Possible 4th Grade Topics

I. Mexican Land Grants

In the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo the United States confirmed that it would honor Spanish and Mexican land grants held by *californios*. These *ranchos* became more valuable in the next few years as the gold rush to California inflated land values and raised cattle prices. At the same time the increase in California's population also brought squatters who began to encroach and lay claim to the californio's large holdings. In 1851 the U.S. Federal Land Act required that californios prove their titles to the ranches in court. Because of their large size and sometimes vague boundaries, these titles were difficult to prove. The legal costs of these court cases and of defending land from squatters ate away at these large estates. The Rancho San Antonio, originally 19,000 acres, was one such estate, which by the end of the nineteenth century had been reduced to a few dozen acres. The Peralta House, sitting at what is considered to be the birthplace of Oakland, sits on the site of what was once the Rancho San Antonio.

- How does land ownership change in a changing economy?
- How have different groups benefited from owning land?
- Who owned land before California became a state?
- How did this land ownership shape California's economic development?

  <u>Possible sources</u>
  - Bancroft digital collection of maps to rancho title claims
  - Resources of the Peralta Hacienda House historical site

II. Who Made Money during the California Gold Rush?—Mining the Miners

Although the gold in the California hills seemed to promise endless riches to the prospectors who traveled there in 1849 and into the 1850s, for most this dream never became a reality. While a lucky few struck it rich, others like John Sutter or James W. Marshall, who first discovered gold in the California hills, died poor. Instead of prospecting for gold for themselves, many miners ended up working for wages for larger, more intensive mining companies. Samuel Brannan, who publicized the discovery of gold, however, grew rich off of the miners themselves. His supply store averaged $5,000 a day (that's roughly $120,000 a day in today's currency) selling supplies to miners in the early days of the gold rush. Others, such as the family of Levi Strauss, and eventually Strauss himself, also made big profits as suppliers.

- How did supply and demand work at the outposts of the United States' economy?

- How did entrepreneurs and boosters shape the gold rush?
- How much gold was found? Who found it? What was it worth?

Possible sources
- Gold production data
- Biographical material about entrepreneurs
- Testimony from miners who failed to find gold

III. Slavery and Freedom in California

The adoption of an antislavery state constitution in California in 1849 made it seem as though California would be a free state. Yet slavery continued in California until the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1852 there were at least 300 slaves working in the gold fields and an unknown additional number working as slaves in California's newly-flourishing cities. Many white miners were threatened by slaves working in the goldfields because they worried that they could not compete with prospectors who employed slave labor. Other opposition to the persistence of slavery in California came from the community of free blacks in the cities, where black merchants and entrepreneurs who were making money off of the gold rush themselves, rallied their resources to fight court cases and print literature in support of black rights and freedom in the state.

- What were the economic motivations for the persistence of slavery on the frontier?
- How were African-Americans part of the gold rush economy?

Possible sources
- *Mirror of the Times*
- Autobiography of Mary Pleasant
- Archy Lee case
- 1849 debates about the state constitution

Related: the Foreign Miner's Tax

At the outset of the early 1850s, Chinese immigration was welcomed in California as a source of much-needed labor. By May of 1852 the California Assembly had recommended the enactment of a foreign miner's license tax, which targeted Chinese immigrants and soon went into effect. This tax collected $3 a month "from every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen."[1] Chinese immigrants may have desired to become citizens, but were ineligible for naturalization, and were required to pay the tax. During the years this tax was in effect, from 1852 until 1870, California collected $5 million from Chinese miners, which provided from 25 to 50% of the state's

[1] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, (Little, Brown: Boston, 1998), 82.

revenue during these years. Another act passed in 1855 charged shipmasters $50 for each passenger they carried to California who was ineligible for citizenship.

- What is the relationship between nativism and economics?
- How have taxes been used for different purposes in American history?

