

The College Board's Advanced Placement Program is currently undergoing a comprehensive course redesign project to ensure that each course reflects the most current thinking in each discipline. This process, which relies on input from eminent educators nationwide, produces redesigned courses that promote focused, hands-on learning and the development of students' ability to think critically, construct solid arguments, and see many sides of an issue — skills that prepare them for college and career.

The redesigns build on the strong foundations of existing AP courses. To illustrate more clearly the evolution that has occurred in U.S. History, we've put together a series of real examples:

For U.S. History, the examples aim to illuminate the following key changes:

- Course Structure
- Consolidated, Targeted Themes
- Defined Expectations
- Exam Design & Examples

Key Change: A more coherent structure that shows relationships among ideas and clearly specifies what will be assessed.

Current Course Structure

Extensive lists of suggested themes and topics, but does not specify what will be assessed.

Themes

12 themes suggested to structure the course

Topic Outline

28 periods accompanied by suggested topics

New Course Structure (Fall 2014)

Curriculum Framework with 9 Periods, Key Concepts, Skills, and Learning Objectives

Themes

7 overarching big ideas to structure the course

+

Key Concepts

9 periods organized into 3 key concepts per period, defining essential events and patterns that students must know.

+

Historical Thinking Skills

Ways that historians investigate and reason about historical phenomena

=

Learning Objective

Statement about what students should know and be able to do to succeed on the AP Exam

Key Change: New course structure organizes U.S. History into large-scale themes that will now be assessed on AP Exam questions.

Current Course Structure

Themes are suggested, but students' understanding of them is not assessed in any way.

- American Diversity
- American Identity
- Culture
- Demographic Changes
- Economic Transformations
- Environment
- Globalization
- Politics and Citizenship
- Reform
- Religion
- Slavery and Its Legacies in North America
- War and Diplomacy

New Course Structure (Fall 2014)

Themes capture "big ideas" in American history, the exam will assess students' understanding of them.

- Identity
- Peopling
- Work, Exchange, and Technology
- Politics and Power
- Environment and Geography
- America in the World
- Ideas, Beliefs, and Culture

Key Change: New course structure organizes U.S. History into larger periods and presents each period with a conceptual focus.

Current Course Structure

28 Periods and Topics

* Approximate Percentage of Test (multiple-choice section only)

20%*	45%*	35%*
Pre-Columbian	1789-1815	1920s
1492-1690	Transformation of Economy & Society in Antebellum America	The Great Depression and the New Deal
1690-1754	Transformation of Politics in Antebellum America	
1754-1789	Religion, Reform, and Renaissance in Antebellum America	The Second World War
	Territorial Expansion and Manifest Destiny	
	The Crisis of the Union	The Home Front During the War
	Civil War	
	Reconstruction	The United States and the Early Cold War
	The Origins of the New South	
	Development of the West in the Late 19 th Century	
	Industrial America in the Late 19 th Century	
	Urban Society in the Late 19 th Century	
	Populism and Progressivism	
	Emergence of America as a World Power	

Whereas the multiple-choice section may include a few questions from the period since 1980, neither the DBQ nor any of the four essay questions in Part B and C will deal exclusively with this period.

New Course Structure (Fall 2014)

Curriculum Framework with 9 Periods

Period	Date Range	Approximate Percentage of ...	
		Instructional Time	AP Exam
1	1491–1607	5%	5%
2	1607–1754	10%	45%
3	1754–1800	12%	
4	1800–1848	10%	
5	1844–1877	13%	45%
6	1865–1898	13%	
7	1890–1945	17%	
8	1945–1980	15%	
9	1980–present	5%	5%

PERIOD 1: 1491–1607

On a North American continent controlled by American Indians, contact among the peoples of Europe, the Americas, and West Africa created a new world.

Students' understanding of all 9 periods will be assessed throughout the exam. No document-based question or long-essay question will deal exclusively with Period 1 or 9.

Key Change: The new course structure uses a Concept Outline to present three key concepts for each historical period

Current Course Structure

Topic Outline with Suggested Topics

Topic Outline

The U.S. History Development Committee's notes about the topic outline:

- This topic outline is intended as a general guide for AP teachers in structuring their courses and for students in preparing for the AP U.S. History Exam.
- The outline is not intended to be prescriptive of what AP teachers must teach, nor of what AP students must study.
- The topics listed here provide some broad parameters for the course and may be expanded or modified for instruction.

1. Pre-Columbian Societies

Early inhabitants of the Americas
American Indian empires in Mesoamerica, the Southwest, and the Mississippi Valley
American Indian cultures of North America at the time of European contact

New Course Structure (Fall 2014)

9 Periods with 3 Key Concepts

PERIOD 1: 1491–1607

On a North American continent controlled by American Indians, contact among the peoples of Europe, the Americas, and West Africa created a new world.

Key Concept 1.1 Before the arrival of Europeans, native populations in North America developed a wide variety of social, political, and economic structures based in part on interactions with the environment and each other.

Key Concept 1.2: European overseas expansion resulted in the Columbian Exchange, a series of interactions and adaptations among societies across the Atlantic.

