Chapter 1

Acing the Test for a College Credit Payday

In This Chapter

- Checking out the College Board
- Putting together a game plan for success
- Decoding your score (and what it can do for you)

U.S. History may be a grand pageant of determination and growth, but chances are good that right now you just want to make sure you score some college credit for that long year you spent busting your butt in AP History. You're not alone; some 350,000 AP students have this same U.S. History exam looming over them right now.

Of all the AP exams, U.S. History is the most often taken Advanced Placement test in the entire fiendish College Board repertoire. You could call it the most popular, if popular is the right word for a national test that makes you sweat for three hours to try to earn college credit for something you've already been tested on too many times in high school. It's tough, but if you don't pass the AP, you don't get paid that college credit. This book is designed to give you the tools you need to ace the AP U.S. History exam. In this chapter, I give you an overview of the test and what to expect so you can prepare yourself for what lies ahead.

School Learning versus Test Prep

This book isn't just about U.S. History, fun as that is. This book is about the Ultimate U.S. History Test and how you're going to score well on that test. As you read, you're going to be practicing Challenge Question and PES responses until they become second nature.

The difference between school and Challenge Question test prep is simple: In test prep, you turn a fact into a question and then answer the question the whole time you're reading history. Mixing in questions with history is what the Challenge Question technique is all about. Your history review in Parts III and IV will be full of questions, but you'll go even farther if you get into the habit of asking and answering questions on your own. And, this *AP U.S. History For Dummies* guide works even better when you combine it with your school AP text. You can pick up some more tips on using outside books in Chapter 2.

The Power of the College Board: What It Is and What It Does

So just who is this College Board, and why does it have such control over your future? Ever notice how the power structure (also known as the Man) seems to be all connected? The College Board (which I'll call CB) is the connection between your present (high school) and your future (college). The CB is a well-meaning, not-for-profit membership association whose official mission is to "connect students to college success and opportunity." Okay so far, but like all connections, it only works if you reach out and grab it.

Founded in 1900, the CB consists of thousands of schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board works with some 7 million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, and enrollment. Among its best-known and feared tests are the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT, and your current favorite, the Advanced Placement program (AP). All of these tests are registered trademarks of the College Board; when it comes to using tests for college placement, the CB is the Man. This can be a good thing.

With what it garners from grading all those tests, the CB gives schools feedback to improve teaching. You may not like the power that CB tests hold over your future, but without them, colleges could just pick the people who are richest or tallest or cutest or something. College Board tests give you the chance to prove what you can do; the AP U.S. History test pays you for what you know with college credit.

Counting the Currency of College Credit

Getting college credit through the AP exam is like finding a rich uncle you didn't know you had. Thousands of universities and colleges in the United States and many other countries are standing by to offer you college credit for the AP U.S. History work you've done in high school. All you have to do is get at least a *3* on the AP U.S. History Exam. (See the section "Score! What does it mean?" later in the chapter.)

When it comes to actually granting college credit, your future university holds all the cards. Neither your high school nor even the benevolent College Board can grant you credit; that has to come from your future school. Be very careful to see your prospective alma mater's policy on awarding credit for high school AP work in print before you enlist in its intellectual army. Either get the written policy from the school or go to `collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp` to download it from the College Board site. More about college policy on AP credit is in Chapter 2.

You'll be happy to know that the College Board is concerned with your bank account as well as your brains. Its recent study of college costs shows that a year at a public or state university costs an average of almost $13,000 in tuition, fees, room, and board (and that's just for in-state students). Add some books, pizzas, transportation, phone, toothpaste, and occasional fun — before you know it, your inexpensive public education is running $20,000 a year.

If you're planning to seek knowledge within the ivy-covered walls of a private college, get ready for an even bigger sticker shock: Average costs are more than $30,000 for basic tuition, fees, room, and board. By the time you count all those extras, a private college education can easily run $40,000 a year.

