June 2, 2015

Letter Opposing the 2014 APUSH Framework

The teaching of American history in our schools faces a grave new risk, from an unexpected source. Half a million students each year take the Advanced Placement (AP) exam in U.S. History. The framework for that exam has been dramatically changed, in ways certain to have negative consequences.

We wish to express our opposition to these modifications. The College Board’s 2014 Advanced Placement Examination shortchanges students by imposing on them an arid, fragmentary, and misleading account of American history. We favor instead a robust, vivid, and content-rich account of our unfolding national drama, warts and all, a history that is alert to all the ways we have disagreed and fallen short of our ideals, while emphasizing the ways that we remain one nation with common ideals and a shared story.

The Advanced Placement exam has become a fixture in American education since its introduction after the Second World War, and many colleges and universities award credits based on students’ AP scores. In fact, for many American students the AP test effectively has taken the place of the formerly required U.S. history survey course in colleges and universities, making its structure and contents a matter of even greater importance from the standpoint of civic education. Many of these students will never take another American history course. So it matters greatly what they learn in their last formal encounter with the subject.

Educators and the public have been willing to trust the College Board to strike a sensible balance among different approaches to the American past. Rather than issuing detailed guidelines, the College Board has in the past furnished a brief topical outline for teachers, leaving them free to choose what to emphasize. In addition, the previous AP U.S. History course featured a strong insistence on content, i.e., on the students’ acquisition of extensive factual knowledge of American history.

But with the new 2014 framework, the College Board has put forward a lengthy 134-page document which repudiates that earlier approach, centralizes control,
deemphasizes content, and promotes a particular interpretation of American history. This interpretation downplays American citizenship and American world leadership in favor of a more global and transnational perspective. The College Board has long enjoyed an effective monopoly on advanced placement testing. The changes made in the new framework expose the danger in such a monopoly. The result smacks of an “official” account of the American past. Local, state, and federal policymakers may need to explore competitive alternatives to the College Board’s current domination of advanced-placement testing.

The new framework is organized around such abstractions as “identity,” “peopling,” “work, exchange, and technology,” and “human geography” while downplaying essential subjects, such as the sources, meaning, and development of America’s ideals and political institutions, notably the Constitution. Elections, wars, diplomacy, inventions, discoveries—all these formerly central subjects tend to dissolve into the vagaries of identity-group conflict. The new framework scrubs away all traces of what used to be the chief glory of historical writing—vivid and compelling narrative—and reduces history to an bloodless interplay of abstract and impersonal forces. Gone is the idea that history should provide a fund of compelling stories about exemplary people and events. No longer will students hear about America as a dynamic and exemplary nation, flawed in many respects, but whose citizens have striven through the years toward the more perfect realization of its professed ideals. The new version of the test will effectively marginalize important ways of teaching about the American past, and force American high schools to teach U.S. history from a perspective that self-consciously seeks to de-center American history and subordinate it to a global and heavily social-scientific perspective.

There are notable political or ideological biases inherent in the 2014 framework, and certain structural innovations that will inevitably result in imbalance in the test, and bias in the course. Chief among these is the treatment of American national identity. The 2010 framework treated national identity, including “views of the American national character and ideas about American exceptionalism” as a central theme. But the 2014 framework makes a dramatic shift away from that emphasis, choosing instead to grant far more extensive attention to “how various identities, cultures, and values have been preserved or changed in different contexts of U.S. history with special attention given to the formation of gender, class, racial and ethnic identities.” The new framework makes a shift from “identity” to “identities.” Indeed, the new framework is so populated with examples of American history as the conflict between social groups, and so inattentive to the sources of national unity and cohesion, that it is hard to see how
students will gain any coherent idea of what those sources might be. This does
them, and us, an immense disservice.

We believe that the study of history should expose our young students to vigorous
debates about the nature of American exceptionalism, American identity, and
America’s role in the world. Such debates are the warp and woof of historical
understanding. We do not seek to reduce the education of our young to the
inculcation of fairy tales, or of a simple, whitewashed, heroic, even hagiographical
nationalist narrative. Instead, we support a course that fosters informed and
reflective civic awareness, while providing a vivid sense of the grandeur and drama
of its subject.

A formal education in American history serves young people best by equipping
them for a life of deep and consequential membership in their own society. The
College Board’s 2014 framework sadly neglects this essential civic purpose of
education in history. We can, and must, do better.

