A History of Advanced Placement United States History: 
A Look into the Pushes and Pulls of Educational Reform in American High School History Classrooms

Annika Wang

Honors Thesis Submitted to the
Department of History, Georgetown University
Advisor: Professor Joseph McCartin
Honors Program Chairs: Professors Chandra Manning and Osama Abi-Mershed

May 8, 2023
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Beginnings of APUSH in the Cold War (1950s-1970s)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Reform Amid a Ballooning National Education Crisis (1980s-1990s)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of all of the amazing people in my life. I would first like to thank Professor Joseph McCartin, who has supported me throughout this entire process since our first Zoom meeting back in September (the first of many to be plagued by Wi-Fi issues). His mentorship led me as I navigated the many roadblocks of thesis writing, and his kindness always gave me the confidence to keep going. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Manning for equipping me with many of the skills that I needed to finish this thesis. From the Hometown History seminar over the pandemic to this year-long thesis seminar, Professor Manning has constantly encouraged me to develop my research skills and refine my written work. Thank you to Dr. Bonnie Morris as well for her guidance and expertise on the AP US History program that was essential to my foundational understanding of APUSH. I would also like to thank Kathryn Joy McGuire for sharing so many materials and meeting with me to discuss the challenges of studying APUSH.

I would also like to thank my parents for their never-ending support. Regardless of the ups and downs of life, I am so grateful because I know I can always count on them for reassurance and advice. Thank you to all of my friends for keeping me motivated, even at ungodly hours. And, of course, a special shoutout to Renee Liu, who has continued to support me despite the many late nights I have pulled since rooming together freshman year, and to Justin Tanaka, my rock.
Introduction

On Friday, May 6th, 2022, 456,520 students sat down to take the Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) examination, a drastic increase from the first one administered in 1956 with only 207 test takers.¹ Although test takers come from various backgrounds and states nationwide, with very little exception, they are all prepared for the same test with the same framework and are graded on the same criteria.² This model is substantially different from the traditional American student experience. The US education system is decentralized, and each state sets its own educational standards to determine its American history requirements. APUSH thus represents the most consistent nationwide high school American history framework and test, and almost half a million students take the course and examination yearly. Moreover, unlike other “core classes” like English, science, or math, the “social studies courses” category is much broader—including subjects such as history, psychology, and economics—and is often non-sequential. High school students, thus, are often limited in their ability to learn about American history in their school’s curriculum and rarely take another American history class in addition to APUSH.³

² While all classes are based off of the same framework provided by the College Board, there are numerous versions of the APUSH examination that are distributed to students during the testing period for security purposes, especially accounting for students across different time zones, and to give schools the option to offer late testing to students under extenuating circumstances. The most commonly administered set of free response questions are posted on the College Board’s website two days after the examination, and only that set may be discussed by students and teachers. The different versions only vary in the exact question being asked, but retain the same format, number, and type of questions. All examinations are graded during the same grading camp, a yearly conference held by the College Board where a group of high school teachers and professors come together to grade papers for a specific subject. Efforts to maintain consistent grading include regular statistical analyses of individual graders during the grading conference and statistical procedures designed to create comparable score distributions across different exam versions. More information on this process can be found here: “Different Versions of Exams,” https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/how-ap-develops-courses-and-exams/different-versions-exams.
Throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Advanced Placement courses and examinations have become heralded as a golden academic standard for high school students because the program is modeled after college-level courses. Universities have long given students credit for their achievement on AP examinations. In 2022, almost 4,000 colleges accepted AP scores as a form of college credit.\(^4\)

While AP programs and APUSH specifically have widespread public and academic acclaim, the course has changed throughout its seventy-year lifespan. The Document Based Question (DBQ)—a new type of essay question that provides primary sources that students have to analyze and differs from the typical recall multiple-choice and essay questions included on the APUSH exam—was introduced to the examination and framework in 1973. It has now become a program staple because it tests students’ knowledge and their application of historical skills. In 2006, the College Board assembled a committee of high school American history teachers and US historians to overhaul the existing framework and examination, eventually releasing a revised version in 2014. In previous years, the framework was less than ten pages long, but the new version extended its length to over one hundred pages to provide teachers with more detail about the expectations of the course. Namely, the AP US History Redesign Committee designed the new framework and examination to evaluate students’ historical thinking skills—similar to the ideology behind creating the DBQ—rather than their knowledge recall abilities. The material explicitly stated that the new design intended to increase the content's flexibility and not to serve as a set curriculum for the course. Nevertheless, these changes were met with heavy public backlash, mostly from conservatives, who criticized the content of the new material. The College Board eventually released a revision of the redesign in 2015 in light of the feedback received from educators and the public controversy.

\(^4\) College Board, “Advanced Placement Program Summary Report.”
Given the significance of this one course and the eventual debate surrounding its redesign, this thesis seeks to investigate the driving factors behind the developments in the AP US History program from its inception to the presentation. Namely, it seeks to answer the question, how has public and academic discourse surrounding the program changed alongside APUSH's development? This thesis aims to illuminate the changing relationship between academics, the public, and historical curricular development in American high schools by examining both throughlines from the program's beginnings.

The Advanced Placement program and the introduction of APUSH came at the intersection of numerous significant educational trends, like the rapid growth of high schools in America. Secondary schools experienced extreme growth between 1910 and 1940, known as the high school movement. The percentage of fourteen to seventeen-year-olds enrolled in secondary school went from only 18 percent to 73 percent between 1910 to 1940, and the graduation rate of high schools increased from 9 to 51 percent. Technological advancements increased the average American’s access to education. Specifically, automobiles, school buses, and improved roads allowed students to travel farther distances to attend school.

Additionally, at the turn of the century, Americans began to look to education, specifically secondary education, to “help solve problems of poverty, urban suffering, labor unrest, poor health, and dislocations caused by accelerating industrialization and concentration of economic power.” In the nineteenth century, the primary reason for students to graduate high school was to take classical courses and seek acceptance to college programs. However, as the job market shifted towards more white-collar occupations and employment opportunities

requiring cognitive skills, more students began to enroll in high school. In the 1910s, approximately half of all public high school graduates indicated that they intended to continue to college without delay, whereas, by 1933, only a quarter said they would. This idea that high school was not just to prepare students for college entry but rather for life broadened the general scope of high school curricula.

As secondary schools and their attendance rates grew, high schools became a “nearly universal institution” aimed at teaching students “social efficiency” and “life adjustment skills” that society deemed necessary. The general public and school administrators wanted secondary education to have multiple purposes, ranging from “the formation of moral character, training for citizenship, preparation for the workplace, [to] instruction in health.” While advocacy for expanding high school programs began with labor-oriented organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers—who viewed public education as a way to disseminate vocational training to improve the United States’ competitiveness in the international marketplace—other groups joined this broad movement. School reform organizations like New York’s Public Education Association lobbied for vocational programs in addition to extracurricular activities, cheap school lunches, and drug and sexual education programs due to the belief that “the school reached almost every young person, [so] it alone could repair the damage wrought by the alleged decay of the traditional educative agencies of [other public institutions].” Most American high schools were designed after the “comprehensive high school” model first put forth by the Cardinal Principles Report of 1918 and later emphasized by James Conan in his famous report, *The American High School Today* (1959). The “comprehensive high school” posited that high

11 Tyack, “The High School as a Social Service Agency,” 47.
12 Tyack, “The High School as a Social Service Agency,” 52.
schools were “characteristic of society” and thus “represented the nation’s devotion to ideals of equality of opportunity and equality of status.” At the same time, this idealized version of the American high school accounted for differences among a diverse student population. It operated under the assumption that each individual was destined to play a role in life perhaps different from their peers. Notably, given the decentralized nature of the American educational system, the federal government played a minor role in the large boom of secondary education at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most efforts and pushes for establishing more high schools and pushing for student attendance came “primarily, although not exclusively, from a grass-roots movement that was funded by local property taxes.”

While enrollment dwindled due to World War II, two postwar trends caused high school enrollment and graduation to increase again. During America’s involvement in World War II, graduation rates across the nation decreased, but by the war’s end, high school rates returned to “abnormally high levels” with the passage of the GI Bill. This bill gave a substantial amount of education assistance, ranging from tuition payments to covering living expenses, to veterans, providing millions of Americans the opportunity to complete their high school education.

The post-war baby boom resulted in another enrollment spike in kindergarten to twelfth-grade schools. During this postwar period, the public and policymakers continued to call on schools to “address questions of economic and social inequality,” bringing the topics of education and its reform to conversations centered on social policy. As such, while the American educational system underwent substantial demographic changes, issues regarding its accessibility

and quality became more visible to its wider public audience.\textsuperscript{17} The number of elementary and secondary school students almost doubled, increasing by 83 percent from 25 million to 46 million between 1950 and 1970.\textsuperscript{18} To account for this increase in enrollment, schools began hiring teachers at a rate even faster than the growth of student attendance. During the same period, the number of teachers increased by 121 percent from approximately 900,000 to above 2 million.\textsuperscript{19}

Due to the rise of student enrollment and teacher hiring, per-pupil government expenditure increased substantially between the early fifties to the seventies.\textsuperscript{20} In 1993-1994 inflation-adjusted dollars, the average per-pupil expenditure rose from $1,299 in 1949 to $3,517 in 1971.\textsuperscript{21} Funding went towards the implementation of “specialized classes, compensatory education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, special education and related services for students with disabilities, and desegregation efforts [following Brown v. Board],” and also to the continued growth of secondary education.\textsuperscript{22} Per-pupil expenditures in secondary schools are typically 1.2 to 1.5 times the amount spent on elementary students due to high schools typically having lower student-teacher ratios and covering subjects at a more complex level, sometimes requiring specialized classrooms, equipment, or higher teacher qualifications.\textsuperscript{23} Notably, public school budgets in the United States come primarily from a combination of local and state government contributions, contributing to an average of approximately ninety percent of public

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Guthrie, “School Finance: Fifty Years of Expansion,” 27.
\textsuperscript{21} Guthrie, “School Finance: Fifty Years of Expansion,” 27.
\textsuperscript{22} Guthrie, “School Finance: Fifty Years of Expansion,” 24.
\textsuperscript{23} Guthrie, “School Finance: Fifty Years of Expansion,” 32.
\end{flushleft}
school funding. The rising attendance of high schools and growing expenditure on secondary schools thus brought education closer to the forefront of public attention.

Another phenomenon that occurred during the lifespan of the AP program was the growth of higher education. Between 1940 and 1980, postsecondary education enrollment ballooned, growing by almost 800 percent from less than 1.5 million to 11 million. The passage of the G.I. Bill also gave returning veterans the opportunity to pursue higher education with little to no cost. Prior to 1960, the increase in college enrollment predominantly came from soldiers returning from service in World War II and the Korean War.

Post-1960, most growth came not only from the surge of high school graduates attributed to the “baby-boomer” generation but also from women and minorities traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education. The Civil Rights Movement and the passage of Brown v. Board and other landmark cases resulted in the growth of secondary school graduation rates among African Americans and encouraged college campuses to receive them. Furthermore, women began to attend college at a higher rate due to “shifting gender-role expectations and female labor force participation rates.” This phase saw the most dramatic growth in college enrollment, with it more than doubling in the sixties, and it was also attributed to the higher graduation rates of high schools. Between the 1940s and the 1980s, college enrollment and high school graduation rates increased alongside each other as higher percentages of high school graduates also began to attend college. In 1940 only 16 percent of high school graduates attended college, but by 1960 this increased to 33 percent. By 1980, this percentage

increased even further to 40 percent. Other factors for the rapid growth of higher education during this time, as discussed by sociologist Martin Trow of the University of California Berkeley, include “the demands of the occupational structure for more educated, the growth of new and semi-professions linked to the expansion of governmental services, the rise in educational standards of living of the whole population which has transformed higher education from a privilege into a right, and, increasing numbers, into an obligation.”

The “public’s widely shared belief in the efficacy of government and confidence in the value of higher education” brought higher education to the forefront of national political discussion. Although state and local governments had previously led discussions surrounding education, reports like the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education, often referred to as the Truman Commission, brought the importance of educational access to the nationwide public. The National Defense Education Act, passed in 1958 in response to the Soviet Union’s technological achievements, sought to improve the quality of American schools’ science, foreign language, and mathematics programs at all educational levels through providing federal funding. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Higher Education Act to “strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education” by giving federal money to universities, creating scholarships, and providing low-interest student loans.

---

The federal government’s role in the discourse about education reform would continue to
grow, and political rhetoric became a significant factor in the public’s understanding of the
general state of American education. For example, the Reagan administration formed the United
States National Commission on Excellence in Education, which published A Nation at Risk in
1983. This report heightened public fears about the perceived deficiencies of the current
educational system in the US. Other political efforts perpetuated this movement of federal calls
to action, like the 1989 bipartisan educational summit, headed by Democratic Governor of
Arkansas Bill Clinton and Republican President Bush, that resulted in the creation of National
Education Goals. This trend continued into the 2000s. With bipartisan support from Congress,
President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which utilized federal
funds to incentivize states to develop educational standards and assessments to evaluate
academic progress and achievement regularly. While “administrative progressives”—a term
used by educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban to describe a group of
predominantly white male professional leaders in education with a “common faith in educational
science above politics so experts could make crucial decisions”—led education reform in the
early twentieth century, by the end of the century politics, public perception, and education
reform became intertwined.

The growth of both high schools and colleges sparked other developments in education as
well, like the expansion of educational organizations and shifts in teaching pedagogies. The
College Board, founded in 1899 as the College Entrance Examination Board, was formed to

36 National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,
38 U.S. Congress, House, Education and the Workforce Committee, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, HR 1, 107th
17.
bridge high school and college. Its importance grew as educators and policymakers sought new approaches to develop American education. Additionally, teaching pedagogies continued to evolve as secondary and postsecondary educators thought of different ways to approach classroom instruction. During the progressive era of education, “pedagogical progressives” like John Dewey, Francis Parker, and William Heard Kilpatrick focused on changing schooling to be more receptive to students and how they learn best, including developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Although conservative educators criticized the progressive approach during the Cold War, referring to it as anti-intellectual and responsible for the nation’s educational deficiencies, these critics also advocated for students to learn using skills-based approaches and develop “the power to think.” Support for this method of instruction continued to guide curricular reform for secondary schools and in secondary school historical education, as seen with the ideologies stated in the National History Standards (1994)—a federally-sponsored curricular reform project developed by the National Center for History in the Schools to serve as a recommendation guide for states and local school boards to remodel their American history curricula—and the APUSH reform in 2014.

The shifting demographics of the educated American population, now being more inclusive of previously marginalized and underrepresented communities, resulted in other notable shifts within the broader historical discipline. One of the most significant developments was the popularization of social history, a field of history that focused on the experiences of

---

40 Despite this being the proclaimed goal of the College Board, the organization’s history is more complex. Readers interested in more information about the history from the organization itself can refer to books like The College Board: Its First 50 Years by Claude M. Fuess (College Entrance Examination Board, 1950) or The College Board and the School Curriculum by John A. Valentine (College Entrance Examination Board, 1987). A more critical version of the College Board’s efforts is discussed in Joseph A. Soares’ The Power of Privilege (Stanford University Press, 2007), specifically the section Eugenics and IQ Tests, which detail how the organization’s programs were used to exclude minority groups from entering elite colleges.


subjects who were often excluded from historical study before—like women, ethnic and racial minority groups, and the working class—in contrast to the influential political figures that had often been the subject of attention in the discipline. As argued by Olivier Zunz, a social historian at the University of Virginia, the growth of social history was “prompted in part by the demographic surge of historians produced by the postwar baby boom and the expansion of Western universities.” These “young historians” who “actively participated in the new pluralist vision of the 1960s” devised and utilized “methods which allowed them to build judgments from thousands of observations of ordinary people” to “investigate groups heretofore ignored or at best misunderstood.”

While these trends had occurred in the academic historical discipline, the heightened interconnectedness of high school education and the political climate exacerbated another phenomenon: cultural wars, or conflicts between different interest groups regarding each of their desires to make their values, beliefs, and practices dominant in society. These conflicts are especially relevant to social studies, which aims to educate students to be better citizens, and history, which teaches students about past narratives. Cultural wars have long impacted historical instruction in secondary schools. One of the most famous examples of an early cultural war involved Harold Rugg, a progressive educator of history, and his series of textbooks called *Man and His Changing Society*, published between 1929 and the early 1940s. Although his books were wildly successful throughout the thirties, they lost their popularity due to the conservative criticisms from organizations the American Legion, which asserted that the books were “un-American” and “pro-socialist.”

---


producing the books by the 1940s. The emergence of the Cold War further exacerbated these cultural conflicts. In 1947, the National Education Association published a three-part social studies textbook series called *Building America* that unexpectedly received negative reviews by patriotic groups such as the American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Catholics. The post-World War II and Cold War anti-communist sentiments emerged in the public’s response to these books. One citizen noted, “If the book that I read was used in our schools throughout the nation…the country would be fully communized in twenty years.”

The cultural wars did not end with the era of the Red Scare. They continued through the 1980s, as seen with the conservative backlash following the publication of the *National History Standards* (1994), and even into the twenty-first century. APUSH—and now famously AP African American Studies—was inevitably caught in the turbulence of the political debate surrounding historical education.

APUSH’s debut and all of its developments occurred at the confluence of the numerous significant currents in education, political history, historiography, and pedagogy.

The College Board has published some of its own work that details the program’s development; however, these works have less analytical narratives and portray the AP’s history in a bland and matter-of-fact manner. For instance, John Valentine’s book, *The College Board and the School Curriculum* (1987) spends one chapter discussing the AP program, but only as an extension of the College Board’s attempts to affect curricular development in American education.

More recently, Eric Rothschild, a former APUSH teacher and employee of the College Board, published an article in *The History Teacher* that traced the program’s history over

---

its forty-year existence (timely for the publishing of the article).47 His work primarily focused on the difficulties the program encountered acting as a bridge between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Both sources primarily served to contextualize the AP program in the broader history of the College Board but mask several relevant scholarly conversations relating to the causes of broad secondary education reform and changes occurring specifically in high school history classrooms.

Most work on the development of the AP history course and exam has analyzed the program’s development primarily in light of trends in education and identified academics as the main drivers of change and lack thereof. An analysis of AP European History Document Based Questions (DBQs) by Blackey concluded that the 1970s were a pivotal period for the development of AP history courses due to the introduction of the document-based question and exploration of new themes less focused on “great man history”. Blackey argued that this shift occurred because the AP program acted to match the development of history in college-level institutions.48 A dissertation published in 1985 by Michael Henry found a similar phenomenon when studying the changes in the APUSH examination between 1960 and 1979.49 He concluded that the introduction of the Document Based Question (DBQ) was a response to a broader push by history and social studies academics toward skills-based instruction in classrooms. However, he noted that the College Board maintained its traditional multiple-choice questions. The idea that the APUSH framework pre-reform had remained relatively stagnant since its inception—aside from the introduction of the DBQ—was further supported by Kathryn

McGuire’s thesis, which focuses on the APUSH test development. She argued that the APUSH curriculum had not changed substantially despite broader shifts in historical thinking. The College Board’s lack of transparency regarding curricular development has resulted in preserving the status quo in the teaching of American history. Although each work has varying conclusions regarding whether or not the changes in the AP history framework were substantive or minimal, they nonetheless mostly place the impetus of its development among professional educators and historians.

However, another branch of literature regarding broader education reform and education reform in history has identified other drivers of curriculum reform, namely the public and politics. These works have integrated more discussions of the subsequent backlash that reforms have received. David Tyack and Larry Cuban’s *Tinkering toward Utopia* (1995) argued that most educational reform efforts in high school settings occurred in an ahistorical, political manner magnifying contemporary education’s defects and ultimately creating a sense of crisis regarding the state of the American education system. Ira Shor’s *Cultural Wars* integrated similar themes of politically driven rhetoric, which had been culminating since the sixties, being a driving force behind the controversies that occurred during social studies reform. Jonathan Zimmerman’s *Whose America* (2002) placed the roots of cultural wars in more localized political conflicts among the American public. He found that there were two separate communities—one being marginalized ethnic groups in cities and the other being conservative Christians in the South—that pushed for the inclusion of new types of content in the history classroom. This

public pressure for more localized control over history classrooms ultimately escalated into a cultural war “vastly exaggerated” due to its rhetorical nature.\textsuperscript{54}

Other pieces of literature synthesized these two perspectives and traced curricular development to both academics and the public. Ronald W. Evans, in his two books, \textit{The Hope for American School Reform} (2011) and \textit{The Social Studies Wars} (2004), placed the process of education reform in social studies in both academics and public politics.\textsuperscript{55} In \textit{The Hope for American School Reform}, Evans argued that while academics spearheaded the social studies reform movement, the movement itself was driven by Cold War fears, thus bringing politics and public sentiments in as factors behind the curricular change. Similarly, \textit{The Social Studies Wars}, which focused on a later period compared to Evans’ other book, found that a wide array of interest groups from within and outside of education struggled to enact curricular change in social studies, and discrepancies between the different groups resulted in the escalation of cultural wars. Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn also contended that the \textit{National History Standards} controversy occurred due to the discrepancy between the public’s, who received the \textit{Standards}, and academics’, who designed the \textit{Standards}, understanding of history.\textsuperscript{56}

Similarly, this thesis aims to expand upon the pre-existing literature on the development of the AP history framework by introducing public opinion as a cause of APUSH’s development to examine how the interplay between professional educators, historians, and the public drove changes in this influential history course. Firstly, to trace the actual development of the course, this thesis utilizes College Board public access material like instructional course guides, released tests, and developmental documents. In order to account for the perspectives of professional

\textsuperscript{54} Zimmerman, \textit{Whose America?}, 7.


educators and historians regarding the course—both as a reaction and a driving factor—this work also draws upon articles from educational journals like *The History Teacher*, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, and the *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*, and written statements from the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians. Lastly, to examine public viewpoints, this thesis looks to media sites—ranging from conservative outlets like *National Review* and *The American Interest* to liberal media like *Vox* and *Quartz*—and public opinion polls.

