

Advanced Placement U.S. History **A Course Overview/Syllabus**

Greetings AP Students, Parents, and Guardians. I want to welcome you and your child to the challenges and joys of AP US History (APUSH)! As you and your child consider whether this is the class for them, I ask you to read this course overview in its entirety in the hopes of making clear what will be expected this year, and then discuss with your son or daughter if they feel they should take Advanced Placement U.S. History. At the end of this description, please have a parent or guardian sign the form, and return it to me.

The AP U.S. History exam, offered in early May, is one of the most challenging AP exams offered. The exam assesses student knowledge from pre-1600 Colonialism through the Reagan era and the fall of the Soviet Union. Over 400 years of college level history. The APUSH exam is a national exam given the first week in May. It is the largest and one of the toughest AP exams, with over 300,000 national and international students testing on the same date. The test consists of 80 multiple choice questions in 55 minutes, as well as three (3) college level essays. The entire test takes 3 hours and 5 minutes. The majority of students who take this class are juniors. In Forest Hills, the AP U.S. History class is offered at the sophomore level, aligning itself with the regular U.S. History course, as well as equipping students with the material needed for the MME test taken their junior year. The AP U.S. History exam is graded on a 0-5 basis, with 5 being the highest. Students take an AP class to prepare for the AP test. If they score a 3, 4, or 5 on this test in May, they are able to receive college credit for a Freshman 100 level history course. Around the world, the percentage of students who took the 2008 exam and who received a 3, 4, or 5 (receiving college credit) was 47%. In 2006, it was 53%. Literally, half of all students who take the AP U.S. History test do not pass.

The Advanced Placement program in U.S. History makes demands upon students that are equivalent to those made by full-year introductory college survey courses. ***This is a freshman level college history course.*** This class requires a level of participation, diligence, commitment, effort, and autonomy above and beyond the ordinary high school level, and unlike any your son or daughter has seen this far in their schooling. The course will follow the College Board's Advanced Placement U.S. History outline, and the State of Michigan Content Standards and Benchmarks for Social Studies.

This is the first AP course students encounter in Forest Hills, all the others are at the upper-classmen levels. Many (almost all) students are NOT prepared for this course, or don't understand or expect the time limits for this course. There is daily homework, long hours of reading from the college textbook, tests every week, and essays every other week. These are college level tests and essays. On top of that, there is the constant review of previous material, as well as the accelerated pace of the course.

However, there is also a sense of great accomplishment in May, when your child can look back and say "I did that". But they will be very, very busy up until that point.

Throughout the course, there will be daily homework and reading assignments, quizzes, and essays, including:

- Reading *as least* one chapter (approx. 30-40 pages) a week from a college-level textbook and outlining each chapter using the Cornell Outlining method.
- Weekly quizzes on the assigned reading and lecture notes.
- Tests every two to three weeks covering ALL assigned reading and lecture notes. ***Some information on the chapter tests will NOT be covered in class. Students need to be aware of this and prepare responsibly for each test.***
- Learning all the Presidents in chronological order.
- Profiles and analysis of major Supreme Court decisions.
- Many primary source analysis readings.

To prepare for this class, please purchase the following materials and bring them to class each day.

- Three-ring binder with dividers. Please do not use this binder for any other subject. If you outline and take notes, you should be able to fill up quite a bit.
- Lined notebook paper (college rule works best) for outlining and for notes in the binder.
- At least two pens and two pencils to keep in or near the binder (I don't stop and wait for those who come unprepared).
- If your child is taking this course in the hopes of obtaining the college credit, then *it is highly recommended, but NOT required*, that the student purchases an AP review book. Examples are Barron's, Kaplan, and Cracking the AP US History Exam. (If purchased, this does not need to be brought to class).
- *It is also highly recommended but NOT required*, that you purchase the Barron's Study Keys. These are two small green books that have greatly helped students in the past, and are quite inexpensive on Amazon or Ebay.

(If it comes down to one option, purchase the study keys.)

In deciding if Advanced Placement U.S. History is right for your child, please consider the following points:

- Students will have readings and work over all breaks.
- Students will have daily homework of at least 45 minutes a day.
- Students who are fully engaged in extracurricular activities might not have enough time or commitment to the class to take AP U.S. History.
- Students should **NOT** take this course just because their friends are taking it.
- It is recommended that students do **NOT** take this course to boost their transcript.
- Does your student have above average study skills? Do they take good notes and can they read a textbook for content? Can they create well-organized outlines? AP U.S. History will quickly expose those students with a lack of serious study skills.

- Are you and your child willing to accept the possibility that performance in the class may not yield an A early on or possibly for the entire course? Many AP U.S. History students start out with very low grades because time is needed to learn how to take college tests, and their writing skills need to be developed.
- Does your child seek help from teachers when they need it? Are they capable of handling pressure, are they a good time manager, diligent, mature, curious, and committed?

I certainly hope this overview helps ascertain whether AP U.S History is the right course for your son or daughter. The course is difficult and demanding for all high school students. Please keep this in mind when establishing expectations for your student and the class. My primary objective is to improve student's information processing skills, and improve their ability to analyze and evaluate the relative significance of historical data, while cultivating the ability to express their ideas in essay form. In simple terms – I need to get your son or daughter, who was a high school freshman 4 months ago, to start writing like a college freshman by the first of May, while covering over 400 years of American History. This will not be simple.

If this course is for you and your child, excellent! I look forward to the pleasure of having your son or daughter in my class and ask you to sign below showing you have read this material. If not, please have your child contact your child's counselor and make arrangements to sign up for regular U.S. History. If you have any other questions you would like to ask me, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or e-mail.

Respectfully yours,

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My website is www.mrsytsma.com

P.S. If you would like to find out more about the Advanced Placement U.S. History program for yourself, you can visit their website at the following address:
<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/subjects.html>

Parent/Guardian Signature _____