

THE REDESIGNED COLLEGE BOARD AP U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK: TEN KEY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A dramatic unilateral change is about to take place in the content of the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) American History course popularly known as APUSH. In a few short weeks, approximately half-a-million high school sophomore and juniors will be taught a curriculum that presents a very different version of American history from the course of study mandated by most state standards.

The newly redesigned College Board APUSH Framework is radically different from the traditional APUSH approach to require coverage of broad general topics that were consistent with and complementary of state history standards. By contrast, the new Framework inculcates a consistently negative view of American culture. It emphasizes conflict, racism, and discrimination while ignoring the achievements of the heroes, entrepreneurs, and dreamers who built our country. If concerned public officials do not take immediate action the College Board - led by David Coleman - will become the *de facto* Board of Education for all of America's public and private schools.

This document will address ten key questions that every citizen and public official should be aware of.

1. WHO WROTE THE COLLEGE BOARD FRAMEWORK?

The College Board insists that the redesigned Framework represents the work of outstanding historians. In reality, we do not actually know who wrote the redesigned AP U.S. History Framework or even when it was written.

2. DOES THE REDESIGNED FRAMEWORK PROVIDE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WITH A FAIR AND BALANCED TREATMENT OF AMERICAN HISTORY?

In his statement "Fiction and Facts about the AP U.S. History Curriculum Framework," Trevor Packer, the College Board's head of AP, insists that the new APUSH Framework provides a "careful and balanced treatment of American history." Framework proponents, including College Board spokespeople, have also reiterated this claim at state board meetings in Atlanta and Austin. But this assurance is refuted by simply reading the Framework itself (see below). Moreover, this claim is challenged by highly regarded commentators and historians. In a National Review Online article entitled "D'Souza's America in our Schools," Stanley Kurtz sounded an alarm when he wrote, "The College Board is pushing U.S. history as far to the left as it can get away with at the high school level." In a detailed report on the new Framework, Dr. Peter Wood, the president of the National Association of Scholars, calls the College Board curriculum guide "a dispiriting document. A great deal of important U.S. history is given cursory treatment and some ideological themes are sounded rather loudly."

3. WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF BIASED STATEMENTS IN THE FRAMEWORK?

Mr. Packer and other College Board spokespeople deny that the Framework contains biased material characterizing its conceptual statements as, “the type of nuanced language used by historians in assessing complex historical events.” The following quotes from the Framework refute Mr. Packer’s argument:

- “Many Europeans developed a belief in white superiority to justify their subjugation of Africans and American Indians, using several different rationales.” (page 25)
- The idea of Manifest Destiny, which asserted U.S. power in the Western Hemisphere and supported U.S. expansion westward, was built on a belief in white racial superiority and a sense of American cultural superiority, and helped shape the era’s political debates.” (page 44)
- “Wartime experiences, such as the internment of Japanese Americans, challenges to civil liberties, debates over race and segregation, and the decision to drop the atomic bomb raised questions about American values.” (page 59)

As questionable as they are in isolation, these statements and others become even more alarming when considered in context. The Framework taken as a whole, from beginning to end, is one long litany of criticism of American beliefs, principles, and behavior. These ideas are not balanced with more positive perspectives; they are essentially the only perspectives offered.

4. IS THE COLLEGE BOARD’S AP U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK ALIGNED WITH STATE CURRICULUM STANDARDS?

In a statement on AP Central, the College Board candidly admits that the Framework deliberately reduces “required content across historical periods to allow teachers greater flexibility to teach topics of their choice in depth.” The College Board goes on to state that, “the new course provides AP teachers with the same flexibility college professors enjoy: the ability to emphasize specific historical examples and de-empathize others.” So while state standards may define the topics that history teachers must cover, the College Board has now decreed that the APUSH teachers need not do so.

It is important to remember that the College Board is a private organization that is not accountable to the American public. The new Framework is in effect a curricular coup that is supplanting legally enacted state standards. For example, a careful analysis of the Georgia Standards for U.S. History revealed 134 required content elements that are not specifically mentioned in the College Board Framework. In addition, Georgia teachers will have to design lessons to cover 60 key topics that are not in their state’s standards.

