



John Locke Global Essay Prize 2025 Prompts Breakdown
History Category - Key Issues and Questions to Address



History Q3

Which figure in history did most to enlarge human freedom?

Key Issues and Questions to Address

1. Definitions of Freedom:

What counts as "freedom"? Political, economic, intellectual, or spiritual?

How do negative and positive conceptions of liberty differ?

Should we prioritize freedom from oppression or freedom to participate?

2. Scope and Scale:

Should we measure impact by numbers affected or by depth of transformation?

Is someone who freed millions from one specific constraint more significant than someone who expanded multiple freedoms for fewer people?

How do we weigh immediate versus long-term impacts?

3. Direct versus Indirect Influence:



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Is a theorist who inspired others more important than the activist who implemented ideas?

How do we attribute causality in complex historical processes?

Should intellectual foundations count as much as direct action?

4. Cultural and Historical Context:

How do we compare figures across vastly different historical contexts?

Is expanding freedom in one historical context more significant than in another?

How do we account for different cultural conceptions of freedom?

5. Contradictions and Limitations:

How do we evaluate figures with mixed legacies on freedom?

What about liberators who were themselves oppressors in other contexts?

How should we weigh personal flaws against public achievements?

6. Western Bias:



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Does the question itself contain Western assumptions about freedom?

How can we fairly evaluate non-Western conceptions of freedom?

Are there important figures from non-Western traditions being overlooked?

7. Individual versus Collective Agency:

Can historical change really be attributed to individuals?

How do we balance recognizing individual leaders versus movements?

Is focusing on "great individuals" itself a limited approach to history?

8. Types of Enlargement:

Breaking chains of existing oppression versus establishing new freedoms

Codifying principles versus changing cultural attitudes

Legal freedom versus substantive freedom



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Approach for Your Essay

For a successful essay on this challenging topic, consider:

Establish Clear Criteria: Define what you mean by "freedom" and "enlargement" at the outset.

Your choice will significantly affect your answer.

Consider Multiple Dimensions: Acknowledge different types of freedom (political, economic, intellectual, etc.) and how they interact.

Make Comparative Arguments: Rather than simply asserting one figure as most important, show why your chosen figure had greater impact than other plausible candidates.

Address Counterarguments: Anticipate objections to your choice and engage with them honestly.

Historical Context: Show awareness of how each figure operated within their historical constraints.

Legacy and Long-term Impact: Consider not just immediate effects but enduring influence.

Methodological Humility: Acknowledge the inherent difficulties in making such comparative judgments across history.



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The strongest essays will likely avoid simplistic heroic narratives while still making a clear, defensible claim about which historical figure did most to enlarge human freedom according to carefully specified criteria.

