

Exercise 1

Understanding the Test Writer

Imagine that you are an MCAT writer. As a generative exercise for creating the Verbal Reasoning section, read the passage below and review the questions which follow concerning the passage. Write one correct answer and one incorrect answer for each question. Try to make the incorrect answer a tricky one.

With the panic of 1837 the mills were closed, thousands of unemployed workers were thrown upon private charity, and, in the long years of depression which followed, trade unionism suffered a temporary eclipse. It was a period of social unrest in which all sorts of philanthropic reforms were suggested and tried out. Measured by later events, it was a period of transition, of social awakening, of aspiration tempered by the bitter experience of failure.

In the previous decade Robert Owen, the distinguished English social reformer and philanthropist, had visited America, and had begun in 1826 his famous colony at New Harmony, Indiana. His experiments at New Lanark, in England, had already made him known to working people the world over. Whatever may be said of his quaint attempts to reduce society to a common denominator, it is certain that his arrival in America, at a time when people's minds were open to all sorts of economic suggestions, had a stimulating effect upon labor reforms and led, in the course of time, to the founding of some forty communistic colonies, most of them in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform," wrote Emerson to Thomas Carlyle; "not a reading man but has the draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket." One of these experiments, at Red Bank, New Jersey, lasted for thirteen years, and another, in Wisconsin, for six years. But most of them after a year or two gave up the struggle.

Of these failures, the best known is Brook Farm, an intellectual community founded in 1841 by George Ripley at West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Six years later the project was abandoned and is now remembered as an example of the futility of trying to leaven a world of realism by means of an atom of transcendental idealism. In a sense, however, Brook Farm typifies this period of transition. It was a time of vagaries and longings. People seemed to be conscious of the fact that a new social solidarity was dawning. It is not strange, therefore, that--while the railroads were feeling their way from town to town and across the prairies, while water-power and steam-power were multiplying man's productivity, indicating that the old days were gone forever-- many curious dreams of a new order of things should be dreamed, nor that among them some should be ridiculous, some fantastic, and some

unworthy, nor that, as the futility of a universal social reform forced itself upon the dreamers, they merged the greater in the lesser, the general in the particular, and sought an outlet in espousing some specific cause or attacking some particular evil.

Those movements which had their inspiration in a genuine humanitarianism achieved great good. Now for the first time the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the insane were made the object of social solicitude and communal care. The criminal, too, and the jail in which he was confined remained no longer utterly neglected. Men of the debtor class were freed from that medieval barbarism which gave the creditor the right to levy on the person of his debtor. Even the public schools were dragged out of their lethargy. When Horace Mann was appointed secretary of the newly created Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837, a new day dawned for American public schools.

from *The Armies of Labor*, Samuel P. Orth. (1919)



Review the following questions concerning the above passage. Write one best and one second best (incorrect) answer.

How does the author characterize the track-record of experimental communities in early to mid nineteenth century America?

Which of the following best characterizes the author's opinion of idealism as it relates to social reform?

What role does the author suggest that rapid technological progress played in stimulating social reform in the 1830s?

Which of the following best summarizes the author's point of view regarding the state of society in the years immediately following the panic of 1837?