The College Board largely instigated the shifts in the APUSH framework and exam structure in response to pedagogical movements that emphasized the development of historical thinking skills and focused on academic perspectives rather than historiographical changes that occurred in academic history, and that the College Board responded as it did mainly as a way to appease public criticism. The AP program’s aim to bring academic skills taught in higher education to secondary schools resulted in its widespread popularity. This attention made the program’s development more subject to public opinion. Subsequently, while the APUSH framework and examination changes were geared toward creating a standardized methodological approach to teaching history, the discourse surrounding these developments centered on the public’s understanding and expectations of American history. Public opinion, then, became a driving force in College Board changes, co-equal with developments in either pedagogy or historiography.

Chapter One of this thesis begins by illuminating the factors behind APUSH’s introduction, focusing on the period between the 1950s and the late 1970s. It discusses the AP program’s foundation during the Cold War and how contemporary educational philosophies manifested in the AP program and APUSH. It additionally discusses the “New History” and
“New Social Studies” movements—or efforts from academic social scientists, historians, and educational experts to restructure social studies and history courses to incorporate a more skills-based approach to learning—and how these sentiments impacted APUSH through the introduction of the Document Based Question (DBQ) in 1973, an essay question that students have to answer using the provided primary source documents.

Chapter Two focuses on the 1980s to the early 2000s and discusses the broader public sentiments of a national education crisis that pushed the widespread growth of the Advanced Placement program. This chapter also looks at the ways this sense of crisis seeped into concerns about US high school history by examining the controversy that erupted following the publication of the *National History Standards of United States History*, a federally-sponsored curricular reform project developed by the National Center for History in the Schools to serve as a recommendation guide for states and local school boards to remodel their American history curricula. Chapter Two demonstrates that despite the pedagogical and historiographical changes during this period, the APUSH framework and examination structure remained relatively stagnant.

Chapter Three looks into the APUSH framework reform process beginning in 2006, the reactions of the public and academic community following its official release in 2014, and the subsequent re-revision in 2015. This chapter details how despite the changes being primarily pedagogical, subsequent public reaction was focused on the content examples discussed by the framework. Chapter three discusses the re-revision and explores the relationship between public opinion and the College Board’s reform process.
Chapter 1: The Beginnings of APUSH in the Cold War (1950s-1970s)

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman presented to a joint session in Congress asking for $400 million to assist Greece and Turkey to “support the free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” In an address now known as the Truman Doctrine, Truman characterized the two ideological sides of the looming Cold War—one based on democratic values “based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression” in contrast to the other “based on the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority…[relying] on terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.” While America and the Soviet Union had faced off in a global power struggle since the end of the Second World War, these geopolitical tensions continued to intensify and culminated in a long-term ideological battle between totalitarian and democratic regimes.

The Cold War and its primary conflict rested on beliefs that created waves of intense pro-American and anti-communist rhetoric, permeating the public and shifting educational discourse. While progressive ideologies, like those put forth by John Dewey, previously guided the development of educational institutions in previous decades, new sentiments in the media criticized these approaches for their anti-intellectualism and anti-American sentiments. The discourse surrounding education reform in the fifties thus shifted. These critiques of progressivism provided the foundation for calls for curricular reform and the general strengthening of the American educational system. Under these circumstances, the Advanced

---

58 Truman, “President Truman’s Address to Congress, (1947).
Placement program debuted, beginning development in 1951 through funding from the Ford Foundation and being taught to students in 1956.\textsuperscript{59}

While the initial Advanced Placement United States History curriculum and test design were created out of a desire to adhere to the conservative history and educational philosophies due to the Cold War, the program was still impacted by contemporary intellectual discourse and thus open to curricular reform. This chapter discusses the national movement to reform high school education in multiple disciplines as spurred by educational concerns from the Cold War. It will demonstrate how this shift in ideology occurred in social studies and history and how this ultimately manifested in the APUSH examination and program. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the discourse surrounding educational reform during the Cold War, showing the beginnings of a skills-based learning approach to teaching high school students. It then details the Advanced Placement United States History program during its introductory years. The following section discusses how this change occurred in history and social studies by examining the “New History” movement. Lastly, it explores how the APUSH curriculum and exam changed in response to this educational trend.

1. **Background: The Cold War as an Ideological Backdrop for the AP Program**

   The Cold War’s presence in the American public’s minds shifted educational discourse to be anti-progressive based on two primary criticisms of the previously popular progressive model: anti-intellectualism and anti-Americanism.\textsuperscript{60} American secondary schools, whose attendance skyrocketed in the pre-World War II decades, and institutions of higher education, whose attendance also increased significantly following the return of soldiers following the end of


\textsuperscript{60} Evans, *Hope for American School Reform*, 34.
World War II, had become subjects of public interest due to their newfound popularity among most Americans. Education played an instrumental role in the ideological conflict of the Cold War, as it trained the American youth how to think and function in society. As declared by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958, “No man flying a warplane, no man with a defensive gun in his hand, can possibly be more important than a teacher.”

Progressivism was the previous prominent educational model, most popularly touted by John Dewey. To Dewey, education played a pivotal role in the perpetuation of American democracy because it “[simplified and ordered] the factors of the disposition it wished to develop and [purified and idealized] the existing social customs.” Even though this way of approaching education was similar to the desires that most conservatives had for the development of American youth—or the desired end goal of education to prepare students to be better American citizens—the progressive approach was attacked by academics and journalists for losing sight of how education ought to transform students. The growth in the societal role of secondary schools accompanied the popularization of secondary schools. High schools no longer only provided students with a liberal arts education but also provided vocational training to prepare them for white-collar jobs immediately after their graduation.

In contrast, those who criticized the progressive education model believed that this expanded role worsened the overall quality of American education, as it caused instructors and institutions to lose sight of intellectual purpose. Arthur Bestor, a prominent US historian and the author of the widely influential *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (1953), headed these attacks and asserted that educators “undermined public

---

63 Tyack, “The High School as a Social Service,” 47.
confidence in the schools” through “deliberately divorcing the schools from the disciplines of science and scholarship.”

Bestor desired to bring back the liberal arts education in secondary schools because he believed that the primary purpose of schools was to instill students with “the power to think.” Like Bestor, the president of Harvard University, James Bryant Conant, emphasized that the purpose of education was to create a well-rounded “rational man” from a student.

Academics believed that teaching students to develop critical thinking skills would allow them to combat communist sentiments. In the words of Gordon Keith Chalmers, another conservative intellectual, President of Kenyon College, and founder of the Advanced Placement program, “In a time in world history when the great organized forces both of intellect and of military power are mobilized against the universality of law and due process, it is clear that the central intellectual task of lovers of freedom is the understanding and exposition of these things.”

Academics concerned about “progressive anti-intellectualism” began to undertake efforts to improve educational curricula. A widespread curricular reform movement began in higher education in response to the concerns of the media and prominent educational figures amid the Cold War. The University of Illinois created a Committee on School Mathematics (UICSM) in 1951 due to the deficiencies of mathematical ability among first-year students. The UICSM emphasized the importance of creating an educational system that taught students a basic understanding of mathematical concepts rather than rote memorization. Students had to learn how to “think mathematically” using “inductive reasoning via materials and activities…aimed at helping students discover the underlying principles of mathematics, such as theorems and

64 Arthur Eugene Bestor, Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1953).
65 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 17.
algorithms” They could then apply this knowledge to “completely novel situations.”

Similarly, Jerrold Zacharias, a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, created the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) to create curricular improvements in physics based on the principle that students should develop solid scientific foundational skills. Zacharias criticized the progressive learning model for its overly simplistic portrayal of the scientific method. He emphasized that the PSSC’s program would allow students to get “an unvarnished and close-up sense of the scientific spirit that leaves no stone unturned in the search for truth, through the use of films, labs, and other new materials.”

While these efforts originated in higher education for issues perceived among college students, they quickly refocused their efforts on pre-college programs and secondary school courses.

Likewise, the College Board, a nonprofit organization founded in 1899 by a combination of elite universities and high schools to close the gap between colleges and secondary schools, tackled the educational reform movement in mathematics. Many mathematicians, like politicians at the time, were concerned with the “wide gulf that was developing between secondary school mathematics curriculum, which had hardly changed in more than fifty years, and the mathematics taught in leading colleges and universities, which was constantly transforming as the result of advances in both theory and applications.” To Professor Albert Meder of Rutgers University, the purpose of math classes in primary and secondary education was for students to develop the fundamental skills to think like professional mathematicians: “The objective is to develop mathematical insight, power, and understanding; to lead pupils to think as a mathematician would think.”

---

68 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 46-47.
69 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 50.
70 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 46.
71 Valentine, The College Board and the School Curriculum, 102.
Meder argued that students would be able to solve issues that were “not exactly like the type of problem that has been solved for him in the classroom or in the textbook.” Instead, students could use the skills they learned in class and apply their knowledge to tackle challenging problems, ultimately better preparing them to pursue more rigorous mathematical studies in college and university. As a result of these sentiments, the Commission on Mathematics convened for the first time in August of 1955 and ultimately created a list of extensive modifications to the traditional math curriculum to serve as a program for college-capable students.

In their final report, the commission noted that their appointment “constituted a frank attempt to influence the secondary school curriculum.” Nonetheless, they emphasized that their work was solely a product of professionals who were highly involved in mathematical instruction. The report only exercised influence “through the work of mathematicians, teachers of mathematicians, and teachers of teachers of mathematics.” One committee member from the Commission of Mathematics even argued that they should integrate more advanced topics into their tests, as it would “influence teaching and the curriculum” to push students to learn more challenging subjects. These efforts to improve mathematics and science curricula across the nation would further be encouraged following the Soviet launch of Sputnik 1 and the reignition of concerns about the inadequacies of the American education system.

Although the fields of mathematics and science were relatively apolitical, some academics undertook these reform efforts for political reasons. Zacharias notably spearheaded

---

74 Valentine, The College Board and the School Curriculum, 110.
76 Program for College Preparatory Mathematics, xi-xii.
77 Valentine, The College Board and the School Curriculum, 104.
78 Valentine, The College Board and the School Curriculum, 112.
the PSSC project due to his commitment to liberal arts education as a means to produce better-educated American citizens:

Having lived through World War II, Hitler, Stalin, Joe McCarthy…it was perfectly clear that you had to get used to the notion that you have to understand why you believe what you believe…The reason I was willing to do it [PSSC] was not because I wanted more physics or more physicists or more science; it was because I believed then, and I believe now, that in order to get people to be decent in this world, they have to have some kind of intellectual training that involves knowing [about] Observation, Evidence, the Basis for Belief.79

These drives for educational reforms, grounded in the intellectual approach of establishing critical thinking skills in the context of the Cold War “crisis in education,” provided the basis for the AP program. The two primary figureheads behind the creation of the AP program, Chalmers and William Cornog, president of Philadelphia’s Central High School, were both committed to the purpose of education as being to “uphold the sanctity of the individual while teaching students about the human condition as an antidote to communism’s threats of collectivism and mechanization.”80 Cornog and Chalmers’ initial report that sparked the foundation of the AP program emphasized that they “wholeheartedly support the values of a liberal education, and would caution school advisors not to let these opportunities for advanced work become vocational” and instead view them as opportunities for individual growth among students.81

These promises, however, were not without their limitations and did not extend to the majority of American youth. Academics who touted intellectualism did so under the assumption of the American meritocratic system, or the belief that only elite students could put this liberal arts education to good use. Thinkers like Conant pushed for the early identification of “gifted” students who might make “especially significant contributions to the nation’s safety and prosperity.”82 The pervasiveness of these beliefs paved the way for the acceptance of the AP

---

79 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 51.
program, which was created to accelerate the academic progress of the nation’s brightest minds by allowing them to take advanced-level courses in high school and avoid repeating this instruction in universities.\(^8\)

At the same time, the Cold War increased concerns about the values being taught in American classrooms, specifically in social studies, as these courses were geared toward educating students to be better citizens. Even prior to the height of Cold War paranoia, critics of progressive education linked this approach to education to communism and disseminated these fears among the public through print media. John T. Flynn published an article in a 1951 edition of the *Reader’s Digest* that criticized the progressive Rugg textbook series because it “set out to introduce the social science courses of our high schools as a seductive form of propaganda for collectivism—chiefly of that type we call socialism,” and taught that “the American system of free enterprise is a failure.”\(^8\) Mary L. Allen published *Education or Indoctrination* (1955) and alleged that “the danger of progressive education lies in its proximity to socialistic and communistic theories”, creating the threat of “communist infiltration in our schools.”\(^8\) Kitty Jones and Robert Olivier wrote *Progressive Education is REDucation* (1956), which asserted that teachers utilizing progressive approaches were “making little socialists” out of students linking them to communism.\(^8\) These attacks occurred on a local level too. Well-known organizations like the American Legion, the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Minute Women further condemned progressive approaches to education. Other newer and smaller organizations like Allen Zoll’s National Council for American Education, notably supported by national organizations, were created to spread pamphlets and periodicals of

---

\(^8\) Evans, *Hope for American School Reform*, 23.
\(^8\) Evans, *Hope for American School Reform*, 23.
\(^8\) Evans, *Hope for American School Reform*, 23.
“un-American” textbooks and lists of “communist” professors. Although schools did not often oust teachers because of these tactics, “teachers, textbooks, and the curriculum were at the mercy of right-wing pressure groups and imposed serious limitations on academic freedom.”

Sentiments of pro-intellectualism and pro-Americanism dominated discourse surrounding education reform during the 1950s, and this ultimately was the backdrop for the emergence of the AP program.

II. The Introduction of Advanced Placement United States History

In 1951, the president of Kenyon College, Gordon K. Chalmers, partnered with the president of Philadelphia’s Central High School, William Cornog, and other college deans to create an educational experiment, now known as the Advanced Placement program, designed to offer advanced, college-level courses to high school students. Born out of Cold War sentiments, the program was designed to accelerate the college education of gifted high school students by bringing introductory college classes to high schools for credits so these students could avoid repeating educational material. The program was funded mainly by private enterprises and philanthropic groups like the Ford Foundation, not governmental institutes or schools. Chalmers and Cornog eventually contracted with the Educational Testing Service—a nonprofit organization founded in 1947 by three other nonprofit educational institutions, the American Council on Education, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the College Entrance Examination Board, to take over testing operations and research—in 1954 to administer evaluative examinations for students in enrolled in the program’s courses. These examinations were logistically one of the quickest ways to ensure the program’s success, as they

---

87 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 24.
88 Evans, Hope for American School Reform, 24.
provided a consistent educational standard. After the results of these examinations were received, the study partnered with officers from the College Board to extend the program. The Board’s membership approved the extension in October of that year. In May 1956, the College Board administered its first Advanced Placement examinations, covering twelve subjects, including American history.

Each course and examination was designed by a subject-specific committee composed of professors and high school educators. Other than the examination taking place over three hours, the committee for each subject had jurisdiction over the content of each examination. While the English and Latin committees opted only to utilize essay questions to assess their students, the math and science committees used both essays and objective multiple-choice questions for evaluation. When the examination concept was first introduced, the history committee “simply rebelled,” refusing to develop an examination to evaluate a student’s historical ability. They argued that “colleges should be willing to trust secondary schools not only to teach competently but to assess soundly the proficiency of their students.” They declined to write a syllabus or recommend any material for the course out of fear that it would encourage “uniformity and rigidity.”

93 Cornog, “Initiating an Educational Program,” 52. The other subjects tested included English composition, literature, physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, Latin, French, German, and Spanish. History was divided into courses, American and European history, although they were designed by the same committee.
94 The first history committee was headed by Charles Keller, a historian at Williams College. While I could not find sources about the specific composition of the 1956 committee, the committee two years later (1958) consisted of: Charles R. Keller, chairman, Williams College; Nathaniel S. French, North Shore Country Day School (Winnetka, IL); Henry F. Graff, Columbia College; Charles C. Griffin, Vassar College; Charles L. Peltier, Newton High School (Newtonville, MA).
95 Valentine, The College Board and the School Curriculum, 84.
However, after a two-year stall, the history committee designed both an American and European history course for the Advanced Placement program. Professor Charles Keller of Williams College, one of the foremost proponents of the “New History” movement in the early sixties and early detractor of the creation of an AP history exam, served as the Director of the College Board’s Advanced Placement Program from 1955 to 1957. Nevertheless, the APUSH course description that the committee designed was relatively vague in order to address the initial concerns that they had. For example, the 1958 APUSH course guide was only seven pages long, with four dedicated to providing example examination questions. Moreover, the beginning of the course description had a disclaimer: “There is no desire to standardize advanced school courses in American history.” Instead of providing a rigid framework for what teachers should cover, they highlighted the variation among college-level courses. If college professors taught different events, used different textbooks, and looked at various sources, these high school APUSH teachers should do the same.

The committee nonetheless noted what historical skills they wanted students to learn. Because the purpose of APUSH was to provide high school students with a college-level introductory course, they emphasized how teachers ought to provide a “thorough grounding in facts” but also “should go on from these facts to an examination of their contexts, their causes, and their significance.” While college-level textbooks ought to be the backbone of the course, the guide noted that students should still have access to various historical material, ranging from secondary sources like general historical works, special studies, and biographies to important

primary sources, to analyze. Ultimately, students should be “trained to weigh historical evidence and interpretations and to arrive at conclusions on the basis of facts rather than prejudice.”\textsuperscript{100}

Despite these stated intentions, the examination did have limitations regarding what extent examiners could seriously test these skills. Two-thirds of the allotted time was dedicated to essay questions, each taking approximately forty to fifty minutes. However, instead of assessing students’ ability to analyze historical documents, the questions relied on students memorizing historical events to piece these details into a brief argument. For example, one question in the 1958 course guide asked students to utilize their knowledge of three documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Constitution—to argue whether or not they supported the generalization “America produced no new conceptions of government…its political ideas and institutions were drawn from Europe, and it supplied nothing more than a congenial environment in which they might flourish.”\textsuperscript{101}

While this question asked students to utilize historical thinking skills like source interpretation and argumentation, students still relied on knowledge recall. Their historical analysis and essay argument hinged upon their pre-existing understanding of the themes expressed in these three documents without access to the specific wording and nuances of any of these sources during their limited writing time. Another sample question included in the 1958 course guide required students to compare and contextualize different historical events in addition to crafting an argument: “How do you account for the fact that the Federalist party disappeared in the early 1800’s and the Whig party in the 1850’s, whereas the Republican party did not disappear after its overwhelming defeat in 1936?”\textsuperscript{102} This question was broader because it did not list specific

\textsuperscript{100} 1958 Advanced Placement Course Guide, 18.  
\textsuperscript{101} 1958 Advanced Placement Course Guide, 23.  
\textsuperscript{102} 1958 Advanced Placement Course Guide, 24.
pieces of evidence students should draw from. Nonetheless, it still depended on students’ recall of each event’s specific circumstances.

The remaining one-third of the time was for students to answer multiple-choice questions that tested students’ memorization of events. Of the sample questions, most of them required students to recall historical events or their details. For example, one question in the 1958 Course Guide asked students to identify “In which of the following ways were the first elections of Wilson and Lincoln similar? (a) The Republican candidates won, (b) The contest was decided in the House of Representatives, (c) The contest was decided in the House of Representatives, (d) A split in the opposition’s ranks made victory possible, (e) The winners received the same number of electoral votes.” Students only had to draw surface-level comparisons between the two events, and their ability to do so depended on how much they remembered the circumstances of these elections. Another set of questions included five separate acts—Kansas-Nebraska, Bland-Allison, Wilson-Gorman, Hepburn, and Norris-LaGuardia—as answers for a series of five sentences, each as their own question. Students had to identify which statement matched each act, again drawing upon what information they had memorized from these acts before the examination. The last type of multiple-choice question included in the 1958 Course Guide had quotations and asked students to contextualize them or identify the speakers. The instructions for this set of questions noted: “You are not expected to recall the sources of these quotations from memory. It is intended rather that you examine each one carefully to determine the point of view it summarizes and then from your knowledge of history select the most probable answer.”

While these questions did attempt to test students’ ability to examine primary sources and identify the main point of view it was demonstrating, students still needed outside knowledge to

---

answer correctly. For instance, one question provided the quotation, “The United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.” It provided the five answers “(a) Britain’s attitude toward the Venezuelan boundary dispute in 1895, (b) Spain’s attempted suppression of the Cuban Revolution in 1895, (c) Russian activities along the west coast of the United States in the 1820’s, (d) France’s activities in Mexico in 1860’s, (e) Secretary of State Blaine’s desire to clarify United States Pan-American policy.”105 Recall of the listed events was needed as much as analysis of the quotations for students to answer the question correctly.

