

Marlborough School—AP United States History

AY 2005-2006

Sections B, C, I: Mr. Aieta, Room C106

Introduction

Welcome to AP American History! This is a college-level course in American history that will both prepare you to take the Advanced Placement exam in May and provide you a chance to learn American history more fully than most high school (and probably most college) students do. Because of the nature of the AP exam itself, much of the course will necessarily involve learning, understanding, and recalling specific factual information about people, events, ideas, issues, and laws. However, the most important thing you should take away from the course will be a personal understanding of the importance of American history and its meaning for American citizens (like you) in today's nation.

Of course, we will try to cover every important feature of American history and, of course, we will never do it. It would be impossible. But we will work hard and have fun coming close. We will focus on quite a few broad issues in the course, but you can expect particular focus on three specific "problems" in American history:

- The historical growth of the national government and Americans' changing attitudes about both the government and citizenship.
- The differing and changing identities of past Americans at the individual, community, and national levels.
- The juxtaposition of ideals versus realities in American history. (You can think of this one as the "American Dream v. American Reality.")

The second and third of these issues will often dovetail with topics and issues under discussion in your American literature class. In some ways, you can think of both classes together as an "American Studies" course.

This course will also provide you with a chance to improve your thinking, studying, reading, writing, analyzing, and test-taking skills. You will learn to read and critically analyze primary historical documents and texts, to plan and write effective essays, and to formulate sound oral and written arguments.

Projects for the class include a research paper, a Roundtable of Antebellum reformers (with you in the role of different reformers), creating a U.S. citizenship quiz, and others. You will also prepare for the SAT II test at the end of the year.

Books for the course

Your main textbook is called *American Passages*. Keep in mind that while this book weighs in at almost 800 pages, most textbooks used in other AP courses are over 1200 pages—and have two columns of text with much smaller type. The material we cover in class will make up for any concise sections of *American Passages*. During the course, you will read two additional books on reformers and the Cold War experience. There is also a study guide, the *Amsco AP United States History Guide* (AMSCO), which you can use for all tests, quizzes, as well as while preparing for the AP exam itself. In addition, you will read various handouts provided by your instructor.

Notebooks/Binders

Course binders are recommended, not required. The main thing I stress is that binders are meant to help you organize your class material and are not meant to become a project unto themselves. Whether you use a binder or notebook, I suggest dividing your notebooks/binders into the following sections: notes, classwork/homework, handouts (including map assignments), assessments (tests, quizzes, projects), and blank-lined paper. Additionally, I suggest that you stick to a 1 ½-inch binder and, whenever that binder gets full, store the material at home and start anew. You may follow a system that works best for you, but please keep all the materials for one class in one place.

Textbook reading assignments

I expect you to have done the assigned textbook reading the night before the class. Textbook assignments average about 15-25 pages. For every chapter, you will be given a set of questions and terms (and perhaps maps and charts). These sheets will provide guidance for you in how to pick out the main themes, concepts, and terms in each reading

assignment. On a given day (listed on your schedule), you will be responsible for handing in those notes. They will be graded on a check-minus/check/check-plus scale. You will be penalized for lateness.

Pop Quizzes

It is important that you keep up with your textbook reading assignments since pop quizzes will often be given on the assigned readings. We will talk about this more in class the first few weeks.

L Periods

Students should expect to stay in class for the duration of all L periods. Remember that the Wednesday L periods are attached to the period after the L, not before.

Test and Quizzes

Tests will usually occur about once every 2-3 weeks. Quizzes may occur at about the same frequency. Some of the “tests” will consist entirely of one in-class essay based on documents. (In AP-speak, they are called a “Document Based Question,” or a DBQ. Don’t worry, you’ll learn all about these soon enough.) Other scheduled tests will ordinarily consist of about 20-25 multiple-choice questions, an essay, and possibly some matching, map, and short identification sections. We will review before each test.

Grading

Grading will be based on performance on tests, quizzes, assignments, and class participation. For the first semester, grading will break down as follows: First Quarter—40%, Second Quarter—40%, First Semester Final—20%. There will be no final for the second semester (because of the AP exam in mid-May). Therefore, your work in each quarter of the second semester will count for 50% of your second semester grade (Third Quarter—50% and Fourth Quarter—50%).

Study Groups/Study Aids

Study groups will improve your understanding and performance, so you should form them. (If you’d like help in forming a group, just ask.) Beware, however, the dangers of dividing up work—if not thought out, it can lead to confusion and more work in the long run. Study groups work really well before exams. Quiz each other orally. (The process of recalling will help you understand and remember.) Form a group that contains students with different instructors; they will bring different strengths to the review sessions. Though it has some flaws, AMSCO is a good study guide for individual tests and quizzes and your mid-year exam. The textbook has an online website to accompany it that you may find useful as well. Other study aids besides the AMSCO book are available on the Internet and in bookstores. (Check out REA and Princeton Review’s AP exam reviews.)

Projects & Assignments

Over the winter break, you will have a short assignment and memorization project. Prior to spring break, you will have selected your research topic and begun investigating primary and secondary sources in preparation for the writing of your essay. This short research paper will be completed in the weeks following the AP exam in May 2006.

Participation

Participation is a crucial part of this class and a substantial portion of your grade for each quarter will be partly based on it. There’s one main rule regarding participation—“There are no stupid questions.” (The kinds of questions people might think of as “bad” often lead to the best discussions.) We will usually lecture, but the class will also involve discussion of various issues. The main point is to stay engaged and involved and ask questions when you don’t understand. You should remember, too, that your participation grade will be based on how well behaved you are in class—so arrive on time, listen respectfully to others (just as you would expect them to listen to you), express your opinions diplomatically, and avoid disrupting class. Sometimes we will have to cut down on discussion in an effort to charge through more material, but we will try to make discussion an important mode of learning in this class.

Changes to Schedule and Syllabus

Expect changes to the schedule and syllabus as the year progresses.