- Scholars Concerned About Advanced Placement History

Signatories

**Affiliation for identification purposes only**

**John Agresto**, former President, St. John’s College-Santa Fe, and former
Deputy Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities

**Patrick N. Allitt**, Cahoon Family Professor of American History, Emory
University

**Stephen H. Balch**, Director of The Institute for the Study of Western
Civilization, Texas Tech University, and Founder, National Association of
Scholars

**Herman J. Belz**, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Maryland

**Gerard V. Bradley**, Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame

**James W. Ceaser**, Harry F. Byrd Professor of Politics, University of Virginia
James Jay Carafano, Military Historian, and Vice President, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, E. W. Richardson Fellow, and Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, Heritage Foundation

John “Chuck” Chalberg, Professor of History, Normandale College

Lynne Cheney, Former Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities

Bruce Cole, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art History, Indiana University, former Chairman of National Endowment for the Humanities, and Senior Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Center

Patrick J. Deneen, David A. Potenziani Memorial Associate Professor of Constitutional Studies and Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame

Robert Faulkner, Research Professor of Political Science, Boston College

John Fonte, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for American Common Culture, Hudson Institute

Richard Fonte, Former Director, We the People Project, National Endowment for the Humanities, Former President, Austin Community College

Robert George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University, and Herbert W. Vaughan Senior Fellow, Witherspoon Institute

Charles Glenn, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Boston University, and Co-Chair, International Conference on School Choice and Reform 2015

Susan Hanssen, Associate Professor of History, University of Dallas

Victor Davis Hanson, Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow, Classics and Military History, The Hoover Institution, Stanford University
John Earl Haynes, 20th Century Political Historian, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Michael Holt, Langbourne M. Williams Professor Emeritus of American History, University of Virginia

Philip Jenkins, Distinguished Professor of History, Baylor University

Robert Davis Johnson, Professor of History, Brooklyn College, The City University of New York

Amy A. Kass, Sr. Lecturer Emerita, University of Chicago

Leon R. Kass, Addie Clark Harding Professor Emeritus, Committee on Social Thought, The University of Chicago, and Madden-Jewett Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

Charles Kesler, Dengler-Dykema Distinguished Professor of Government, Claremont McKenna College

Ralph Ketcham, Professor Emeritus of History, Public Affairs, and Political Science, Syracuse University, and Senior Research Associate, Campbell Public Affairs Institute

Joseph Kett, James Madison Professor Emeritus of History, University of Virginia

Harvey Klehr, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Politics and History, Emory University

Yuval Levin, Editor, National Affairs, and Hertog Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Center

Gordon Lloyd, Robert and Katheryn Dockson Professor of Public Policy, Pepperdine University

Herb London, Professor Emeritus and former John M. Olin Professor of Humanities, New York University, and former President, Hudson Institute
Myron Magnet, Manhattan Institute, and Author of *The Founders at Home: The Building of America, 1735-1817*

Joyce Malcolm, Patrick Henry Professor of Constitutional Law and the Second Amendment, George Mason University School of Law

Harvey Mansfield, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government, Harvard University

Peter Mansoor, Raymond E. Mason Jr. Chair in Military History, Ohio State University

George Marsden, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Notre Dame

Ted McAllister, Edward L. Gaylord Chair, and Associate Professor of Public Policy, Pepperdine University

Wilfred McClay, G.T. and Libby Blankenship Chair in the History of Liberty, and Director of the Center for the History of Liberty, University of Oklahoma

Robert Merry, Historian, former Publishing Executive

Wilson D. Miscamble, Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

Joshua Mitchell, Professor of Government, Georgetown University

Paul D. Moreno, William and Berniece Grewcock Chair in Constitutional History, Hillsdale College

Mark Moyar, Senior Fellow, Joint Special Operations University, and Author of *Triumph Forsaken*

Johnathan O’Neill, Chair, Department of History, Georgia Southern University

Robert Paquette, Professor of History, Hamilton College

Ronald Radosh, Professor Emeritus of 20th Century US History, The City University of New York, and Hudson Institute
Paul Rahe, Charles O. Lee and Louise K. Lee Chair in the Western Heritage, and Professor of History, Hillsdale College

Thomas Reeves, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Wisconsin-Parkside

Daniel Robinson, Fellow, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford

Diana Schaub, Professor of Political Science, Loyola University Maryland

Mark Smith, Carolina Distinguished Professor of History, University of South Carolina

James Stoner, Professor of Political Science, Louisiana State University

Sandra Stotsky, Professor Emerita of Education Reform, University of Arkansas

Stephan Thernstrom, Winthrop Professor Emeritus of History, Harvard University, and Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute

Jean M. Yarbrough, Gary M. Pendy Sr. Professor of Social Sciences, Bowdoin College

Donald Yerxa, former Director, The Historical Society, and Editor, Historically Speaking
Additional Signatories as of June 25, 2015

**Affiliation for identification purposes only**

**Michael Allen**, Professor of History, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, University of Washington, Tacoma

**Elizabeth Altham**, Instructor in AP U.S. History, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Academy, Rockford, Illinois

**Douglas Ambrose**, Professor of History, Hamilton College

**Marc S. Anderson**, AP U.S. History instructor and social studies department chair, Northern High School, Dillsburg, Pennsylvania

**Michael Auslin**, Resident Scholar and Director of Japan Studies, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

**Ronald H. Averill**, Former Dean of Social Sciences, South Puget Sound Community College

**Michael Barton**, Professor of American Studies and Social Science, Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

