
AP United States History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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AP[®] UNITED STATES HISTORY

2017 SCORING GUIDELINES

Short Answer Question 4

“An arrogant and stubborn faith in America’s power to shape the course of foreign events compounded the dangers sown by ideological rigidity. Policymakers . . . shared a common . . . conviction that the United States not only should, but could, control political conditions in South Vietnam, as elsewhere throughout much of the world. This conviction had led Washington to intervene progressively deeper in South Vietnamese affairs over the years. . . . This conviction prompted policymakers to escalate the war. . . . Domestic political pressures exerted an equally powerful . . . influence over the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. . . . Another ‘loss’ to communism in East Asia risked renewed and devastating attacks from the right.”

Brian VanDeMark, historian, *Into the Quagmire*, 1995

“The escalation of U.S. military intervention [in Vietnam] grew out of a complicated chain of events and a complex web of decisions that slowly transformed the conflict . . . into an American war. . . . [President Lyndon Johnson] made the critical decisions that took the United States into war almost without realizing it. . . . Although impersonal forces . . . influenced the president’s Vietnam decisions, those decisions depended primarily on his character, his motivations, and his relationships with his principal advisers. . . . The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of *The New York Times* or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C., even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting.”

H. R. McMaster, historian, *Dereliction of Duty*, 1997

- Briefly explain ONE major difference between VanDeMark’s and McMaster’s historical interpretations of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War.
- Briefly explain how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945 to 1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support VanDeMark’s interpretation.
- Briefly explain how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945 to 1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support McMaster’s interpretation.

Scoring Guide

0–3 points

Score 3

Response accomplishes **all three** tasks set by the question.

Score 2

Response accomplishes **two** of the tasks set by the question.

Score 1

Response accomplishes **one** of the tasks set by the question.

Score 0

Response accomplishes **none** of the tasks set by the question.

Score NR

No response. Response is completely blank.

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Short Answer Question 4 (continued)

Scoring Notes

- a) Response briefly explains ONE major difference between VanDeMark's and McMaster's historical interpretations of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War.

Examples of responses to (a) that would earn the point:

- VanDeMark credits Cold War foreign policy and domestic politics, as well as institutional forces, for the United States deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict.
- McMaster credits the decisions made consciously and unwittingly by President Lyndon Baines Johnson and the advisors who surrounded him for the United States deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict and/or the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam.

- b) Response briefly explains how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945–1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support VanDeMark's interpretation.

Examples of responses to (b) that would earn the point:

- Development of United States Cold War policy in the postwar era.
- United States Containment policy after 1947; NSC-68 1950.
- Commitment of United States to Cold War ally, France, after the end of Second World War
- United States helped France to maintain its colonial possessions in Indochina after 1945 (First Indochina War); United States paid for 80 percent of the conflict by early 1950s.
- United States refused to allow elections for reunified Vietnam to take place in 1956.
- Korean War, 1950–1953, confirmed some policymakers' beliefs about containment as a useful strategy.
- United States initial support of South Vietnamese premier, Ngo Dinh Diem.
- United States policy shaped by belief that war against communism was one of good versus evil or enslaved versus the free world.
- United States belief that North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh were influenced by communism.
- Fear of communism domestically shaped policies in Truman and Eisenhower administrations, forced hard line stance by Democrats and Johnson, proving they were strong on communism to maintain political power in the Congress and achieve approval of legislation
- The specter of McCarthyism shaped anticommunism in United States.
- Belief in spreading the democratic values and ideology of the United States worldwide.
- Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had already deeply involved United States in conflict prior to Lyndon Johnson.
- Truman, blamed for the loss of China in 1949, drove a hard line to contain more territory from turning communist.
- CIA involved in/led the overthrow of the Iranian and Guatemalan governments in 1954, long-time commitment of some United States policymakers against suspected communist inroads.

- c) Response briefly explains how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945–1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support McMaster's interpretation.

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Short Answer Question 4 (continued)

Examples of responses to (c) that would earn the point:

- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 spurred by “manufactured” or fabricated incident.
- President Lyndon Johnson’s need for approval and votes for Great Society domestic legislation and programs resulted in his acquiescence on Cold War foreign policy or his willingness to take a hard line.
- Efforts to manage United States involvement in Vietnam through gradual escalation of funds and finally combat troops.
- Johnson’s willingness to follow the directives of his policy advisors, especially the Department of Defense, his trust in their assurances that policy approaches to Vietnam would net gain.
- Johnson to blame for maintaining and escalating the policies of his predecessors.
- Johnson lost his presidency as a result of escalation of the Vietnam conflict — evidence that he was blamed by the American people.

Write your answer to **SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION 4** on this page only.

