Evaluate the extent to which the political and economic trends during the antebellum era (1820-1860) represented an expansion of democratic ideals analyzing what changed and what stayed the same from the period before the era to the period after.

Before the antebellum era, notables overwhelmed the government system. What was supposed to be a fair democracy by the people was run by a rich elite of American businessmen. However, due in part to movements caused by the Second Great Awakening like individualism and the wants for franchise, the people started to become more aware of American politics. When Pennsylvania and Maryland expanded franchise to all white male men, the expansion of the democratic ideals had begun. Before the antebellum period, politics and economics were controlled almost impartially while after, the middle class had grown, the economy had flourished, and common men like Andrew Jackson had begun to take office.

Before the antebellum, the middle class was small, but thriving still. Artisans like stone cutters and blacksmiths maintained almost all business. However, the antebellum put them into minority, having a new middle class rise of men who were factory managers or owner, farms, and other industrialists. As a result the cheaper appliances and products produced by the factories undersold the artisans, making many of them impoverished. The new middle class that took its place was much more ambitious though. Many strived to become industrial elite. For example, middle class families started to afford luxury items and sent their children to school in pursuit of a better life. From this class emerged an abundance of inventors and free thinkers that not only furthered society industrially, but also brought upon advancement through improvements in infrastructure and transportation.

In the Midwest, pre-antebellum trade with the northern cities were next to impossible. The roads and routes that had been built were full of holes and saturated with thieves and bandits. However Henry Clay’s installation of the American System changed much of that. Suddenly the government started building roads and canals that connected minor as well as major cities. With this innovation came the introduction of the steamboats, created by Robert Fulton, which allowed for the trade to move in two directions on a river. The Midwest suddenly had trains and roads that were government sanctioned that allowed the flow of trade more easily. This trade was supported by the new non-notable government.

The freedom that an increased franchise brought revolutionized the political landscape. No longer could wealthy elites buy their way into power. Now, they needed the supporter of the new voters, mostly poor people who had not benefited from many of the government's policies. As a result, candidates for president started to try and appeal to the “common man”. Politicians drank cider instead of wine, they developed nicknames, they supported popular beliefs, but not always the best beliefs. As a result, while it is argued that his inauguration may have been rigged, Andrew Jackson eventually became the president in 1832. As a popular president, he claimed almost absolute-like control in the name of the people. As a result his policies that came to follow reflected what he thought was the opinions of the common people, instead of that would maintain the nation's structure and economy. His policies were so disliked that they ended the “Era of Good Feelings” and the Whig Party was created. This party struggled at first, but then became popular when they used the same tactics Jackson did to get selected. In the Post Antebellum period, it was clear that the strive for freedom had come at some costs, but also revolutionized what the government stood for.

In pre Antebellum America, government was run by rich elites who held monopolies on many enterprises. When the Antebellum period occurred, the politicians became intellectual more common men, and competition of business sent economic profits through the rod. The Antebellum left a lasting effect of overall exposing Americans to more freedom both economically and politically.

- Clear, concise explanation of context and strong thesis addressing all parts of prompt
- Adequate, but not overwhelming specific factual evidence to support ideas
- Consistent and thoughtful analysis of how economic & political trends were changing from before antebellum period to after.
- Has clearly structured paragraphs on both economic and political trends. Articulate language and effort to connect to lasting impacts

Scores a 46/50 (A-)

Sample Essay Antebellum In Class Long Essays
Evaluate the extent to which social and intellectual reform movements during the antebellum era (1820-1860) represented an expansion of democratic ideals analyzing what changed and what stayed the same from the period before the era to the period after.

The antebellum period of America was an era of change. Beginning with the expansion of male suffrage that prompted a more democratic political system, giving more power to the everyday people rather than a small number of upper class notables. Along with the political reforms came many social and intellectual movements that questioned the current social norms that were voted in the Constitution along with developing alternate ways of life that opposed the industrial economic progression. Reformers tied political and economic injustices to their moral values, creating national movements. Intellectually, the transcendentalism and other new beliefs regarding societal structure emerged with new utopias, while rights movements such as abolition and women’s rights challenged the social norms.

New intellectual ideas emerged during the antebellum period, because with more voice in political matters and the idea of “a self-made man” influenced individualism. People began to think more for themselves, making this period became known as the “American Enlightenment”. One example of nonconformity was the Transcendentalist movement. Rather than complying to the capitalist and economic based perspective of success, they valued simplicity and individual reliance. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the founder, believed that self-improvement came from a spiritual connection with the nature rather than wealth. Other intellectuals emulated this ideology such as Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Whitman. The Transcendentalist strayed from societal norms. A common thing during the period were isolated Utopian societies in which people replaced typical American urbanizing life with small societies based on their beliefs. The Transcendentalists founded Brook Farm, and there were many others such as The Mormons, Mother Anne’s Shakers, and Oneida. Though their values varied widely, they all had specific ideologies that they wanted to live by, showing that during the antebellum period there was more diverse views due to the growing individualism emphasized by democratic society.

As white men gained suffrage and independent other minority groups began to question their rights, seeing that they did not align with the most basic ideals of America’s democracy. Women and African Americans saw that the Constitution as contradicting itself, and developed reform movements to right for rights. The abolition movement was generally not accepted by the American population with only about 10% of Americans claiming to be supporters. William Lloyd Garrison lead the movement demanding immediate end to slavery. More conservative abolitionists wanted a delayed end while moderates pushed for colonizing them. Garrison started a paper called the Liberator, and former slave, David Walker, had a paper as well. Pamphlets made using the new steam powered printing press were a common method of spreading the word. Other abolitionist and women’s rights supporters included the Grimke sisters, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Another method to promoting abolition was religious appeal and the development of a political party. With the Van Buren’s party structure, the political machine, political parties now had a stronger voice in democracy. Women’s rights movements stemmed from the abolition movement stemmed from the abolition movement when women such as Stanton and Mott, saw that they themselves did not have rights. They fought for the social reforms of marriage and suffrage. Overall with the development of democratic ideals, social reform movements began that influenced the future of American society and set a precedent for the future movements.

- Clear and thoughtful explanation of context and strong thesis addressing all parts of prompt
- Abundant appropriate specific factual evidence in whole response supporting ideas
- Consistent, but at times limited, analysis of how both intellectual and social trends were changing during antebellum period and impacting Americas development into a more democratic society.
- Clearly structured paragraphs on both intellectual and social trends. Articulate language, easy to understand language but only a limited effort to connect to lasting impacts

Scores a 46/50 (A-)