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Studying for the AP US History course is an exercise in memorization and critical thinking. Multiple-choice questions ask you to read and analyze documents based on your historical knowledge, while essay questions require similar skills but with the added challenge of synthesizing your ideas into a coherent argument that incorporates both outside knowledge and evidence given to you. In this comprehensive AP US History study guide, I will give you all the resources and strategies you need to prepare for the AP exam and any other test that comes your way in this course! 2021 AP Test Changes Due to COVID-19 Due to the ongoing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, AP tests will now be held over three different sessions between May and June. Your test dates, and whether or not your tests will be online or on paper, will depend on your school. To learn more about how all of this is going to work and get the latest information on test dates, AP online review, and what these changes means for you, be sure to check out our 2021 AP COVID-19 FAQ article. What's the Purpose of This AP US History Study Guide? This guide will help you prepare for the AP US History test and other assessments you encounter throughout the school year in your AP US History class. It includes instructions for creating an effective study plan, a few helpful study tips, an overview of the content covered in the AP course, and a list of resources for practice questions. This is a one-stop shop for all the information you need to master the AP US History curriculum. Creating a Study Plan for AP US History; 5-Step Guide You should start studying sooner rather than later for the AP US History exam because there's so much information to remember. Ideally, you'll build on knowledge throughout the year and regularly review to avoid forgetting earlier parts of the course. I recommend doing a holistic review after each in-class test that covers everything you've learned up to that point. You can then begin your final review for the AP test in March or April so you will have an entire month or two to spread out your studying. Below are the steps I recommend following to prep for the AP US History test. The whole process should take you about 11 hours and 30 minutes. Step 1: Take a Full-Length Practice Test Time: 3 hours 15 minutes The first step is to take a full, official AP US History practice test under realistic conditions. Time yourself in accordance with the real test and write out both essays (DBQ and Long Essay) completely. Mark any multiple-choice questions you had to guess on—it's important to go over this information later even if you happen to guess correctly. When you're done, score your practice test to see how well you would do on the real AP exam if you were to take it right now. Depending on how much you're hoping to improve your AP US History test score, you might have to budget for more or less study time. If you're already scoring close to 5 (or a low 5), you might complete these steps once and find that you're satisfied with your results. If you're scoring 2 or more AP points lower than you'd like to, however, plan to go through this process several times. Step 2: Catalog Your Mistakes and Guesses Time: 1 hour After you score your practice AP US History test, go through your mistakes and lucky guesses. Try to categorize the mistakes by content area so you can look for patterns and determine which parts of the course you need to study the most. Once you've identified what you need to study, move on to reviewing the actual content. Make a list in descending order of the topics that correspond to the highest number of missed multiple-choice questions and missed points on short-answer and free-response questions. Step 3: Study Relevant Content Areas and Practice Multiple-Choice Questions Time: 2 hours Use the list you made in the previous step to guide your review of the AP US History content. Start with the areas for which you need a little refresher, and work your way up to the big issues you had on the diagnostic test. When you're satisfied that you've fixed the gaps in knowledge that led to your errors, you should do some practice APUSH multiple-choice questions to make sure you really know your stuff (you can find them in review books or on one of the sites listed later in this article). Step 4: Practice Planning and Writing Essays Time: 2 hours You'll need to practice writing essays before you take the AP US History test so you feel comfortable with the time constraints and requirements. This is especially true when it comes to the Document-Based Question, which has a unique format. After examining the problems with your essays from the original diagnostic test, practice your skills on additional free-response questions. For the sake of saving time, you don't necessarily need to write out entire essays, but you should at least make rough outlines that include all the components of a successful essay. That said, if you struggled a lot with time on your initial AP practice test, then I'd recommend going through another timed free-response section in full so you can practice moving more quickly. Step 5: Take a Second Full Practice Test Time: 3 hours 15 minutes Once you've gotten more familiar with the APUSH material, take a second full AP practice test to assess your progress. If you find that you've improved to a satisfactory level, you might stop there and just do some light review until the exam. If you're still not happy with your results, repeat this process, and make sure that you're really absorbing the material as you study. Always time practice tests to the specifications of the AP exam! You have to get used to thinking and writing quickly. 