GMAT-Reading-Test 16

**Passage 16**

In 1896 a Georgia couple suing for damages in the

accidental death of their two year old was told that since

the child had made no real economic contribution to the

family, there was no liability for damages. In contrast,

**(5)** less than a century later, in 1979, the parents of a three

year old sued in New York for accidental-death damages

and won an award of $750,000.

The transformation in social values implicit in juxta-

posing these two incidents is the subject of Viviana

**(10)** Zelizer’s excellent book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*.

During the nineteenth century, she argues, the concept

of the “useful” child who contributed to the family

economy gave way gradually to the present-day notion

of the “useless” child who, though producing no income

**(15)** for, and indeed extremely costly to, its parents, is yet

considered emotionally “priceless.” Well established

among segments of the middle and upper classes by the

mid-1800’s, this new view of childhood spread through-

out society in the iate-nineteenth and early-twentieth

**(20)**centuries as reformers introduced child-labor regulations

and compulsory education laws predicated in part on the

assumption that a child’s emotional value made child

labor taboo.

For Zelizer the origins of this transformation were

**(25)** many and complex. The gradual erosion of children’s

productive value in a maturing industrial economy,

the decline in birth and death rates, especially in child

mortality, and the development of the companionate

family (a family in which members were united by

**(30)**explicit bonds of love rather than duty) were all factors

critical in changing the assessment of children’s worth.

Yet “expulsion of children from the ‘cash nexus,’...

although clearly shaped by profound changes in the

economic, occupational, and family structures,” Zelizer

**(35)**maintains. “was also part of a cultural process ‘of sacral-

ization’ of children’s lives. ” Protecting children from the

crass business world became enormously important for

late-nineteenth-century middle-class Americans, she

suggests; this sacralization was a way of resisting what

**(40)** they perceived as the relentless corruption of human

values by the marketplace.

In stressing the cultural determinants of a child’s

worth. Zelizer takes issue with practitioners of the new

“sociological economics,” who have analyzed such tradi-

**(45)** tionally sociological topics as crime, marriage, educa-

tion, and health solely in terms of their economic deter-

minants. Allowing only a small role for cultural forces

in the form of individual “preferences,” these sociologists

tend to view all human behavior as directed primarily by

**(50)**the principle of maximizing economic gain. Zelizer is

highly critical of this approach, and emphasizes instead

the opposite phenomenon: the power of social values to

transform price. As children became more valuable in

emotional terms, she argues, their “exchange” or “ sur-

**(55)**render” value on the market, that is, the conversion of

their intangible worth into cash terms, became much

greater.

1. It can be inferred from the passage that accidental-death

damage awards in America during the nineteenth

century tended to be based principally on the

(A) earnings of the person at time of death

(B) wealth of the party causing the death

(C) degree of culpability of the party causing the death

(D) amount of money that had been spent on the person

killed

(E) amount of suffering endured by the family of the

person killed

2. It can be inferred from the passage that in the early

1800’s children were generally regarded by their

families as individuals who

(A) needed enormous amounts of security and affection

(B) required constant supervision while working

(C) were important to the economic well-being of a

family

(D) were unsuited to spending long hours in school

(E) were financial burdens assumed for the good of

society

3. which of the following alternative explanations of the

change in the cash value of children would be most

likely to be put forward by sociological economists as

they are described in the passage?

(A) The cash value of children rose during the

nineteenth century because parents began to increase

their emotional investment in the upbringing of

their children.

(B) The cash value of children rose during the

nineteenth century because their expected earnings

over the course of a lifetime increased greatly.

(C) The cash value of children rose during the

nineteenth century because the spread of

humanitarian ideals resulted in a wholesale

reappraisal of the worth of an individual

(D) The cash value of children rose during the

nineteenth century because compulsory education

laws reduced the supply, and thus raised the costs,

of available child labor.

(E) The cash value of children rose during the

nineteenth century because of changes in the way

negligence law assessed damages in accidental-

death cases.

4. The primary purpose of the passage is to

(A) review the literature in a new academic subfield

(B) present the central thesis of a recent book

(C) contrast two approaches to analyzing historical

change

(D) refute a traditional explanation of a social

phenomenon

(E) encourage further work on a neglected historical

topic

5. It can be inferred from the passage that which of the

following statements was true of American families over

the course of the nineteenth century?

(A) The average size of families grew considerably

(B) The percentage of families involved in industrial

work declined dramatically.

(C) Family members became more emotionally bonded

to one another.

(D) Family members spent an increasing amount of time

working with each other.

(E) Family members became more economically

dependent on each other.

6. Zelizer refers to all of the following as important

influences in changing the assessment of children’s

worth EXCEPT changes in

(A) the mortality rate

(B) the nature of industry

(C) the nature of the family

(D) attitudes toward reform movements

(E) attitudes toward the marketplace

7.Which of the following would be most consistent with

the practices of sociological economics as these

practices are described in the passage?

(A) Arguing that most health-care professionals enter

the field because they believe it to be the most

socially useful of any occupation

(B) Arguing that most college students choose majors

that they believe will lead to the most highly paid

jobs available to them

(C) Arguing that most decisions about marriage and

divorce are based on rational assessments of the

likelihood that each partner will remain committed

to the relationship

(D) Analyzing changes in the number of people enrolled

in colleges and universities as a function of changes

in the economic health of these institutions

(E) Analyzing changes in the ages at which people get

married as a function of a change in the average

number of years that young people have lived away

from their parents

**ANSWERS**

A

C

B

B

C

D

B