DESTINY OF THE REPUBLIC TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS

American canals — An important piece of American infrastructure for transporting cargo between cities before railroads replaced them.

American prisons — Both a physical structure and social institution of the justice system used for incarcerating those accused or convicted of a crime.

Antisepsis/sterilization in medicine — Measures taken to protect the patient from infection by inhibiting the growth of microorganisms through the sterilization of medical personnel, instruments, and surroundings.

Battle of Little Bighorn — In 1876, allied Lakota and Cheyenne warriors under Sitting Bull decimated the 7th U.S. Cavalry under Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer on the Little Bighorn River in Montana.

Chester A. Arthur — The Vice President under Garfield who later became the 21st President of the United States upon Garfield’s assassination.

Chicago fire — One of the most famous urban disasters in U.S. history; much of downtown Chicago burned in 1871.

Childhood mortality — A term to describe and track the rate of death for children in the modern era due to unsanitary conditions and illnesses such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis, cholera, smallpox and diphtheria.

Civil service reform — The legislative reform of mandating that applicants demonstrate their competence for a non-elective federal post; this was intended to extinguish the “spoils system” whereby a victorious political party rewarded its supporters with appointment to public office regardless of qualifications.

Crédit Mobilier railroad scandal — A fraudulent railroad construction company set up by the Union Pacific half of the transcontinental railroad.

Election of 1876 — An election in which the electoral votes of three states were contested and a congressional commission had to decide that the Republican candidate won.

First ladies — Wives of the Presidents of the United States.
Garfield’s religious heritage — Garfield was a lifelong active member of an American Protestant tradition that began as an anti-denominational and anti-creedal movement. Known as the Stone-Campbell Movement, Garfield’s particular affiliation was with that part of the movement that became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Homeopathy — A system of treatment based on the idea that substances that produce symptoms of sickness in healthy people will have a healing effect when given in diluted quantities to those who exhibit those same symptoms.

Insanity defense — When a lawyer defends a person accused of a crime, using the argument of insanity or not being in a right mind when the crime occurred.

Key inventions of the Gilded Age — The work of Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Alva Edison, and others made the United States a cauldron of major technological innovation during the Gilded Age.

Malaria & the miasma theory — The tropical disease malaria was originally thought to be spread by miasma, a poisonous vapor believed to cause disease.

Mental illness — A broad term used to describe disorders of thought, mood, and behavior that impair normal functioning, social relationships, and productivity.

Nominating conventions of the Gilded Age — Before the Civil War, national conventions to nominate presidential candidates became the standard way for U.S. political parties to operate. Primaries, though, were a 20th-century innovation.

Oneida community — An intentional “utopian” American community meant to exemplify a society where religious ideals were part of everyday life, all members were equal, and property and families were shared.

Reconstruction & the Freedmen’s Bureau — This federal bureau—a point of contention between President Johnson and Congress—was a key part of Reconstruction efforts to provide medical care and education to freed slaves, along with integrating them into America’s economy. The bureau was arguably the first federal welfare program and also the first federal civil rights institution.


Women in medicine — How women practiced medicine as nurses, midwives, homeopaths, and physicians in the late 1800s.