3 Essential AP US History Study Tips The following tips for AP US History will help you make the most of your time as you work your way through the process outlined above. The APUSH exam assesses your historical knowledge in a different way than other tests you might have taken in the past do. Make sure your study methods lend themselves to the format! #1: Make Thematic Connections The ultimate goal of AP US History is for you to be able to connect individual events to the main themes of the course and draw conclusions about historical trends based on your analysis. As you study, don't just look at events in isolation—examine how they relate to other events of the time and how they might've resulted from different cultural and political attitudes. What were the outcomes of particular events, and how and why did they feed into different, larger trends? Ask yourself to dig deeper. This will help you on both in-class assessments and the AP test. Looking for help studying for your AP exams? Our one-on-one online AP tutoring services can help you prepare for your AP exams. Get matched with a top tutor who got a high score on the exam you're studying for! #2: Read and Repeat When you read content notes for AP US History, you might think you have a fact committed to memory but forget it when it comes up on a test. The best way to combat this is to pause every couple of minutes and try to remember the facts that you just reviewed without looking back at your notes; you'll know immediately whether you're absorbing the information or not. If you're having trouble remembering a particular fact, try to make a distinctive connection with something else that's easier to remember. For example, say you were trying to remember which items were taxed by the Townshend Acts. (It was glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea.) You could think of the mnemonic GuLPP IT to remember them. It also makes sense because all the taxes were repealed except for the one on tea, which you can gulp! I know this sounds super weird, but I often find that the weirder the method of remembering something is, the more likely it will stick in your mind. #3: Practice Writing Essay Questions The free-response section is the biggest challenge on the AP US History exam because you have to plan and write two coherent essays (one DBQ and one Long Essay) in less than two hours. It's imperative that you do lots of practice before the AP test to prevent your essays from being disorganized or lacking in focus. You can consult the College Board site for links to past AP US History free-response questions. Make sure you always have a strong thesis statement and all the points in your essay relate directly back to it. Plan out your essay before you start writing to keep yourself on track. You should also try to include relevant outside knowledge but only if it pertains directly to your argument and the question itself. Don't just spew out everything you know about the topic! Write your practice essays in illegible cursive with a fountain pen. It's what the Founding Fathers would have wanted. AP US History Course Content: Themes and Units AP US History covers history in what is now the United States from 1491 to the present. There are eight main themes in the course that are connected through nine units, or time periods. For each of these themes, I'll go over the main historical topics associated with it. Before that, though, here's a quick overview of the AP US History units and what percentage of the AP exam they each make up: AP US History Unit/Period % of Exam Unit 1: 1491-1607 4-6% Unit 2: 1607-1754 6-8% Unit 3: 1754-1800 10-17% Unit 4: 1800-1848 10-17% Unit 5: 1844-1877 10-17% Unit 6: 1865-1898 10-17% Unit 7: 1890-1945 10-17% Unit 8: 1945-1980 10-17% Unit 9: 1980-Present 4-6% Source: 2019-20 AP US History Course and Exam Description Theme 1: American and National Identity Focuses on how and why definitions of American and national identity and values have developed among the diverse and changing population of North America as well as on related topics, such as citizenship, constitutionalism, foreign policy, assimilation, and American exceptionalism. Theme 2: Work, Exchange, and Technology Focuses on the factors behind the development of systems of economic exchange, particularly the role of technology, economic markets, and government. Theme 3: Geography and the Environment Focuses on the role of geography and both the natural and human-made environments in the social and political developments in what would become the United States. Theme 4: Migration and Settlement Focuses on why and how the various people who moved to and within the United States both adapted to and transformed their new social and physical environments. Theme 5: Politics and Power Focuses on how different social and political groups have influenced society and government in the United States as well as how political beliefs and institutions have changed over time. Theme 6: America in the World Focuses on the interactions between nations that affected North American history in the colonial period and on the influence of the United States on world affairs. Theme 7: American and Regional Culture Focuses on the how and why national, regional, and group cultures developed and changed as well as how culture has shaped government policy and the economy. Theme 8: Social Structures Focuses on how and why systems of social organization develop and change as well as the impact that these systems have on the broader society. Look at all these themes! It's like being at a theme park minus the scents of fried food and despair! Also, I HIGHLY doubt this roller coaster could pass a safety inspection. AP US History Content: Notes and Outlines In this