

AP U.S. History Study Guides



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Seven Themes in AP U.S. History¹

The seven themes listed below identify the essential content of the AP U.S. history course. Every question on the AP exam will relate to one of these seven themes.

1. American and National Identity (NAT)

This theme focuses on how and why definitions of American and national identity and values have developed, as well as on related topics such as citizenship, constitutionalism, foreign policy, assimilation, and American exceptionalism.

- a. Explain how ideas about democracy, freedom, and individualism found expression in the development of cultural values, political institutions, and American identity.
- b. Explain how interpretations of the Constitution and debates over rights, liberties, and definitions of citizenship have affected American values, politics, and society.
- c. Analyze how ideas about national identity changed in response to U.S. involvement in international conflicts and the growth of the United States.
- d. Analyze relationships among different regional, social, ethnic, and racial groups, and explain how these groups' experiences have related to U.S. national identity.

2. Politics and Power (POL)

This theme focuses on how different social and political groups have influenced society and government in the United States, as well as how political beliefs and institutions have changed over time.

- a. Explain how and why political ideas, beliefs, institutions, party systems, and alignments have developed and changed.
- b. Explain how popular movements, reform efforts, and activist groups have sought to change American society and institutions.
- c. Explain how different beliefs about the federal government's role in U.S. social and economic life have affected political debates and policies.

3. Work, Exchange, and Technology (WXT)

This theme focuses on the factors behind the development of systems of economic exchange, particularly the role of technology, economic markets, and government.

- a. Explain how different labor systems developed in North America and the United States, and explain their effects on workers' lives and U.S. society.
- b. Explain how patterns of exchange, markets, and private enterprise have developed, and analyze ways that governments have responded to economic issues.
- c. Analyze how technological innovation has affected economic development and society.

4. Culture and Society (CUL)

This theme focuses on the roles that ideas, beliefs, social mores, and creative expression have played in shaping the United States, as well as how various identities, cultures, and values have been preserved or changed in different contexts of U.S. history.

- a. Explain how religious groups and ideas have affected American society and political life.
- b. Explain how artistic, philosophical, and scientific ideas have developed and shaped society and institutions.
- c. Explain how ideas about women's rights and gender roles have affected society and politics.
- d. Explain how different group identities, including racial, ethnic, class, and regional identities, have emerged and changed over time.

¹ AP[®] United States History Curriculum Framework

5. **Migration and Settlement (MIG)**

This theme focuses on why and how the various people who moved to and within the United States both adapted to and transformed their new social and physical environments.

- a. Explain the causes of migration to colonial North America and, later, the United States, and analyze immigration's effects on U.S. society.
- b. Analyze causes of internal migration and patterns of settlement in what would become the United States, and explain how migration has affected American life.

6. **Geography and the Environment (GEO)**

This theme focuses on the role of geography and both the natural and human-made environments on social and political developments in what would become the United States.

- a. Explain how geographic and environmental factors shaped the development of various communities, and analyze how competition for and debates over natural resources have affected both interactions among different groups and the development of government policies.

7. **America in the World (WOR)**

This theme focuses on the interactions between nations that affected North American history in the colonial period, and on the influence of the United States on world affairs.

- a. Explain how cultural interaction, cooperation, competition, and conflict between empires, nations, and peoples have influenced political, economic, and social developments in North America.
- b. Analyze the reasons for and results of U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in North America and overseas.

Thinking Skills Required for AP U.S. History

AP U.S. History requires students to think **analytically** and **historically**, and students must be able to demonstrate these skills in writing. Students must also be able to make use of these skills when answering multiple choice questions.

What is Analytical Thinking?

1. **Making an assertion.**

An assertion is a conclusion that students have reached after examining all available evidence. Additional evidence might lead students to change their conclusion.

2. **Defending an assertion with specific, accurate, and relevant information.**

3. **Anticipating and destroying counterarguments.**

What are the Nine Historical Thinking Skills Required for AP U.S. History?²

- 1. Historical Causation**
Why did something happen in history, and what was the result or impact?
- 2. Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time**
What has stayed the same in history, and what has changed? Why?
- 3. Periodization**
How and why is historical information organized into time periods, and what are the turning points?
- 4. Comparison and Contrast**
What do two or more historical topics have in common? How are they different?
- 5. Contextualization**
When and where did something happen in history, and what else was going on?
- 6. Historical Argumentation**
What position should you take on a historical question, and what evidence will support your position? Can you address a counterargument to the position you are defending?
- 7. Appropriate Use of Relevant Historical Evidence**
How reliable is the evidence that supports your historical argument?
- 8. Interpretation**
What are the various explanations of something that happened in history?
- 9. Synthesis**
Can you bring in an additional category of analysis, such as politics, economics, society, culture, geography, etc.? Can you connect information from one time period to another?

² AP[®] United States History Curriculum Framework

Using the AP U.S. History Study Guides

In a Nutshell

The section labeled “In a Nutshell” provides a short description of the time period.

Key Concepts

The information in the “Key Concepts” section outlines the general information that students should know about the time period. Students should read these key concepts before they begin studying the time period in more detail.

Significant Topics

- The “numbered” topics provide **required information** about U.S. history from the *AP[®] United States History Curriculum Framework*. This information should be studied, examined, and committed to memory before taking the AP exam.
- The “lettered” information under “Significant Topics” provides **optional information** that can be used as evidence to support assertions students make regarding the required information for each topic. Teachers might ask students to skip some of the optional information provided in these study guides. Teachers might also provide additional information not listed on these study guides.
- Students who combine what they know about U.S. history with their ability to think historically and write well should do well on the AP exam.