



## Student Performance Q&A: 2013 AP<sup>®</sup> United States History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> United States History were written by the Chief Reader, Ernest Freeberg of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

### Question 1

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The document-based question asked students to analyze both the underlying forces and specific events that led to growing opposition to slavery between 1776 and 1852. It required students to draw on multiple chapters from standard textbooks. This presented a challenge, requiring them to synthesize information from a range of sources, understand cause and effect in this important social movement, and demonstrate an awareness of change over time.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score on the DBQ was 3.48 out of a possible 9 points.

Students performed reasonably well on the question. Students generally used a wide range of the documents and no one document was consistently misused or misinterpreted. Students seemed to have some knowledge of specific factual information from the period.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Weaker essays tended to string together long direct quotes from the documents which interrupted the flow of the essay for the reader. Many essays tended to be descriptive rather than analytical in nature, dumping factual information without using it to support their theses or to answer the question. Students continue to have chronological sequencing problems, frequently bringing in outside information from outside the time period.

#### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

One of the most significant problems is students' failure to connect the outside information to the

question. One example is that many students stated that the Missouri Compromise allowed Missouri to enter as a slave state, Maine as a free state, and established a 36°30' boundary separating slave and free territories. However, students failed to indicate how the Missouri Compromise contributed to the growing opposition to slavery. Many students could improve their score by 1–2 points simply by explicitly stating how and why the information they are using answers the question. This should be done throughout each paragraph.

As emphasized in the last two years, students should be encouraged to synthesize the information that is in the documents rather than paraphrasing or quoting the documents. Long quotes interrupt the flow of the essay for the reader. Instead of telling what is in a document, students should use the main idea of the document to support their thesis. Continued emphasis needs to be placed on using the documents as cues to trigger outside information. Outside information should be confined to the time parameters of the question.

## **Question 2**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This question sought to test students' understanding of economic development in the colonial Atlantic world. The question involved British North America before the rise of independence movements and hence tested student understanding of the period beyond the familiar narrative of events leading to colonial separation from Great Britain. The question tested students' factual understanding of the time period as well as the historical thinking skills of analysis, cause and effect, chronological reasoning, and continuity and change over time.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score on Question 2 was 2.78 out of a possible 9 points.

Two-thirds of the students chose to answer the question, which was straightforward and contained immediately recognizable terms, in particular, "trade" and "mercantilist." Beyond some understanding and analysis of those terms, however, students struggled with the question. Although some students produced middle category (5-7) essays, high category (8-9) essays were much less common than usual.

The better essays did two things well. Essays that exhibited an understanding of change over time and remained within the periodization of question were usually quite strong. For example, students who differentiated between succeeding versions (even if only two) of the Navigation Acts almost by definition placed the change within the context of the end of salutary neglect and thus provided both good information and analysis.

Second, essays that distinguished colonial economic development by region were frequently high-quality responses. These essays employed both analysis and substantive information. They commonly cited shipbuilding, fishing and lumbering as industries arising in New England, and agriculture (specifically tobacco, rice, cotton, and indigo) as developing in the South. A few very strong essays included the middle colonies and their meat, flour, grain, and dairy products in the analysis. In making regional distinctions students had to employ specific facts and substantive consideration, and thus produced good quality essays. The best essays continued from this position, linking regional development to trade and mercantilism thereby engaging with all parts of the question.