section, I'll give you notes on the AP US History course content so you can study the facts and connect them to the themes above. The content is divided into the nine units and historical periods. Under each time period, I'll list important topics with links to notes you can use. Every period also includes a link to at least one timeline of significant events. I think it's helpful to have these handy so you get a better grasp of the chronology (which will be very helpful for free-response questions). The timelines are from AP Study Notes, while the rest of the notes are from a different site called APNotes.net. I chose to source the notes from the second website because it gives a more succinct overview of the content, with key dates and major events in bold. Overall, it's great for a quick review. I recommend looking at the chapter outlines on AP Study Notes if you want to see a longer, more detailed description of historical trends and events in the United States. Period 1: 1491-1607 Period 2: 1607-1754 Period 3: 1754-1800 Period 4: 1800-1848 Period 5: 1844-1877 Period 6: 1865-1898 Period 7: 1890-1945 Period 8: 1945-1980 Timeline of Significant Events (1970-1980) Stagnation in the seventies Period 9: 1980-Present Timeline of Significant Events (1980-1990) Resurgence of Conservatism Timeline of Significant Events (2000-Present) The start of the new century Quick Reference Sheets Here are some quick reference sheets you can use for further AP US History prep. APUSH Teacher Creations Interactive timeline of major historical events in the US through 2015 CourseNotes Spacious skies, amber waves of grain, etc. Additional AP US History Resources to Test Your Knowledge Here are some print and online resources you can use to review for the AP US History exam and smaller portions of the curriculum throughout the school year. AP US History Review Books Though not free, AP prep books can be excellent resources for your prep. Here are a few books we recommend getting your hands on. Read our full article on the best review books for APUSH for more details and advice! One of the single most important parts of your college application is what classes you choose to take in high school (in conjunction with how well you do in those classes). Our team of PrepScholar admissions experts have compiled their knowledge into this single guide to planning out your high school course schedule. We'll advise you on how to balance your schedule between regular and honors/AP/IB courses, how to choose your extracurriculars, and what classes you can't afford not to take. Official College Board Materials The following AP US History practice questions come directly from the College Board, so they're the most accurate representations of what you can expect on the real test. Try to save these resources for later in your studying so you can get an accurate reading on your strengths and weaknesses when you're close to the exam. Note that older materials are not aligned with the current exam format, so you will have to tweak your prep a bit to make them work. Get more guidance on how to use official practice resources in our collection of APUSH practice tests. Unofficial Practice Materials Although College Board materials are the gold standard when it comes to APUSH prep, there are some good-quality unofficial resources you can make use of, too. Here are the best ones. Quizlet Flashcards and Quizzes These student-created sets of flashcards cover every single aspect of AP US History. You can study different sets depending on where you are in the course or which areas need the most improvement. After you study the terms, you can play games to review them and test your factual recall! Historyteacher.net Mini Practice Quizzes This site offers mini practice quizzes for every topic covered in the APUSH course. There are multiple-choice questions as well as "short-answer" questions (you get a drop-down menu of 12 answer choices). These won't help much with the more analytical elements of the test, but if you want to test your knowledge of facts, they'll serve you well. Albert.io AP US History Practice Quizzes Albert provides a series of quizzes on every topic in the current APUSH curriculum. As you go through them, the site gives you stats showing how you performed on questions of varying difficulty levels. This should help you figure out whether you've truly mastered the material. Practice Quizzes for The American Pageant, 12th Edition This helpful site contains chapter-by-chapter practice quizzes based on an old edition of The American Pageant APUSH textbook. Questions are multiple choice and true/false. This resource is more helpful for factual recall than for analysis questions. CourseNotes AP US History Practice Quizzes CourseNotes offers a total of six pages of multiple-choice quizzes on all the topics you need to know for the AP US History exam. Nice! Varsity Tutors AP US History Practice Quizzes A well-known test-prep company, Varsity Tutors has short multiple-choice practice quizzes on every APUSH topic as well. Matching and Multiple-Choice Short Practice Quizzes This website has sets of matching and multiple-choice questions for every period in US History. They've got questions; YOU'VE got answers! Wrap-Up: Making the Most of This AP US History Study Guide AP US History covers eight major themes across nine time periods. It's hard to study this much material, which is why it's good to have a game plan! To recap, the steps I recommend taking in your APUSH prep are as follows: #1: Take a full practice test#2: Catalog your mistakes#3: Study relevant content areas and practice multiple-choice questions#4: Practice planning and writing essays#5: Take a second full practice test

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