Themes in AP U.S. History

The U.S. History Development Committee’s notes about the themes:

- The themes listed in this section are designed to encourage students to think conceptually about the American past and to focus on historical change over time.
- These themes should be used in conjunction with the topic outline on pages 7–12.
- The themes are not presented in any order of importance; rather, they are in alphabetical order. These ideas may serve as unifying concepts to help students synthesize material and place the history of the United States into larger analytical contexts.
- These themes may also be used to provide ideas for class projects.
- AP U.S. History courses may be constructed using any number of these themes.
- Teachers and students should also feel free to develop their own course themes as they look at the American past through a variety of lenses and examine U.S. history from multiple perspectives.

American Diversity

The diversity of the American people and the relationships among different groups. The roles of race, class, ethnicity, and gender in the history of the United States.

American Identity

Views of the American national character and ideas about American exceptionalism. Recognizing regional differences within the context of what it means to be an American.

Culture

Diverse individual and collective expressions through literature, art, philosophy, music, theater, and film throughout U.S. history. Popular culture and the dimensions of cultural conflict within American society.
Demographic Changes
Changes in birth, marriage, and death rates; life expectancy and family patterns; population size and density. The economic, social, and political effects of immigration, internal migration, and migration networks.

Economic Transformations
Changes in trade, commerce, and technology across time. The effects of capitalist development, labor and unions, and consumerism.

Environment
Ideas about the consumption and conservation of natural resources. The impact of population growth, industrialization, pollution, and urban and suburban expansion.

Globalization
Engagement with the rest of the world from the fifteenth century to the present: colonialism, mercantilism, global hegemony, development of markets, imperialism, cultural exchange.

Politics and Citizenship
Colonial and revolutionary legacies, American political traditions, growth of democracy, and the development of the modern state. Defining citizenship; struggles for civil rights.

Reform
Diverse movements focusing on a broad range of issues, including anti-slavery, education, labor, temperance, women’s rights, civil rights, gay rights, war, public health, and government.
Religion
The variety of religious beliefs and practices in America from prehistory to the twenty-first century; influence of religion on politics, economics, and society.

Slavery and Its Legacies in North America
Systems of slave labor and other forms of unfree labor (e.g., indentured servitude, contract labor) in Native American societies, the Atlantic World, and the American South and West. The economics of slavery and its racial dimensions. Patterns of resistance and the long-term economic, political, and social effects of slavery.

War and Diplomacy
Armed conflict from the precolonial period to the twenty-first century; impact of war on American foreign policy and on politics, economy, and society.

Topic Outline

The U.S. History Development Committee’s notes about the topic outline:

• This topic outline is intended as a general guide for AP teachers in structuring their courses and for students in preparing for the AP U.S. History Exam.

• The outline is not intended to be prescriptive of what AP teachers must teach, nor of what AP students must study.

• The topics listed here provide some broad parameters for the course and may be expanded or modified for instruction.

1. Pre-Columbian Societies
Early inhabitants of the Americas
American Indian empires in Mesoamerica, the Southwest, and the Mississippi Valley
American Indian cultures of North America at the time of European contact
2. Transatlantic Encounters and Colonial Beginnings, 1492–1690
First European contacts with Native Americans
Spain’s empire in North America
French colonization of Canada
English settlement of New England, the Mid-Atlantic region, and the South
From servitude to slavery in the Chesapeake region
Religious diversity in the American colonies
Resistance to colonial authority: Bacon’s Rebellion, the Glorious Revolution, and the Pueblo Revolt

3. Colonial North America, 1690–1754
Population growth and immigration
Transatlantic trade and the growth of seaports
The eighteenth-century back country
Growth of plantation economies and slave societies
The Enlightenment and the Great Awakening
Colonial governments and imperial policy in British North America

4. The American Revolutionary Era, 1754–1789
The French and Indian War
The Imperial Crisis and resistance to Britain
The War for Independence
State constitutions and the Articles of Confederation
The federal Constitution

5. The Early Republic, 1789–1815
Washington, Hamilton, and shaping of the national government
Emergence of political parties: Federalists and Republicans
Republican Motherhood and education for women
Beginnings of the Second Great Awakening
Significance of Jefferson’s presidency
Expansion into the trans-Appalachian West; American Indian resistance
Growth of slavery and free Black communities
The War of 1812 and its consequences
6. Transformation of the Economy and Society in Antebellum America

The transportation revolution and creation of a national market economy
Beginnings of industrialization and changes in social and class structures
Immigration and nativist reaction
Planters, yeoman farmers, and slaves in the cotton South

7. The Transformation of Politics in Antebellum America

Emergence of the second party system
Federal authority and its opponents: judicial federalism, the Bank War, tariff controversy, and states’ rights debates
Jacksonian democracy and its successes and limitations