First-rate analysis, backed with specific information, separated high from low-quality essays. Essays that investigated how colonial economic development, trade, and British mercantilist policies intertwined showed strong analysis. Many lesser-quality essays had a workmanlike thesis that essentially paraphrased

the question. In those weaker essays, the analysis of trade, mercantilism, and development was muddled and hence the analysis was weaker than that of the stronger essays.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

1. The most important and frequent errors were chronological. Many essays insisted upon including information that was not within the given time period. For example, many essays discussed the Stamp Act, Tea Act and other well-known policies that are generally taught as leading to the Revolutionary War. What made this a major error was that many essays did not understand that these events were not within the question's given time parameters. Thus, the essays failed to understand chronology and failed to acknowledge the boundaries of the question.
2. Many of the essays were very light on specific information. Essays that wrote vaguely of "mercantilist policies" were not nearly as strong as those that could identify the Navigation Acts, Woolen Act, Hat Act, Iron Act, etc. Moreover, many essays only wrote about mercantilism as hindering economic development, but not what it spurred. This probably results from the fact that many students do not understand "mercantilism" or "mercantilist policies." This prevented students from properly and fully answering the question.
3. Many essays were greatly unbalanced in the way they handled the question. The answers were essentially about either triangle trade or mercantilism or colonial economic development, but not all three.
4. Many essays did not understand the concept of a colony. Triangle trade was often well understood, but mercantilism and the relationship between a colony and its home country were regularly poorly comprehended and subsequently dealt with in overly broad generalities.
5. The way students handled cotton was often problematic. Poor essays tended to assume that cotton was the major export commodity of the southern colonies—projecting the nineteenth century back onto the late 1600 and early 1700s.
6. Poor essays exhibited what might be termed Chronology Collapse Disorder. These essays jumped wildly from earlier to later events—for example, creating a chronology that moved directly from Jamestown to the Stamp Act in two sentences or less.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

1. Teachers should spend time on the early colonial period and teach it as its own important historical era, rather than as a prelude to more important events. Most students seemed poorly equipped to handle a question that focused on history prior to the French and Indian War. Teachers should actually teach material from this time period, rather than simply having students read chapters over the summer with the formal teaching beginning with 1763. Teachers should also be sure to teach about the economy of this period—and its regional differentiation. Some students seemed only to have knowledge of the social history of the time.
2. Remind students of the importance of chronological reasoning as a tool for understanding United States history. Students knew some events, but they did not always know how one event was linked to another. Sometimes they simply saw the events of the period as a series of happenings that occurred in isolation and not always in correct order.

3. Teach students how to read and scrutinize an essay question; prepare them to pay special consideration to the prompts included in the question. Essays should address all parts of the question, and then analyze by linking historical information from the time period of the question to what the question is asking them to do. Analysis should be integrated throughout the essay, not limited to the thesis and/or the conclusion. In addition, work with students and teach them what it means to not only write a thesis, but also to fully develop the thesis within the essay.
4. Teachers should focus on terminology. Students need to understand the terms they are using—for example, mercantilism and trade—and then employ their understanding in their response. Furthermore, properly used terminology can elicit a basic linkage between events and thus help the essay with both analysis and chronological reasoning.

### **Question 3**

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The question asked students to analyze the ways in which the United States sought to advance its interests in world affairs between 1789 and 1823. It required students to identify America's interests in world affairs from the administrations of Washington through Monroe and then show how the United States promoted those interests by using relevant historical information to support their argument. The question tested the historical thinking skills of cause and effect, chronological reasoning, and continuity and change over time.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score on Question 3 was 2.12 out of a possible 9 points.

Only about one-third of the students chose to answer this question, even though it was a mainstream question that allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge of the early years of the republic and the foreign policies of the five presidents who served at this time. Those students who chose to answer the question and understood the intent of the question did fairly well.

Students who wrote the better essays organized them either chronologically or thematically, covered events throughout the entire time period from 1789 through 1823, and demonstrated an understanding of the continuities and changes in foreign policy during this period. They exhibited a good understanding of chronology, provided analysis throughout their essays, and supported their arguments with relevant historical evidence (Washington's Farewell Address, the Neutrality Act of 1793, the XYZ affair, the quasi-war with France, impressments of United States sailors, the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine).