While the course guide did not include recommendations for what specific materials and events teachers should include, it did provide a brief list of subtopics that students should be familiar with. These topics were relatively aligned with traditional historical narratives, including the “Making of American nationalism,” “Business enterprise in America,” “Leadership in America,” and most blatantly, “America as a world power.”106 These themes reflected the American values that became increasingly prominent in high school education due to the Cold War. Similarly, the guide only briefly mentioned subjects that had become controversial due to public controversies surrounding what subjects should be covered in American history classes. For instance, there is a vague mention of “minorities” under the section “Divisive ideas and interests in American history,” the quick inclusion of “slavery” and “unions” in “American labor systems and organizations.”107 This bias was also apparent in the sample questions provided in the guide, which had an overwhelming amount of questions dedicated to political history. In an analysis of the fifteen sample questions, Kathryn McGuire found that “three are about presidents,

six about political actions, four about political interactions between the United States and other countries, one historiographical, and one about immigration.”

Overall, the reception to the Advanced Placement program was positive. Through AP conferences, high school teachers and professors could interact with each other and discuss new ways of instructing and learning. Supporters of the program referred to this as “piercing the sheepskin curtain,” as it allowed high school teachers to understand how college professors were evaluating students. This new connection also caused college-level educators to consider the changes and reform efforts occurring in high school education, ultimately “[restoring] a respect for scholarship among students and teachers in secondary schools.” Harry Dawe, the chairman of the history department at the Beaver Country Day School, described the introduction of the Advanced Placement United States History program as being an “old revolution…which forced high schools to teach genuine history” and brought secondary and higher level educators together to discuss how American history ought to be taught in high schools. Professor of history at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now known as Carnegie Mellon University), Edwin Fenton, elaborated on his positive experiences with the Advanced Placement program. Through participating in an AP history conference, he realized that he had an incorrect perception of teaching in high schools, as some “instructors from public and private high schools described exciting history courses more demanding than many of the college survey courses [Fenton] knew about.” Through developing a cooperation program between colleges and high schools through teaching AP courses—alongside other professors and faculty members from the Carnegie

---

Institute of Technology—Fenton discovered the challenges that plagued the development of academically rigorous history programs. He now questioned how he could “combine an emphasis on subject matter with skills that are important in the study of history” and “how often [he] must repeat a technique before [he] can be certain that students have mastered it,” which were valuable considerations in building his approach to teaching.¹¹³

However, that was not to say that the program was perfect or did not receive criticism. Despite Dawe’s praise for the program, he criticized it for pushing introductory college-level history courses onto underprepared high school students. He argued that the course’s “heavy reliance on college texts and mature secondary sources” was a “trap set by the AP” that “could well serve to remove students too far from the reality of the past and to encourage a kind of pedantry which sits poorly on teenagers.”¹¹⁴

In a 1961 edition of The Bulletin of The National Association of Secondary-School Principals, Jack Arbolino, the then Director of the Advanced Placement Program, responded to the common sentiments surrounding the program in educational discourse. He noted that the program’s supporters consisted of organizations like the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, individual schools, college teachers, and administrators all over the country. Not only did these individuals “endorse…and become volunteer workers for the cause,” but they also “manifestly appropriated themselves to a private sense of responsibility for its welfare.”¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, he did list five common concerns regarding the program:

(a) it is undemocratic, a money-making scheme of the College Board, a subversive attempt by the colleges to re-establish dictatorial practices, (b) it is used by schools to look rather than be good, (c) it accents credit and, by overemphasizing testmanship, may lead to the breeding of a race of

¹¹⁴ Dawe, “Reformation in Teaching History,” 34.
academic spigots, (d) it limits the growth of the curriculum, unduly influences it, and restricts experimentation, (e) identification of the superior student is difficult at best; early identification is dangerous.\(^{116}\)

Arbolino attempted to address each of these concerns, beginning with the disclosure that the AP program was actively losing money.\(^{117}\) While Arbolino primarily deflected concerns (b) and (c) as originating from other stakeholders like secondary schools and college institutions, he seriously addressed (d) and emphasized that the program was “not designed to remain static” but rather to adapt as new directions emerged in academic scholarship. He additionally underscored that while the program was designed to “identify our [America’s] best students,” the definition of an exceptional student is constantly changing; educators “must never close doors on our young people” and “must always be ready to say when we were wrong.”\(^{118}\) Despite these concerns—many of which would come back later to influence the ongoing development of AP programs—Arbolino asserted that the program “[provided] a way to strengthen American education, and it [was] working.”\(^{119}\)

**III. The “New History” Movement**

While the AP program emerged as one response to pro-intellectual sentiments espoused during the Cold War, the widespread push for curricular reform occurring in higher education continued to persist and would eventually spread to the fields of history and social studies. Unlike the sweeping reforms that had been present in other disciplines—as exemplified by the aforementioned UICSM, PSSC, and College Board Committee on Mathematics projects—social studies were relatively left behind. Historian Milton M. Klein lamented how “the almost frantic hunt for science talent has received public approval and private support” with “new ideas [being]

\(^{116}\) Arbolino, “What’s Wrong with the Advanced Placement Program,” 29.

\(^{117}\) Despite losing $200,000 in 1961, the program is now the College Board’s highest grossing program, having surpassed the SAT.

\(^{118}\) Arbolino 30-31

\(^{119}\) Arbolino, “What’s Wrong with the Advanced Placement Program,” 32.
accepted, old ones re-examined, and the door thrown open to experimentation,” whereas the
“same [could] not be said for the humanities or for the social studies.” Educators such as Peter A. Soderbergh—a high school teacher, principal, professor, and dean in higher education—and professor of education Byron Massialas both noted how the social studies curriculum had largely remained the same. The latter wrote in 1966 that “with minor [alterations, for example] the substitution of American history for European history in grade seven—the 1916 pattern for the social studies curriculum persists until today.”

Despite critiques that history in classrooms had mainly remained static—focusing predominantly on rote memorization instead of cultivating historical skills—the advocacy for using primary sources in all levels of education existed long before this time. In the Madison Conference—a subcommittee of the widely influential Committee of Ten focusing on secondary education in the US in 1892—historians “no part of historical education does so much to train the pupils as the search for material, the weighing of evidence, and the combining of results thus obtained in a statement put into a form useful to other persons.” A few years later, the American Historical Association’s Committee of Seven also advocated for the usage of primary sources alongside textbooks. The Committee wrote that students “get a valuable training of judgment” from “comparing the statements of sources and arriving at conclusions from taking them together.” While they did note that a diversity of sources would benefit students, they nonetheless cautioned against the overreliance on this type of training. Specifically, they were

---

122 National Education Association, Committee of Ten, Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies: Appointed at the Meeting of the National Educational Association, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 197. Notably, during this time, secondary education was limited and most students who attended secondary school did so to continue on into higher education. Discourse surrounding secondary education was subsequently more intellectual during this time, which would later shift in the 1910s as more students began to attend high school and the institutions themselves would play different vocational roles as well.
concerned that the “inexperienced and immature minds” of students would create generalizations from insufficient evidence. Subsequently, they also encouraged teachers to use secondary sources as systematic history surveys for students to form correct historical notions. Some schools took these recommendations quite seriously. During the late 1890s, the usage of primary sources in high school classrooms grew, with the most dramatic growth occurring in New England high schools. Additionally, other experts in higher education had pushed for a curriculum revolution within the social studies field. The American Sociological Society—chaired by a prominent educational sociologist at the University of Minnesota named Ross L. Finney—pushed for sweeping changes in their 1919 report on teaching social studies across the nation.

Nonetheless, the ability of these scholars to influence the public was limited. Their revolutionary ideas had to be approved by influential decision-makers with the resources and power to enact educational change and influential public figures who could encourage Americans to embrace and perpetuate these changes. By the 1960s, the movement for curricular reform eventually swept up history and social studies, and people began to sponsor the development of educational projects to reform these subjects’ curricula as more Americans began to attend both high school and college. Both public and private organizations began to allocate resources to social studies research projects. For instance, the United States Office of Education and the National Science Foundation both funded curriculum projects with government money. The American Council of Learned Societies and the National Council for the Social Studies supported social studies curricular reform by publishing articles and sponsoring

124 McLaughlin et al., The Study of History in Schools, 101-102.
125 McLaughlin et al., The Study of History in Schools, 146.
educational meetings. The efforts of academic social scientists, historians, and educational experts to restructure social studies and history courses to incorporate a more skills-based approach to learning following contemporary pedagogical teaching perspectives would be known as the “New Social Studies” and “New History” movements.

With this increased effort poured into reforming social studies curricula came over forty separate projects within the span of two years. Social scientists in university settings spearheaded the vast majority of these projects. However, these reform efforts were broader than the sphere of higher education. A National Council for the Social Studies survey found that five hundred schools across the country had revised their social studies curriculum in some way.

Moreover, in the “New History” Movement, historical educators continued their attempts to enact widespread disciplinary reform by creating new forums for discussion to bridge higher and secondary education. One prominent example of this change came from the creation of The History Teacher, a peer-reviewed journal from the University of Notre Dame founded in 1967 amidst the movement. In the first edition, the editor wrote that the journal aimed to “create closer intellectual ties" among all levels of history educators because these groups had been “too often isolated.” It invited school teachers and professors alike to submit articles regarding history teachers’ professional problems and interests.

The rate at which educational experts pushed for reform accelerated, and by 1967 more than fifty national projects had started. That year, many project teams and directors presented and offered reports on their work at a National Council for the Social Studies convention. Although each project covered a different scope—they varied in grade levels, subject, and

---

geographic region—they generally emphasized student inquiry, with students being encouraged to “use the techniques and methodology of social scientists” rather than merely memorize facts. This advocacy allowed teachers to implement more local history into their syllabi, as teachers could access local primary sources and historical documents more easily. State legislatures and boards of education also began to defer curriculum choices and educational requirements to local decision-makers. This shift towards fewer course mandates gave teachers greater instructional freedom to implement curricular change. A national survey conducted by Richard Gross for the NCSS regarding social studies education in public schools found that approximately ninety percent of secondary school teachers felt “quite free to approach [controversial topics] in class.”

However, the “New History” movement was naturally not a monolith and was subject to criticism from the group that had pushed this reform the most—educators. One major concern was that the “New History” and “New Social Studies” movements involved complex and numerous changes to approaches to learning, which made their end goal unclear and muddled the movement. In an article published for The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, longtime New Jersey high school history teacher William Goetz wrote that the “revolution [had] not lived up to the expectations of its zealous prophets,” because it was hampered by the “repetitive haggling” over theoretical questions and spread into too many directions which failed to develop a cohesive trend development that teachers could feasibly follow. As also noted by Ronald Smith in Social Studies Curriculum Development: Prospects

134 Hertzberg, Historical Parallels for the Sixties and Seventies, 9.
and Problems, “the problem of the new social studies was not so much how to innovate as to how to synthesize these diverse ideas into a practical and viable program.” In a similar criticism, high school history teacher John L. Betts—who had participated in the team-teaching Citizenship Education Project and the Project for the Improvement of Thinking—noted the confusion behind the logistics and purpose of a skills-based teaching approach. He hypothesized four distinctive potential end goals for students who were to explore the “raw data” of history: “(1) to arrive at a conclusion, a generalization, a concept, or fact, or (2) to verify such a generalization already established, or (3) develop new attitudes and understandings while unfreezing old ones, or (4) simply to augment the student’s ability to think critically.”

Additionally, educators were concerned that these “New Social Studies” developments did not include feasible ways for teachers to assess these new skills that students should be taught; in a piece published in the 62nd edition of The Social Studies journal, Laszlo and Mary Miklos noted that “the traditional methods of evaluation simply [were] not adequate” since teachers were moving towards educating students in reflective thinking or inquiring. Despite this acknowledgment projects needed to develop a new evaluation system to reflect the new teaching pedagogies, many released projects did not include new testing criteria or methods. Elwood Bridner, the creator of his own social studies curriculum sponsored by the University of Maryland, wrote that “the available information on evaluating conceptual instruction [was] very meager” but did not offer any assessment ideas in his model.

Moreover, other educators argued that these reforms were biased in favor of academics in higher education and failed to account for the reality of teaching in high schools. Some teachers, like John Jarolimek, criticized these curricular projects because they were rigid and “teacher-proofed,” essentially strict frameworks that were designed so that anyone could teach them, and did not require any input or creativity from teachers. This sentiment widened the gap between academics and regular high school teachers. Many materials provided by these projects also came in complete curriculum form, including the primary sources necessary and discussion questions that should be taught in class. Moreover, since the content was relatively complex for a secondary school level, each module often required multiple class periods for students to review all of the material thoroughly. In addition to the fact that even the best students had difficulty comprehending the readings, students and teachers alike struggled to maintain interest in the dense, repetitive, and long material. High school teacher Betts further argued that these reforms were not being made in high school classrooms because the typical teacher was more than likely conservative—unaware of any new instructional movement and “happily wedded to the status quo.”

Historian William Goetz also noted that “the social studies revolution started at the top…[and] failed to turn many teachers on.” Additionally, secondary-level teachers and administrators had to consider the cost of implementing new programs, which were too high for them to change much feasibly.

Other historians noted their concerns regarding what extent the secondary school environment could facilitate the proper growth of students’ source analysis skills. Mike Krug, a professor of history and education at the University of Chicago, and Walter Rundell, a professor

---

144 Betts, “‘Revolution’ in the Social Studies,” 19.
146 Betts, “‘Revolution’ in the Social Studies,” 19-20.
of American history who was then teaching at the University of Oklahoma, both noted their fears that students would not have “the necessary content or facts to make valid generalizations,” reminiscent of the concerns laid out in the Committee of Seven’s report. Similarly, Betts wrote that he “did not subscribe to [the revolutionists’] goal that data must be used inductively as a matter of common practice for the changing of attitudes and the formulation of generalizations.” Instead, he hoped that “these forays into outside reading [would] reinforce previously acquired knowledge, provide enrichment or descriptive material, improve the student’s command of more sophisticated English, and furnish a core around which, hopefully [they] may fashion a stimulating class discussion.”

While the “New History” and “New Social Studies” movements had their critics, even the critics noted that these projects and ideas had usefulness. At the end of his review, Jarolimek concluded that “our experiences with the projects should have taught us that when it comes to curriculums, the home-grown variety is the one that is most likely to survive.” In a similar vein, Goetz concluded that teachers should consider new materials as “springboards, not ends,” and the extent to which social studies curricula could develop was dependent on individual school systems and educators.

The fervor for curricular reform in history ultimately died down in the early seventies as its novelty wore off and criticism for it grew. Leadership in “New Social Studies” and “New History” movements began to die down. Many early and prominent figureheads either began to develop different educational projects, joined other university research efforts, or left classroom instruction in favor of administrative positions. The last edition of Social Education, a

---

148 Betts, “‘Revolution’ in the Social Studies,” 23.
peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the National Council of the Social Studies, devoted to discussing curriculum reform was published in November of 1972.\textsuperscript{152} Although educators would continue to use their established channels to discuss curricular reform—for instance, publishing articles in \textit{The History Teacher} and \textit{Social Education}—the seventies witnessed a dropoff in the amount of material published and discussed to push for this change.

Additionally, this type of learning was unpopular among traditional school, parent, and assessment expectations of education, which emphasized “coverage, exposition, and fact-learning.”\textsuperscript{153} Ultimately, these movements failed to make a lasting impact in the public’s perception of how these courses should be taught. In a 1977 survey conducted by the National Science Foundation, parents, students, and teachers highly ranked the importance of the basic goal of education “to read with understanding” but gave a low rank to the more complex goal of “understanding and valuing the democratic process as both an idea and reality.”\textsuperscript{154}

Shifting demographics of students and broader national political movements also created friction in school environments that muddled educational discourse. As secondary school attendance shifted to include more American youth from historically marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds, the pedagogies of the “New Social Studies” and “New History” movements established in the previous decade seemed “heartless, joyless, stiffly academic, and unresponsive to the cultural needs of students.”\textsuperscript{155} The background of the Civil Rights Movement and the growth of student activism further overshadowed curricular reform efforts. During the late sixties and early seventies, school environments became ideologically charged as the nation dealt with domestic issues like racism and integration and international issues like the Vietnam

\textsuperscript{152} Henry, “The Advanced Placement American History Examination,” 33.
\textsuperscript{153} Beyer, “Gone but Not Forgotten,” 253.
War. Given the politically charged climate in schools, many students did not take to the idea that their role was only to be an academic inquirer, but rather believed in their ability to be a “social activist in search of an individual or group identity.”

This politically contentious backdrop caused these educational reform movements to become tangled with the broader discourse of general societal upheaval since these projects “seemed to call for accepting all opinions as if they were openly arrived at.” On the one hand, minority groups across the country began to mobilize to fight for equality, more people were concerned with America’s involvement in the Cold War—specifically Vietnam—and there was an overall rise in “demands for participatory democracy and involvement, with a corresponding questioning of the credibility of the authority in a field.” On the other side, conservatives criticized these new approaches for straying too far from the original purpose of social studies—which was, as articulated by the National Education Association Committee on Social Studies in their 1917 report, to ensure students became “good citizens” by “participating in the building of an invigorated democratic society.” For instance, in an article published in *Social Education* in 1975 titled “What Have We Done to Social Studies?” author James Benjamin criticized the teaching methods for their effects on how teachers portrayed content to students. He describes “excessive emphasis on conflict as a societal change agent, the supremacy of individual rights, ‘humanizing’ historical figures, the inadequacies of American society, and gimmickry in social studies methodology” as being some of the many problems from this new way of teaching.

---

159 Hertzberg, *Historical Parallels for the Sixties and Seventies*, 12.
160 James M. Benjamin, “What Have We Done to Social Studies?,” *Social Education* 39, no. 2 (February 1975): pp. 88-90.
While the support for the “New Social Studies” and “New History” curricular reform projects waned, the idea that students should learn skills rather than just facts persisted in secondary school curricula. A survey from the National Science Foundation conducted in 1980 did find that a substantial number of teachers did continue to utilize inquiry-based curriculum materials developed during this time.\(^ {161}\) The National Council for the Social Studies similarly found that hundreds of schools had changed their social studies curricula to adopt these lines of thinking.\(^ {162}\)

**IV. APUSH in the Seventies: Change and Stagnation in Response to the Reform Movement**

Ironically, as the “New History” and “New Social Studies” movements began to fade, the Advanced Placement United States History program made a huge change: in 1973, the College Board introduced a new section on the examination called the Document Based Question (DBQ). The inaugural question asked students to rely on a “critical evaluation of the accompanying documents,” giving students fifty-five minutes to analyze eleven sources and compose an essay on the influencing factors of the Immigration Act of 1924.\(^ {163}\) While students were encouraged to refer to “historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents…where relevant,” the instructions reminded them to “write an essay which relates the documents to the question.”\(^ {164}\) This new part of the exam reflected the skills that the curricular reform movement encouraged. While many “New History” supporters came from higher education, it was actually the secondary school teachers that pushed for the implementation of the Document Based Question into the AP history examinations. Specifically, Reverend Giles Hayes of the Delbarton

\(^{161}\) Senesh, “The New Social Science Movement of the 1960s,” 68.


School in New Jersey played a prominent role in its development. He was deeply involved in the “New History” movement and hoped that this new section would allow students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate sources and data, thus making them junior historians.\textsuperscript{165} Although there was not total unanimity among governing College Board committee members regarding the effectiveness of the Document Based Question, it withstood the test of time, and very few committee members suggested it be eliminated.\textsuperscript{166}

The College Board also attempted to respond to the calls of the “New History” movement by looking at the possibility of implementing a different type of multiple-choice question into their pre-existing section in 1972. The organization brought together the Examining Committee and Educational Testing officials to assess the potential of utilizing inquiry questions on the exam by considering Edwin Fenton’s Carnegie Test for Social Studies Inquiry Skills—the same Edwin Fenton who played a significant role in the growth of the AP program in the Pittsburgh area.\textsuperscript{167} Fenton designed this multiple-choice test not to assess students based on their content knowledge but rather their “ability to recognize a problem from data, formulate hypotheses, recognize the implication of hypotheses, gather data, evaluate data, and evaluate hypotheses.”\textsuperscript{168} However, the reactions among the Examining Committee were largely negative. Most complaints centered on the multiple-choice aspect of these questions—multiple options could answer some questions, others questions did not have an entirely correct answer, and most questions could be answered by common sense rather than specific historical content. The most notable issue committee members found was that multiple-choice questions did not require

\textsuperscript{166} Henry, “The Advanced Placement American History Examination,” 158.
\textsuperscript{167} ETS (Educational Testing Services) is an organization that the College Board utilizes to actually conduct their examinations.
\textsuperscript{168} Henry, “The Advanced Placement American History Examination,” 88.
students to utilize their historical skills in a learned set of rules and procedures. They, “If knowledge is necessary to make an inquiry into history, can we really talk about skills at all?”

Similarly, the APUSH Examining Committee doubled down on their usage of multiple-choice questions, as evidenced by their response to Bloom’s Taxonomy of cognitive skills, an influential educational theory of the time. During the mid-fifties, Benjamin Bloom developed a taxonomy of behavior based on the idea that there were six levels of cognitive skills. It was utilized by various disciplines to classify, validate, and construct tests of cognitive abilities and allowed educators to innovate how they were evaluating students according to the new skills they were teaching them. While the Committee of Examiners of the Advanced Placement American History program looked at Bloom’s Taxonomy to choose their multiple-choice questions, they ultimately maintained their initial skeptical view of its merit. Many committee members believed recall questions were superior to questions that Bloom’s Taxonomy categorized as being at a higher cognitive level. The committee justified prioritizing recall questions because, as noted by member Stephen Klein, “the crucial dimension of knowledge is not recall, which is constant, but significance or lack of significance according to the prevailing criteria of scholarship.”