Key Concept 1.3: Contacts among American Indians, Africans, and Europeans challenged the worldviews of each group.

Key Change: The new Curriculum Framework explicitly lays out historical thinking skills that students must demonstrate for credit and placement.

Current Course Expectations

Course Outline emphasizes content only

4. The American Revolutionary Era, 1754–1789

The French and Indian War
The Imperial Crisis and resistance to Britain
The War for Independence
State constitutions and the Articles of Confederation
The federal Constitution

5. The Early Republic, 1789–1815

Washington, Hamilton, and shaping of the national government
Emergence of political parties: Federalists and Republicans
Republican Motherhood and education for women
Beginnings of the Second Great Awakening
Significance of Jefferson's presidency
Expansion into the trans-Appalachian West; American Indian resistance
Growth of slavery and free Black communities
The War of 1812 and its consequences

6. Transformation of the Economy and Society in Antebellum America

The transportation revolution and creation of a national market economy
Beginnings of industrialization and changes in social and class structures
Immigration and nativist reaction
Planters, yeoman farmers, and slaves in the cotton South

7. The Transformation of Politics in Antebellum America

Emergence of the second party system
Federal authority and its opponents: judicial federalism, the Bank War, tariff controversy, and states' rights debates
Jacksonian democracy and its successes and limitations

8. Religion, Reform, and Renaissance in Antebellum America

Evangelical Protestant revivalism
Social reforms
Ideals of domesticity
Transcendentalism and utopian communities
American Renaissance: literary and artistic expressions

New Course Expectations (Fall 2014)

Curriculum Framework
with 9 Historical Thinking Skills

Skill Type III: Crafting Historical Arguments from Historical Evidence

Skill 6: Historical Argumentation

Historical thinking involves the ability to define and frame a question about the past and to address that question through the construction of an argument. A plausible and persuasive argument requires a clear, comprehensive, and analytical thesis, supported by relevant historical evidence — not simply evidence that supports a preferred or preconceived position. In addition, argumentation involves the capacity to describe, analyze, and evaluate the arguments of others in light of available evidence.

Proficient students should be able to ...

- Analyze commonly accepted historical arguments and explain how an argument has been constructed from historical evidence.
- Construct convincing interpretations through analysis of disparate, relevant historical evidence.
- Evaluate and synthesize conflicting historical evidence to construct persuasive historical arguments.

How could this skill be approached in the AP U.S. History course?

This skill asks students to be able to describe commonly accepted historical arguments about the nature of the past and then explain how such arguments have been constructed from historical evidence. Over the span of the course, students should move from describing to evaluating the conflicting historical evidence used in making plausible historical arguments. In U.S. history, the skill of historical argumentation often operates in conjunction with course themes that transcend several periods and with other skills. For example, in conjunction with the theme of politics and power, students might be asked to examine evidence and construct an argument about the causes of the Civil War. The application of argumentation and causation might take students back to previous centuries to construct a coherent thesis with supporting evidence that includes a sophisticated analysis of the introduction of slavery to North American colonies, relative

Key Change: Learning Objectives for each theme clearly state the AP Exam’s goals for student understanding and historical reasoning.

Current Course Expectations

Topic Outline lists content to be covered without specifying what students must understand or be able to do with that content

4. The American Revolutionary Era, 1754–1789

The French and Indian War
 The Imperial Crisis and resistance to Britain
 The War for Independence
 State constitutions and the Articles of Confederation
 The federal Constitution

5. The Early Republic, 1789–1815

Washington, Hamilton, and shaping of the national government
 Emergence of political parties: Federalists and Republicans
 Republican Motherhood and education for women
 Beginnings of the Second Great Awakening
 Significance of Jefferson’s presidency
 Expansion into the trans-Appalachian West; American Indian resistance
 Growth of slavery and free Black communities
 The War of 1812 and its consequences

6. Transformation of the Economy and Society in Antebellum America

The transportation revolution and creation of a national market economy
 Beginnings of industrialization and changes in social and class structures
 Immigration and nativist reaction
 Planters, yeoman farmers, and slaves in the cotton South

7. The Transformation of Politics in Antebellum America

Emergence of the second party system
 Federal authority and its opponents: judicial federalism, the Bank War, tariff controversy, and states’ rights debates
 Jacksonian democracy and its successes and limitations

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 American Renaissance: literary and artistic expressions

New Course Expectations (Fall 2014)

Theme + Key Concept + Skill = Learning Objective

Learning Objectives by Theme: Identity (ID)

This theme focuses on the formation of both American national identity and group identities in U.S. history. Students should be able to explain how various identities, cultures, and values have been preserved or changed in different contexts of U.S. history, with special attention given to the formation of gender, class, racial, and ethnic identities. Students should be able to explain how these sub-identities have interacted with each other and with larger conceptions of American national identity.

Overarching questions:

- How and why have debates over American national identity changed over time?
- How have gender, class, ethnic, religious, regional, and other group identities changed in different eras?