IV. Where does money come from?
With all of the financial upheavals and fluctuating prices in our economy recently, it's difficult to know just how much a dollar is worth or how much it will be worth in the future. But when he hold a dollar bill in our hands we can be reasonably certain that it is, in fact, a dollar. This was not the case in the years following the American Revolution up to the outbreak of the Civil War. This was a time when private banks, some of dubious reputability, were issuing money and no the federal government. Under state corporate charters banks and sometimes railroads, insurance companies, and canal companies would design and print paper money. If brought back to the issuing institution, these paper slips could, in theory, be redeemed for gold or silver coin. With so many banks issuing money it was hard to know which notes were real and which notes came from a bank that would actually be able to redeem them. Counterfeits and counterfeiters abounded and because there was not enough gold or silver in circulation to meet the demand for money, far more notes were printed than could ever be redeemed, setting the stage for financial panics.

- What is money?
- Why does the government print money?
- Where does money's value come from?

Related: The San Francisco Mint
Established in 1852 and opened in 1854 to meet the tremendous demand from the Gold Rush, the San Francisco mint produced over $4 million in gold pieces during its first year in operation.

- Why was there such a tremendous demand? Why didn't miners use gold as money?
- Why couldn't they use the mint in Philadelphia?

V. Large-scale Farming in California

Agribusiness has a long history in California. As California was transformed by the new economies of the gold rush it continued to be transformed after the gold rush by the rise of large scale farming from 1860 to 1880. During these years it was wheat—not artichokes, avocados, and almonds—that were grown in the bonanza farms of California's Central Valley. This wheat was so prized by the British that it was shipped all of the way around South America directly to Liverpool, where it received top dollar prices. Another large-scale farming venture in the late-nineteenth century was the cattle ranching firm of Miller & Lux, which applied industrial business methods to run their extensive system of ranches. They were, in the words of historian David Igler, "Industrial Cowboys." Studying large-scale farming in California provides an opportunity to study the labor system that supported it and how the economic demands of these "factories in the fields" shaped immigration and labor on the West coast.

- What were the precedents for the concentration of land ownership in California's history?
- What advances in technology encouraged the rise of large-scale farming in California?

<u>Possible sources</u>

- Digital holdings of the Bancroft's Miller & Lux collection
- Farm journals
- Testimony from immigrant laborers
- Maps and data on land ownership

Possible 5th Grade Topics

I. Boycotts in the Colonies

In response to the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties, American colonists began to unite and call for the non-importation and eventually the non-consumption of British goods. This strategy was intended to upset how the colonial marketplace was supposed to work, with colonies exporting raw materials to Britain and importing British manufactured goods and luxury items. Through the boycotts colonists came to "appreciate that their own economic dependence could be effectively translated into organized resistance."[2] This was the first mass political boycott and as historian T.H. Breen notes, "a brilliantly original American invention."[3] Studying these boycotts provides a way of understanding the relationship between imperial and colonial economies and the significance of everyday economic decisions made by consumers to the success of resistance in the American colonies. It also offers an opportunity to study women's roles as active participants in and enforcers of the boycotts as they choose what to buy and where to shop based which merchants adhered to non-importation strictures. By making these choices and by spinning their own cloth, homespun, instead of buying British textiles, the women of the American Revolution began to form a political identity through their role in the colonial economy.

- How was trade an important part of Britain's relationship to the colonies?
- Who were the different participants in the colonial economy? Did they all support the boycotts?
- What made women so important to this economic form of protest?

Possible sources:

- Boycott propaganda
- Letters between key political figures
- Poems, songs, testimonies, and diaries of women involved in the boycotts

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[2] T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 197.
[3] Ibid., xvi.

II. The Proclamation of 1763—Did Indians Own Land?

After the bloody conflict of Pontiac's Uprising at the end of the Seven Year's War, the British government drew an imaginary line down the Appalachian Mountains: the Proclamation of 1763. Intended to protect Indian claims to land, prevent future conflicts between western settlers and Indians, and to regulate but not totally obstruct westward expansion, the Proclamation was part of a series of commitments made by the British to protect Indian land claims in the years leading up to the war's end. Most significantly, the Proclamation officially recognized that Indians did, in fact, have property rights that the British had an obligation to protect.[4] Were Indian claims to land the same as British claims to land? How was land ownership a part of Indian economies and how did different Indian economies work? In what ways did different understandings of land ownership and the relationship of the different economies of British settlers and Indians contribute to conflict in the colonies?