8. Religion, Reform, and Renaissance in Antebellum America

Evangelical Protestant revivalism
Social reforms
Ideals of domesticity
Transcendentalism and utopian communities
American Renaissance: literary and artistic expressions

9. Territorial Expansion and Manifest Destiny

Forced removal of American Indians to the trans-Mississippi West
Western migration and cultural interactions
Territorial acquisitions
Early U.S. imperialism: the Mexican War

10. The Crisis of the Union

Pro- and antislavery arguments and conflicts
Compromise of 1850 and popular sovereignty
The Kansas–Nebraska Act and the emergence of the Republican Party
Abraham Lincoln, the election of 1860, and secession

11. Civil War

Two societies at war: mobilization, resources, and internal dissent
Military strategies and foreign diplomacy
Emancipation and the role of African Americans in the war
Social, political, and economic effects of war in the North, South, and West
12. Reconstruction
Presidential and Radical Reconstruction
Southern state governments: aspirations, achievements, failures
Role of African Americans in politics, education, and the economy
Compromise of 1877
Impact of Reconstruction

13. The Origins of the New South
Reconfiguration of southern agriculture: sharecropping and crop lien system
Expansion of manufacturing and industrialization
The politics of segregation: Jim Crow and disfranchisement

14. Development of the West in the Late Nineteenth Century
Expansion and development of western railroads
Competitors for the West: miners, ranchers, homesteaders, and American Indians
Government policy toward American Indians
Gender, race, and ethnicity in the far West
Environmental impacts of western settlement

15. Industrial America in the Late Nineteenth Century
Corporate consolidation of industry
Effects of technological development on the worker and workplace
Labor and unions
National politics and influence of corporate power
Migration and immigration: the changing face of the nation
Proponents and opponents of the new order, e.g., Social Darwinism and Social Gospel

16. Urban Society in the Late Nineteenth Century
Urbanization and the lure of the city
City problems and machine politics
Intellectual and cultural movements and popular entertainment

17. Populism and Progressivism
Agrarian discontent and political issues of the late nineteenth century
Origins of Progressive reform: municipal, state, and national
Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson as Progressive presidents
Women’s roles: family, workplace, education, politics, and reform
Black America: urban migration and civil rights initiatives
18. The Emergence of America as a World Power
American imperialism: political and economic expansion
War in Europe and American neutrality
The First World War at home and abroad
Treaty of Versailles
Society and economy in the postwar years

19. The New Era: 1920s
The business of America and the consumer economy
Republican politics: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover
The culture of Modernism: science, the arts, and entertainment
Responses to Modernism: religious fundamentalism, nativism, and Prohibition
The ongoing struggle for equality: African Americans and women

20. The Great Depression and the New Deal
Causes of the Great Depression
The Hoover administration’s response
Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal
Labor and union recognition
The New Deal coalition and its critics from the Right and the Left
Surviving hard times: American society during the Great Depression

21. The Second World War
The rise of fascism and militarism in Japan, Italy, and Germany
Prelude to war: policy of neutrality
The attack on Pearl Harbor and United States declaration of war
Fighting a multifront war
Diplomacy, war aims, and wartime conferences
The United States as a global power in the Atomic Age

22. The Home Front During the War
Wartime mobilization of the economy
Urban migration and demographic changes
Women, work, and family during the war
Civil liberties and civil rights during wartime
War and regional development
Expansion of government power
23. The United States and the Early Cold War
Origins of the Cold War
Truman and containment
The Cold War in Asia: China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan
Diplomatic strategies and policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations
The Red Scare and McCarthyism
Impact of the Cold War on American society

24. The 1950s
Emergence of the modern civil rights movement
The affluent society and “the other America”
Consensus and conformity: suburbia and middle-class America
Social critics, nonconformists, and cultural rebels
Impact of changes in science, technology, and medicine

25. The Turbulent 1960s
From the New Frontier to the Great Society
Expanding movements for civil rights
Cold War confrontations: Asia, Latin America, and Europe
Beginning of Détente
The antiwar movement and the counterculture

26. Politics and Economics at the End of the Twentieth Century
The election of 1968 and the “Silent Majority”
Nixon’s challenges: Vietnam, China, Watergate
Changes in the American economy: the energy crisis, deindustrialization, and the service economy
The New Right and the Reagan revolution
End of the Cold War

27. Society and Culture at the End of the Twentieth Century
Demographic changes: surge of immigration after 1965, Sunbelt migration, and the graying of America
Revolutions in biotechnology, mass communication, and computers
Politics in a multicultural society

28. The United States in the Post–Cold War World
Globalization and the American economy
Unilateralism vs. multilateralism in foreign policy
Domestic and foreign terrorism
Environmental issues in a global context