

An Open Letter from the Authors of the AP United States History Curriculum Framework

We, the authors below, served on the Advanced Placement United States History Curriculum Development and Assessment Committee from 2008 through 2012. In that capacity, guided by continued dialogue with and input from the teachers who work each day with our nation's most talented and dedicated students, we authored the Curriculum Framework that was published in October 2012 and that is at the heart of the College Board's current *Course and Exam Description* for AP U.S. History.

We are writing this letter to correct recent uninformed criticisms that have been made in the press about the AP U.S. History Curriculum Framework. We are proud to have participated in this landmark project to improve the teaching of United States History. We hope that this new course will help train a generation of students to understand their nation's history and to be active citizens who can apply their understanding of the past to their daily lives.

The motivation to redesign AP United States History came first and foremost from AP teachers, who repeatedly expressed frustration with the way they believed the AP U.S. History course prevented them and their students from exploring in any depth the main events and documents of U.S. history. Scholars of teaching and learning in history, and history teachers themselves, felt that the AP course provided too little guidance about what might be on the AP exam, causing them to rush their students in a quick march through a list of historical events. There were too few opportunities to understand the "why" of U.S. history, and or to make its deeper meanings come alive to students.

After receiving high-level guidance on the scope and main goals of the course from the AP U.S. History Redesign Commission, our committee, composed of award-winning teachers and experienced history professors, worked to develop a framework of key concepts, skills, and learning objectives for the course. We had two key goals for the project. One was that the course meet the expectations of college and university history departments, so that the hard work of AP students on the AP Exam would continue to be rewarded with college credit and placement. The other was that the course and exam allow teachers to go into depth about the most significant concepts of the course.

The AP U.S. History course is an advanced, college-level course – not an introductory U.S. history course - and is not meant to be students' first exposure to the fundamental narrative of U.S. history. Because countless states, districts, and schools have their own standards for U.S. history teaching, we did not want to usurp local control by prescribing a detailed national curriculum of people, places, and events. As a result, we created a *framework*, not a full curriculum, so that local decision makers and teachers could populate the course with content that is meaningful to them and that satisfies their state mandates (such as teachers choosing to discuss the heroic World War II experiences of Bob Dole, Daniel Inouye, or Dorie Miller).

Many of the comments we have heard about the framework reflect either a misunderstanding of U.S. history or a very limited faith in history teachers' command of their subject matter. The Curriculum Framework was written by and for AP teachers – individuals who were already

experts in U.S. history and its teaching. Based on feedback from other AP teachers outside the Curriculum Development and Assessment Committee, we did not think it necessary to specifically identify Martin Luther King, Jr., among the post-war “civil rights activists” mentioned in the framework. Any United States History course would of course include King as well as other major figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Dwight Eisenhower. These and many other figures of U.S. history did not appear in the previous AP framework, either, yet teachers have always understood the need to teach them. Critics who believe we have omitted them from the course are misunderstanding our document, and we request that they examine the AP Practice Exam as evidence of our determination that AP students must be exposed to a rich and inclusive body of historical knowledge.

We want to close by calling attention to what we believe the course we created *does* do, as opposed to what it does not do. We believe that it strikes a careful balance between teaching factual knowledge and critical analysis. AP U.S. History students will analyze and interpret primary written sources as well as maps, statistical tables, and pictorial and graphic evidence of historical events. These students will learn to carefully compare and contrast the views of leading historians, to debate and discuss historical issues, and to write analytical essays. They should be able to express themselves with clarity and precision, and know how to evaluate authorship, to engage an historical narrative, and to credit the phrases and ideas of others. Debate and disagreement are central to the discipline of history, and thus to AP U.S. History as well. The goal is to help students acquire a strong command of historical facts and then to be able to understand, formulate, and critique different interpretations of the past and of its meaning for today. Studies of college faculty and department chairs, AP teachers, and experts in history teaching and assessment have confirmed that our approach meets the rigors of college-level history while also being balanced, teachable, and engaging for students.

We reiterate our belief that the Curriculum Framework will result in a better AP course for students and their teachers. We look forward to the end of this controversy, so that AP students and teachers can return to the vital task of deeply engaging with the major individuals, developments, and ideas that have guided our nation through its history.

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