political, military, and industrial leaders. *America: Pathways to the Present* chooses instead to weave the stories of ordinary women and men from many backgrounds and occupations together with the stories of the famous.

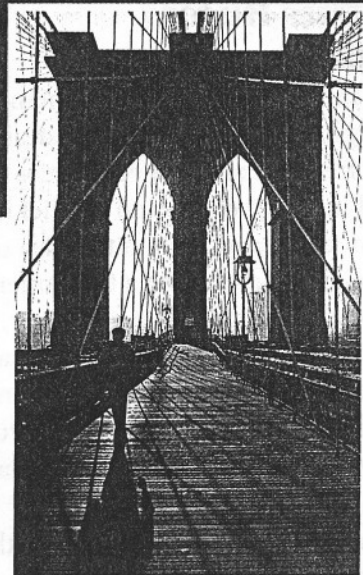
HISTORY HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT

The building of the Brooklyn Bridge was a turning point in history. Its success led to a boom in bridge building that made the crossing of major waterways a casual, everyday event throughout the country. The Brooklyn Bridge is an important path to the present, but it is only one of many events that, when studied historically, can lead us to a better understanding of the United States today. History reveals that many key events of the past have had a lasting impact on the present.

Obviously, most of the people you will read about in this book died long ago. As a result, their dreams and actions may seem remote to you. But the people of the past once walked and talked, hoped and dreamed, cried and laughed like you. And many of the things they did—from the bridges they built to the games they played—still affect us today.



*To understand who you are,
you first have to know
about those people whose
beliefs and experiences
shaped your life.*



The Brooklyn Bridge (in the foreground above and in the inset) remains an important part of the life of New Yorkers today.

THE PAST IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PRESENT

Studying the past is like studying a foreign country; the people there often do things differently from us. In America's past, its people sometimes did things quite differently than we do today. For example, Americans once had a very different view of what *equality* meant.

When historians examine our country's past, they focus on the realities of people's lives at that time. They try to help us understand why people in the past made the choices they did. History is not always pleasant or uplifting. The stories of the past do not always have happy endings. Sometimes they are very violent and disturbing.

We need to be honest about these events, and also to try to understand them and assess their meaning. Your job as a history student is to make a connection with them, to find out what you do and do not share with them and to engage them in conversation as a means of gaining a better understanding of both them and yourself.

UNITED STATES HISTORY SHOWS THEMES

As we study the past, we see certain themes of history emerging. Among them are a desire for personal freedom and respect for the dignity of all human beings, and a belief in political democracy and faith in the idea of self-government. There is also a fundamental notion of social equality, and faith in our ability to improve our environment so that as many people as possible can enjoy a decent standard of living. These themes, which run throughout this book, are described on pages 8 and 9.

Disagreements about how to balance these themes provide much of the energy of

American history. Americans agree that liberty is an important goal, but they also believe that it should be balanced with the need for social order. Americans know that the two goals of liberty and order constantly clash, but that each is important to the success of the other. Similarly, how do we balance the need for change with the need for stability? How do we balance economic growth with the need to preserve the environment? How can we share the benefits of prosperity with everyone without reducing the standard of living for many?

WHY STUDY HISTORY?

Knowing about the past can help you understand the present. You know this from personal experience. To understand who you are, you first have to know about those people whose beliefs and experiences shaped your life.

Studying history also keeps the memory of these people and their experiences alive. Learning the history of the nation is like learning the history of a family. Historians feel a sense of obligation to the people who came before. Studying history is their way of saying, we remember you, as we hope people will remember us.

History reminds us of the continuity of the human experience. We may dismiss the past as irrelevant, to conclude that dead people and past events have little to do with us. But that would be a mistake. The present is linked to the past. History is not about memorizing a series of dates and events; it is an active, imaginative journey during which you share experiences with people from the past. These people may speak, think, and dress differently from you, but they still share universal concerns and a wish for a better future. To study history is in a very real sense to participate in history itself.

What History Means to Me

by Tushar Khanna



Vision is perception. When I look at an object, whether it is a rock, statue, or book, I do not just see it. I see the whole picture, the transparent image with its history glowing inside. The object's history is what gives the object life, value and meaning. So when I look at the American flag, I do not just see colorfully stitched cloth. I see the existence of the United States of America, all the hardships it has overcome and accomplishments, and the battle cry of glorious America. That's what history means to me, an understanding of the future through the vision of the present and past.

When I look at the Constitution, I see the images inside of delegates' months of work that was put into making it. I see the faces of the framers of the Constitution, who wanted to make it perfect. I see all the people who fought for the twenty-seven amendments.

When I look at a voting ballot, I see the images of women smiling for joy because they can vote due to the expanded suffrage. I see the hard work of the previous forty-two Presidents. And most of all, I see the Constitution.

I don't see a lot of "real" things, since I live near a farm in a small community in New Jersey. But when I am walking on a nearby street, and I see the railroad tracks, I see the moments in time when Congress first authorized the construction of railroads in the early 1800s. When I walk past the harbor, I see images of all harbors. I see Charleston Harbor (home of Fort Sumter), the location of the first battle of the Civil War, the war between the north and south that when finished, united our country.

I look beyond the horizon, and I see a ship coming in. But I don't see a ship; instead I see the frightful occurrences of Germans sinking U.S. ships and attacking, which forces us to enter World War I. But in the end it did strengthen us by making us a world power.

As I walk away from the harbor, I see a dollar bill on the ground. What I see glowing inside it is the past horror of the stock market crash of 1929, causing the Great Depression. I decided not to take it because it's not mine.

AHH! I breathe the fresh air. I look at the clouds, but it's not the clouds I see! I see the image of a humongous mushroom cloud, one that formed due to the atomic bombs the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan to make them surrender in World War II. That was a very glorious moment since the U.S. did win the war, but an even more distressful moment since so many people died.

History is all around us. Wherever you look, there's history. History is what makes up all things and everything important about them. Without history, they would all just be dust in the air. So when I look in the mirror, I see the events, values, and memories of my entire life reflected back through the mirror in one single image.