

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE COLLEGE BOARD'S DEFENSE OF THE AP U.S. HISTORY REDESIGN

The College Board submitted a 19-page document entitled "A Look at the AP U. S. History Course Redesign" to the North Carolina State Board of Education. The College Board's presentation contains a number of misrepresentations. This rebuttal shines a bright light on the numerous misleading and disingenuous statements made by the College Board so that the SBOE can clearly and unambiguously evaluate the redesigned AP U. S. History course (APUSH).

1. ARE NORTH CAROLINA FAMILIES REALLY SAVING \$42, 539,026 IN TUITION COSTS?

According to the College Board, "In 2013, North Carolina students qualified for \$42,539, 026 in college credit through their AP scores." North Carolina families are certainly NOT seeing this level of tangible savings in their household bank accounts!

It is important to remember that individual North Carolina colleges and universities grant course credit - NOT the College Board. The individual schools in North Carolina are under no obligation to follow the College Board's AP grading scheme. So qualified is NOT the same as received.

In 2013, North Carolina students took 86,904 AP Exams. A total of 51, 795 or 59.6 percent received scores of 3 or higher. In it's financial calculations, the College Board appears to have assumed that all of these students received college credit. Is this easily verifiable assertion actually true?

North Carolina colleges do not all give credit for an AP score of 3 or higher. For APUSH, achieving a score of 3 actually means that students correctly answered just 42 percent to 50 percent of the questions! Do many of the leading North Carolina colleges and universities view this as a level of academic proficiency worthy of granting college credit? No and the College Board knows this as it is easily and readily discovered on the College Board's own AP course credit website.

In 2013, 23.3 percent of the North Carolina students who took the AP U. S. History Exam scored a 3. Using the College Board's course credit website, it is easy to determine that many leading North Carolina colleges and universities, eg., UNC - Chapel Hill, UNC - Wilmington,

UNC - Asheville, UNC - Greensboro, Wake Forest, Duke, Davidson, Elon, Guilford, High Point University, Appalachian State University, and Salem all refused to give college credit for a 3 in AP U.S. History.

So a student who scored a 3 received NO credit from these schools and his or her family saved NO money! However, either the State of North Carolina or the student's family did pay the College Board for taking the test.

The finding for AP U.S. History is largely consistent with the credit North Carolina colleges and universities give for other AP courses. The figure of \$42,539,026 therefore represents a College Board calculation of the theoretical maximum amount of credit that could be gained IF North Carolina colleges and universities actually thought a below 50 percent performance was worthy of receiving college credit. Given these facts, the actual in-pocket savings for North Carolina families is actually much lower than \$42,539,026 claimed by the College Board.

2. IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBJECTIVES, CONCEPTS, AND AP QUESTIONS CLEAR?

On page 8 the College Board provides an example of the alleged clear relationship between the new APUSH Framework and the new APUSH Exam. Is there a logical connection between the Learning Objective cited by the College Board and the Concept Outline?

The Learning Objective ("Explain how civil rights activism in the 20th Century, affected the growth of African American and other identity-based political and social movements.") is actually taken from a discussion of the Identity theme on page 21.

The Concept Outline Statement ("Seeking to fulfill Reconstruction-era promises, civil rights activists and political leaders achieved some legal and political successes in ending segregation, although progress toward equality was slow and halting.") actually appears on page 74. It can be found under Key Concept 8.2: "Liberalism, based on anticommunism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of governmental and especially federal power to achieve social goals at home, reached its apex in the mid-1960s and generated a variety of political and cultural responses."

Can you follow these hopscotch leaps in logic? It isn't easy. Even worse, the relationship between the Concept Outline Statement

and the “Related AP Exam question” is NOT substantiated by the body of released questions.

The College Board has now released one Sample Test and a number of illustrative exam questions to the public. In addition, the College Board has sent audit teachers a “first batch” of supplementary exam questions. The “Related AP Exam question” cited by the College Board on page 8 (“Briefly explain ONE specific example of civil rights activism that curtailed segregation between 1945 - 1980) is NOT contained in any of these sets of questions.

So where does this question come from? Was it in fact written specifically for this presentation? Are you thoroughly confused and troubled? I am and I think many others will be also.

3. WERE THE OLD APUSH MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS FRIVOLOUS AND UNPREDICTABLE?

The College Board has always controlled and owned the content of all its AP Exams. There is no magical outside figure forcing a beleaguered and downtrodden College Board to create frivolous and unpredictable questions. The College Board has decades of experience creating AP tests taken by millions of students.

Should the members of the North Carolina State Board of Education take seriously the College Board’s sudden *mea culpa* that the old APUSH exams were so obviously flawed?