What separated the high essays from the low essays was the students' use of analysis. Many essays had unfocused or only partially developed thesis statements that addressed the time period in narrative fashion without identifying the interests the United States sought to advance (e.g., national security, territorial expansion, economic interests, establishment of national honor/respect, and relations with Europe) or how the United States promoted them. Test takers who identified the interests of United States foreign policy and then showed how the United States went about achieving these interests during the entire time period did well.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

1. Students who could not connect the question's dates to the foreign policies of the time period did poorly. Unfortunately, some students, instead of writing about the early national period, wrote essays about foreign policy in the 1840s, the late-nineteenth century, or the mid-twentieth century

either because they transposed the date 1789 to 1898 or equated the words foreign policy with time periods other than 1789 to 1823.

2. Students used the terms “neutrality” and “isolationism” interchangeably although these terms have different meanings.
3. Some students wrote narrative, rather than analytical, essays about the time period. They identified historical information that was within the time period, but did not use the information to show how the United States sought to advance its interests.
4. Sometimes students did not discuss the entire time period and had noticeable informational gaps. Students often neglected the 1790s or stopped their essay at the War of 1812.
5. Students were confused about the provisions and enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine. They discussed the doctrine as a pronouncement supported by the full military might of the United States government, an action which did not occur at this time.
6. Students often referred to the United States at the end of this period as a regional and global power. Some students went so far as to identify the United States as a “superpower.”

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

1. It appears that many students may have received limited instruction on the foreign policy of this era, so teachers should not neglect the foreign policy of the Early National Period when teaching the course. When preparing lessons on the foreign policy of the time period from 1789 to 1823, help students understand the continuities and changes that occurred.
2. Remind students of the importance of chronological reasoning, cause and effect, and continuity and change over time as important thinking skills for understanding United States history. Students knew events, but they did not always know how one event was linked to another or how the events helped the United States advance its interests. Sometimes they simply saw the events of the period as a series of happenings that occurred in isolation and not always in correct order. The better essays were able to identify and discuss how a foreign policy begun in one administration was continued or changed in another, such as how succeeding presidents responded to Washington’s policy of neutrality and the warning in his Farewell Address.
3. Teach students how to read and scrutinize an essay question, address all parts of the question, and then analyze by linking historical information from the time period of the question to what the question is asking them to do. Some students only implicitly identified the interests of the United States in world affairs, choosing instead to focus on actions. Had they identified the interests, students would have had an easier time organizing their essays and using analysis. Analysis should be integrated throughout the essay, not limited to the thesis and/or the conclusion. In addition, work with students and teach them what it means to not only write a thesis, but also to fully develop the thesis within the essay.
4. Before students begin to answer an essay question that asks that they confine their answers to a period within specified dates, encourage them to think about the significance of those dates. Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate models of historical periodization that historians use to categorize events into blocks of time, such as the Early National Period. In this essay, students might have connected the date 1789 with the inauguration of George Washington and the beginning of the republic and the date 1823 with the promulgation of

the Monroe Doctrine. Some students saw the War of 1812 as a turning point in foreign affairs, while other students used it to show change over time in foreign policy goals. Had a good number of students been able to connect the dates of the question with this time period, they may have written much better essays.

5. Finally, stress the skill of contextualization with your students. Contextualization involves the ability to connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place, and to broader regional, national, or global processes. Students who could place United States interests in the context of the tensions between France and Britain, the Napoleonic Wars, the Atlantic trading system, and/or the concurrent evolution of political parties and their ideas (e.g., Alexander Hamilton's protective tariff, Hamilton's affinity for the British, Thomas Jefferson's affinity for the French, the Era of Good Feelings) were able to organize and develop essays that were much more effective. Review time period-specific vocabulary with your students so that they do not use it in the wrong context. For example, the word imperialist was not used in the 1790s and early 1800s to describe proponents of United States expansion. That word became popular in the late nineteenth century.

