

## **Rebuttal to the College Board’s New List of Frequently Asked Questions August 11, 2014**

During the last several months we have provided the public with a sustained and comprehensive review of the serious flaws in the College Board’s redesigned AP U.S. History Framework and Exam. We have called on the College Board to withdraw the Framework for a year while reinstating the previous Topic Outline and Exam. College Board representatives have acknowledged the growing chorus of criticism and repeatedly claimed, “We’re listening.”

The College Board is apparently not listening carefully enough. The College Board just posted a new set of “Frequently Asked Questions” on its [AP Central website](#).

The College Board questions restate the concerns we have raised. Unfortunately, the College Board’s answers reveal a disturbing tendency to misrepresent facts and an equally troubling failure to listen to the public.

### **QUESTION 1: WHO WROTE THE AP U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK?**

We have repeatedly asked the College Board to reveal the names of the authors of the AP U.S. History Framework. The College Board has finally responded by adding a list of the names of the 13 members of the AP U.S. History Redesign Commission and 9 members of the AP U.S. History Curriculum Development and Assessment Committee. Since the committees overlap, the list contains a total of 19 different college professors and high school teachers. We have known about the membership of these committees for a long time, so providing a list of their names is nothing new.

Significantly, though, the College Board does not identify these professors and high school teachers as “authors.” Instead, they are simply listed under the heading of “Acknowledgments.” Attending workshops, exchanging emails, and posting on the College Board’s electronic discussion boards are not the same as formally writing a specific section of the Framework. There is a big difference between being cited as an author and being listed under the heading “Acknowledgments.”

Who actually wrote the Framework? It strains common sense to believe that all 19 people did. The two committees probably established the Framework’s basic outline of skills, themes, and concepts. But who wrote the actual text of the Framework? Are we to believe that 19 college and high school historians and teachers actually omitted Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Martin Luther King from the Framework? If the College Board truly believes in transparency, then full disclosure is essential. As of now, the Framework authors are still anonymous.

## **QUESTION 2: WHEN WAS THE AP U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK WRITTEN?**

According to the College Board website, “the Framework was written, sent out for public review, and revised based on that feedback from 2007 – 2011.” This claim does not appear to be consistent with the known facts. The College Board’s definition of “public review” did not include members of state and local boards of education, publishers, civic leaders, and other concerned citizens. Why? Is a top-down process appropriate and transparent? Why was there not a participatory role for the other key stakeholders?

Apparently the College Board’s definition of “public review” is limited to selected teachers and college professors. We do know that the College Board sent something to 58 college history departments in November 2010. At the same time, it sent “elements of the proposed curriculum Framework” to 413 high school AP U.S. History teachers. However, there is clearly a big difference between “elements” of the redesigned Framework and an actual draft of the complete document.

The College Board answer states that the Framework was finally completed in 2011. If this is true, why was it not disseminated to AP U.S. History teachers at either the 2011 or the 2012 AP National Conference? In fact, the Framework was not officially posted on the College Board website until the Fall of 2012. Why were the key public stakeholders, including concerned citizens, left out of the process? By the College Board’s own chronology, there appears to be plenty of time for external stakeholder review. The College Board seemingly chose to exclude the public in its “public review.”

## **QUESTION 3: WHY DID THE COLLEGE BOARD REVISE THE AP U.S. HISTORY PROGRAM?**

The 5-page Topic Outline contained 28 chronologically ordered historic topics. The College Board claims that this course “required a breathless race through American history.” The College Board then presents a table labeled “American teachers perspectives on AP U.S. History.” This table reveals that 24 percent of the surveyed teachers believed that the old APUSH course “has the right balance of breadth and depth.” In contrast, 81 percent of the teachers believed that the revised AP U.S. History Course “has the right amount of balance and depth.”

Though the data in the Table appears to support the redesigned Framework, looks are deceiving. In reality, this data was based upon a survey of just 413 APUSH teachers conducted in November 2010. We do not know what the teachers were actually shown at that time. But we do know that they did not see a full draft of the redesigned Framework, since the completed document did NOT exist.

It would be interesting to know how teachers would now answer the College Board survey. Would they still believe that a 98-page Framework organized into 9 chronological units, with 9 historical thinking skills, 7 themes, and 27 key concept statements provides a manageable balance of scope and depth?

#### **QUESTION 4: CAN TEACHERS ALIGN THEIR AP U.S. HISTORY SYLLABI WITH THEIR STATE STANDARDS?**

The College Board answers this crucial question by unequivocally declaring, “Yes.” The College Board is an unelected organization that is not accountable to the American public. The new 98-page 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 standards in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama revealed over 100 elements that are not in the College Board Framework.

The College Board’s redesigned Framework does contain a number of elements that are NOT in typical state standards. For example, the Framework contains over 50 specific elements that are not in the South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama standards. Furthermore, the College Board Framework opens with a 9-day unit covering the period between 1491 and 1607. We are unaware of any state that includes this period in its standards. The Framework elements are NOT optional. According to the Framework, “every AP Exam question will be rooted in these specific learning objectives.” And the Framework emphasizes in bold print that students will not have to know any content outside the 98 pages of the Framework: “Beginning with the May 2015 AP U.S. History Exam, no AP U.S. History Exam questions will require students to know historical content that falls outside this concept outline.” Material that appears in state standards but not the Framework will not be tested.

The 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? There will not be enough time in the school year to do both. 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.