- What has ownership meant in the past?
- How has land been important to the development of different kinds of American economies?

  Possible sources
  - Indian and British maps
  - Indian and British treaties
  - Indian speeches (for example, from the Abenakis, or from Corn Tassel's speech)

III. Slavery in the West Indies, Profits in New England

Beginning in the 1640s and peaking in the 1760s and 1770s, New England ports and towns profited from trade with the West Indies. The early deforestation of islands in the West Indies to make way for sugar cane created a large demand for timber growing in New England. In addition to timber, the New England market provided much-needed barrels, shipping supplies, and corn to the sugar islands. In exchange for these items, New England traders brought sugar back to the North where it was distilled into rum. This rum was then traded in West Africa for slaves, who were then sold to the sugar plantations in the West Indies. This trade was conducted by mostly small firms, but one of the more prominent trading companies was Brown Brothers, the company which founded Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Because New England traders were buying the sugar they needed to distill rum from the West Indies and not directly from England, they were subject to a sugar tax, which they evaded by smuggling.

[4] Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 4.

In 1764, when British officials lowered the sugar tax but cracked down on smuggling, New England ports and towns responded with outrage.

- What were the differences and similarities between the economies of the New England and the West Indies and how were they interconnected?
- How did different regions participate in the slave economy?

<u>Possible sources:</u>

- Advertisements from New England city newspapers
- Mercantile data and correspondence

IV. The Economics of Slavery in the South

What makes an economy based on slave labor unique? These broad questions invite the study of a number of specific topics about the southern antebellum economy. Slaves represented both a source of labor and a major investment in the southern economy where the cash crop economies of tobacco, rice, cotton, and sugar dominated and encouraged the concentration of wealth among a small group of ruling elites. Questions about whether slavery was a capitalist institution and whether it was profitable have rankled historians for decades, but it might be more useful to ask how the demands of a cash crop economy intersected with the racial order in the South. How did the economics of slavery affect southerners who were neither slaves nor slaveholders? In addition, not all slaves worked on plantations; some worked in urban areas and some worked as a part of a hiring-out system, where slaveholders rented out the labor of their slaves and then collected their wages. How was slave labor in the cities and on small farms also a part of the Southern economy?

- Why was slavery used in the South instead of another labor system, indentured servitude or wage labor?
- How did intensive cash crop farming shape the southern economy and drive expansion into the Deep South?
- Who owned slaves?

<u>Possible sources</u>

- Slave and slaveholder narratives
- Slave letters
- Slave sale documents

V. The Price of Revolution—How did America pay for the Revolutionary War?

When the first Continental Congress met in 1774 it had no money, no treasury, no tax collectors, and no taxes to collect. How would the colonies finance an armed conflict against the British? Without the power to tax, the Continental Congress printed its own money, about $241,550,000 of it between 1775 and 1780.[5] They printed so much of this paper money, which was not backed by gold or silver, and its value became so inflated that the currency collapsed by 1779-80, inspiring the phrase, "not worth a continental." Another strategy of the American government was to seek loans from other foreign powers. The first loan from France was repaid in tobacco, but the next (and much larger) loans from France as well as from Spain and Holland were to be repaid in hard currency and with interest. The struggle of the states to repay this debt and the controversy over how it should be repaid was a central issue of the young republic, illustrating how fragile the economy of the rebellious colonies and early Republic was.

- What has been the role of public debt in American history? (What is public debt?)
- Who has paid for this debt?
- Who has owned this debt?

  Possible sources:
  - Treasury loan and state debt certificates
  - Articles of Confederation
  - Constitution

[5] William G. Anderson, *The Price of Liberty: The Public Debt of the American Revolution*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983).