## Question 4

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The question asks students to analyze the impact of technological innovations on the lives of two of three groups: factory workers, middle-class urban residents, and Midwestern farmers during the period from 1865 to 1920. The essay allowed students to demonstrate several historical thinking skills: cause and effect, change over time, and contextualization. The question is broad enough that students could take their arguments in different directions. Students could analyze the impact of technological innovations on any aspect of the lives of the three groups (e.g., social, economic, work, leisure, gender, political lives). The question required students to draw conclusion(s) regarding the impact of technological innovations on the lives of two different groups of people, make an argument, and support the argument with relevant historical evidence drawn from the period from 1865 to 1920.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score on Question 4 was 3.34 out of a possible 9 points.

Some students analyzed the impact of technological innovations in more detail and depth without referencing specific technological innovations relevant to factory work, middle-class urban life, and/or Midwestern agriculture. For example, students discussed the mechanization of agriculture without referencing a specific piece of farm equipment (i.e., tractor, seeders, combine), and then analyzed technological innovations' impact accurately and in depth. Some essays analyzed both direct and indirect impact, demonstrating a clear causal relationship between various events, trends, and developments (e.g., assembly lines caused working conditions and pay to worsen, prompting factory workers to form unions like the Knights of Labor and the AFL; wastewater treatment and indoor plumbing caused higher standards of sanitation for middle-class urban residents, thus improving health and quality of life while reducing contagious disease like cholera).

Better essays included relevant information that is specific to the time period of 1865–1920. Some essays used accurate technological innovations that were first invented or developed before 1865, but were then refined or further developed after 1865. Weaker essays referenced technological innovations and their impact that could have occurred in any historical time period (i.e., machines make work easier). Weaker essays also listed accurate technological innovations without analyzing their impact on the lives of two groups.

Although most of the essays addressed each of the groups separately, some analyzed the impact of technological innovations on both groups taken as a whole. Sometimes students interwove the groups in their essays (e.g., movies changed the way both urban middle-class residents and factory workers spent leisure time; mass production of factory goods provided more consumer goods to Midwestern farmers through catalogs and to middle-class urban residents through department stores, thereby raising their standards of living).

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

1. Students described either technological innovations, the lives of the groups of people, or both technological innovations and the lives of two groups, without analyzing the impact of the technological innovations on the lives of the groups.
2. Students listed accurate examples of technological innovations in the period, but did not analyze their impact on the lives of the groups.
3. Students referenced technological innovations that were irrelevant to the groups and/or the time period (e.g., the impact of technological innovations on female factory workers in the Lowell textile mills during the 1830s and 1840s, the cotton gin's effects on southern planters before the Civil War, widespread use of the radio by middle-class urban residents in the 1920s, and television's impact on middle-class urban residents during the 1950s).
4. There was some geographical confusion. For example, students sometimes described Midwestern farmers as Southern planters, Southwestern cattle ranchers, or California farmers.
5. Students concentrated their essays on Gilded Age information (e.g., Boss Tweed, robber barons, monopolies) without clearly connecting it to the question.
6. Students confused middle-class urban residents with factory workers.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

1. Encourage the development of analytical thinking. Question 4 challenged students to analyze the impact of technological innovations on the lives of different groups of people during the period 1865–1920. Emphasize analysis rather than recitation of factual information. Teachers can reinforce analytical and writing skills through explicit instruction in writing essays that answer historical questions and require analysis.
2. Prompt students to identify the tasks of the question (analyze) and key words/phrases (impact of technological innovations, lives of two groups) in order to better focus on exactly what the question is asking the students to do.
3. Emphasize cause and effect along with chronological context.
4. Stress the importance of writing a clear thesis that explicitly answers the question.
5. Make sure students choose the essay about which they know the most historical information.
6. Be sure that students read the question and answer the question asked.

## Question 5

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

Question 5 asked students to analyze the reasons behind the *emergence* of social protest in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1945–1975) for two of four groups: African Americans, college students, Latino Americans, and women. To answer this question, students had to connect broad social and cultural processes (long-term causes) and events close to the given dates (proximate causes) to post-war protest movements and illuminate the reasons for the emergence of these movements. This made answering the question trickier than it first appeared.