**Fred Baumann**, Professor of Political Science, Kenyon College

**Christopher Beneke**, Associate Professor of History, Bentley University

**Robert Nicholas Berard**, Professor of History and Education, Mount Saint Vincent University

**Jay Bergman**, Professor of History, Central Connecticut State University

**Suzanne Geissler Bowles**, Professor of History and American Studies Minor Coordinator, William Paterson University

**Robert Bresler**, Professor Emeritus of Public Policy, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg
Kent Masterson Brown, President, Witnessing History, LLC

Richard Buitron, Adjunct Professor, San Antonio College

Jonathan Burack, President, Burack Educational Services

Colin B. Burke, Independent Scholar, and Associate Professor Emeritus of History, University of Maryland-Baltimore County

Michael Burlingame, Chancellor Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies, History Department, University of Illinois at Springfield

Peter Cohee, Teacher, Weston High School, Weston, MA

Ashley Cruseturner, Professor of History, McLennan Community College

Paul du Quenoy, Associate Professor of History, American University of Beirut

William C. Dennis, Former Professor of American History, Denison University, and former President, Philadelphia Society

Nicholas Doom, Instructor in AP U.S. History and Social Studies, Anderson W. Clark Magnet High School, La Crescenta, California

John C. Eastman, Henry Salvatori Professor of Law and Community Service and Former Dean, Dale E. Fowler School of Law at Chapman University

John T. Fishel, Lecturer, International and Area Studies, College of International Studies, The University of Oklahoma, and Emeritus Professor, National Defense University

Matthew Franck, Director, William E. and Carol G. Simon Center on Religion and the Constitution, Witherspoon Institute, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Radford University

Burton W. Folsom, Jr., Charles F. Kline Chair in History and Management, Hillsdale College
Charles Geshekter, Professor of History, Emeritus, California State University, Chico

Kevin Gutzman, Professor and Chair-elect of History, Western Connecticut State University

Doreen Hamilton, Former College English Instructor, University of Washington, and Former Teacher, Seattle Public Schools

Don Hickey, Professor of History, Wayne State College

Kevin Jenkins, Associate Professor, Tift College of Education, Mercer University

Donald Kagan, Dean Emeritus, Yale College, and Sterling Professor of Classics and History, Yale University

Kevin Kijewski, Superintendent of Schools, Archdiocese of Denver, and Adjunct Professor of Education, University of Southern California Rossier School of Education

Anthony K. Knopp, Emeritus Professor of History, University of Texas at Brownsville

Robert C. Koons, Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

Kirby Lehman, Former Superintendent, Jenks Public Schools

Mary Anne Marcella, 5th Grade History Teacher, New York City

James W. Muller, Professor and Chair of Political Science, University of Alaska, Anchorage

Larry D. Nachman, Emeritus Professor of Political Science, College of Staten Island, City University of New York

D. Brendan Nagle, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Southern California
William Nancarrow, Interim Dean of Faculty, Associate Professor of History, Curry College

Patrick Nolan, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of South Carolina

Ronald Pestritto, Graduate Dean and Professor of Politics and Charles and Lucia Shipley Chair in the American Constitution, Hillsdale College

Roger Ream, President, Fund for American Studies

Glenn Ricketts, Professor of Political Science, Raritan Valley Community College, Public Affairs Director, National Association of Scholars

Kevin Roberts, President, Wyoming Catholic College

William Saxby, Dean and Professor of Psychology, Colorado Christian University, School of Humanities and Science

David Schaefer, Professor of Political Science, College of the Holy Cross

Kurt Schuler, Senior Fellow in Financial History, Center for Financial Stability

Maimon Schwarzschild, Professor of Law, University of San Diego

Larry Schweikart, Professor of History, University of Dayton

Gilbert T. Sewall, Director, American Textbook Council

Colleen Sheehan, Professor of Political Science, Villanova University, Director, Ryan Center for the Study of Free Institutions, member, Pennsylvania State Board of Education

Joseph Morrison Skelly, Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History, College of Mount Saint Vincent

Meghan Slanina, AP U.S. History and AP U.S. Government instructor, Holy Name High School, Parma Heights, Ohio
Steven Smith, Research Associate Professor in Archeology and Anthropology, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology, University of South Carolina

Phoebe S. Spinrad, Professor Emerita of English, Ohio State University

Lawrence Squeri, Professor Emeritus of History, East Stroudsburg University

Stanley W. Trimble, Professor Emeritus of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles

Michael Uhlmann, Research Professor of American Politics, Claremont Graduate University

Jack Warren, Executive Director, American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati

Bradley C.S. Watson, Professor of Politics, Center for Political and Economic Thought, Saint Vincent College

Robert Whealey, Professor Emeritus of History, Ohio University

David M. Whalen, Provost and Professor of English, Hillsdale College

Steven E. Woodworth, Professor of History, Texas Christian University

If you would like to be considered as an additional signatory, please see instructions at www.nas.org/articles/open_letter_american_historians.