#### **QUESTION 5: DOES THE NEW AP U.S. HISTORY COURSE FRAMEWORK SIDELINE IMPORTANT EVENTS AND FIGURES IN AMERICAN HISTORY?**

Concerned citizens have questioned why the College Board has omitted key figures, including Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Martin Luther King. Despite this criticism, the College Board insists that it is not “sidelining important people and events.” According to the College Board, “the new AP U.S. History course puts them at the center of students’ investigation of our nation’s past.” Unfortunately, facts are stubborn things. The redesigned Framework omits Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Dorothea Dix, William Lloyd Garrison, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jane Addams, Theodore Roosevelt, the Tuskegee Airmen, Jackie Robinson, Jonas Salk, Rosa Parks, Dwight Eisenhower, Dr. King, and many other Americans who made significant contributions to our country’s history.

The College Board cannot explain these omissions by claiming that the Framework establishes “baseline requirements” or by saying that it grants teachers the flexibility “to select which

figures to focus on in-depth.” Any flexibility they have to do so will be limited by the fact that people and events not in the Framework will not be tested. The expansion of the document governing the APUSH course from 5 pages to 98 makes it even more significant, and troubling, that so many American heroes have been excluded. The College Board has yet to explain why it had room for Chief Little Turtle but not for Dwight Eisenhower, or why it had room for the Black Panthers but not for Dr. King.

The College Board provides a table listing 15 required readings that are mentioned in the Framework. We applaud the College Board for attempting to enrich the AP course with key historic documents. However, we believe that its current list omits many seminal documents and entirely ignores the commitment of many states to enrich the American story with works of literature. Omitted works that should be added include Winthrop’s “City on a Hill” sermon, Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, excerpts from de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, excerpts from Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, and excerpts from Dr. King’s speeches. Once again, we do not understand why the College Board’s anonymous authors had room for the architecture of Spanish missions but not for great works of American thought.

#### **QUESTION 6: DOES THE NEW AP U.S. HISTORY PROGRAM USURP LOCAL CONTROL BY MANDATING HIGH SCHOOL COURSE CONTENT?**

The College Board insists that it “respects and supports local control over course and instruction.” In reality, the redesigned Framework clearly supplants legally enacted state curriculum guides and standards. As documented in our response to Question 4 (see above), the College Board Framework is not well aligned with state standards. The College Board’s claim that the new Framework leaves room for “broad teacher discretion” is clearly contradicted by the emphatic warning that no content knowledge will be required outside the Framework. As Benjamin Franklin warned, “Never confuse Motion with Action.” (Now we know why the Framework omits Franklin!)

#### **QUESTION 7: IS THE AP U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK THE ONLY RESOURCE TEACHERS HAVE TO GUIDE THEIR PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION?**

The College Board answers this important question by saying, “The AP U.S. History Framework, while far more detailed than what teachers had in the past, is a guide for the construction of a comprehensive U.S. history curriculum by districts and teachers. Each summer the College Board sends AP teachers sample AP exam questions that they then use to create their individual AP courses.”

This vague and misleading statement conceals a disturbing reality. One year ago, the College Board provided APUSH teachers with 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 (DBQs), 104 essay questions, and almost 400 graded sample essays. These materials are now all outdated by the new APUSH Exam.

The College Board has replaced this extraordinary collection of preparation materials with just one Sample Test. This practice exam is not accompanied by sample graded essays. 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.

The College Board made the Test available to APUSH teachers this summer. The College Board claims that the 413 APUSH teachers who participated in the 2010 survey, overwhelmingly supported the new redesigned Framework. This claim is undermined by the College Board's admission that "[w]ithout seeing a revised exam, however, participants' estimates were highly tentative."

APUSH teachers and their students will clearly be handicapped by the dearth of preparation materials. The College Board announced that it will address the shortage of preparation materials by posting the 2015 APUSH Exam for public review and comment. The College Board's claims that it "shares the same goals as the public: to ensure that AP Exams are balanced in their coverage of important topics." While we welcome the publication of the 2015 APUSH Exam, it will not help students or teachers who still lack an adequate supply of preparation materials.

#### **QUESTION 8: DOES THE AP U.S. HISTORY COURSE PRESENT A BALANCED PICTURE OF AMERICAN HISTORY?**

The College Board continues to answer this key question by unequivocally stating, "Yes. Ensuring historical accuracy and balance was a primary concern in our development of the new AP U.S. History course and exam." The College Board then admits "While anyone can point to an isolated statement within the document as an example of a positive or negative depiction of a specific topic in American history, we ask reviewers to examine the full document as a way of experiencing the balance that external reviewers found."

The College Board's external reviewers consisted of the history professors at 58 colleges and universities who participated in the November 2010 "Validation Study" and the 413 APUSH teachers who participated in a survey conducted at the same time. We do not know what document the history professors and APUSH teachers actually received and reviewed. Based on the College Board's own chronology, the document probably consisted of a description of the Framework's chronological organization, themes, skills, and concept outline. The incomplete document almost certainly did not include the essential content that contains the Framework's numerous biased statements.

Concerned citizens, national commentators, and prominent historians are now carefully reading the actual College Board AP U.S. History Framework. They have collectively denounced the Framework for its failure to provide students with a fair and balanced treatment of American history. Stanley Kurtz first sounded an alarm when in an article published in the National Review Online, he warned, "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.”

Many concerned citizens have noted that while the Framework does a good job of presenting examples of oppression and exploitation, it does a very poor job of presenting examples of American heroism, courage, and innovation. For example, the Framework completely omits such notable American achievements as the construction of the Panama Canal, the Lend-Lease program, the Marshall Plan, the Salk vaccine, and the Apollo Project. In addition, the Framework totally neglects the heroism and valor of American servicemen and women.

A growing chorus of critics is denouncing the Framework. As of this writing, no independent historian, commentator, or APUSH teacher has publicly stepped forward to defend the Framework. The College Board has yet to explain this absence of public support.