



Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP® United States History Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP United States History. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

Part A

Question 1 (DBQ)

What were the Cold War fears of the American people in the aftermath of the Second World War? How successfully did the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower address these fears?

What was intended by the question?

By beginning in 1948, the question required the student to understand the way in which the Cold War had developed prior to the election of 1952. Therefore, students were expected to summarize issues and events of the Truman and Eisenhower years as they related to fears in the minds of Americans, 1948-1961. The documents were intended to be used primarily in assessing the Eisenhower administration's responses to the fears identified by the student.

How well did the students perform?

Overall, responses were of a quality similar to those of previous years. The documents were straightforward and relatively easily understood, so fewer students were led astray by misinterpreting documents. As in the past, responses tended to be more descriptive than analytical. This tendency may have been reinforced by the fact that the first part of the question required description.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Numerous students failed to understand that the second part of the question required analysis. In terms of specific errors, students most commonly had misunderstandings about the following:

Year in which Dwight Eisenhower assumed the presidency

1. State of the economy in the 1950s
2. Contrast between Eisenhower and Kennedy policies
3. Distinctions between containment, massive retaliation, brinkmanship and New Look

4. Eisenhower's handling of Senator Joseph McCarthy
5. Relationship between Eisenhower and Secretary John Foster Dulles

These topics were generally omitted:

1. Role of the CIA and intelligence in the Eisenhower era
2. Specific foreign policy crises, including Hungary, Lebanon and Suez
3. Role of propaganda (VOA, etc.)

Part B:

Question 2

How did economic, geographic, and social factors encourage the growth of slavery as an important part of the economy of the southern colonies between 1607 and 1775?

What was intended by the question?

The overall intent was to examine the general pattern of economic growth in the colonial period and to show change over time in the institution of slavery. The question solicited discussion of the impact economic, geographic, and social factors had on slavery in the colonial period.

How well did the students perform?

Although this was a mainstream topic, a large number of students performed poorly. Most responses had little factual information to support the arguments, contained simplistic generalizations and assumptions about the growth of slavery, and displayed a lack of understanding of the sequence of events. Numerous essays had a restatement of the question as the thesis. Overall, a large number of students performed poorly on this question.

What were the common errors or omissions?

1. Students misunderstood the time frame of the question and provided a detailed discussion of events in the nineteenth century rather than the colonial period.
2. A number of essays used inappropriate examples in their discussions, e.g., "King Cotton" and the impact of the cotton gin.
3. Numerous responses had simplistic generalizations about how slavery worked, often with the assumption that Blacks were "naturally suited" for hard labor.
4. Many answers had stereotypical comments about Blacks and the "pious" North.
5. Students displayed a misunderstanding of geographic differences between the regions

Question 3

The Jacksonian period (1824-48) has been celebrated as the era of the “common man.” To what extent did the period live up to its characterization? Consider TWO of the following in your response.

- Economic development
- Politics
- Reform movements

What was intended by the question?

This question tests students’ understanding of the Jacksonian period (1824-1848) as the era of the common man and requires an evaluation of this characterization. It required students to use two of three categories in responding. In asking students to make a judgment concerning “to what extent the period lived up to its characterization,” the question required analysis. For the categories chosen, students had to analyze the historical events, decisions, ideas and the like in terms of their effects on the common man. The question required the student to reach some conclusion about the participants, process, goals and/or outcomes of the categories relative to the period’s characterization and state that conclusion as a thesis. Implicit in the question was the need to define the term *common man*.

How well did students perform?

Only 17% of the students selected this question, which most likely explains why students tended to perform well. Most addressed two categories and used historical examples from the period to analyze the characterization. Students often took much for granted, however, in that they made sweeping generalizations regarding the accuracy of the characterization without explaining why it was accurate (i.e., “states rights helped the common man” or “Jackson destroyed the Second Bank. This helped the common man”). Such limited analysis suggested that students did not recognize the complexity of the question and resulted in lower scores.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Students made the following common errors and omissions:

1. Essays had limited analysis with minimal or no explanation of why and how the characterization was accurate.
2. Students confused the period of the question with Jackson, the president. Most students focused on Jackson even though the question asked about the period. As a result, some students gave Jackson credit for many, if not most, of the events/developments in the period (i.e., instituting the spoils system, national nominating conventions, universal white male suffrage and various social reforms).
3. Students focused their essays on 1828 through 1836 or 1840. They failed to consider the entire scope of the period, 1824-1848.
4. Few students chose reform movements. In general the discussion and analysis of reform movements were weak, indicating a possible lack of understanding of this topic.
5. Some essays lacked balance between a discussion of historical examples as evidence *and* analysis of the complexity of the question. Students often did the former without the latter, and, as a result, some answers were merely descriptions of the categories.
6. Sometimes students confused the term *common man* by applying a twentieth-century definition rather than a nineteenth-century one. However, many did recognize that Blacks

(both free and slave), Indians, and women were not included in the nineteenth-century definition.

Part C

Question 4

How and why did transportation developments spark economic growth during the period from 1860 to 1900 in the United States?

What was intended by the question?

The question required students to explain the cause and effect relationships between the growth of railroads (and to a lesser degree waterways and electric traction) and economic expansion.

How well did students perform?

There were numerous essays that provided mere generalizations about transportation and economics — “faster, farther and cheaper”— and little specifics or analysis. Most responses were brief with little outside information.

What were the common errors or omissions?

Students made the following errors or omissions:

1. Numerous responses demonstrated a confused understanding of the chronological developments in transportation. Many essays discussed developments that occurred in the early nineteenth century or the twentieth century at length.
2. Most essays did not establish a clear connection between transportation and economic growth.
3. Many students omitted international trade and ocean-going steamships in their discussion of changes in transportation.

Question 5

Describe and account for the rise of nativism in American society from 1900 to 1930.

What was intended by the question?

The question required students to consider some of the limits to the process of assimilation of immigrants, particularly those from areas other than northern and Western Europe, into early twentieth-century America.

How well did the students perform?

Some students did exceedingly well in both describing and accounting for the rise of nativism during this period. They displayed a clear understanding of the term *nativism* and the related issues of the period in question. Many others did poorly because they had problems with the term itself or fell into the common error of wandering through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Numerous students could not adequately respond to a question that required both social history and more factual, political history. An unusually large number of responses were totally out in left field because either the students did not understand *nativism* or they misread it as “nationalism.”

What were the common errors and omissions?

Students made the following errors or omissions:

1. Few essays defined the term *nativism*.
2. Some essays discussed events outside the time period of the question, elaborating on the 1880s, 1890s or 1930s.
3. Some students focused solely on the 1920s, producing a nice social history essay on the Harlem Renaissance or the “Roaring ‘20’s.”

There were some commonplace factual errors. For example, placing the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 1920s, the Japanese internment during World War I, and Know-Nothings at various points in time. Some students confused Senator Joseph McCarthy with Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer.