



# The AP European History debate

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The College Board's Advanced Placement exams play an outsized role in American schooling. While they are taken by only a small slice of high schoolers, their prestige and visibility means they have a broader impact.

This is especially true in areas like history and the humanities. Thus, when the College Board released a disturbingly politicized and incoherent framework for US History a couple years ago, I was [an outspoken critic](http://www.aei.org/publication/10-thoughts-on-the-new-ap-us-history-framework/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/10-thoughts-on-the-new-ap-us-history-framework/>). When the College Board admitted it had a problem, rewrote the framework, and released a vastly improved version, [I said so](http://www.aei.org/publication/surprise-the-new-ap-u-s-history-framework-is-scrupulously-fair-minded/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/surprise-the-new-ap-u-s-history-framework-is-scrupulously-fair-minded/>).



([http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Map\\_of\\_Europe\\_in\\_1794\\_Samuel\\_Dunn\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_in\\_Hemispheres.jpg](http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Map_of_Europe_in_1794_Samuel_Dunn_Map_of_the_World_in_Hemispheres.jpg))

Close-up, 1794 Map of Europe, Samuel Dunn. OpenSource.

Of late, a new debate has emerged regarding the College Board's European History Framework. The thoughtful folks at the [National Association of Scholars \(NAS\)](https://www.nas.org/articles/college_board_shreds_european_history_study_finds_faith_and_freedom_gone) have issued a [blistering critique](https://www.nas.org/articles/college_board_shreds_european_history_study_finds_faith_and_freedom_gone) ([https://www.nas.org/articles/college\\_board\\_shreds\\_european\\_history\\_study\\_finds\\_faith\\_and\\_freedom\\_gone](https://www.nas.org/articles/college_board_shreds_european_history_study_finds_faith_and_freedom_gone)) of the new effort. In response, one of the most vocal critics of the US History framework, Larry Krieger, has this time risen to the College Board's defense — arguing that NAS is wrong on the European History framework. A retired US History teacher, Krieger's voice carries particular weight on this issue as he is credited as a key player in pushing the College Board's revision of the AP US History framework in 2015.

This is an important discussion among serious people and, in the spirit of full and open debate, I've agreed to post Krieger's take here.

**On the Manufactured AP European History "Controversy"**

A new report on AP European History, entitled *The Disappearing Continent*, seems to echo many of the same criticisms that I first raised about the 2014 edition of the AP US History course outline. I spent much of 2014 and 2015 raising public awareness of my concerns about AP US History, so I have a strong track record of speaking out against the AP Program when criticism is necessary.

In this case, however, the criticisms of the AP European History course in this new report are entirely unwarranted. The AP European History framework, which was released to the public more than two years ago, is a fair and historically accurate document that is widely respected by AP teachers and historians.

The original AP US History (APUSH) framework, released in the summer of 2014, was a flawed document. It was poorly organized and poorly written. It also presented a generally negative view of American history. I am very proud of the fact that I was the first Social Studies educator to publicly criticize the APUSH framework. My criticisms were intended to be constructive. For example, I called upon the College Board to revise its definition of Manifest Destiny, present a historically accurate discussion of President Reagan's role in ending the Cold War, and return the concept of American exceptionalism to its traditional place as a key part of America's historical identity.

The College Board responded to public feedback from me and others by incorporating needed, substantive changes which resulted in a new, comprehensive, balanced and meaningful [revision](https://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/english-history-and-social-science/us-history/2015-ced) (<https://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/english-history-and-social-science/us-history/2015-ced>) that I and the overwhelming majority of teachers and reviewers fully endorse.

I have read the *Disappearing Continent* report and the College Board's [AP European History Course Framework](https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-european-history-course-and-exam-description.pdf) (<https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-european-history-course-and-exam-description.pdf>) multiple times, and I do not believe that the principal criticisms in the report are supported by evidence from the AP European History framework or the 2016 AP European History Exam.

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Here are just a few examples of where the report fundamentally mischaracterizes the AP European History course:

- 1) The report claims that the AP European History framework minimizes "the evils of Communism, the brutal destructiveness of Soviet rule, and the aggressiveness of Soviet foreign policy." But in reality, the AP European History course does address this subject matter squarely, stating: "Stalin's economic modernization of the Soviet Union came at a high price, including the liquidation of the Kulaks, famine in the Ukraine, purges of the political rivals, unequal burdens placed on women, and the establishment of an oppressive political system" (p.118). This treatment of the topic hardly minimizes the evils of Communism.
- 2) The report claims the AP European History course ignores the value of European cultural, scientific, artistic, and intellectual contributions. This accusation is patently false. The framework includes extensive coverage of every major European artistic and literary movement from the Renaissance to Postmodernism.
- 3) The report claims that the AP European History framework deliberately presents a biased "progressive" view that verges on being "neo-Marxist." This is a fabrication.

If the College Board's intent was to guide students toward a "soft-Marxist" view of European history, it would be readily apparent in the 2016 AP European History Exam. This is clearly NOT the case. The Exam included short essay questions on scientific discoveries, the rise of capitalism in the Dutch Republic, the impact of 19<sup>th</sup> century railroads, and broad trends in the workforce in France. Its two long essay questions asked students to discuss change and continuity in attitudes towards and experiences of European women from the Reformation through the Enlightenment OR from the First World War through the Cold War. And finally, the

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Document-Based Question asked students to evaluate primary source documents about German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

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4) The report claims that the AP European History framework “erases” British history from the seventeenth century to the rise of Margaret Thatcher. In reality, the framework highlights key events in British history including the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, the rise of the British Empire, and Britain’s role as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. The framework directs teacher’s attention to such seminal figures as John Locke, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and John Stuart Mill. For example, the framework specifically states that, “In economic and politics, liberal theorists such as John Locke and Adam Smith questioned absolutism and mercantilism by arguing for the authority of natural law and the market.” This clearly underscores the framework’s commitment to Great Britain’s historic role in promoting liberty.

5) Finally, the report repeatedly claims that the AP European History course minimizes what it calls “European exceptionalism.” While American exceptionalism is an integral part of America’s identity, I can find no textbook references to the term “European exceptionalism,” so I am baffled by why the AP European History class would be criticized for failing to include such a spurious “concept” as “European exceptionalism.”

This disingenuous report is full of falsehoods. I encourage members of the public to read the AP European History course outline before accepting the misinformation that this new report has generated about a class my students continue to find challenging and rewarding as they prepare for college and beyond.

Larry Krieger is a retired teacher, author, and tutor.

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**Learn more:** [The mend of history: A study of the revisions to the AP US History framework](http://www.aei.org/publication/the-mend-of-history-a-study-of-the-revisions-to-the-ap-us-history-framework/)  
(<http://www.aei.org/publication/the-mend-of-history-a-study-of-the-revisions-to-the-ap-us-history-framework/>) | [The overheated reactions to the new AP US History framework](http://www.aei.org/publication/the-overheated-reactions-to-the-new-ap-u-s-history-framework/)  
(<http://www.aei.org/publication/the-overheated-reactions-to-the-new-ap-u-s-history-framework/>) | [Redeeming the Reagan Era in AP US History](http://www.aei.org/publication/redeeming-the-reagan-era-in-ap-us-history/)  
(<http://www.aei.org/publication/redeeming-the-reagan-era-in-ap-us-history/>)

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This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/the-manufactured-ap-european-history-controversy/>