The “New History” and “New Social Studies” movements did have other minor impacts on the APUSH test. In the short term, the question selection of the AP US History examination was affected by the presence of the “New History” movement. The percentage of questions focused on “New History” topics—involving social science data, arts, and the humanities—increased between 1960 and 1974. However, they decreased following this period similar to the

---

general reaction to the movement. While there was an “initial burst of enthusiasm,” it was followed by a “cooling of interest and finally a retreat towards more traditional patterns of instruction and evaluation.” This trend notably was only in the essay section, as Scott’s analysis demonstrated that there was not an increase in “New History” questions in the multiple-choice section.

Overall, the APUSH Examination Committee was not entirely resistant to change. They established meetings to discuss the possibilities to implement tools popularized in national curriculum reform education trends, like Fenton’s Test and Bloom’s Taxonomy, even if the multiple-choice questions did not necessarily change. Nonetheless, the introduction of the Document Based Question in 1973 marked a significant shift in how the APUSH examination would be assessed, as it actively evaluated a student’s argumentative capabilities based on both knowledge recall and source analysis. While the DBQ would be subject to change over the next few decades—from students analyzing eleven sources in fifty-five minutes, to being extended in 1976 with students analyzing twenty-four sources in sixty minutes, to being shortened in 1982 with eight sources over forty minutes—its sustained overall presence marked a permanent change in the way the exam, and thus the course, was constructed. An article published in The College Board Review exemplified the responsiveness of the AP US History examination and framework to contemporary educational trends. Test Committee member William Hochman advocated for exam question experimentation so that the AP history courses would be more aligned with contemporary approaches to historical teaching. While he did not want the program to “tremble with every breeze that [swept] through the educational scene,” he nonetheless

---

175 “AP U.S. History Past Exam Questions.”
advocated for questions of less traditional content—such as minority groups and the arts—and that tested different skills of students, like detection of bias in historical documents.  

The AP program and APUSH specifically were products of pro-education and pro-American sentiments that had bubbled up in public and academic communities due to the looming presence of the Cold War, creating a program focused on conservative historical narratives that students would learn through the memorization of knowledge. This pro-intellectual approach to education reform persisted into the sixties, and academic communities pushed for a shift in teaching pedagogy in various subjects like history and social studies. Through the introduction of the DBQ, we can see how the APUSH framework and examination were subject to change due to shifting academic discourse and the increased popularity of a skills-based approach to learning. Although some of APUSH’s development in this chapter can be attributed to public sentiments from the Cold War, the most change occurred due to academic scholarship. Although educators would continue to play a pivotal role in the continued evolution of APUSH, the program’s growing popularity would further subject it to public scrutiny.

---

Chapter 2: Reform Amid a Ballooning National Education Crisis (1980s-1990s)

While the rhetoric of education reform in the sixties and seventies was shaped by Sputnik and the Cold War, by the eighties, it had morphed and branched into multiple education concerns, all under the umbrella of a national education crisis. As discussed in the last chapter, education reforms were initially rooted in concerns about the quality of science and mathematics courses in high schools. However, by the seventies, it had expanded into falling literacy rates, and by the eighties, these anxieties had spread into many aspects of public education. In the words of Ernest L. Boyer—the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and author of *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*—the push for education reforms was no longer guided by a “single gleaming speck” like Sputnik in the Cold War, but had become a noisy conglomerate of many worries that loomed over the public like a “dark, foreboding cloud.”

This chapter will discuss the origins of the national education crisis in the media and political rhetoric and demonstrate how these sentiments bled into discussions regarding educational reforms in history classes, specifically manifesting in public anxiety about the historical content being taught. At the same time, these broad educational concerns caused the AP program’s popularity to skyrocket. Amid these two phenomena—the intense growing rhetorical media debate regarding how American history should be taught in high school and the blossoming prevalence of the AP program, both spurred by the sense of a national education crisis—the APUSH framework remained relatively stagnant. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and its political response fueled the rhetoric about a national educational crisis, which inspired the establishment of the *National History Standards* and the ensuing rhetorically charged

---

controversy. Nevertheless, amidst the furor, the use of AP US History continued to rise among American high schools. Its curriculum proved essentially unchanging, making APUSH an island of stability in the middle of a sea of educational change in the second half of the twentieth century.

I. Background: The Rhetorical Escalation of a National Education Crisis

In 1983, the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education (UNCEE) published the famous *A Nation at Risk* report. The UNCEE was composed of eighteen members from various backgrounds, ranging from government actors to those working in the private sector and educational academics. Published under the Reagan administration and the leadership of the Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, the report cited the decline of multiple educational statistics, predominantly drawing from the College Board’s SAT scores. The report’s authors used these data points as evidence that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and as a people.”

That same year, Boyer published *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, which also proclaimed that “If we [the American public] do not seize this special moment, we will fail the coming generation and the nation.” The conclusions of these two reports are emblematic of the rhetoric that advanced the national education crisis of the 1980s and ultimately resulted in the mobilization of government officials and educational experts in a series of reforms to combat these problems.

Even before the publication of highly impactful reports such as *A Nation at Risk* and *High School*, as the media and federal officials continued to report declining test scores and as politicians pushed the “back to basics” concept in educational policy, public opinion on

---

contemporary education policy shifted negatively. Multiple polls showed that many American respondents had less faith in their education system compared to the respondents from previous years. One poll revealed a drop in the percentage of respondents who said their children received a better education than they did from 61 percent in 1973 to 41 in 1979. Only 45 percent of respondents in 1983 said they would want their child to teach at a public school as a career compared to the 75 percent in 1969. Additionally, the percentage of respondents that gave public schools an A or B grade declined from 48 percent in 1974 to 31 percent in 1983.180 When poll respondents were asked what the biggest problems facing public schools were, “curriculum and educational standards” appeared each year within the top five answers between 1976 and 1980s.181

However, this perception of the declining state of the American education system was mostly shaped by the presentation of these facts. The statistics that A Nation at Risk cited and the authors’ interpretation of them were notably limited in their scope. The statistical interpretation favored by politicians such as Regan, and later Bush, juxtaposed the rising cost of education and general stagnant and dropping test result scores to conclude that “Americans are not getting their money’s worth from public schools.”182 However, the reality of these statistics was more complex than the conclusion of A Nation at Risk painted them to be. SAT scores actually began to decline as educational reforms were enacted post-Sputnik, but stopped a year before the report was published. Additionally, African American test takers’ SAT scores were increasing faster than white students.183 An interview with a College Board spokesperson for an article published in the New York Times in 1983 covering the publication of A Nation at Risk further revealed that

181 Tyack and Cuban, Tinkering toward Utopia, 32.
182 Tyack and Cuban, Tinkering toward Utopia, 37.
183 Shor, Cultural Wars, 111.
there was an error in the evidence presented in the report: the College Board did not find a
decline in the physics and English achievement tests they conducted.184 While A Nation at Risk
painted the picture that all educators—since their committee was so diverse—felt that a sense of
urgency was necessary due to the dismal state of the national education system, there was no
consensus among educational experts. For instance, Howard Harold Howe II—a former US
Commissioner of Education who then taught at the Harvard Graduate School of
Education—referred to the report as “sensational.” Howe noted that while there were certainly
issues with the American education system, it was not as extreme as the report made it out to be:
“I think American education has a cold. Most people think it has the flu. It certainly doesn’t have
the pneumonia that the commission suggested.”185

Moreover, years later, in interviews conducted by Anya Kamenetz for National Public
Radio, two authors that contributed to A Nation at Risk—Yvonne Larsen, the vice chair of the
commission, and Gerald Holton, professor emeritus of physics and the history of science at
Harvard University and member of the commission—both indicated that the report was written
on the basis that education was already declining. Larsen noted that she was “called by
[President Reagan’s] office,” and they asked her to be a part of the commission formed out of the
preexisting concern that the “rigor in our schools had diminished” and that “if we continued how
we were going, we wouldn’t continue to improve.”186 Holton additionally mentioned how the
report’s purpose was to create a sense of urgency among the public. “Education was not on the
front page” at the time, but Holton and his colleagues “knew that trouble was ahead…[and]

186 Anya Kamenetz, “What ’A Nation at Risk’ Got Wrong, and Right, about U.S. Schools,” NPR (NPR, April 29,
something had to be done.”¹⁸⁷ The publication of *A Nation at Risk* was heavily reported in the media, which spread the impact of the report’s grave conclusion. For instance, *Newsweek*’s report on *A Nation at Risk* emphasized its urgent and bleak message: “The sum of this report is that one of the fondest assumptions of American life—progress from one generation to the next—has been nearly shattered.¹⁸⁸

In the years following these reports, especially *A Nation at Risk*, educational reform became a hot-button issue for many American politicians, with many lawmakers taking action to address this sense of crisis among the public. President George H. W. Bush and all fifty governors—with the Democratic Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton, primarily working alongside President Bush—came together in 1989 for a summit to discuss education reform and ultimately created the National Educational Goals. These six goals, to be achieved by the year 2000, were to promote the K-12 education of American children. Goal 3 highlighted that students should have a “demonstrated competency in challenging subjects” like history and that schools should prepare their students for “responsible citizenship.”¹⁸⁹ At the end of the summit, President Bush declared that “the time has come to establish clear national performance goals, goals that will make us internationally competitive and second to none in the twenty-first century.”¹⁹⁰ The introduction of these goals perpetuated the movement of government-sponsored national education reform, which continued into the decade. Thus, educational specialists began to further investigate how to bring specific school subjects into conversation with the national educational crisis narrative.

¹⁸⁷ Kamenetz, “What ‘A Nation at Risk’ Got Wrong.”
¹⁹⁰ Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 149.
II. The Crisis Bleeds into History Reform

In light of this new narrative of an educational crisis, the federal government continued to sponsor national assessments to identify the specific problems plaguing each discipline, even though states primarily control education in the US. In 1986, the National Assessment Governing Board conducted the first national assessment of history. The results revealed that “some two-thirds did not know in which half of the century the Civil War had taken place, and even larger proportions could not identify the Scopes trial, the Progressive Movement, or Jim Crow laws.”\(^\text{191}\) The perceived educational history crisis was that students did not have the knowledge of basic historical events in American history. With an impact similar to *A Nation At Risk*, the publication of another national report demonstrating the inadequacies of the American education system further incentivized policymakers to act.

The *National Standards of US History* was part of a series of mass education reforms sponsored by the US government to improve the quality of education so that the US would maintain its role at the top of the global power hierarchy. The program was designed to only serve as recommendations rather than governmental mandates for the education system, especially given America’s decentralized approach to education.\(^\text{192}\) Additionally, while the creation of these standards was to be federally funded, they would mostly be spearheaded by educators.\(^\text{193}\) Even though there were some apprehensions among politicians—especially conservative ones—because of the shift toward a “national history standard,” there was clear bipartisan support for the creation of national education standards, which took place under the


\(^{192}\) Bahmuer, “The Struggle Over America’s National History Standards,” 100.

\(^{193}\) Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 152.
administration of a Republican president but had the explicit support of Democrats. Even Lynne Cheney, who would become the figurehead of criticism of the *National Standards* only a few years later, was one of the key actors responsible for its creation. She chaired the National Endowment for Humanities, which provided a two-million-dollar grant for the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) alongside the Department of Education.\(^\text{194}\) This organization was selected to develop the national history standards due to its connections with “every significant organization with an interest in history and social studies” and enlisting hundreds of scholars and teachers to collaborate on this effort.\(^\text{195}\) The directors of the *National Standards* project were Gary Nash, a US historian at the University of California Los Angeles who specialized in the revolutionary era, and Charlotte Crabtree, a K-12 education specialist.\(^\text{196}\)

The historical discipline had undergone immense change, with more contemporary work focusing on social history and subjects that were traditionally forgotten or written over. For instance, historian Joan Scott—through her widely read 1986 article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” published in the *American Historical Review*—brought attention to women's and gender history.\(^\text{197}\) Other influential academics like E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm emphasized the importance of studying the working class to understand societal development. In contrast, American history in primary and secondary education remained static. As described by historian David Danbom, it was a narrative that “told us what it was to be an American” but was limited by its lack of nuance, failure to address non-public aspects of life, and near-exclusive focus on great men.\(^\text{198}\)


\(^{197}\) https://www.jstor.org/stable/1864376

The *National Standards* project aimed to connect professional historians with the general education of history to elevate high school curricula. Subsequently, the *National Standards* embodied an academic’s understanding of history. It strove to teach students not only important historical events in American history but also how to think like a historian. The five standards of historical thinking would be as follows: (1) critical thinking, (2) historical comprehension, (3) historical analysis and interpretation, (4) historical research capabilities, and (5) historical issues analysis and decision-making.¹⁹⁹ In addition to this skills-based approach, the *National Standards* imbued their standards with themes prominent in social history, such as race, class, and gender.²⁰⁰ The content standards spanned ten eras, ranging from pre-Columbian US history to the modern day, with each period having between two to four more specific standards or main takeaways. These standards also had subcategories identifying what skills students should utilize to thoroughly study historical content. For example, one of the standards asked students to “analyze the role of new laws and the federal judiciary in instituting racial inequality and in disenfranchising various racial groups.”²⁰¹ As written by Nash, the co-director of the project, “The original version of the national history standards shows the influence of scholars who wanted to analyze American history in a more penetrating way while helping their students appreciate and recognize the achievements and struggles of minorities and non-Western peoples.”²⁰²

The public’s first exposure to the completed product of the *National Standards of US History* came through a scathing article published in the media. A few days before the official publication of the *National Standards of US History*, Lynne Cheney published an opinion article

¹⁹⁹ Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 177.
²⁰¹ National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for History Basic Edition*.
in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled “The End of History.” Throughout the piece, Cheney criticized the *National Standards* for “political correctness” in that it overemphasized the dark parts of American history and overly admired relatively obscure and less important historical figures at the expense of prominent white males. She specifically cited the number of times the *National Standards* referenced each subject to prove this point. To her first point, McCarthyism was mentioned nineteen times and the Klu Klux Klan seventeen times. To her second point, Cheney pointed out that while Harriet Tubman is mentioned six times, "two white males who were contemporaries of Tubman, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, get one and zero mentions, respectively,“ and proceeded to list other prominent white, male inventors who were not mentioned in the *National Standards*.\(^{203}\) She additionally quoted an unnamed whistleblower, writing that "those who were pursuing the revisionist agenda no longer bothered to conceal their great hatred for traditional history."\(^{204}\) She concluded that this politicized history would remove a significant aspect of the American past from schools and that “our children deserve to know [that we are better people than the *National Standards* indicate].”\(^{205}\) Other conservative political figures joined the fray. Four days later, Rush Limbaugh tore out pieces of a US history textbook on live television, using this action as a metaphor to describe what the *National Standards* would do to American history.\(^{206}\) Limbaugh doubled down on the assertion that the *National Standards* were a product of political correctness that manipulated the past:

> History is real simple. You know what history is? It’s what happened. The problem you get into is when guys like this try to skew history by saying, ‘Well, let’s interpret what happened because maybe we can’t find the truth in the facts, or at least we don’t like the truth as it’s presented. So let’s change the interpretation a little bit so that it will be the way we wished it were. Well, that’s not what history is. History is what happened, and history ought to be nothing more than the quest to find out what happened.”\(^{207}\)

---


\(^{206}\) Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 5.

\(^{207}\) Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 6.
This rhetoric was taken even further by other conservative critics, attacking the *National Standards* not only for its un-American-ness but also for its elitism. For instance, Charles Krauthammer wrote that the standards were “hijacked by the educational establishment,” and James Atlas decried them for being “academic chic.”

The historians who had authored the *National Standards* had to respond to the widespread criticism focused on the historical content mentioned. Nash and other historians primarily asserted that the definition of history put forth but Rush Limbaugh—that history is merely what happened—is an inherently inadequate representation of the subject. According to Nash, “Even centuries ago, intelligent people would have laughed at the notion that the past is nothing but a set of agreed-upon facts.” The authors of the *National Standards* argued that history is about “understanding the nature and meaning of change, the complexities of human behavior, and the multitude of connections between the past and our world today.” Likewise, Theodore Rabb, a historian who strongly disagreed with some of the choices in the *National Standards*, wrote: “Of course, we argued because historians do argue and so should students. To have an informed citizenry, history has to be learned, not as a set of lifeless facts, but as a felt, meaningful way of understanding oneself and one’s society.”

In addition to attacking the conservative critics’ definition of history, Nash also pointed out the hypocrisy in Cheney’s arguments. The study of “gloomy” events such as McCarthyism and the Klu Klux Klan were important demonstrations to students of how movements that “attacked our nation’s founding ideals” were fought against, and only “authoritarian governments

---

dictate relentlessly nationalistic history.” Similarly, another American historian, Eric Foner, wrote an influential essay to support the counterattack against the critics of the *National Standards*. He asked how “freedom” and the imposition of a “sanitized, feel-good history, whether inspired by a desperate plight of inner-city youth or by the passion of conformity” could ever be compatible, especially given America’s foundational principles.

The defenders of the *National Standards* additionally charged their opponents for engaging in these history wars for political gain instead of genuinely improving American history education. One of the authors of the *National Standards*, Ross E. Dunn, argued that while the creators of the *National Standards* attempted to “talk seriously about history education,” their “adversaries really had no interest in that subject other than as a rhetorical device for proclaiming the country’s bad moral state.” The debate within the media subsequently became filled with political rhetoric. In a retrospective piece about the *National Standards* and their subsequent controversy, Diane Ravitch—a faculty member at New York University, former Assistant Secretary of Education under Bush, and member of the National Assessment Governing Board under Clinton—noted that the authors “mistakenly insisted that few reputable historians objected to the standards” or the general direction of history, thus “implying that only racists and yahoos were against them,” further politicizing the debate.

While the primary discourse about the *National Standards* in the media was between conservative critics like Cheney and historians like Nash, many other figures were affected by the drama due to the diminished reputation of the *National Standards*. While conservative political figures like Cheney and Limbaugh actively attacked the *National Standards*, even

---

214 Dunn, “The Ugly, the Bad,” 23.
liberal politicians condemned it. The Clinton administration distanced itself from the \textit{National Standards}. Secretary of Education Richard Riley issued a statement that rejected the \textit{National Standards} while pointing out that the Bush administration funded it, a move criticized by Nash and Dunn as “running for cover.”\textsuperscript{216} In January 1995, the US Senate voted 99-1 to disapprove the \textit{National Standards} and rule out the “future certification of any voluntary national content standards...if based upon [this work].”\textsuperscript{217} Louisiana Democrat Bennet Johnston only voted “no” because he wanted to do more than condemn the \textit{National Standards} and entirely revoke the program’s federal funding.\textsuperscript{218} Some senators initially viewed a federal attack on the \textit{National Standards} as an “unwarranted governmental intrusion.”\textsuperscript{219} However, the constant negative discourse in the media about the \textit{National Standards} and the argument that American history education should provide “core information about who we are as a nation” ultimately swayed the senators to almost unanimously condemn the \textit{National Standards}.\textsuperscript{220} Subsequently, even though some educators praised the \textit{National Standards}, few public officials of either party wanted to be caught supporting something deemed "derogatory, gloomy, and unpatriotic."\textsuperscript{221}

While the history wars played out in the media for the public eye, numerous academics and educators published valid criticisms of the \textit{National Standards} while acknowledging its benefits. For instance, one \textit{Newsweek} writer praised the \textit{National Standards} for presenting an “improved casting of America’s story...[folding less traditional history] into the main American landscape” but also posed the question, “It’s history, all right, but whose?”\textsuperscript{222} Although this question is the key to understanding historical revisionism, analysts have cautioned that this type

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} Bahmueller, “The Struggle Over America’s National History Standards,” 101; Dunn 23
\item \textsuperscript{217} Ravitch, “The Controversy over National History Standards,” 17.
\item \textsuperscript{218} VanBurkleo, “The National History Standards,” 169.
\item \textsuperscript{219} VanBurkleo, “The National History Standards,” 168.
\item \textsuperscript{220} VanBurkleo, “The National History Standards,” 168.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Dunn, “The Ugly, the Bad,” 23.
\item \textsuperscript{222} VanBurkleo, “The National History Standards,” 172.
\end{itemize}
of history is not necessarily accessible to younger audiences as it leaves them without an anchor or clear public identity. Additionally, as written by another historian, Sandra F. VanBurkleo, “If [historical] criticism loses touch with the heritage of the past, it becomes weightless, a mere compendium of momentary complaints.” Similarly, Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers and a progressive educator who supported the creation of national standards, criticized the National Standards for their “negativism and failure to place democratic ideals at the center of the nation’s history.” Nonetheless, he praised the standards for creating “substantive and demanding” history in schools and thus advocated for the National Standards to be revised instead of scrapped. Diane Ravitch similarly argued that the National Standards could and should be fixed due to their contributions to improving national education. Ravitch was explicitly concerned that while the standards declared that American history should “reflect both the nation’s diversity and the nation’s commonalities,” it failed to truly develop an understanding of “our common civic identity and shared civic values.” These academic critiques from educators and historians ultimately spurred the revision process for the National Standards.

In 1995, the Council for Basic Education—a nonprofit educational group founded in 1956 by prominent intellectuals that aimed to advance liberal arts education in public schools—sponsored the revision process and two panels of historians to review the US and world history standards separately. These panels comprised numerous historians with divergent perspectives, creating a “model of democratic discussion and professional responsibility.” The US Standards panel determined that although the project had “defined excellent criteria for the

“standards,” “most of the problems stemmed from the project’s failure to meet its own criteria,” specifically in the teaching examples section. The panel highlighted the National Standards’ inadequate treatment of economics, science, medicine, and technology and the negative portrayal of technological changes. Additionally, the panel further criticized many teaching examples that had attracted extensive conservative condemnation. They noted that a “relatively small but significant number of these examples” either tended to convey a “disproportionately pessimistic and misrepresentative picture of the American past” or created an unbalanced telling of the past that “[paid] little attention to political history.”