The intent of the question was to engage students in analysis of causes rather than just have them write a descriptive narrative concerning protests in the time period. The question required students to assess the large pool of related information by looking at cause and effect, rather than change over time (as is usually the case in Question 5). Rather than requiring students to address the entire breadth of the time period, the question instead used those organizing years, because the various protests emerged at different times throughout the period. Students were asked to examine the transformative influence of World War II and its impact on the reasons that these groups had particularly intense waves of protest in this period.

A very large percentage of students took this question (71 percent). This is likely because the amount of information available for students to use in addressing this question is very broad. Additionally, many students are familiar with at least the basic historical information from the period. Another factor that may explain the large percentage of students choosing this question is the familiarity of students with some of the major figures in the civil rights movement.

The intent of the question was to assess students' understanding of the postwar social, political, and economic milieu in which protest emerged. The relative popularity of the question reflected students' familiarity with the time period, protest group(s), or both, as well as how recently their teacher had covered that material.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score on Question 5 was 3.71 out of a possible 9 points.

Students performed at generally high levels on this question, as the adjusted mean score for the essay was significantly higher than other questions addressed by student this year. The time period and the topic lent itself to a body of historical information which students had studied recently before the exam, and, in the case of some protest movements, have learned at many levels in their education. Nearly all students appeared to have at least a general sense of the protests, particularly as related to African Americans. This meant that, to some degree, essays had to demonstrate either more sophisticated analysis or a greater command of the information in order to be more highly ranked. There were very few essays that appeared to have little or no grasp of what the question was asking. Students also rarely failed to adequately structure the answer.

In the sample picking process, the Exam Leaders (ELs) found that African Americans appeared most often. College students and women were nearly evenly split and most often paired with African Americans. Coverage of Latinos was generally rare and may have been attributable when chosen to regional differences in the AP course. Despite the question's time period structure, beginning in 1945 and ending in 1975, the ELs found that it was possible to draw on prior information to establish context for the emergence of protests in the time period. This was particularly true of African Americans and women. As long as students were able to adequately link this information to the reasons protest emerged in the period, there was no penalty.



For African Americans, women, and college students, the legacy of these movements (and the debates surrounding them) are still compelling for most Americans and for this reason, among others, students appeared generally knowledgeable about the origins of each.

This was not the case for the Latino Civil Rights Movement, however. While a few students attempted to write thoughtful analyses of Latino protest, it seems that this remains an area of deficiency in high school AP classrooms and college textbooks. Students are either not taught this material, or they are unable to situate Latino protest within the context of postwar social movements. Either way, students who chose this option wrote with limited knowledge. Most skipped this option entirely.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

1. Although nearly all students displayed at least a basic understanding of protests in the time period, many students suffered from a very jumbled sense of chronology. Periodization of the available information about protests, particularly on women, was generally weak across many of the essays. Students often stated that the women's suffrage movement was within the stated time frame of the question. Stronger students would use the protests of the early twentieth century to establish a framework for African Americans and women, but students were often unable to clearly delineate to what period this earlier information belonged.
2. Although many students successfully addressed the question, there was a tendency towards being more descriptive than analytical. Students often appeared merely to list information describing protests from the period without linking it clearly to the causes.
3. Students very rarely wrote about Latino Americans. It is likely that the relatively few students who chose to address Latinos did so because of a regional difference in approach to this group.
4. Students were better at analyzing the causes for the emergence of student protest mostly because the reasons for the emergence of this movement falls within the period 1945–1975 and includes Vietnam and the draft as readily apparent reasons. Some students introduced suburban conformity as the reason for the emergence of the counterculture. Stronger students synthesized the anti-war movement and the counterculture as different protest strains with common origins. In addition, quite a few papers attempted to argue that college students protested *against* African American civil rights, citing James Meredith and the entire state of Alabama as examples.
5. Students who wrote about women in the time period very often had a more generalized and simple understanding. They often described a desire to leave the home and enter the workforce, but often had very little sense of the greater forces driving this desire. Far too many students placed women's suffrage in the postwar period, indicating a somewhat confused sense of chronology. Repeated mention of Margaret Sanger and birth control as the result of protest in this period also suggested mangled chronology as students conflated the protests from the question's time period with the protests of the early twentieth century.
6. The essays typically had a fairly solid understanding of the protests of African Americans. They did occasionally conflate the early twentieth century with this period, but this was less common than with women. Latinos were virtually absent, regardless of the region from which students came.
7. Conceptually, most students failed to take advantage of the cue "emergence" and presented longstanding grievances as a cause for suddenly full-blown social movements. This was especially the case with African Americans and women, both of whom were often presented as suffering without protest or redress until, inexplicably, they started protesting in the 1950s and 1960s. This gave most of the essays a contrived structure: years of suffering led to sudden protests led to social justice.