5. DOES THE COLLEGE BOARD FRAMEWORK COVER AMERICA'S GREATEST HEROES?

Mr. Packer and other College Board spokespeople insist that the Framework has not eliminated key American heroes. Once again, the actual content of the Framework weakens this claim. The Framework's anonymous authors ignore the personalities and achievements of American giants whose courage and conviction built our country. For example, the Framework excises Roger Williams, Benjamin Franklin, Dorothea Dix, William Lloyd Garrison, Jane Addams, Theodore Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from the American story. George Washington's contribution to American history is reduced to a brief sentence fragment noting his Farewell Address. (page 34). While the College Board's anonymous authors ignore these American heroes they do find the space to highlight the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panthers. (page 63)

6. DOES THE COLLEGE BOARD PROVIDE TEACHERS WITH ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO PREPARE THEIR STUDENTS FOR THE APUSH EXAM?

The redesigned Framework will be tested by a redesigned Exam. In the past, teachers had a wealth of high-quality preparation materials that included seven released exams with 600 multiple-choice questions. In addition, the College Board's AP Central website provided a trove of valuable materials that included 26 Document Based Questions, 104 essay questions, and almost 400 graded sample essays. These materials are now outdated by the new Exam. The College Board has replaced them with just one sample exam (discussed below). There are no sample essays for any of the new essay formats. This dearth of preparation materials will severely handicap teachers and their students.

7. WHAT IS THE "SECRET EXAM" AND WHY IS IT AN ISSUE?

The College Board has provided its certified APUSH teachers with a password protected Sample APUSH Exam. This "Secret Exam" is not available to the public. College Board regulations warn that "Exams may NOT be posted on school or personal websites, nor electronically transmitted for any reason."

Aware that the redesigned Framework is not aligned with legally enacted state standards, the College Board is trying to evade this problem by claiming that exam questions "are written in a way that allows students to focus their responses on the historical examples taught in the course." The "Secret Exam" prevents the public from determining if this claim is accurate.

8. DOES THE NEW APUSH EXAM ACTUALLY GIVE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS THE "FLEXIBILITY" TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE COLLEGE BOARD FRAMEWORK AND STATE STANDARDS?

The College Board's insistence that its questions will be "written in a way that allows students to focus their responses on the historic examples they were taught in class" –

which might be examples from state standards rather than the Framework – is contradicted by the Framework itself. The College Board refutes its own “flexibility doctrine” when it unequivocally states that “the newly designed AP U.S. History Exam will not ask students about historic content that falls outside the concept outline.” Moreover, the “flexibility doctrine” conflicts with the structure of the new Exam. For the College Board’s “flexibility doctrine” to work, Exam questions will have to be very broad. In fact, the Exam includes 55 multiple-choice questions, four short-answer essays, and a document-based question. Taken together, these questions account for 85 percent of a student’s score. By their very nature, these focused questions can only be answered by very specific answers – and the College Board says those answers will come from the Framework, not from state standards or any other source.

9. DO REVISIONS OF THE AP U.S. HISTORY COURSE AND EXAM ALIGN WITH THE COMMON CORE NATIONAL STANDARDS?

Common Core is one of the most contentious issues in American education. The current head of the College Board, David Coleman, is widely acknowledged as one of the primary architects of Common Core. So, it should come as no surprise that the College Board website states that the redesigned AP U.S. History course “dovetails with the Common Core State Standards for reading and writing literacy.”

A growing number of states have now withdrawn from Common Core; many more are seriously considering withdrawal. The close links between the redesigned APUSH Framework and Common Core provide an alarming back-door way for supporters of Common Core to use the AP American history course to circumvent state control over what is taught in their schools.

10. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE COLLEGE BOARD DELAYS IMPLEMENTING THE REDESIGNED FRAMEWORK FOR A YEAR?

The College Board is aware of the increasing criticism now directed at its redesigned Framework. At a meeting of the Texas Board of Education on July 19th, a College Board representative acknowledged the criticism and repeatedly said, “We’re listening.” The College Board has listened for long enough. The time has come for Mr. Coleman to withdraw the redesigned Framework for a year. This will give the College Board time to fully address the Framework’s biases and omissions. It will also give the College Board time to develop more practice tests. And finally, it will demonstrate that the College Board is indeed listening to the public.