The criticisms and recommendations from the Council for Basic Education reports were received well by the creators of the National Standards and were reflected in their 1996 revision. The language that was determined to be politically biased was either revised or eliminated, and all teaching examples were dropped to remove the most scathing criticism and prevent readers from confusing them with the standards. The five standards of historical thinking that had garnered much positive feedback remained, allowing for the further dissemination of this approach to history. Additionally, the National Standards maintained the thematic elements from social history in its general structure. As described by Danbom, “The lives of women and minorities were recounted and respected; and the experiences of ordinary people were recognized.” Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Ravitch, both mild critics of the National Standards 1994 edition, even jointly endorsed the new 1996 revision in the Wall Street Journal, describing them as “rigorous, honest, and as nearly accurate as any group of historians could make them.”

Some critics continued to attack the 1996 National Standards. However, most of the media

---

frenzy had died down, leaving the future of American history education in an “uneasy silence” that might have “left the headlines but not the hearts and minds of those who were in the trenches on both sides.”

While the 1996 revision of the *National Standards* received positive feedback from academics, especially compared to its initial iteration, the overall controversy resulted in the collapse of the national standards movement, not just in the subject of history. State governments and local school boards were once again in charge of history. Every state, except for Iowa, put together its own standards program to improve the quality of history education within their state. Nonetheless, they lacked the resource capacity and inclination to create a team and thus standards as comprehensive as the *National Standards* project. While many contain language that aims to emulate the skills-based approach from the *National Standards*, they did not define specific events, issues, or individuals and thus made it impossible for teachers to effectively use these standards. This history war ultimately marked a shift in which the overall effort to create national standards and improve the American history education would be taken over and stunted by partisan politics.

Nevertheless, the *National Standards* still positively impacted the future of history education, especially on an individual level. Even with their controversial examples, the 1994 version of the *National Standards* was still widely disseminated among educators throughout the nation who were thus better equipped to emulate the *National Standards*’ best practices. It additionally demonstrated to historians and progressive educators that they needed to take more of a middle ground in their approach to reforming the American history education system.

---

235 Dunn, “The Ugly, the Bad,” 23.
236 Dunn, “The Ugly, the Bad,” 23.
239 Dunn, “The Ugly, the Bad,” 24.
Despite their integrated approach and inclusion of relatively diverse perspectives, the creators of the National Standards “wandered into a firestorm because they had lost touch with what much of the public believed American history was and should be.”²⁴⁰ While the National Standards controversy allowed history to become relevant to the mainstream again, it nonetheless created a tumultuous atmosphere surrounding the future of history in American schools.

III. The AP Program Amidst National Education Reforms

In 1989, amid sweeping bipartisan support for national education reforms, the College Board Review added to this push by highlighting the AP program. As written by Eric Rothschild, a history teacher from Scarsdale, New York, “Both sides in the struggle over national standards have called for a fair and scholarly curriculum. It’s here. It’s AP.”²⁴¹ Similarly, in a 1993 report, the president of the College Board, Donald Stewart, wrote:

> In a period of continued questioning about the quality of American secondary education and the accomplishments of our high school students, the Advanced Placement Program is nationally acknowledged as an educational approach that is a superb model for the nation to emulate. The National Education Goals Panel, America 2000, and the New Standards Project have all praised AP as a program that works on a national scale…In addition, the US Department of Education is using AP data as an indicator in the annual report—The Condition of Education.²⁴²

While there was an ongoing national debate about the state of the American education system and how to reform it, educators and policymakers heralded the AP as a nationally recognized and rigorous program that could be used as a tool to improve the quality of education. In High School, even as Boyer contributed to a looming sense of crisis around US education, he also utilized the AP program to discuss secondary education reinvigoration.²⁴³

State governments pushed for increased exam accessibility. In the late 1980s, South Carolina passed legislation to require all high schools to offer AP courses and mandating that all

state colleges and universities accept scores of 3 or higher. By 1993, seventeen states funded teacher attendance at the summer Advanced Placement Institutes to learn more about these courses. Washington DC additionally directly financed AP training for teachers, and West Virginia even created a statewide AP center. Florida gave faculty bonuses and extra funding towards AP programs in public schools each time a student passed an exam. Following these initiatives, which took place between 1999 and 2005, the number of Florida public school students that took AP exams increased by 95%, with a 132% increase for African American students and a 137% increase for Hispanic students. Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Minnesota, Washington DC, and Texas joined a similar legislative trend, and all paid part or all of their students’ examination fees by 1995.

The federal government even acknowledged the AP program’s merit by using the program’s data in educational studies. The US Department of Education utilized AP data in the annual *Condition of Education* report—specifically the number of students taking these examinations and what their results were as a way of measuring the quality of education access and overall academic achievement—validating its data as a “bona fide quality marker for the education system.” Furthermore, in 2000, the federal Office for Civil Rights included AP participation data in their regular equity surveys. In the 1998-1999 school year alone, the federal government spent $2.7 on AP examination fee subsidies for low-income students and the professional development of AP teachers from low-income districts.

---

244 Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 194.
248 Finn and Scanlan, *Learning in the Fast Lane*, 38.
249 Finn and Scanlan, *Learning in the Fast Lane*, 38.
The AP program did not just receive support from the government but also from notable public groups like the Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation. For instance, from 1987 onward, the Mellon Foundation offered fellowships to summer AP institutes for teachers working in low-income and disadvantaged communities, benefiting over 1000 teachers within about seven years.\footnote{Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 195.} These programs provided teachers, especially those from low-income schools, with robust and regular professional development opportunities.\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 826.} In Texas, Peter O’Donnell, a Dallas businessman and staunch Republican, used his family foundation to bring the program to Waxahachie, a town south of Dallas where the major SuperCollider project was poised to be developed.\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 56.} Although this location was near an urban center, in 1990, only 3% of high school juniors and seniors were even enrolled in any AP class.\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 56.} O’Donnell believed that Waxahachie could attract families with rich educational backgrounds for the Super Collider project if local schools could offer solid educational programs for these scientists’ children. His initiative was so successful in achieving test accessibility and performance that he expanded this program to include Dallas, specifically targeting poor and minority schools that had difficulty funding AP program implementation.\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 57.}

Another telling example of the variety of support for program expansion can be seen in Oklahoma City in 1991. Walter Lambert, Supervisor of Advanced Placement Programs and former US History Test Development Committee member and table leader, wrote to AP teachers across the country asking for recommendations to recruit potential AP teachers to his school district.\footnote{The APUSH examination is graded by a group of teachers and professors that meet at an annual conference. Professors and teachers are grouped together at a table and grade examinations at the same time, with each table having a table leader who ensures consistency among the grading standards. This call for references included salary bonuses for teachers based on their students’

\footnote{Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 195.}\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 826.}\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 56.}\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 56.}\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 57.}
scores, as well as a scholarship of the same amount for the student who achieved that score—$300 for each 5, $200 for each 4, and $100 for each 3. These financial incentives were also supplemented by local businesses, demonstrating their support for expanding AP programs. The use of AP programs and APUSH to improve the general education level of the American public represented how, during that time, “tests [were] not simply used to judge the success of reform efforts; they are the reform efforts.” As Peter Schrag, a longtime educational reporter, argued by 2002, these tests were used as “the best weapon” to upgrade schools and bring better teachers to low-income students.

These public efforts to improve AP accessibility succeeded. In the decade following this widespread public support, the number of students taking exams increased between sixty to eighty percent, and the number of high schools participating in AP programs increased by forty percent. Moreover, by 1994, 26.3% of AP exam takers were minorities, increasing from 19.5% in 1988. Although minority students were still underrepresented, as they comprised nearly 29% of the American high school population, it nonetheless represented a vast improvement in the diversity of test takers from years prior. While in 1986, the typical AP student was likely to come from homes with large amounts of wealth or a highly educated background, by 1998, AP students no longer came from a homogenous background. This increased course accessibility allowed low-income and minority students to improve their education. In an interview conducted with Black Issues in Higher Education, Donald Stewart, the president of the College Board,

---

260 Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 195; Schneider 822
261 Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 29.
262 Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 29.
263 Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 196. This information was found from longitudinal studies of AP students.
noted how the AP program “[raises] the expectations of minority students and [helps] them achieve higher goals…bringing more minorities into professional and graduate schools.” This positive impact was even discussed at a local level. As one superintendent said, “Who is most likely to reap long-term benefits from AP classes? Those most likely to struggle in college, the very ones often relegated to second-class status in their high schools.” Similarly, Raul Rodriguez, an APUSH and AP Spanish teacher at the Xaverian High School in Brooklyn, praised the program, saying, “It is automatically assumed that white kids can do the work in school and minority kids can’t. With AP, Hispanics see that they can do it too.”

Despite these statistics, educational experts still raised concerns regarding the actual accessibility of this program. Even if administrators and teachers successfully introduced AP courses to their high school, students could still opt not to take these courses. Houston teachers noted that students decided against taking AP classes for a variety of reasons: the school did not offer an AP course in a subject they were interested in, the school prevented “low performing” students from even enrolling in the course, friends did not take the course, or simply because the student did not know the merits of taking an AP course. The introduction of the program sometimes created a rift between the different types of students at school. William Ouchi found that implementing AP classes in the James A. Garfield high school in Seattle created a rift between the teachers: “Teachers had formed two conflicting camps, one which taught the neighborhood black students, and the other which taught the AP courses to whites and Asians.” AP courses also require considerable resources from their schools and teachers, as classes are designed to be relatively small and intensive with high rigor, making it extremely

265 Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 826.
266 Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 196.
difficult to implement the program in certain schools.\textsuperscript{269} Several minority students in California even tried to sue the state because their school offered too few AP courses, putting them at a disadvantage compared to other students with more access to these courses.\textsuperscript{270} Professor of American public policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Timothy Hacsi, also argued that “testing, in the case of AP tests and in general, is more likely to reinforce class structure than to make it more fluid.”\textsuperscript{271} Michael Kirst, professor of education at Stanford University, similarly argued, “The ones who get hurt [by a failure to take AP and other rigorous high-school courses] are the 80 percent of students who are not in Advanced Placement or honors classes…[because] too many won’t be ready for college because they have no clue about which high-school courses they need to take.”\textsuperscript{272}

The College Board even acknowledged the program’s issues of accessibility and implementation challenges. In 1993, the College Board published \textit{The Advanced Placement Challenge: Providing Excellence and Equity for the Future}. This pamphlet emphasized that the AP experience—the newly upgraded curriculum and genuine excitement about the work—was more important than students’ initial scores, especially as teachers had to adjust to teaching new curricula.\textsuperscript{273} Furthermore, the organization used to honor schools that had a high percentage of pass rates on exams. However, once educators complained that this endorsement incentivized schools to discourage students who might perform poorly from taking the exam, the College Board stopped this practice.\textsuperscript{274}

Additionally, influential educational thinkers still argued that the mere expansion of AP courses and exam accessibility represented a positive shift in educational development. The

\textsuperscript{269} Hacsi, “Document-Based Question,” 1396.
\textsuperscript{270} Hacsi, “Document-Based Question,” 1396.
\textsuperscript{271} Hacsi, “Document-Based Question,” 1399.
\textsuperscript{272} Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 38.
\textsuperscript{273} Rothschild, “Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program,” 198.
\textsuperscript{274} Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 37.
oldest high school comparative index, the “Challenge Index,” was created by Jay Mathews, an educational columnist for *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*, in 1998. Still in operation today, the “Challenge Index” compares private and public schools to each other based on a ratio of the number of AP, International Baccalaureate (IB), or Cambridge tests given at a school each year compared to the number of seniors that graduated in that year. Notably, the “Challenge Index” does not rank schools based on the overall performance of students on these examinations, referring to these results as “more a measure of student family income than school quality.”

Instead, it operates under the assumption that AP, IB, and Cambridge tests are the most challenging courses that can be offered to high school students. Mathews refers to these testing opportunities as a “unique measure of the depth of learning” because “teachers cannot dumb down the exams because they are written and graded by independent experts.” The invention of the “Challenge Index” and its reliance on AP exam accessibility represented how respected these examinations were by education experts. As written by Mathews, “Even if [students] struggle with [the exam], they’ve gone one-on-one against the academic equivalent of Michael Jordan. They’ll have a visceral sense of what they’re going to come up against in college.”

While policymakers, educators, and the public alike pushed for the growth of AP programs to bolster American education, some evidence pointed to the fact that high school students were still not improving. Most national measures of academic achievement and college readiness showed that student performance had flatlined over the past fifty years, even among the top ten percent of students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress exams.

Additionally, while the program had expanded, it only reached a limited number of students, and

---

276 Mathews, “High School Ranking System.”
278 Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 35.
fewer succeeded in passing at least one or more tests. Education writer Andrew Mollison wrote, “Those passing one or more AP tests probably comprise less than ten percent of the group that entered high school together.”\textsuperscript{279} More specific to the AP program, a 2005 study of Texan school records found “zero effect for the average kid of AP enrollment on college performance.”\textsuperscript{280} After adjusting for school curriculum, family, and school characteristics, Klopfenstein and Thomas discovered that AP students had the same likelihood as non-AP students to return for their second year of college and did not have higher grade point averages than their non-AP counterparts.\textsuperscript{281} Another organization heavily disputed these findings, but after conducting a similar study, conceded that “AP exam scores, not AP enrollment, predict how well a student will do in college.”\textsuperscript{282}

While the nineties brought on a new era of flourishing for the AP program, they also brought on a new wave of competition and difficulties for its further proliferation. While the program was unmatched before the mid-eighties due to the lack of college-level courses available to high school students, state lawmakers began expanding opportunities for students to take college-level classes. In 1985, Minnesota implemented a statewide postsecondary option program that enabled high school students to enroll full- or part-time in specific courses or programs at eligible higher-level institutions.\textsuperscript{283} Ohio followed suit four years later, launching a similar program, and by 2000 many states likewise increased the options of dual enrollment options high school students were eligible to take.\textsuperscript{284}

At the same time, some prestigious high schools even stopped offering AP courses because of their limitations. In 2001, Ethical Culture Fieldston School, a prestigious private

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{279} Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 36.
\bibitem{280} Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 37.
\bibitem{281} Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 823.
\bibitem{282} Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 37.
\bibitem{283} Finn and Scanlan, \textit{Learning in the Fast Lane}, 132.
\bibitem{284} Finn and Scanlan, \textit{Learning in the Fast Lane}, 132.
\end{thebibliography}
school in New York City, even made a point to abolish AP courses because “teaching such courses resulted in too narrow and confining a curriculum.”\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, \textit{Learning in the Fast Lane}, 173.} In 2006, Concord Academy, one of the most prestigious boarding schools in the Northeast, similarly moved away from AP programs because “Concord Academy’s faculty members [were] convinced that they can engage students in much deeper learning if they create their own curricula.”\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 825.} Other well-known and exclusive high schools moved away from teaching traditional AP history courses, instead developing their own skills-based curriculum and allowing, but not requiring, students to take the exam at the end of the course. Choate Rosemary Hall offered a thematic world history course which explicitly emphasized “the development of skills used by historians—critical reading, writing, and oral presentation.”\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 823.} History courses at Deerfield Academy similarly stressed that their goal was to “sharpen students’ judgment in the selection, organization, and discussion of the important facts and ideas of the past…[giving] students practical experience as young historians.”\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 823.} Although AP history courses were designed to emulate college-level classrooms, these elite high schools deemed the program insufficient. It should be noted that most of the high schools that were able to move away from the AP program “already [had] near-perfect reputations with elite colleges” and could thus afford to develop their own academic programming without losing prestige.\footnote{Schneider, “Privilege, Equity, and the Advanced Placement Program,” 827.} Nevertheless, their departure from the program represented how well-regarded educational institutions began disregarding the AP.

Colleges additionally began to move away from generous policies accepting AP credit, especially following mass expansions of the program. As discussed by Eric Rothschild, “the most severe problem of all remains that of communication between AP and the colleges and

\footnote{Finn and Scanlan, \textit{Learning in the Fast Lane}, 173.}
The College Board used to have an intimate relationship with the colleges that accepted AP exam scores, and the program’s limited scope to prestigious high schools gave elite institutions confidence in the accuracy of their scores. However, as the program expanded to more institutions and as academics increasingly questioned the quality of the program, collegiate faith in the program similarly wavered. The lack of constant communication between universities and the College Board meant that professors and college admissions officers had become increasingly reliant on rumors or colleague reports to assess the implications of AP scores themselves. Subsequently, higher-level institutions’ treatment of AP programs and their merits followed similar trends—even though AP programs were considered advanced and critical on high school transcripts, exam scores were not treated as reverently. Harvard, one of the earliest participating college-level institutions in the program and once used to accept a 3 as a qualifying score, only accepted 5’s for credit in 2000. More extremely, the University of Pennsylvania no longer allowed students to use these credits to satisfy their graduation requirements by the same year.

IV. Shifting Discourse Regarding APUSH

While broader AP discourse certainly applied to discussions about AP US History discussions, historians had unique praises and criticisms of the program. For instance, Gary Nash, one of the authors of the National History Standards who crafted these standards to close the gap between history in secondary and higher-level institutions, praised APUSH for its ability to integrate analytical reading and writing into the high school curriculum. Similarly, Sam Wineburg, a renowned professor of education concentrating on history, lauded the program for

---

293 Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, History on Trial, 114.
its easy implementation in schools that needed to improve their social studies programs
drastically. To Wineburg, the further development of social studies national standards, like those
seen by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the National Council for
Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), were “bloated and unrealistic” because high
schoolers lacked the most fundamental abilities to read and write analytically and these criteria
did nothing to address that. In contrast, Wineburg described “forward-looking educators” who
made strides towards academic improvement by “adopting academically rigorous programs like
the AP.” His support of the program did not come without criticism. He called the AP
pedagogy “less stimulating” with the overall experience being “dreary” because of the
“impossibility of getting through the curriculum” that causes teachers to “bolt out of the starting
gate and leave their students in the dust.” Nevertheless, Wineburg believes in the AP historical
model because of the Document Based Question (DBQ), which challenges students to regularly
practice reading primary documents and writing essays, describing this as a feature that “you’ll
find nowhere else in the social studies curriculum…[that] redeems such classrooms.”
Subsequently, despite AP history’s drawbacks, the program continued to receive support from
educational trailblazers because of its ability to encourage general skill growth through the lens
of history.

Concerns regarding the merits of the AP’s history programs also began to surface. The
1999 edition of The History Teacher, the most widely recognized journal in the US dedicated to
teaching history, centered solely on AP history courses, with historians, high school teachers, and
even former students discussing their gripes with the program. A former APUSH student and

then senior at Brown University, Eric Neutuch, lambasted the course for being hyper-focused on the test. He describes his class activities as a mere “race to accumulate facts” from “Bailey and Kennedy’s dry history text,” with weekly multiple-choice quizzes that did not even require a single complete sentence. Neutuch notably scored a 5 on the exam, which consisted of multiple free-response questions, and so undoubtedly had a strong ability to read and write analytically. While he conceded that “[his] writing and analytical abilities undoubtedly improved to some extent,” he argued that “this improvement was relatively small in relation to what could have been had the course aimed beyond the test.” He overall categorized his experience as an “educational tragedy,” which made him “apathetic and disenchanted” like so many other AP students, coming to the ultimate conclusion that “history is boring and our nation’s collective past is unrelated to [his] present.”

While Neutuch’s experience in the course was not necessarily representative of all students’ experiences in an APUSH classroom, it nonetheless serves as a cautionary tale of how teaching history to a standardized test can severely disillusion students. Moreover, the editors of the 1999 edition of The History Teacher similarly believed that this student criticism was essential to highlight in educational discussions about AP history programs.

The concern among the historical community that the APUSH curriculum did not represent the new developments in the historical discipline was based on the stagnation of the APUSH framework. In a recent analysis of different APUSH Course Guides, Kathryn McGuire found that social history gained traction with a significant increase in the number of women mentioned. Nevertheless, political history remained the most prominent theme in sample

---

questions throughout five course guides analyzed between 1958 and 1998. “War” was mentioned ninety times throughout the five course guides, repeated more than “government,” and “Wilson” was mentioned forty-two times. Additionally, when comparing the 1958 to 1998 Course Guide, McGuire found that political history content only dropped from 65% to 55% and social history increased from 10% to 18%. McGuire subsequently argued that the APUSH curriculum “reinforced the status quo of history content” despite the College Board’s claims of being “cutting edge” and implementing a wider variety of historical content to reflect the shifts occurring in academic history.