8. Since the question required students to analyze the reasons for the emergence of these protests, it was important when training readers to remind them that good essays often analyzed material that fell before 1945. Unfortunately, most of the essays we read spent their ink describing these movements in a narrative between 1945 and 1975.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

1. It is important that although textbooks and many teachers often address this topic in a more thematic way that students are still taught clearly to recognize the chronology of events. It was clear from this question that students often struggle with periodization. This may be particularly true when you have a topic (women’s rights, civil rights) that is often taught more thematically.
2. Although students did generally well on this question, it is important to note that there were significant gaps in knowledge and understanding. It appears that the coverage of Latino Americans in this period is either minimal or nonexistent in many courses. The coverage of student protests appears somewhat limited as well.
3. We would tell teachers that it is essential that their students address each element of the question, especially analysis of the reasons protests emerged, to achieve the highest possible scores. This particular question called for a use of cause and effect rather than change over time. It would help the student if teachers specifically use the analysis of cause and effect in their teaching presentations and student assignments to ensure students have a strong sense of causation.
4. It is highly recommended that help with how to write an essay and the purpose of writing the essay is continuously taught throughout the course. For a college-level course with expectations of college-credit students need to do more than simply have a fact-based knowledge of history; they need to know how to write a convincing essay using the facts of history, with an explicit thesis sentence. Although this sounds simplistic, it is important for teachers to emphasize that students need to answer the question that is asked and the whole question. Encourage students to look for the layers in the question.
5. High school teachers should continue to stress the importance of **reading** the question.
6. Chronology remains important when addressing cultural phenomena, such as protest movements.
7. Women and Latinos remain on the fringe of United States history. As instructors, we need to fully integrate these groups into mainstream culture. The fact that students ignored or misrepresented the efforts of women and Latinos is a reflection of their treatment by teachers and in current textbooks.
8. The African American Civil Rights Movement was the first of many postwar protest movements, most of which presented a broadly common critique of American social and economic structures in the twentieth century. These movements inspired, cross-fertilized, and defined each other. Students in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Women in SDS joined the National Organization for Women (NOW). Some strains of Latino protest took inspiration for ethnic pride from the Black Panthers, whereas others followed the goal of universal social justice of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In hindsight, 1945–1975 was an *era* (as opposed to a decade—“the 1960s”) of protest, which this question makes clear. It is time to teach these postwar movements in a similar fashion

to the way the reform movements of the 1830s–1850s are taught in most classrooms: as part of a broad historical trend.

9. AP questions almost never ask students to recount the narrative they learned in class. However, students use this narrative style to write descriptive essays that often miss the point of the question itself. Teachers can overcome this problem by offering their students essay questions and classroom exercises that a) critique the narrative, or b) ask students to move analytically within the narrative (by comparison, by tracing causes, by establishing context) so that students learn that the factual framework is the *foundation* of historical analysis, not the result. We have to know the facts. But the AP test requires students to *analyze* those facts. If more students were aware of this requirement, they would be less likely to write descriptive essays that only graze the question.