Learning Objective	In particular, students can ...	In the concept outline:
Students demonstrate understanding of ways that debates over national identity have changed over time.	ID-1 Analyze how competing conceptions of national identity were expressed in the development of political institutions and cultural values from the late colonial through the antebellum periods	2.3.II, 3.1.II, 3.2.I, 4.1.II
	ID-2 Assess the impact of Manifest Destiny, territorial expansion, the Civil War, and industrialization on popular beliefs about progress and the national destiny of the U.S. in the 19th century	4.1.II, 5.1.I, 5.3.II, 6.3.II
	ID-3 Analyze how U.S. involvement in international crises such as the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, and the Cold War influenced public debates about American national identity in the 20th century	7.1.II, 7.3.II, 7.3.II, 8.1.II
Students demonstrate understanding of ways that gender, class, ethnic, religious, regional, and other group identities changed in different eras.	ID-4 Explain how conceptions of group identity and autonomy emerged out of cultural interactions between colonizing groups, Africans, and American Indians in the colonial era	1.3.II, 2.1.II, 2.2.II, 3.1.I, 3.2.II
	ID-5 Analyze the role of economic, political, social, and ethnic factors on the formation of regional identities in what would become the United States from the colonial period through the 19th century	2.1.II, 3.3.I, 3.3.II, 4.1.I, 4.1.II, 4.2.II, 5.2.I, 5.2.II, 5.3.II, 6.1.II
	ID-6 Analyze how migration patterns to, and migration within, the United States have influenced the growth of racial and ethnic identities and conflicts over ethnic assimilation and distinctiveness	3.3.I, 4.2.II, 5.1.II, 6.2.I, 7.2.I, 7.2.II, 7.2.II, 7.3.II, 8.3.II, 8.3.II
	ID-7 Analyze how changes in class identity and gender roles have related to	7.1.I, 8.3.II,

Key Change: A new AP Exam design allows for better assessment of thematic understandings and use of historical thinking skills.

Current Exam

Heavy emphasis on discrete multiple-choice questions focuses on mastery of content knowledge

- 80 multiple-choice questions:
55 minutes
- 1 document-based question:
60 minutes
- 2 free-response questions:
70 minutes

Redesigned Exam (Spring 2015)

By reducing the number of multiple-choice and adding short-answer questions, the exam now also assesses thematic understanding and application of historical thinking skills.

- 55 multiple-choice questions:
55 minutes
- 4 short-answer questions:
45 minutes
- 1 document-based question:
60 minutes
- 1 long-essay question:
35 minutes

Key Change: Multiple-choice questions will now ask students to apply their content knowledge to understanding and interpreting historical evidence.

Current Exam

Multiple-Choice Question Example

57. Which of the following achievements of the “carpetbag” governments survived the “Redeemer” administrations?

- (A) Participation by both Whites and African Americans in local government
- (B) Establishment of a public school system
- (C) Election of African American majorities in state legislatures
- (D) Establishment of a vigorous Republican Party in the South
- (E) Opening of public facilities to African Americans

Redesigned Exam (Spring 2015)

Multiple-Choice Question Example

“Our . . . destiny [is] to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. . . . The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on [California’s] borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the [plow] and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meetinghouses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California. . . . Their right to independence will be the natural right of self-government belonging to any community strong enough to maintain it.”

– John L. O’Sullivan, 1845

1. The process described in the passage above most directly led to political controversies in the 1840s and 1850s over the

- (A) expansion of slavery into newly acquired territories
- (B) authority of the Supreme Court to overturn federal laws
- (C) role of the federal government in economic development
- (D) use of natural resources in newly acquired territories

Key Change: The redesigned exam features new short-answer writing questions that focus on students' use of particular historical thinking skills.

Current Exam

No Short-Answer Questions; instead, greater number of Multiple-Choice Questions.

Redesigned Exam (Spring 2015)

Short-Answer Questions provide students some flexibility to demonstrate their historical understanding.

United States historians have proposed various events to mark the beginning of an American identity.

- A) Choose ONE of the events listed below, and explain why your choice best represents the beginning of an American identity. Provide at least ONE piece of evidence to support your explanation.
- End of the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War) in 1763
 - Signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776
 - Ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1788
- B) Contrast your choice against ONE of the other options, demonstrating why that option is not as good as your choice.

Key Change: The Document-Based Question will remain largely unchanged as a critical part of the AP Exam.

Current Exam

Document-Based Question

Analyze the responses of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration to the problems of the Great Depression. How effective were these responses? How did they change the role of the federal government?

Redesigned Exam (Spring 2015)

Document-Based Question

Analyze major changes and continuities in the social and economic experiences of African Americans who migrated from the rural South to urban areas in the North in the period 1910–1930.

Key Change: The long-essay question type on the AP Exam will remain essentially the same, although now only one will be required.

Current Exam

Free-Response Question

Analyze the extent to which TWO of the following influenced the development of democracy between 1820 and 1840:

- *Jacksonian economic policy*
- *Changes in electoral policy*
- *Second Great Awakening*
- *Westward movement*

Redesigned Exam (Spring 2015)

Long-Essay Question

Some historians have argued that the American Revolution created a distinct political identity in the United States, transforming what it meant to be an American. Support, modify, or refute this contention using specific evidence.