Contemporary historians even conducted studies regarding AP history programs and their curricular development in light of evolving historical practices in academia. In a 2002 edition of *The History Teacher*, University of California San Bernardino history professor Robert Blackey analyzed the AP European History free response questions since its inception, noting the shifts in types of historical questions designed by the College Board. Although the addition of the DBQ generally promoted historical thinking, it still received criticism for how “aptitude and reading skills seemed to take precedence over thinking historically.” The College Board even amended the DBQ instructions, warning students not to “simply summarize the documents individually,” in 1998 and bolding these directions the following year. Blackey’s article found yet another issue with free-response questions. Despite the expansion in the framework of historical thinking caused by the implementation of the DBQ—including the utilization of more diverse materials and further emphasis on historical thinking and methodology—“actual teaching in schools had not yet caught up with these tectonic shifts within the discipline.” Students continued to opt to

answer more traditional questions that covered political events or themes, and even if they did respond to more unconventional topics, they performed worse.307

Subsequently, Blackley suggested four solutions to improving the gap between secondary historical education and the discipline as a whole:

First, textbook authors could give more thought to how they organize and write about social history (and other non-traditional issues) insofar as what students might be expected to learn and, eventually, incorporate into responses to essays on these subjects. Secondly, test development committees, as well as teachers when we compose our own questions, could try to be more creative in how we write and phrase such questions and in what we ask students to do with what they know about this material. Third, as history teachers become more aware of these problems faced by students who are learning as well as answering AP questions about social history, they could work—individually and with others—to become more creative in how this theme is taught. Finally, although test development committees have usually checked to see that newer areas being tested are covered effectively in the most widely used textbooks, those committees must maintain that diligence to ensure that no widely-used textbook escapes review.308

Blackey’s proposition points to the complex nature of educational development, especially in history. On the one hand, AP history testing committees have the ability and responsibility to design questions to promote a broader understanding of history and ought to control textbooks. On the other hand, a part of this development is outside of the College Board’s control. Textbook makers and teachers shape how historical content and skills are conveyed to students. While AP programs could affect students, critical external factors still determined how these courses would convey information to their students. Described by the College Board as the “beating heart” of the program, teachers are required to not only master the content, especially as exams and curriculum develop, but also teach students specific analytical and argumentative skills.309 While discourse regarding program improvements was undoubtedly directed toward the College Board, Blackley’s analysis also accounted for other stakeholders.

Another article of note in this edition of The History Teacher came from a high school teacher’s perspective and reflected the difficulties of implementing an AP US History course.

---

309 Finn and Scanlan, Learning in the Fast Lane, 163.
Pete Blagaich, an AP US History teacher at the Center for International Commerce magnet (with students selected from the top 30% of the school district) at Long Beach Polytechnic High School in California, wrote about his experience trying to establish a more accessible APUSH program. Led by a “burgeoning interest in AP classes,” Blagaich and the rest of the CIC administration began to require APUSH for all junior CIC students. By “making AP universal,” they believed that “the better students would motivate others” and that “the policy would add prestige to the CIC program.” The pass rates proved to be undesirable for Blagaich and the rest of the administration, as the same number of students passed the exam even though significantly more students were taking it. Much to Blagaich’s horror, the rate even dropped from thirty percent to between ten and fifteen percent. After teaching at the PACE magnet (a more selective program, only taking students from the top 10% of the district), Blagaich “realized you cannot achieve success merely by exposing someone to a curriculum” and that “requiring all CIC students to take AP was a mistake.” This experience led him to conclude that AP courses are not for everyone because some students were not motivated enough to pass the examination at the end of the year. Blagaich’s conclusion differed from the other teachers and educational academics that believed a student merely taking an AP course would be better off due to the program’s rigor. Teachers, especially history teachers, were not a monolith across the nation and had a variety of perspectives regarding the quality and accessibility of APUSH. While the framework had not changed much during these two decades, the increasingly complicated discourse surrounding AP programs and APUSH ultimately pushed the College Board to take action.

While scholars had illuminated the numerous issues present with APUSH and provided a variety of potential solutions for different stakeholders to positively affect the exam, curriculum, and broader American education system, the College Board inevitably had to take accountability and overhaul its approach to AP programs and APUSH specifically. Although the National Standards controversy was a separate issue, it nonetheless demonstrated the complex world of public opinion and politics to which the AP could be exposed. As said by Bruce Johnstone, former chancellor of the State University of New York and member of the College Board’s AP commission, said, “People could start wondering who authorized the College Board to set national standards for high schools…this question has been glossed over as long as the AP has been perceived as basically good…and the rest of the high-school curriculum has been seen as so flawed.”

While most negative discourse regarding the AP and APUSH was limited to intellectuals in the nineties and early twenty-first century, the College Board would soon enter into a firestorm of public opinion, eerily reminiscent of the National Standards debacle, following its substantive response to growing criticism of the program.

---

313 Mollison, “Surviving a Midlife Crisis,” 38.

The early 2000s marked a continuation of national attempts to solve the education problem illuminated by studies such as the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk* and Ernest L. Boyer’s *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, both published in 1983. In 1989, a bipartisan group of lawmakers—President George H. W. Bush and all fifty governors—came together to create the National Education Goals to establish national performance goals to improve the American education system by the year 2000. However, they could not achieve all they set out to do by that deadline.  

Subsequently, in 2001, with a similar bipartisan push, Congress passed, and President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law. With the long title reading “An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind,” the act utilized a standards-based approach with yearly testing and assessments to improve and monitor the basic skills of elementary and secondary school students. This continued push to increase school rigor through testing reinforced the culture predisposing schools to incorporate the Advanced Placement (AP) program.

Previously, many influential educational decision-makers, ranging from state legislators to school administrators, pushed for the growth of Advanced Placement (AP) courses to improve high schools across the country. The widespread respect for AP programs continued into the twenty-first century, as the NCLB Act contained the Access to High Standards Act, which established “AP programs of assistance to increase the access of low-income students to AP high

---

316 Examples cited in the previous chapter include state funding support from states like Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Minnesota, and other funding efforts outside of schools like the Waxahachie program in Texas and Walter Lambert’s support of the AP program in Oklahoma City.
school courses and AP tests to earn advanced placement and credits at institutions of higher education.\textsuperscript{317} However, as AP programming continued to proliferate, American education standards continued to stagnate. As reported in 2006 by Andrew Mollison, a writer for the Hoover Institute education think tank at Stanford University, many national measures for high-school academic achievements had flatlined over the past fifty years.\textsuperscript{318} Growing criticisms of the AP program—which stemmed from the emerging critiques discussed in the previous chapter—eventually caused the College Board to consider revising some of its programs to reflect newer methods developed in college-level institutions more accurately.

Specifically, in 2006, the College Board called together both professional historians and experienced high school American history teachers to form a commission to address increasing concerns about the current APUSH framework.\textsuperscript{319} The redesign committee decided on five broad changes within the APUSH framework, being that the new curriculum would have: (1) more focus on the founding documents and source analysis, (2) more transparency, making past exams more accessible to educators, (3) more flexibility, with less of an emphasis on fact-based multiple-choice questions and more open-ended example questions, (4) more balanced, requiring students to look at multiple sides of an issue, and (5) more local, allowing for students to write about historical examples required by their state standards.\textsuperscript{320} These changes were released in 2014 to be used for the 2014-2015 school year and were met with substantial debate, prompting the College Board to release another revision in 2015.

This chapter will illuminate how the AP US History framework reform adopted a skills-based learning approach more aligned with modern history and pedagogical practices that

\textsuperscript{317} No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.  
\textsuperscript{320} “Get the Facts about the Advanced Placement U.S. History Redesign.”
allowed teachers greater discretion over what content they taught. Although the reforms gave greater local control to content, there was a disconnect with the public and pushback fixated on the framework’s new content—specifically on which historical facts were included or excluded, how they were portrayed, and whether or not they were aligned with traditional conceptions of American history. This controversy caused the College Board to amend its framework, ultimately demonstrating how educational reforms in high school history programs, while driven by academic history pedagogies, remained tethered to public opinion on what history should be. This chapter is divided into three parts, each focusing on a different aspect of reform and its aftermath, beginning with the reform process, then moving into reactions to the reform process, and finishing with a discussion of the re-revision that the public controversy caused.

I. The Reform Process and New Framework

2006 marked the formation of the AP US History Commission, which consisted of secondary and higher-level educators who would rewrite the existing APUSH framework to align with history as it was taught in colleges more accurately. The project was presented to a larger audience the following year at the AP Annual Conference in Las Vegas. Project Director Allison Clark walked attendees through the redesign process and its reasoning. Clark specifically cited a 2002 report from the National Research Council as a significant motivator for revising the program. Although the report focused on opportunities for educators to improve math and science programs, its conclusion that courses should focus on “deep understanding rather than comprehensive coverage” and “reflect current understanding of learning… [and] research directions within the discipline” rang true for AP history classes as well.321 The College Board wanted to update their AP history curriculum to incorporate contemporary teaching pedagogies.

utilized by professional historians in the same way that science courses were regularly modernized in light of new developments in approaching scientific research or mathematical study.

Additionally, growing criticism of the program influenced the desire to overhaul AP US History. As stated by the College Board-produced fact sheet detailing the APUSH redesign and process behind it, the commission was formed primarily to address high school teachers’ concerns that “AP required too much content without enough depth.” Lawrence Charap, the senior director of AP curriculum development, noted the growth in general criticism about AP history programs for “fostering a mile wide and inch deep approach to teaching challenging courses” in his piece detailing the APUSH redesign process. He also noted three more pieces of criticism that encouraged the College Board to change the framework: (1) many teachers noted that the current examination did not give them the flexibility to customize the content they taught, (2) the way AP history was taught was inconsistent and heavily dependent on the instructor’s pedagogical approach to teaching history, and (3) regardless of the teacher’s views, the AP experience was essentially a memorization race to prepare for the examination in May. Trevor Packer, the head of the Advanced Placement program, noted to the Washington Post that a survey of APUSH teachers found that 72 percent disliked the “vagueness of the five page course outline provided by the AP program.” He additionally alluded to a similar criticism summarized by Charap: the previous framework “prevented [teachers] and their students from exploring in any depth the main events and documents of US history...[and] there were too few

opportunities to understand the “why” of US history, and or to make its deeper meanings come alive to students.” These critiques, notably, were not centered on any discrepancies between the field of academic history and the content taught in the course but were connected to new educational theories of learning.

In addition to complaints from educators, the College Board was also aware of students’ disenchantment with AP history programs and the subject in general. Charap further cited a few educational studies conducted by a range of experts, from Sam Wineburg to John Bransford, to illuminate that history ranked among the least-liked subjects by high school students and that students would avoid taking it if they could. APUSH teachers also noted this phenomenon. For instance, longtime APUSH educator Brenda Santos found that in the small, urban Connecticut school she taught at—which served predominantly African American and Latino students—students frequently gave lower ratings when asked for their enjoyment of attending history classes compared to other subjects. Additionally they were more likely to fail history than any other course. Subsequently, the College Board had to consider in their redesign the fact that “students don’t love history, and they don’t excel in history courses.”

In order to account for all of these reasons, a multitude of factors informed the APUSH redesign process. They cited sources ranging from successful college curricula to national and select state historical standards and established learning and science approaches to curriculum and assessment design, such as Learning and Understanding published by the National Research Council in 2002 and Understanding by Design published by Wiggins and McTighe released in 2005. Utilizing the latter’s curriculum design methodology, the Commission articulated “a set

---

329 Santos, “Adapting to the Redesigned AP U.S. History Course,” 413.
330a AP History Redesign Project Overview and Status: AP Annual Conference.”
of key understandings within US history and a description of what a student with these understandings will know and be able to do.”\textsuperscript{331} Despite using these educational resources, the College Board still emphasized that educators would be at the forefront of the redesign process, as seen through their 2007 presentation. Clark stated that while College Board and Advanced Placement program-specific staff managed the redesign process, the redesign commissions would solely consist of teachers and professors. The role of the AP staff was only to “develop resources to support and facilitate the work of these teams.”\textsuperscript{332} The new framework was ultimately guided by the “expertise of the leading educators and scholars from both higher and secondary education” and would continuously solicit feedback from figures that had traditionally been involved in the past APUSH courses and examinations.\textsuperscript{333}

These historical thinkers reworked the APUSH examination and curriculum to ensure that it integrated both necessary course content knowledge—organized by periods and themes—and necessary historical thinking skills—such as analysis, contextualization, argumentation, and synthesis—in its foundation. For US History specifically, the course content teachers delivered to students would be guided by critical questions, allowing instructors to choose the information they wanted to teach, assuming it addressed the main question within the period and theme.\textsuperscript{334} In the past, the APUSH Course Description only listed possible topics and themes that could have been tested on the exam instead of what was guaranteed to be tested. Furthermore, it did not mention how much knowledge students were required to know of each topic or theme and did not provide examples of how students would utilize their content knowledge while simultaneously demonstrating a historical thinking skill. Teachers felt forced to

\textsuperscript{331} Charap, “Redesigning Advanced Placement U.S. History,” 32.
\textsuperscript{332} Charap, “AP History Redesign Project Overview and Status: AP Annual Conference.”
\textsuperscript{333} Charap, “AP History Redesign Project Overview and Status: AP Annual Conference.”
\textsuperscript{334} Charap, “AP History Redesign Project Overview and Status: AP Annual Conference.”
cover all topics to prepare their students for all possibilities, leaving little time for their classes to explore any themes in greater depth or meaningfully develop their historical skills.\textsuperscript{335} In order to aid teachers in their endeavor to connect skills to content, the redesign identified key learning objectives that allowed students to identify historical patterns in the context of specific events and periods.\textsuperscript{336} The College Board created these guiding questions to clarify essential ideas that students had to know and be able to identify while providing teachers the freedom to choose the actual content they taught to students.

In order to further address the criticism that the APUSH examination pushed for rote memorization of historical events rather than the cultivation of historical skills, the redesign changed the composition of the multiple-choice section. The previous version of the exam consisted of an eighty-question multiple-choice section that the College Board weighted as fifty percent of the student’s final score.\textsuperscript{337} Moreover, most of these questions were knowledge-based—either the student knew the correct answer or did not prior to beginning the exam. There certainly were “trick questions” that complicated the link between content knowledge and a correct answer. However, most multiple-choice questions did not require students to take an analytical approach to arrive at an answer. While students could end up lucky and guess the right choice, they still would not have used the historical skills they should have learned throughout the course to arrive at the correct response. Besides the fact that there was no content limit regarding what could be asked, this style of questioning further incentivized teachers to prioritize breadth over depth.\textsuperscript{338} One example of a former multiple-choice question of this nature was provided on the redesign fact sheet asked students to choose why the National

\textsuperscript{335} Charap, “Redesigning Advanced Placement U.S. History,” 32.
\textsuperscript{336} Charap, “Redesigning Advanced Placement U.S. History,” 32.
\textsuperscript{337} Charap, “Redesigning Advanced Placement U.S. History,” 32.
\textsuperscript{338} Charap, “Redesigning Advanced Placement U.S. History,” 32.
Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966, giving the options (a) encourage women to believe in the “feminine mystique”, (b) challenge sex discrimination in the workplace, (c) oppose the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, (d) advocate restrictions on access to abortion, or (e) advocate equal access for women to athletic facilities. While a student could make an educated guess based on their knowledge of social events in 1966, this question does not assess a student’s historical skill.

Instead of weighting multiple-choice questions at fifty percent, the redesign reduced its significance so that it only counted for thirty percent. Additionally, skills-based multiple-choice questions would replace factual memorization questions like those in the example above. Numerous multiple-choice questions would now be connected through an overarching piece of evidence ranging from text, maps, and artwork to a collection of data, which would test a student’s ability to comprehend a source instead of memorizing a specific fact. An example of this shift can also be found in the College Board’s fact sheet about the revision, which showed two multiple-choice questions connected to the primary document *George Washington’s Farewell Address* (1796). The first question asked students to choose what the concerns expressed by Washington were addressing, and the second question asked students to use the main themes of the document to pick a twentieth-century US foreign policy decision that it influenced. Although these questions were still multiple-choice, students had to utilize contextualization and identify key themes in different events, marking a departure from the types of questions found in the old sample. Similarly, Charap also used two questions in his explanation of the APUSH redesign to demonstrate how the new questions were designed with

---

learning objectives, historical thinking skills, and curriculum framework concepts in mind. His examples were related to a passage from John L. O’Sullivan in 1845, which demonstrated popular beliefs about Manifest Destiny. Both questions—one which asked which past sentiment influenced the ideas found in this passage, and the other which asked which political controversy the ideas in O’Sullivan’s passage led to—required students to identify key themes within a passage once again and use their historical causation thinking skill. The College Board notably decided to preserve the multiple-choice section of the test, as this section was the most objectively standard, and they feared that removing it would “shake the confidence that professors [felt] in AP exam scores when it [came] time to make decisions about credit and placement.”

The redesign committee subsequently included a new section, the short answer questions, to account for the twenty percent of the exam that was now missing from the reweighting of the multiple-choice section. These short answer questions, typically asking two or three sub-questions based on an overarching idea, were designed to test further students’ historical thinking skills, including “awareness of context, change and continuity over time, causation, and synthesis.” Some of these questions were centered around primary sources, similar to the multiple-choice questions in the previous paragraph. For instance, in an example provided in the College Board fact sheet, students were asked to analyze a political cartoon from 1883 to identify a point of view expressed by the artist and then to use one historical development between

---

343 Charap’s article cites this passage as being written by John L. O’Sullivan. O’Sullivan was the editor of the Democratic Review, under which the passage “Annexation” appeared. However, the author of the article was named Jane McManus Storm Cazneau, who wrote under the pen-name Cora Montgomery and often did not sign her name in the articles she wrote. For more information on this, refer to Thomas R. Hietala, Manifest Destiny: American Exceptionalism and Empire (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
1865-1910 to support this perspective and one to challenge it. The second and third parts of the question interestingly required students to look at multiple sides of an issue and find evidence for it, a departure from previous questions, which focused on “only isolated incidents with negative implications.” Moreover, this question notably tested students’ ability to continue identifying cross-event trends but gave greater flexibility to what students could answer. The provision of a broad period allowed teachers to teach what content they wanted to, as long as it could fit an overarching theme laid out in the new framework.

Similarly, this allowed teachers to cover more local history aligned with their state standards. While in the past, a niche multiple-choice question could ask a student to pick which out of the five provided colonies required larger communities to provide reading and writing instructors, new short answer questions would allow students to use local history in a correct answer. For instance, a newly designed question asked students to give two examples of contact between Native Americans and Europeans that resulted in a change in Native American societies and one example of how Native American societies rejected this change. This type of question allowed students to “write about the historical examples required by their state standards.”

Despite these broad changes, the wide variety of state standards and local educational guidelines limited how much explicit curricular change there could be. The College Board was aware of this issue and even sponsored teachers in each of the fifty states to develop an alignment guide. These guides would demonstrate to what extent the new framework and each state’s history standards aligned to ensure that the new framework could be properly taught.

Additionally, while increased content flexibility was already built into the types of questions students would be assessed on, the College Board also had to incorporate this adjustability into their framework design. Although the framework aimed to clarify the details the test would require as “historical knowledge” and included examples to show teachers how to incorporate these new ideas into their curriculum, these examples were only optional. The framework specifically made minimal mention of “specific individuals, small-scale events such as battles and elections, and other details of American history” to accommodate for the variety of content that different teachers would choose to use. The College Board’s redesign fact sheet further emphasized that the new framework was “just that” and was not a “comprehensive curriculum” because “the College Board [respected] the rights and roles of teachers to select historical elements on which to focus.”

While the College Board wanted their redesign to match developments in the history discipline, they nonetheless anticipated some of the criticisms the new framework would draw. In addition to spotlighting the fact that the framework was not intended to be a curriculum and was designed to be flexible, the redesign committee also made explicit decisions to avoid attracting particular critiques. Citing the history wars sparked by the National History Standards publication in the 1990s, Lawrence Charap wrote that educators involved with the redesign process worked to “preserve many familiar political and social elements of the history survey.” The commission made this concession even though it knew this approach would displease many advocates of the various subfields within the historical discipline. At the same time, Charap acknowledged that some teachers would still attack the new framework for political correctness.

---

Earlier in the revision process—when the College Board announced that they would test students on the pre-Columbian period and the more recent past since both of these periods are often taught in college-level classes—some teachers had already deemed the framework as being politically correct for “mandating [the] coverage of events that they believed did not belong in a U.S. history course.”

The APUSH Redesign Committee took the old examination and framework and attempted to better align it with contemporary developments in educational thinking about the science of learning, mostly centered on increasing local control. Newer types of multiple-choice questions and short answer questions replaced the old, heavily-weighted multiple-choice section. The committee did away with the old “laundry list of disconnected facts” and “mere list of general subject headings” and created a new framework explaining core concepts students needed to understand within the period. While the revision process had already included a built-in testing period, during which the College Board solicited the advice of both secondary and postsecondary educators, they still had to face the even larger and harsher court of public opinion. Charap concluded that although he anticipated a controversy, he believed this would lead to regeneration and hoped that the redesign could “mark the beginning of a much-needed debate about the goals and benefits to our society of rigorous exploration of the past.”

II. Reaction to the Revised Framework

Although Charap anticipated some controversy, perhaps his desire for “a much-needed debate” should have been more carefully considered. Like the National Standards history wars, the APUSH exam revisions were met with considerable conservative backlash. Although the

redesign gave more autonomy to states and localities in determining what specific historical content should be taught, critics of the new framework crafted rhetorically based arguments that alleged the framework’s new concepts and content examples were politically biased. The conservative attacks on the new framework were two-pronged—iconic Republican figureheads led a national effort to criticize the program while state and school boards spearheaded localized attempts to condemn and even ban the teaching of the current framework—and both groups aimed to force the College Board to re-revise the framework.