- a) According to Brian VanDeMark, the war in Vietnam was fought by America because the public felt that their country had a moral ~~duty~~ responsibility to defend the Vietnamese. However, H. R. McMaster argues that the US involvement in Vietnam was caused by uncontrollable forces and influences in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, ^{rather than the public.}
- b) Truman's policy of containment and the country's belief that the US should prevent the expansion of communism for the good of mankind could be used to support VanDeMark's interpretation.
- c) Lyndon B. Johnson's assumption of John F. Kennedy's role as president and obligation to continue ~~the~~ the policy of flexible response and resistance to communism could be used to support McMaster's interpretation that the President was placed in an administration already leaning toward and ready for conflict with Vietnam.

Write your answer to **SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION 4** on this page only.

a) one major difference between Van DeMark's and McMaster's interpretations is who they blamed the war on. Van DeMark believed that domestic political pressure to combat communism and control ~~the~~ south Vietnam had caused the increased escalation in the Vietnam war while McMaster ~~blame~~ put the blame solely on ~~the~~ President Lyndon Johnson

b) The Domino theory is an example that would support Van DeMark's interpretation of the cause of the war with Vietnam. This theory, that stated if one country fell to communism, then others would soon thereafter follow, inspired the escalation of US involvement in Vietnam.

c) President Lyndon Johnson led the United States into increased involvement in the Vietnam war by means of the My Lai Massacre, where hundreds of women, children, and elderly people were murdered. This anchored the US to their commitment to fight in Vietnam as well as increased the antiwar sentiment back home.

Write your answer to **SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION 4** on this page only.

One major difference between VanDeMark's and McMaster's historical interpretations of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was that VanDeMark believes the U.S. as a whole got themselves into the war with Vietnam, although it does say policy makers, it is not specific. Yet, McMaster's interpretation is very straight forward believing the Vietnam War and the U.S.'s interaction in it was all the president's, Lyndon Johnson's, fault. VanDeMark's interpretation can be supported by all the revolts and reforms American's held stating and making it very clear how they didn't want to go to war with Vietnam, but policy makers did it anyway. Also, McMaster's interpretation can be supported by Lydon Johnson not taking the American's feelings into account with his decision. Americans didn't want to be apart of yet another war but detente was calling Johnson's name and he did what he felt like he had to do.

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2017 SCORING COMMENTARY

Short Answer Question 4

Overview

Responses were expected to successfully explain a major difference in how excerpts from works by two historians, Brian VanDeMark and H. R. McMaster, interpreted United States involvement in the Vietnam War. In addition, responses were expected to explain how one event or development in the period from 1945 to 1975 could be used as historical evidence to support each interpretation. In so doing, the responses could address the shifting nature of United States foreign policy between 1945 and 1975, particularly in the realm of the Cold War and the fight against communism. Finally, responses had to demonstrate the ability to interpret documents or quotations adequately.

This question assessed the skill of Interpretation.

The Learning Objective assessed in this question focuses on the role of the United States in the world (the reasons for and the results of United States diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in North America and overseas).

Sample: 4A

Score: 3

- a) The response earned 1 point because it correctly explains VanDeMark's notion that United States involvement in the Vietnam conflict was based on the idea of containing the spread of communism, while McMaster's viewpoint is that the United States intervened largely because of decisions made by President Johnson and his administration, not the public.
- b) The response earned 1 point because it refers to the policy of containment as having national support as explained in VanDeMark's passage.
- c) The response earned 1 point because it successfully explains the position taken by McMaster that President Johnson's decision to stay in the conflict was largely influenced by the actions taken by his predecessors.

Sample: 4B

Score: 2

- a) The response earned 1 point because, while simplistic, the explanation of the two texts is sufficient. There is a clear understanding of VanDeMark's position that the United States enacted the policy of containment as a reason to intervene in Vietnam and of McMaster's position that President Johnson's decisions were responsible for the policy of United States intervention.
- b) The response earned 1 point because it uses information about the Domino Theory to buttress VanDeMark's explanation regarding the decision of the United States to enter the conflict.
- c) The response earned 0 points because it does not adequately or accurately address the question posed.

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Short Answer Question 4 (continued)

Sample: 4C

Score: 1

a) The response earned 1 point because it explains (weakly) the positions taken by the two authors and their interpretations of why the United States became involved in the Vietnam conflict. While the answer is simplistic, it offers enough information to have earned credit.

b) The response earned 0 points because it does not make clear what historical event or development could be used to support VanDeMark's argument.

c) The response earned 0 points because it fails to provide explicit information to successfully support McMaster's argument. It is basically a general statement about the United States, President Johnson, and the reaction of United States citizens about the involvement in the conflict.