

Rebuttal to College Board Talking Points on the New AP U.S. History (APUSH) Framework and Exam

Talking Point #1

Nothing has really changed with APUSH – the course has always relied on teachers to fill in details from state standards, and it still will. Particular individuals and events haven't been “excised” from the course because they were never there to begin with.

Rebuttal

Actually everything has changed. The old 5-page Topic Outline provided a chronological sequence of key topics. An analysis of released APUSH exams revealed that test items clustered around a predictable group of key people and events – all of which were covered in state standards. The previous APUSH course was thus strongly aligned with state standards.

This is no longer the case. Now instead of strong alignment with state standards, the new APUSH Exam will be exclusively aligned with the Framework. The Framework categorically states, “Beginning with the May 2015 APUSH Exam, no AP US History Exam question will require students to know historical content that falls outside this concept outline.” So key figures like Benjamin Franklin really have been excised from the APUSH Framework and will not be tested on the Exam.

With 98 pages to work with, there is more than enough space to include Ben Franklin, James Madison, and Dr. Martin Luther King, among many others who are not mentioned. The College Board has failed to explain why the Framework omits these key historic figures while it does have space to include Chief Little Turtle, the Students for a Democratic Society, and the Black Panthers.

Talking Point #2

Because students must still take end-of-course tests in history, and because those tests are based on state standards, APUSH teachers will still have to teach the state standards.

Rebuttal

State U.S. History standards and the College Board Framework are like oil and water – they will not mix. The old 5-page Topic Outline provided a traditional baseline that did not conflict with state standards. The new 98-page College Board Framework establishes a new baseline so far to the left that it conflicts with all state standards. For example, a correlation commissioned by the College Board revealed 181 post-Civil War items required by Texas Standards that are not covered in the College Board Framework. An analysis of the Georgia U.S. History Standards revealed 132 Georgia elements that are not in the College Board Framework. In addition, the College Board Framework contains 60 elements that are not covered in the Georgia Standards.

This discrepancy between traditional state standards and the radical College Board Framework will force APUSH teachers to make a difficult choice. Will they teach the content in their state standards and thus place their students' APUSH scores in jeopardy? Or will they teach the content in the College Board Framework and thus place their end-of-year state test scores in jeopardy? Given this choice, most APUSH teachers will probably emphasize the College Board Framework in order to prepare their students for the high-stakes APUSH Exam. They will teach just enough material from state standards to enable students to pass the end-of-year tests (good scores are unnecessary). Their primary focus will thus be on the APUSH Exam.

Talking Point #3

APUSH doesn't supplant state standards, because APUSH is voluntary, and most students don't take it.

Rebuttal

It is true that AP U.S. History is not a required course. However, all 50 states do require their high school students to take at least one year of U.S. History. As a result, approximately 500,000 high school students take AP U.S. History each year. The course is an important part of the college resumes for these students. As explained in Talking Point 2 above, the APUSH Framework does supplant state standards for these students. It is important to remember that APUSH students are among the top performers in their schools. Taken together, they form the next generation of America's business, scientific, and political leaders.

Talking Point #4

The only reason for the radical rewrite (going from 5 to 98 pages) is to give the influx of new teachers more guidance on how to teach the course.

Rebuttal

As baby boom teachers retire, many high schools will turn to a new generation of APUSH teachers. One year ago, APUSH teachers had a wealth of high-quality preparation materials that included 8 released exams with 680 multiple-choice questions. In addition, the College Board's AP Central website provided a trove of valuable materials that included 26 Document Based Questions (DBQ), 104 essay questions, and almost 400 graded sample essays. These materials are all now outdated by the new exam format.

What will replace these preparation materials? Just one sample exam, access to which is restricted to certified APUSH teachers. The dearth of preparation materials will severely handicap both new and experienced APUSH teachers and their students. One "Secret Test" accompanied by no sample graded essays will not provide teachers with an adequate amount of preparation materials for a full-year course. The lack of a full complement of tests and sample essays raises serious questions about why the College Board is choosing to prematurely launch the new Framework this year.

Talking Point #5

The secrecy of the sample exam is necessary for test security.

Rebuttal

It is important to remember that the Sample Test (*i.e.*, the “Secret Test”) that the College Board sent to its audit teachers is a practice test. It is not the actual test that students will take in May 2015. Releasing this test to the public does not threaten test security.

Talking Point #6

The political slant of the Framework doesn’t exist. Examples: The emphasis on pre-Columbian or pre-Jamestown history has always been there; the exam has long included questions on that era.