A group of conservatives across the country condemned the framework for its detail, crafting rhetorical arguments based on claims that it was politically biased. The wave of criticism following the publishing of the new framework began with Larry Krieger, a retired APUSH teacher and author of AP history prep material, and his article published by the Heartland Institute, a conservative and libertarian public policy think tank, in early 2014. Krieger criticized the College Board for effectively utilizing a detailed course framework as a curriculum that includes events that advance a negative view of America and ignores important foundational figures and values.360 Later that year, Stanley Kurtz, a senior fellow at the conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center, released an article in the National Review that asserted the College Board was attempting to politicize American history through a new, detailed framework. Kurtz highlighted how many influential figures involved in the redesign process were advocates of a “leftist approach” and asserted that their new framework would force all teachers to take that approach in their APUSH classrooms.361 Kurtz disagreed with the idea that the old framework created difficulties for teachers. Instead, he argued that its short length of five pages allowed for

“sufficient flexibility” so that “liberals, conservatives, and anyone in-between could teach US history their way, and still see their students do well on the AP Test.” While Kurtz’s article consisted of emotional language criticizing the College Board for politicizing history in its new reform, his article did not mention the actual content of the framework. Kurtz briefly mentioned the College Board’s stated intentions—skeptically noting that they “disclaim political intent”—but did not include evidence from the framework itself to demonstrate its political biases. Instead, his beliefs and ad hominem attack of the new framework were only extrapolated from his interpretations of the work published by the people involved in the redesign process and based on the implications of having a more detailed framework.

Although the redesign primarily sought to create flexibility surrounding the framework’s content, other groups criticized the framework for the included and excluded material. In August 2014, the Republican National Committee (RNC) released a resolution that further condemned the new framework for conveying a “radically revisionist view of American history that [emphasized] the negative aspects of our nation’s history while omitting or minimizing the positive aspects.” The resolution cited the lack of materials on “the Founding Fathers, principles of the Declaration of Independence, the religious influences on our nation’s history,” and “exclusion of discussion of US military (no battles, commanders, or heroes) and omits many other individuals and events that greatly shaped our nation’s history (for example, Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk, George Washington Carver, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Tuskegee Airmen, the Holocaust).” Despite creating a list of the positive aspects of American history that the framework failed to include, the resolution did not include specific examples of the

364 “Resolution Concerning Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH).”
negative it alleged the framework had. The resolution only provided one sentence that doubled down on its claim that the framework was politically skewed: “The Framework presents a biased and inaccurate view of many important events in American history, including the motivations and actions of 17th-19th century settlers, American involvement in World War II, and the development of and victory in the Cold War.” However, the RNC, did not provide any specific examples of the framework’s perspective on these supposedly biased or inaccurate events. Then Republican Party presidential candidate Ben Carson added to the emotional language in the resolution’s attack on the framework, contending that the course portrayed America so negatively that students who took it would want to join ISIS.

Given this backlash, the College Board decided to release a sample APUSH practice test to the public, tests which are typically reserved for only certified AP teachers to access. However, the release of this exam did not quell the concerns about the new framework, and detractors began to focus their criticism on the framework’s specific content and sample questions. For instance, Lynne Cheney published another article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled “The End of History, Part II,” referencing “The End of History” article she wrote condemning the *National History Standards* following its release. Cheney began her op-ed with a criticism of a sample, post-reform APUSH exam multiple-choice question which featured Ronald Reagan’s Berlin Wall Speech. While Cheney did not include the question, she mentioned that the correct answer used this specific speech—which she viewed as President Reagan’s most eloquent moment—as an example of the US’ “increased assertiveness and bellicosity” during the

---

365 “Resolution Concerning Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH).”
Interestingly, she claimed that this answer and its negative portrayal of American history, specifically of Reagan as a warmonger, did not allow students to acknowledge important ideas and historical context. While in this instance, it seems that Cheney criticized this question for its lack of nuance, the rest of her article focused on the content published in the framework of the examination. She and others—whom she specifically referred to as educators, academics, and other concerned citizens—took issue with the new framework because it presented American history negatively, mainly detailing the oppression that marginalized groups faced. In contrast, Cheney wrote that the current framework ignored the “transcendent individuals” whose stories told a different narrative of American exceptionalism and success. Her article did not include the same buzzwords as the original “The End of History,” and Cheney did not call the framework “politically correct” or “revisionist.” Nevertheless, she emphasized that the purpose of her article was to assert that history curriculums “shouldn’t be farmed out [to a large nongovernmental organization like the College Board]…it should stay in the hands of the people who are constitutionally responsible for it: the citizens of each state.” Cheney’s primary concern with the framework was its detail, as she believed that the College Board now had “de facto power over curriculum” that it had not had before. Her article’s conclusion is just one example of how the public fixated on the content of the new framework, even though the content included in the new framework was only supplementary and not mandatory for teachers to use.

Another conservative intellectual, Peter Wood, criticized the framework’s themes and language as evidence of its bias. He complained that the seven themes listed in the new

---

372 Peter Wood is the president of the National Association of Scholars, a conservative education advocacy group founded in 1987. Wood has a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Rochester and worked at Boston University and The King’s College in New York City in various provost and administrative positions before
framework—(1) identity, (2) work, exchange, and technology, (3) Peopling, (4) Politics and power, (5) America in the world, (6) Environment and geography (physical and human), and (7) ideas, beliefs, and culture—sidelined military history, constitutional history, and religious history. He argued that while these types of history could be incorporated into the different themes, they “appear as sidelights to the real story” and that “APUSH shoves a lot of important American history into the shadows.” Wood additionally criticized the language in the framework for being overly political and presenting only one historical interpretation as a takeaway for students. Specifically, he criticized Key Concept 7.2: “Although the New Deal did not completely overcome the Depression, it left a legacy of reforms and agencies that endeavored to make society and individuals more secure, and it helped foster a long-term political realignment in which many ethnic groups, African Americans, and working-class communities identified with the Democratic Party.” Wood wrote that this concept sounded like “the voice of the Democratic Party itself,” as it “simply [set] aside the numerous economists who argue that the New Deal prolonged and deepened the Depression and that its legacy of “reforms” fostered patterns of dependency and the arrogation of extra-Constitutional powers to the federal government.” Wood was also highly concerned with the rhetoric of the language used in the framework and provided other potential interpretations of historical events and trends. He criticized the framework for describing “new migrants” as an “important labor force” for the economy, and emphasized how “[other Americans] with equal justification see the rapid growth of a population that displaces native-born workers.” Similarly, he juxtaposed the framework’s

becoming the president of the National Association of Scholars in 2009. He is still the president of the organization as of 2023.

key concept that “the end of the Cold War [brought] new challenges to the US leadership in the world” to the perspective that this period marked a “liberation of Europe from the tyranny rooted in the outcome of World War II and the final discrediting of communist ideology.” The lessons Wood criticized for only “[arguing] for one side of a dispute” contained relatively neutral language, including the adjective “important” and the noun “challenge.” However, the other perspective Wood compared these takeaways to contained more political rhetoric, like the “displace,” “native-born,” “tyranny,” and “final discrediting.”

Similarly, the conservative education advocacy group National Association of Scholars published, but did not write, a letter to the College Board from a group of college professors calling themselves “Scholars Concerned About Advanced Placement History.” They drew upon the rhetoric of other critics, writing that they disapproved of the redesign due to its “arid, fragmentary, and misleading account of American history.” Like Wood, they asserted that the new themes were “abstractions” that downplayed “essential subjects” like “elections, wars, diplomacy, inventions, and discoveries.” Furthermore, they argued that the new framework had an ideological bias. Instead of centralizing one American national identity like the 2010 framework, the document focused more on “various identities, cultures, and values” that detracted from “sources of national unity and cohesion.” Other than discussing the implementation of these themes, the letter did not cite other specific content issues with the framework.

Resistance to the new framework did not just take place among conservative intellectuals but also larger state legislatures and school boards. Although one of the main aims of the redesign was to give more local control to how APUSH could be taught, these groups nonetheless attacked the framework. One prominent example of this can be seen in the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE)’s resolution to condemn the new framework. Prior to the passage of the resolution, prominent opponents of the reform, Jane Robbins and Larry Krieger, published an article in Breitbart News, a Texas-based conservative news network, describing how APUSH and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) US History Standards were incompatible like “oil and water” due to the former’s presentation of “military history, the free enterprise system, and the core values and documents embodied in the concept of American exceptionalism.”

Even though Texas as a state had greatly supported the growth of the AP program in its schools, the SBOE passed a resolution to request the College Board to rewrite the redesign “in a transparent manner to accurately reflect US history without a political bias and to respect the sovereignty of Texas over its education curriculum.”

Specifically, the chair of the SBOE, Barbara Cargill, highlighted the “controversial wording” of the framework as one of the reasons why they believed it needed to be rewritten but did not publicize specific examples of this. State Board of Education member Ken Mercer, a Republican from San Antonio, did refer to the framework’s lack of specifics as contributing to their rejection of it. He noted that they failed to include civil rights icons like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Caesar Chavez, and “sanitized lessons on World War II,” not mentioning the Holocaust or liberation of concentration camps that are present in the Texas US history curriculum.

Nevertheless, the SBOE

---

emphasized that they were not “attempting to restrict access to AP courses in Texas public schools.”

A similar phenomenon occurred in other states across the country. The Georgia state senate also passed a resolution condemning the new framework. As argued by the Republican Senator William Ligon Jr. of Brunswick, a city on the southeastern coast of Georgia, the test was biased left and presented an “inaccurate view of America’s free enterprise system.” Unlike the Texas resolution, the Georgia state senate developed a stronger resolution, Senate Resolution 80, to incentivize the College Board to act. In order to push the College Board to revise the framework, the senate stated that it would push the state to look for alternatives to AP programs and attempt to reduce College Board federal funding, even though the organization and AP program covered significantly more courses and examinations beyond APUSH. The resolution adopted the complaints of the Republican National Committee’s resolution verbatim:

“WHEREAS, the new APUSH framework reflects a radically revisionist view of American history that emphasizes negative aspects of our nation’s history while omitting or minimizing positive aspects; and WHEREAS the framework minimizes discussion of America’s Founding Fathers, the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the religious influence on our nation’s history, and many other critical topics that have long been a part of the APUSH course; and WHEREAS, the framework presents a biased and inaccurate view of many important themes and events in American history, including the motivations and actions of seventeenth to nineteenth century settlers, the nature of the American free enterprise system, the course and resolution of the Great Depression, and the development in the Cold War.”

The Georgia Senate Resolution 80 did add the discussion of the American free enterprise system and the Great Depression to their list of “biased and inaccurate views” of the framework and did not mention World War II. Nonetheless, the resolution clearly adopted the language from the RNC’s condemnation of APUSH redesign. Like the RNC, the Georgia senate did not provide any

388 “GA Senate Approves Resolution to Change AP History Exam.”
specific examples of these alleged “biased and inaccurate views,” and did not even list the “positive aspects” of American history that the framework neglected to include. Their resolution was thus entirely rhetorical but overall vowed to look for alternatives to APUSH in light of these purported flaws.

In the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the Committee on Education voted 11-4 to pass House Bill 1380, which barred state funds from being used for the APUSH program unless certain changes were made to the framework. The bill itself, unlike the Georgia resolution, did not cite controversial language and a biased perspective as its reasoning but instead cited a list of fifty-one documents, writings, speeches, and proclamations in American history that were not included in the framework but had to be taught in accordance with Oklahoma state history standards. However, the sponsor of the bill, Republican Representative Dan Fisher, explained to the media that the new framework characterized the US as a “nation of oppressors and exploiters” and shows “what is bad about America,” drawing upon similar rhetoric to the other conservative detractors of the framework.

However, these negative reactions were met with their own backlash from multiple groups, such as students. In Jefferson County, Colorado, the new conservative-majority School Board called for a review of the new framework. Thousands of students participated in local protests—which took place in September, early in the school year during which the new framework was rolled out—throughout the county and in neighboring areas following the School Board’s announcement out of the concern that the review would censor essential aspects of the

---

392 Song, “Oklahoma Educators Quash Attempt to Ban AP U.S. History.”
newly revised APUSH curriculum. Teachers similarly supported these protest efforts, with educational instructors participating in a mass “sick-out” that briefly closed two high schools. Even the College Board demonstrated their support for the “courageous voices of the students in Colorado,” emphasizing that “if a school or district censors essential concepts from an Advanced Placement course, that course can no longer bear the ‘AP’ designation.” The students were ultimately able to get the review process scrapped. In Oklahoma, Moin Nadeem, a junior in high school, created a Change.org petition that garnered almost 38,000 signatures which called upon Oklahoma lawmakers to prevent HB 1380 from becoming law out of the concern that the bill would limit Oklahoma students’ accessibility to different educational choices. According to Matthew Holtzen, an APUSH instructor at Enid High School in Oklahoma, “Oklahoma educators have been contracting legislation to voice their concerns…they’ve also been helping students, parents, and community members to learn about this issue and how to contact members of the legislatures.” Similarly, the president of the Oklahoma Education Association, Linda Hampton, noted, “Our members were very clear that the government should not tell teachers what they should be teaching and that the College Board is a reputable organization that stands for academic excellence.” These efforts resulted in HB 1380 failing to receive a hearing on the floor of the House. Representative Fisher “backtracked” and proposed that instead of eliminating

396 Gionet, “Months after Protests, JEFFCO Board Scraps AP US History Curriculum Review.”
398 Song, “Oklahoma Educators Quash Attempt to Ban AP U.S. History.”
399 Song, “Oklahoma Educators Quash Attempt to Ban AP U.S. History.”
funds for APUSH, the state should require a “review of the curriculum to promote a more patriotic course.”

Professional organizations additionally voiced their support for the new APUSH framework. The American Historical Association (AHA) published a positive statement regarding the redesign, pushing back against the conservative backlash generated by the controversy. Their position was strongly articulated by unequivocally rejecting the notion that the new framework was “anti-American, purposefully incomplete, radical, and/or partisan.” Importantly, they emphasized how the framework was “grievously mischaracterized as a curriculum” in a “deeply troubling” manner and that it was merely a document to guide teachers on how to connect content (which the teachers, school district, and state would decide on) to imperative historical skills. They justified their support because they believed it accurately reflected historians’ shift to a more skills-based learning approach. Interestingly, they also noted that this revision would facilitate the creation of “actively thinking and engaged citizens,” further emphasizing their conviction that the framework was not Anti-American. They additionally emphasized how the new framework was not partisan because “studying history challenges anyone’s beliefs, whatever their political commitments may be.” Nonetheless, the AHA statement of support did not draw upon concrete evidence from the framework to support their claims, and drew upon some emotional language to convey their point, ironically similar to how the detractors of the framework did not include specific content.

---

400 Song, “Oklahoma Educators Quash Attempt to Ban AP U.S. History.”
The Organization of American Historians (OAH) released a similar statement of approval using rhetoric, albeit more neutral and positive than the AHA’s statement, to defend the new framework. They also emphasized that the major change the College Board introduced was to “enhance student analytic powers” and shift to the skills-based learning approach common among other academic disciplines like science and medicine.\footnote{OAH Issues a Statement in Support of the AP Standards,” History News Network, August 29, 2014, https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/156767.} Their perspective of the new framework was open to its limitations. They noted that time restraints would limit any teacher's ability to teach America's complex history in one school year. They underscored that the framework’s most important purpose was not to create a perfectly comprehensive curriculum for all teachers to follow but rather to attempt to “incorporate enlarged historical findings into the design of courses and tests without overburdening teachers of confusing students.”\footnote{OAH Issues a Statement.”} Nevertheless, they believed that the new framework would allow students to “reconcile deeper understandings in American history with classroom realities,” ultimately allowing them to “foster their success in the complex contemporary worlds they will enter.”\footnote{OAH Issues a Statement.”} However, unlike the AHA’s statement, the OAH avoided describing the new framework’s criticisms. Instead, they emphasized that “if approached with respect and good will,” both “supporters and critics of the revisions [would] benefit from conversations that grapple with our expanded understandings of the American past.”\footnote{OAH Issues a Statement.”} The OAH thus highlighted how APUSH’s new framework could “engage and unite Americans who value the study of United States history.”\footnote{OAH Issues a Statement.”}

Additionally, not all reactions were entirely positive or negative. For instance, Florida was more receptive to the new framework but maintained caution when addressing it. The Florida Council for Social Studies (FCSS) expressed their “concern over the ideological conflict”
but continued to “support American History teachers in their efforts to provide an engaging learning environment.”\(^{409}\) While the FCSS acknowledged the lack of specific historical figures and documents, they nonetheless emphasized that it was the job of the teachers to flesh out the APUSH curriculum in their own classrooms: “Critics of the framework show a lack of trust in veteran history teachers to appropriately fulfill the purpose of the new framework to encourage new young American historians.”\(^{410}\) They also noted that their state standards focused more on content than the AP framework, which underlined themes and conceptual approaches to history. Subsequently, given the preexisting Florida history guidelines, the FCSS believed that Florida students taking APUSH would have successfully learned American history twice, having received a “double dose of the early American past and realize its connection to the modern age” and the second time with a more discipline-based learning approach.\(^{411}\)

Moreover, not all historians had a positive perception of the revision. Although the OAH released a statement supporting the new framework, the OAH president noted, “Some things need fixing. Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric was described as ‘bellicose’ as a matter of fact, and of course [the document] shouldn’t have said that.”\(^{412}\) Jeremy Stern, a history education consultant whom the College Board would eventually hire for the re-revision process, objected to the “presentism of the document, the urging of teachers and students to condemn the past for not living up to the moral standards of the present, rather than trying to understand it from the perspective of the period.”\(^{413}\)


III. The Re-Revision

While there were various opinions regarding the redesign, the College Board ultimately decided to take further action and revise the new framework. On February 28, 2015, the College Board created an online forum that critics of the redesign could use to submit what they wanted to see improved. This website stated that it would not accept specific content suggestions, as teachers were responsible for selecting which specific facts and figures would be taught. However, they welcomed feedback on the higher-level historical concepts that would be covered in all APUSH classrooms. To further double down on their rejection of the overreach criticisms made by many of their detractors, the College Board reiterated that they would “not be accepting requests to mandate that all teachers in all schools teach the exact same content as each other, as that would be an imposition of one, set curriculum on all teachers, something that the AP Program has always steadfastly avoided.”

Following this period for public feedback, the College Board met with various groups—“teachers and historians, parents and students, and other concerned citizens and public officials from across the country all provided feedback.” For instance, they convened with conservative academics to better understand their perspectives regarding the reform, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank focused on education policy. While the framework was predominantly revamped by a group of seven historians and history educators brought together by the College Board, the organization also hired educational consultants, such as the aforementioned critic Jeremy Stern, to review the new framework.

Later that year, the College Board released their revision of the redesign, describing the changes as having been made with a “clearer and more balanced approach.”\textsuperscript{418} The new revision explicitly integrated Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin into the key concepts mentioned in the guidelines to address the criticisms that the 2014 framework omitted too many important historical events and figures.\textsuperscript{419} Additionally, the section on World War II—which was criticized for focusing on Japanese internment and the atomic bomb instead of the events occurring in Europe, like the Holocaust—added the widespread public perspective that most Americans “saw the war as a fight for freedom against fascism.”\textsuperscript{420} The re-revision additionally changed the language surrounding specific topics that previously garnered criticism. The key concept about the Reagan administration no longer referred to his “bellicose rhetoric” and only vaguely references his “speeches” as one way he “asserted US opposition to communism.”\textsuperscript{421} The new guide additionally narrowed the broader category of “identity” to “American and national identity,” with a description that included related topics such as “citizenship, constitutionalism, foreign policy, assimilation, and American exceptionalism.”\textsuperscript{422} The inclusion of American exceptionalism in this description was especially notable, as critics denounced the old framework for neglecting that topic.

Additionally, the College Board changed the language surrounding specific events to be more vague. While the 2014 version stated that “Spanish and Portuguese explorers poorly understood the native peoples they encountered in the Americas,” the new framework described

\textsuperscript{422} Strauss, “College Board Bows to Critics,” 2015.
them as “mutual misunderstandings” between European and Native American groups instead.\(^{423}\) In the past version, “Europeans helped increase the intensity and destructiveness of American Indian warfare,” whereas following the revision, the European introduction of guns and alcohol only “stimulated changes” in native communities.\(^{424}\) Another example of this can be seen in the characterization of the British enslavement of people of African descent. Previously, the framework stated that this institution was “reinforced by the belief in British racial and cultural superiority,” the new document included that “other European empires in the Americas also participated in the slave trade.”\(^{425}\)

These revisions successfully quelled the boom of public concern regarding the new framework. Wood wrote that although the initial tone of the “pushback from College Board was arrogant and dismissive,” it eventually began to take in and act upon the content of the criticism.\(^{426}\) The *National Review* published another article about the APUSH framework, except this time, the authors called the revisions “good in [their] own right.”\(^{427}\) In another article Frederick Hess, the director of education policy studies at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute, also wrote that “[the new framework] doesn’t only address the most egregious examples of bias and politicization; rather, nearly every line appears to have been rewritten in a more measured, historically responsible manner.”\(^{428}\) The new version also found success among the historical organizations that had defended the original framework. Jon Butler, the president of the OAH, stated that this document was a “very evenhanded” and “rather neutral” document, which is “what it should be.”\(^{429}\) The executive director of the AHA James R. Grossman gave a


\(^{426}\) Strauss, “College Board Bows to Critics,” 2015.


more neutral response and stated that “professional historians on the whole think this is fine,” and that “teachers also seem to be fine with this.”