On page 9, the College Board reprints two questions from the 2006 APUSH exam as examples of random questions linked to a vague Topical Outline. In fact, these two questions are neither frivolous nor unpredictable. Marcus Garvey was a significant African American leader during the 1920’s whose activities have generated a number of questions clearly linked to the topic “The ongoing struggle for equality” in Unit 19, “The New Era: 1920’s.” Similarly, Three Mile Island is a significant event clearly linked to the topic “Environmental issues in a global context” in Unit 28, “The United States in the Post-Cold War World.”

It is important to point out that the College Board is the copyright owner of each AP exam question. If the College Board officials believed that these or any other exam questions were unfair then they had the legal and professional responsibility to delete them.

There is a substantial difference between continuous improvement,

which should be applauded, and wholesale, arbitrary revisionism actually driven by a biased political agenda.

4. ARE THE REDESIGNED MULTIPLE-CHOICE EXAM QUESTIONS SUPERIOR TO THE OLD MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS?

The College Board has now released 102 of the new stimulus-based multiple-choice questions. Page 10 provides three questions generated by a paragraph from *The Autobiography of Ben Franklin*. College Board officials have often cited this question as an example of how their new questions promote the works of our Founders and the analysis of primary source materials.

Numerous critics have pointed out that the Ben Franklin quote has nothing to do with either Franklin's life and achievements or with America's founding principles. The question is actually about George Whitefield. Once a student determines this point, he or she should be able to easily answer the questions.

College Board officials deliberately create the erroneous impression that the old exam questions focused entirely on factual recall. In fact, these exams all included a wide variety of questions. For example, the 2012 and 2013 exams contained 24 multiple-choice questions asking students to analyze primary source quotes, political cartoons, maps, pictures, graphs, and charts.

5. WHY AREN'T THE TEXTS TEACHERS ARE "EXCITED TO USE" INCLUDED IN THE FRAMEWORK?

Page 11 lists 25 famous speeches and essays that "teachers are excited to use." College Board spokespeople have implied that these texts were neither tested nor taught in the past. This is completely false. In fact, most of the 25 texts generated questions on old exams and should have been part of a standard APUSH curriculum.

The real issue is not whether teachers are excited to use these texts. The essential issue is why these texts are not specifically listed in the redesigned Framework. The new document devotes 17 pages to a discussion of skills and themes and 53 pages to a concept outline. It thus has more than enough space to list these seminal texts.

6. ARE THE SUPPORT MATERIALS REALLY ROBUST?

The College Board boasts that the new APUSH Framework is supported

by the “most robust set of supporting materials for AP U.S. History teachers in the AP Program’s 60-year history.” This statement ignores a number of key facts.

First, it is important to remember that the College Board originally only released a Sample Test to APUSH audit teachers. An outraged public forced the College Board to release this “Secret Test.”

Second, it is important to note that one year ago APUSH teachers had access to 8 released exams with 680 multiple-choice questions. In addition, the AP Central website contained 25 sample Document-Based Questions (DBQ’s) and 100 sample Long Essay questions. In addition, the AP Central website contained almost 400 graded essays. In contrast, the College Board’s “robust set of supporting materials” currently includes just 102 multiple-choice questions, 10 short answer questions, 5 long essay questions, 2 DBQ’s, and less than 20 graded essays.

7. **DOES THE FRAMEWORK ENJOY THE UNANIMOUS SUPPORT OF PROFESSIONAL WRITERS AND HISTORIANS?**

The final slides in the College Board presentation erroneously suggest that professional organizations and historians have unanimously endorsed the APUSH Framework. This is not true. Here is a selection of critical comments that raise specific objections that the College Board has yet to successfully refute:

“The College Board is pushing U.S. History as far to the left as it can get away with at the high school level....The College Board’s defenders have hinted at the revisionist perspective that inspired the redesigned APUSH Framework, yet they have not properly explained that perspective to the public. A more complete explanation would be controversial, even shocking.”

Dr. Stanely Kurtz, National Review Online

“The College Board recently released its new AP U.S. History Curriculum Framework. It is, in many respects, a dispiriting document. A great deal of important U.S. history is given cursory treatment and some ideological themes are sounded rather loudly.”

Dr. Peter Wood, President of the National Association of Scholars

"The new APUSH curriculum represents the bad and the ugly but not the good of American history. The result is a portrait of America as a dystopian society - one riddled with racism, violence, hypocrisy, greed, imperialism, and injustice. Stories of national triumph, great feats of learning, and the legacies of some of America's greatest heroes - men and women who overcame many obstacles to create a better nation - are either completely ignored or given brief mention."

**Dr. Ralph Ketcham, Professor Emeritus of American History,
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