Rebuttal

The 5-page Topic Outline did begin with a three-line Unit on Pre-Columbian Societies. This unit generated just 3 of the 680 released multiple-choice questions between 1984 and 2013. All three of these questions asked for very general information about American Indian cultures of North America at the time of European contact. In contrast, the redesigned Framework opens with a 4-page unit covering the period from 1491 to 1607. This unit will generate 5 percent of a student’s overall score on the APUSH exam.

The Framework uses this period to establish a baseline in which thriving, autonomous, and ecologically well-adapted Native American communities inhabit the North American continent. Their idyllic existence is then permanently disrupted by the arrival of European invaders. The European invasion enables the Framework’s anonymous authors to establish their key theme that European exploitation led to Native decline and black bondage. The Framework explains, “Many Europeans developed a belief in white superiority to justify their subjugation of Africans and American Indians using several different rationales.” Once established, this negative view of American history as a story of conquest and plunder becomes a dominant theme in the rest of the Framework.

Example #1: Even though the Framework doesn’t spell out key battles, etc., it does require study about the causes, courses, and outcomes of the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II. Obviously teachers will discuss battles.

Rebuttal: The Framework does not mention key American military commanders or the valor and sacrifice of American servicemen and women. It is hard to understand why the Framework’s anonymous authors could not find space in a 98-page document to include these topics. The “Secret Test” does not ask a single question about American battles or commanders. This sends APUSH teachers a clear message that they can skip military history to save time.

Example #2: All the negative episodes, such as the internment of Japanese-Americans, must be included because they are integral parts of college courses.

Rebuttal: American history is the story of how we as a nation have striven to fulfill the democratic values announced in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, Gettysburg Address, and Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech. The Framework should present a balanced view of U.S. history that honestly presents both America's achievements and its failures. The Framework does a good job of presenting examples of oppression and exploitation. It does a very poor job of presenting American triumphs and completely omits achievements such as the construction of the Panama Canal, the Lend-Lease program, the Marshall Plan, the Salk vaccine, and the Apollo Project.

Example #3: If there really were a political slant, surely some of the thousands of members of the College Board would have blown the whistle.

Rebuttal: The College Board employees are neither historians nor APUSH teachers. There was little or no reason for them to examine the redesigned APUSH Framework. In addition, speaking out is not easy. On December 1, 1955 thousands of black and white citizens sat on segregated buses in the South. No doubt many of them realized that segregation was wrong. Only Rosa Parks had the courage and conviction to say "No." Fortunately, concerned citizens across America are now looking at the College Board's APUSH Framework and saying "No."

Talking Point #7

The APUSH revisions were created by prominent historians and educators and provide an accurate, nuanced picture of American history in keeping with most college courses.

Rebuttal

Surprisingly little is actually known about the process the College Board used to create the redesigned Framework. We do know that the College Board assembled an AP U.S. History Curriculum Development and Assessment Committee that included 16 college professors and 11 high school teachers. However, we do not know when the committee met or what they did. Believe it or not, we still do not know who actually wrote the 98-page APUSH Framework.

Talking Point #8

The APUSH changes have nothing to do with David Coleman, because they were drafted before he joined the College Board.

Rebuttal

The College Board posted the redesigned APUSH Framework on its AP Central website in the Fall of 2012. Mr. Coleman became President of the College Board at approximately the same time. Mr. Coleman has now had almost two years to examine and evaluate the new APUSH Framework. He is aware of the rising chorus of criticism that is being directed at the Framework.

We have repeatedly called upon Mr. Coleman to address the public's justified concerns about the APUSH Framework. Unfortunately, he has thus far chosen to remain silent. We can only conclude that he approves of the new Framework.

Talking Point #8

Larry Krieger has a financial interest in keeping the former APUSH course, because otherwise his prep materials would be outdated.

Rebuttal from Larry Kreiger

I am indeed the author of very successful APUSH prep books. But authors of preparation materials actually welcome major changes in a course - major changes mean new editions and new editions mean more sales. So normally, I would be very pleased to update and revise my books. However, the new APUSH Framework violates my own personal and professional codes. I grew up in rural North Carolina and played Uncle Sam in a 5th-grade play. I am proud to be an American and proud that my history lessons all fulfilled my first principal's advice to "tell your students what made America great." I have no intention of standing idly by while anonymous people at the College Board hijack the AP U.S. History course.