The revisions did still meet some criticism from both conservatives and especially liberals. Stanley Kurtz remained skeptical of the College Board and APUSH reform and continued to assert that the College Board continued “to be under the influence of leftist historians.” These new changes also sparked leftist concerns regarding the reduction of critical language in American history. An article written by Libby Nelson for Vox, a generally liberal and progressive media site, argued that the removal of references to racism was political. Nelson reported the removal of “whiteness,” “white racial superiority,” “xenophobia,” and “racism,”—with mentions of the former being cut in half and removed from terms like “white settlers” and “white citizens”—from the framework and the portrayal of concepts like Manifest Destiny and slaveholding Southern ideologies. The author noted that while these changes could genuinely be to streamline the framework and that the explicit details no longer mentioned could still certainly be taught by teachers, they nonetheless also could be interpreted as the continuation of the political narrative that “Americans are, by default, white unless otherwise specified.” Similarly, Jake Flanagin, a human rights writer for the digital news outlet Quartz, argued that these revisions would only “lessen understanding” and “increase divisiveness” among students. He used the changes from the frameworks, specifically looking at the portrayal of violence and racism and their role in the treatment of Native Americans and African enslaved people. One example Flanagin provided was the new statement—which read, “as

---

chattel slavery became the dominant labor system in many southern colonies, new laws created a
strict racial system that prohibited interracial relationships and defined the descendants of
African American mothers as black and enslaved in perpetuity”—which he criticized due to its
suggestion that “white supremacy didn’t inspire the slave economy, but was rather a byproduct of
economic necessity at the time.”435 Although he drew upon evidence, Flanagin’s argument and
article concluded with a biting rhetorical remark: “Get excited for the inevitable 2016 revisions,
where slavery will be referred to as ‘involuntary labor’, Native Americans will be called
‘pre-Americans’, and casus belli for the Civil War will be diluted down to a simple dispute on
the true height of Lincoln’s top hat.”436 Nevertheless, the following year, the discourse
surrounding the APUSH program and framework dwindled, and the topic quietly disappeared
from the public sphere.

Interestingly, most of the media discourse surrounding the controversy did not cite the
perspectives of high school teachers when discussing the changes in the framework. Most
accounts from teachers regarding the new framework came from local news reports and high
school publications, and most tended to be positive. Roderick Pope, an APUSH instructor in
Atlanta, Georgia, approved the changes because “they’re trying to get the kids to think like
historians.”437 David Burton, from Oklahoma, spoke to the Huffington Post, “I enter politics from
a more conservative perspective myself, and I didn’t see what they were seeing in the old
version. But I don’t see any reason now why they would think that there’s some conspiracy
involved in the curriculum framework.”438

435 Flanagin, “All the Ways the New AP US History Standards Gloss over the Country’s Racist Past.”
436 Flanagin, “All the Ways the New AP US History Standards Gloss over the Country’s Racist Past.”
437 Sophie Durham, “A Push for Curriculum Change Quiets Opposition,” The Southerner Online, August 30, 2015,
438 Rebecca Klein, “After Facing Backlash, AP U.S. History Course Revised to Emphasize American Ideals”
(Huffington Post, July 30, 2015),
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ap-us-history-framework_n_55ba1f15e4b0af35367a538d.
That was, however, not to say that all teachers reacted positively to the reform. A former APUSH teacher spearheaded the initial movement against the framework. The National Association of Scholars also published an article detailing two APUSH teachers’ disdain for the new framework. Elizabeth Altham, a teacher at a Catholic school, asserted that the College Board was guilty of “minimization, if not the outright ignoring, of the characters and decisions of great men.”

Marc Anderson, a public school teacher in central Pennsylvania, mentioned that the “2014 version of APUSH made it increasingly difficult for him to teach US history in an honest way and the 2015 changes were merely superficial,” but did not specify how or why he believed that.

Other teachers noted their overall support for the new changes and their disapproval of the political attacks on the new framework. Teacher Emily Nuttall from Chamblee, Georgia, noted that the Georgia Senate Resolution 80 “assumes that teachers only stick to the test, but almost all AP teachers are going above and beyond to try to make connections between topics in the curriculum.” Another Georgia-based APUSH teacher, Chad Hoge, spoke to the Los Angeles Times about the controversy. He testified against the resolution in Georgia and believed “most of the controversy stemmed from the College Board writing the framework for experts in American history, and it being read and criticized by the general public.” Although Hoge knew that the “colonial elites” referenced in the 2014 framework were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, he noted, “others who don’t read the language that way, they may think, ‘My gosh, what have they done, they’ve taken all these great men out of history.’

440 Thorne, “APUSH Teachers Speak.”
echoed these sentiments and wrote, “Many comments we have heard about the framework reflect either a misunderstanding of US history or a very limited faith in teachers’ command of their subject matter. The Curriculum Framework was written by and for AP teachers—individuals who were already experts in US history and its teaching.”

However, numerous educators voiced their concerns regarding the sheer length of the new framework and how adapting this material might pose an instructional challenge. A longtime APUSH teacher from Chamblee, Georgia, named Stephen Rubino, noted that he was “more upset about the test itself being changed,” since it required him to adapt a new and more complex way of teaching. Another experienced teacher, Luther Spoehr, noted how history teachers, pressed for time and short on background knowledge, march their students through the years with factual question after factual question…[and] this new hundred-page Curriculum Framework may well keep that particular ball rolling.” Even the supporter of the new framework and veteran APUSH teacher Brenda Santos wrote that the new 125-page document lacked a concrete or dominant structure which made “the task of creating a course from this framework nothing less than massive.”

Despite the concerns that this new framework would challenge educators, the overall reception of the revision was positive. Following the release of the 2015 revision, the College Board stated that the new edition “has been embraced by educators, including AP US History teachers who reviewed it at the recent AP Annual Conference.”

Looking at the APUSH framework reform, the public backlash, and its subsequent reform, we can observe the process of developing modern history courses in high schools and the

---

443 Klein, “After Facing Backlash, AP U.S. History Course Revised.”
444 APUSH Attacked in Georgia Senate.”
447 Klein, “After Facing Backlash, AP U.S. History Course Revised.”
barriers to education reform. While the framework was pushed by modern developments in the pedagogical approaches to teaching history, it had to be subject to the court of public opinion before it could be properly implemented in schools. Most importantly, this framework and its public have contributed to developing historical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the discipline among students. “The redesign has prompted all history teachers at my school to teach their students that history is a way of thinking and that history knowledge—like all knowledge—is produced through a method of inquiry, investigation, and argumentation.”448

---

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to address how public and academic discourse surrounding APUSH have changed alongside the program’s development and to what extent these perspectives played a role in the evolution of APUSH. While the actual revisions to the course were developed under academic professionals to incorporate their methodological approach to teaching history, the public has ultimately played a prominent role in pushing for these alterations. Concerns about APUSH’s ability to adequately teach students history spurred the College Board to redesign the course. Although many of these changes were geared towards incorporating skills and making content more flexible, the public’s hyperfixation on content has proven that regardless of the stated intent of educational reforms in history, these efforts are continuously subject to the public’s interpretation of them. Thus, educational reform is intertwined with public opinion, which must always be considered as we continue redefining what high school students should be taught in history classrooms.

Echoes of the 2014 APUSH framework controversy and previous cultural wars can be heard through the recent news of the new AP African American Studies course. The program’s development took place for over a decade but was accelerated following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. The pilot program was rolled out to sixty schools nationwide for the 2022-2023 school year. Approximately halfway through the pilot course’s instruction—taught at five schools in Florida—the Florida Department of Education rejected the course. Florida education officials first stated, “As presented, the content of this course is inexplicably contrary to Florida law and significantly lacks educational value.” Governor Ron DeSantis’ press secretary Bryan Griffin further commented, “The course is a

vehicle for a political agenda and leaves large, ambiguous gaps that can be filled with additional ideological material."450 Most of the issues the Florida Department of Education highlighted were relatively contemporary. For instance, they flagged the inclusion of the word “intersectionality,” which refers to the idea that different identities interact with one another to create different individual experiences in society, because it is “foundational to critical race theory and ranks people based on their race, wealth, gender, and sexual orientation.”451 They additionally cited the inclusion of modern African American writers and activists, such as Angela Davis and bell hooks, as being against their state code due to the authors’ political beliefs and language usage. Following this denouncement, one Florida district ended their two schools’ participation in the pilot program.452

Unlike the 2014 APUSH reform controversy, the primary player behind the conservative backlash to the initial course came from the Florida Republican government specifically rather than from a broader movement of iconic Republican figureheads and other state governments. Other states, even ones with strong conservative leadership, did not react as strongly. Arkansas and Virginia are currently reviewing the pilot program but have yet to make any drastic decisions like Florida. North Dakota will review the course if any district decides they were to offer the program, and following a pending law in Texas, the course could also be reviewed and banned. However, the Mississippi Office of Secondary Education approved the course. Moreover, in further contrast to these reactions, liberal governments have reacted positively to the introduction

of the course. Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey (Dem.) announced that the course would be offered to twenty-five more schools the following school year. Governor JB Pritzker of Illinois (Dem.) even noted that their Department of Education would ensure that the program was not “watered down” before approving it.453

The College Board released its revised framework on February 1st, 2023 in honor of Black History Month. Contemporary terms and movements, some of which were flagged by the Florida Department of Education, now only made brief mentions in the framework—“reparations, incarceration, intersectionality and Black Lives Matter” were now only mentioned as optional topics for a final project.454 “Police brutality” was entirely removed from the framework, but African American Republicans like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice now made an appearance.455 Additionally, the secondary sources that were included in the initial pilot framework no longer made an appearance.

Academics also voiced their concerns about the framework changes regarding the revised version’s academic and political integrity. In an open letter posted to Medium signed by hundreds of African American Studies faculty across the nation, academics called for the College Board to restore the integrity of the course. Firstly, they asked the College Board to rescind the February revision and restore the removed critical concepts, scholarship, and frameworks. They emphasized that this censored framework was not capable of “introducing students to the foundational concepts, themes, and commitments of African American Studies.”456 Lastly, they

455 Hartocollis, Goldstein, and Saul, “The College Board’s Rocky Path.”
456 African American Studies Faculty in Higher Ed, “A Call to the College Board to Restore the Integrity of the AP African American Studies Course,” Medium (Medium, February 16, 2023),
requested that the College Board create new platforms for students in states that would censor AP content, like Florida, to sit for the examination and “assume a leadership role in fighting against widespread efforts by states to censor anti-racist thought and expression.”

These revisions were also met with public criticism, albeit this time predominantly liberal, due to the belief that they were politically motivated, especially in light of the statements from the Florida Department of Education. Critics of the new framework were alarmed by the removal of specific material that the Florida government flagged, and media portrayals heightened this tension. The New York Times published articles titled “The College Board Strips Down Its A.P Curriculum for African American Studies” and “Florida Officials Had Repeated Contact with College Board Over African American Studies,” which disseminated the theory that the College Board made framework changes in order to “please conservatives” and the Florida government specifically. Vanity Fair also published an article titled “Ron DeSantis Successfully Bullies the College Board Into Tailoring AP African American Studies to the Needs of Fragile White People.” The Guardian also published an article called “Cowering to politics: how AP African American studies became the most controversial course in the US.”

The National Review’s article on the matter—written by Stanley Kurtz, one of the conservative


457 African American Studies Faculty in Higher Ed, “A Call to the College Board.”


figures that contributed to the controversy behind the 2014 APUSH framework reform—was titled “Big Win for DeSantis in Battle over AP African-American Studies.”

Concerns about the politics behind the revision were exacerbated by a statement released by the Florida Department of Education. Although the College Board maintained that these January statements were released too late to impact the revisions substantially, the Florida DOE revealed that they had been in contact with the College Board as early as July 2022. During this time, the FDOE wrote, “The preview materials appear to include content that may not be permissible. In order for the review to continue, we need information from College Board that demonstrates teaching the content would not require teachers to be out of compliance with Florida law.” In another letter sent to the College Board by the FDOE in February, the FDOE detailed numerous points of contact and meetings with the College Board since July 2022. The FDOE additionally claimed credit for the February 2023 revisions: “by no coincidence, we were grateful to see that the College Board’s revised February 1, 2023, framework removed 19 topics, many of which FDOE cited as conflicting with Florida law, including discriminatory and historically fictional topics.” This statement perpetuated the notion that the AP African American Studies course did not have educational value, as initially posited by the DeSantis’ administration publicly in January 2023.

Criticism of this revision also originated from public organizations and their leadership, and most of it was centered on the implications of these changes. For instance, David Johns, the executive director of a civil rights organization that advocates for people who identify as Black and LGBT, called for the College Board to “reconsider censoring its curriculum and the

462 Meckler, “Florida Details Months of Complaints about AP African American Studies Course.”
education of our young people to meet the demands of a Governor with a radical political agenda. Similarly, Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers labor union, wrote that she was “disappointed” because “too often politics interferes with education, which is exactly what DeSantis attempted here.” Senior manager of free expression at PEN America—a free speech organization—Jeremy Young, noted that even if the College Board claimed the changes were not political, the board “risked sending the message that political threats against the teaching of particular types of content can succeed in silencing that content.” Organizations like the National Parents Union and California Federation of Teachers (CFT), a California affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers representing education workers from childhood through higher education, also condemned the new changes. Public reaction and their media portrayals were highly focused on the political and rhetorical implications of the changes in the framework.

The College Board, however, fired back against these public and Florida allegations to assert that the February framework reform was not political. In their response to the FDOE, released to the public on February 9th, they maintained not only that they never received legitimate written feedback from the FDOE but also that all topics, regardless of being removed from the framework, were all historically accurate and had “substantial educational value.” The College Board’s letter additionally asserted that the changes in the framework were not due to the FDOE’s complaints but rather due to routine content reduction led by the data analysis of

---


465 Heyward and Sei, “College Board’s Revised AP African American Studies Course Draws New Criticism.”

466 Hartocollis and Fawcett, “The College Board Strips down Its A.P. Curriculum for African American Studies.”


African American Studies courses in college. In an interview with National Public Radio, CEO of College Board David Coleman further stressed that the committee revisions began in September before the Florida public statements: “there are time stamps, there’s clear evidence, so it is simply false that the changes were made after.” Coleman and his colleague, the senior director of the AP African American Studies course, Brandi Waters, additionally clarified that the removal of secondary sources—many authors of which were under fire by the Florida government—occurred due to the streamlining of the framework. All other AP classes' frameworks, including AP US History and AP English, did not mention specific secondary sources. These sources and authors were only initially included in the pilot program to offer teachers support. Although these secondary sources would not be included in the framework, they would continue to be made available online through the AP Classroom resource. Coleman further emphasized that “no authors have been banned from the course,” and all secondary sources were removed so that the framework would focus on primary sources that are what “really opens up students’ understanding for bigger concepts and theories.”

Kerry L. Haynie, a Duke political science professor who worked on the committee that developed the course, stressed that “not one time was there any discussion of Ron DeSantis, or any political pressure, when the committee met” and noted that the New York Times’ claims were “wildly misleading at best.” The College Board also released a statement addressing the controversy called “Our Commitment to AP African American Studies, the Scholars, and the Field” on February 11th.

469 College Board Communication, “College Board Responds to the Florida Department of Education.”
471 Ryan, Brown, and Kelly, “College Board Responds to Backlash over AP African American Studies Curriculum.”
They expressed their deep regret for not clarifying the details of the framework changes and more importantly “not immediately denouncing the Florida Department of Education’s slander…that African American Studies lacks educational value.”

Amidst the controversy—between the public statements from Florida officials and the public critics of the reworked framework—other figures directly involved with the pilot program contributed their positive opinions regarding the new course and its potential impact. Nelva Williamson, an instructor of the pilot program in Houston, said this was still a “great opportunity for students to learn, to take a deep dive into the history and culture of the African diaspora,” despite the framework changes. Rachel Williams-Giordano, a pilot teacher in Cambridge, Massachusetts, remarked that the course allowed students to “look at multiple sources and take into consideration different perspective and what influences people’s perspectives,” and ultimately conclude that “the course does have educational value, [as it allowed students to] learn something new every day.” Teachers like Don Singleton in Los Angeles and Tony Green in Oakland found that the course allowed them to teach students about historical events that they had not been able to cover in other courses, ranging from broad lessons in the history of Africa to the more personal story of Alonzo Herndon, one of the first black millionaires. Students also reflected on the value that the course provided for them. Gianna Reynolds, a student in Los Angeles, remarked that she did not learn anything about the history of Africa prior to slavery, even in her AP World History course, and that through taking this class, she learned that “[her] history doesn’t begin and end with slavery and the civil rights era.”

474 Goldstein, Saul, and Hartocollis, “Florida Officials Had Repeated Contact with College Board.”
476 Waxman, “AP African American Studies Course Was Success.”
477 Waxman, “AP African American Studies Course Was Success.”
American Studies student, Auryona Lomas from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, told *Time Magazine* that the course’s discussion of Henrietta Lacks, whose cancer cells have been used for scientific research without her or her family’s consent, and the 1972 Tuskegee syphilis study, in which African American males who were unaware of the nature of the experiment were purposefully not treated for syphilis so scientists understand the effects of the disease untreated, allowed her to understand why her grandmother was initially hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine.478

Nevertheless, the controversy that erupted from the new February 2023 framework catalyzed another announcement. On April 24th, 2023, the College Board announced that the scholars behind the development of AP African American Studies were working to redesign the course for the second time. The board asserted that they were “committed to providing an unflinching encounter with the facts and evidence of African American history and culture” and had to “listen to the diversity of voices in the field” to “best reflect this dynamic discipline.”479

The public outcry at the February 2023 framework showed the College Board the importance of contemporary issues in African American Studies that necessitated acknowledgment in the AP African American Studies framework. The statement additionally addressed controversy to the initial framework and to the February redesign:

In embarking on this effort [to create an AP African American Studies Course], access was our driving principle—both access to a discipline that has not been widely available to high school students, and access for as many of those students as possible. Regrettably, along the way those dual access goals have come into conflict. The updated framework, shaped by the development committee and subject matters from AP will ensure that those students who do take the course will get the most holistic possible introduction to African American Studies.480

The development committee is now continuing to workshop the framework, and the second redesign, or any news other than its eventual arrival, has yet to be released to the public. While it

478 Waxman, “AP African American Studies Course Was Success.”
is not yet clear whether or not the new design will fit the College Board’s stated goals, their statement contained themes similar to that of APUSH’s redesign process between 2014 to 2015. It underscored the importance of the course’s accessibility to students as a guiding factor in the redesign process.

The controversy over the AP African American Studies course and framework is not exactly the same as the conflict over the APUSH framework reforms. Although most APUSH reform efforts, and even the program’s inception, were geared towards introducing students to different historical methods, the introduction of AP African American occurred to teach students different types of historical content. While the AP African American Studies course designers similarly highlighted skills in the course framework—specifically applying disciplinary knowledge, source analysis, and argumentation—they released a substantially more detailed guide of mandatory topics for instruction.481 Nevertheless, the ubiquity of the AP African American Studies controversy in the media demonstrates the continued importance of AP programs, especially involving history, in education and the eyes of the public.

Overall, these events together reveal the continued role of politics and public opinion in educational reform and the public’s obsession with content. Despite the fact the College Board explained most framework changes of both AP US History and African American Studies as being for instructional purposes, the revisions were analyzed for content by the public, co-opted by different interest groups, and ultimately became subject to politically charged rhetoric that resulted in another redesign. Looking at this discourse, we can observe the escalation of cultural wars and the difficulties faced when trying to enact changes in high school history classrooms. While these courses are designed to give more content freedom to individual instructors, they are

nonetheless still heavily impacted by the wills of state and local boards of education, especially those that wish to restrict the content and theories that can be taught in schools.

Despite all of the controversy faced by the College Board between AP US History and AP African American Studies—and even in light of the growing concerns regarding the overall efficacy of the AP program mentioned in chapter two—the AP program has continued to grow. Almost half a million students are likely enrolled in an AP US History course for the 2022-2023 school year and will have sat for the examination on May 5th. Another half a million students will likely enroll and take the examination next year, and the following year that number might even increase further. The reach of this history examination and framework remains, as well as other College Board AP programs. In light of the continued entanglement of public opinion and education, this thesis aimed to illuminate how the public not only reacted to but also served to drive education reform alongside academic discourse. The development of courses like AP US History and AP African American Studies and the following discourse push us to think more about how we can create substantive educational reform that can be accessible in light of the rhetorically charged debates surrounding what history should be taught in high schools.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Newspapers:

American Interest.
Associated Press News.
Breitbart News.
CBS Denver.
Denver Post.
Education Week.
Guardian.
Huffington Post.
Los Angeles Times.
MSNBC.
National Public Radio.
National Review.
Quartz.
Talking Points Memo.
Time Magazine.
USA Today.
Valdosta Daily Times.
Vanity Fair.
Vox.
Washington Post.
**Wall Street Journal.**

**Academic Articles and Sources:**

**American Historical Review.**

**Arena.**

**Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.**

**Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.**

**Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.**


https://doi.org/10.1093/oahmag/oat018.

**Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas.**


**History News Network.**

**History Teacher.**

**Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.**


**Mathematics Teacher.**

**Michigan Historical Review.**

**Organization of American Historians Magazine of History.**

**Phi Delta Kappan.**

**School Review.**
Social Education.


Public Access:

College Board Documents:


Government and Political Documents:


http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2015-16%20INT/hB/HB1380%20INT.PDF.


*Educational Resources:*

https://phi.history.ucla.edu/nchs/history-standards/.


*Miscellaneous:*

African American Studies Faculty in Higher Ed. “A Call to the College Board to Restore the Integrity of the AP African American Studies Course.” Medium. Medium, February 16, 2023.  


Secondary Sources:


