

Topic: Westward Expansion – Analyzing Data

Historical Thinking Skill Assessed: Critical Reading

Grade Level: Middle

Using the Item: The question assesses students' ability to critically read data in a table to identify historical trends.

Background: The data below was drawn from the United States decennial census. The United States Constitution orders that a census be taken every ten years for apportioning representatives to Congress among the states; however, the census is also an important tool for historians. An analysis of census data can identify important trends in population growth and distribution. The U.S. Census Bureau reports information by geographic regions, economic indicators, racial and ethnic groupings, etc. The data presented in the table below, drawn from U.S. Census Records, shows a westward movement in the distribution of the U.S. population between 1820 and 1860, as well as an overall growth during that time.

Table of United States Population by Region: 1820-1860

Year	Total U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West
1820	9,638,453	4,359,916 (45%)	4,419,232 (46%)	859,305 (9%)	
1840	17,063,353	6,761,082 (39%)	6,950,729 (41%)	3,351,542 (20%)	
1860	31,443,321	10,594,268 (34%)	11,133,361 (35%)	9,096,716 (29%)	618,976 (2%)

Source: United States Census: 1790-1990. Accessed 6/29/14. <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/table-16.pdf>

Based on your analysis of the data what historical concept best explains the changes in U.S. population distribution between the years 1820 and 1860?

- A. Immigration (2)
- B. Expansionism (4)**
- C. Sectionalism (1)
- D. Urbanization

Explanation: Answer B is the correct answer; expansionism can explain the westward shift of population and is also accurate to the time period noted. Answer A is not entirely invalid, as the increase in total U.S. population is attributable in large part to immigration. However, immigration does not explain the shift in population among the regions. Although sectionalism ("C") could be suggested, the data focuses on population trends, not specific social, cultural, or political differences among the regions. The item provides specific dates (1820-1860), which would automatically rule out colonialism ("D"). Answer D, urbanization, is entirely invalid. The table provides no information about the distribution of population within the regions among urban and rural areas, and the table actually indicates a shift in population away from the more urban Northeast toward the almost entirely rural Midwest and West.

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Direction: Analyze the data in the table below, and circle the response that best answers the question.

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