Working now and playing later

What if Mom and Dad are paying? In that happy circumstance, do you even care about costs? Yes, you do (or at least should). You'll probably be racking up some student loans during those long years that, unlike the ten bucks you once borrowed from Uncle Milt, the college loan sharks will definitely make you pay back with interest. Also, you probably won't be making much money while you're going to school. The average college graduate earns almost $14,000 more per year than folks her age who don't send their brains for a higher-education tune-up. You want to get to the big money as soon as possible.

If you score high enough on the AP exam to earn six juicy college credits for AP U.S. History, you can subtract that from the time you'll have to spend in college classes. (See "Score! What does it mean?" later in this chapter for more information.) Or you can use the extra time to study sand castle architecture in Hawaii. Pass enough AP exams and you can save half a year or more of undergraduate tuition-paying time — what you do with that time is up to you.

But if you skate past the Intro to U.S. History course in college, will you be able to keep up with the poor suckers who had to take the sit-down version of Intro in college? Yes. The always-researching College Board found that students who tested out of introductory courses actually did better in upper-division subjects than the people who took the intro classes. This number includes AP students who just squeaked by with a *3* on the AP exam. So it's worth some effort to earn a Get-Out-of-Intro-Jail-Free card.

But, you hope, you'll be paying that for only four years before you earn your prestigious diploma, right? Not so fast. The average public university student takes 6.2 years to earn a degree; the average private school undergraduate clocks in at 5.3 years. (See the sidebar "Working now and playing later" for info on how AP tests can help you shave time off that period.) The total average college expense is $124,000 for a public university and $212,000 for a private college. Maybe you should just skip college and use the money for a luxury car to impress people during your long fast-food career.

Putting Together Your AP Game Plan

A little concerned about what you know (or don't know) about U.S. history? Don't worry. If I didn't start you at the beginning and work you gently to the end, this wouldn't be a *For Dummies* guide. Although I can't promise to turn you into a Pulitzer-prize winning history guru overnight, you don't need that anyway. You just need a decent score on the AP U.S. History exam.

Taking in the test basics

To help make that happen, I start you out in Part I with some inside tips on how to maximize your score when the big test day is finally upon you.

In Part II, you get tuned up with a few sample questions before you dive into the actual U.S. history in Parts III and IV. That way, you can be thinking about how to extract potential questions from the condensed history in the middle sections of this book.

Moving on to actual history

In Parts III and IV, I give you the basics of U.S. history from American Indians to the Internet. This review covers key topics the Test Inquisitors like to keep in their secret libraries to surprise and shock you. College Board tests aren't actually written by mad professors in a castle torture lab but by nice, tweedy historians who just want to be sure you know some true stories. The College Board U.S. History Development Committee has standards, and before you get to exam day, it's in your best interest to know about them.

Think like the test writers to survive their clever question schemes. They're not going to feel right asking you something obscure (like the color of Abe Lincoln's dog), but they'd feel really smug by tripping you up with something like "Who issued the Monroe Doctrine?" (Hint: It wasn't Marilyn Monroe.) The Grand Inquisitors are going to ask about concepts they consider key to American history — the important issues highlighted in your school text (but not literally highlighted — it's only a rental, you know). When you see a highlighted topic, make up questions about it while you're reading. These are *Challenge Questions,* and when you make them up, you're thinking like the test writers do.

Testing, testing, 1-2-3!

In Part V, I show you the AP test. No, not the very test you'll see on the big day. If I did that, the only teaching I'd be doing would be in the prison cafeteria. You'll get as close as I can honestly take you to the test you're going to conquer. I give you two sample tests with questions that have appeared before and will eventually appear again on the AP. After you take the practice tests, I go over the answers with you, including some warning about places you could go wrong. By the time you're done, you'll be in U.S. History shape, ready to run, dodge, and score with the best of them.

The Political, Economic, and Social (PES) Answer Secret

What I, the test makers, and hopefully you have come to appreciate is that history isn't just facts; the meaning behind those facts is just as important. These meanings are *trends* or *themes*. When you've got the themes, you have a framework on which to remember the facts. Plus, the AP is really big on themes. The main themes are PES: political events and decisions, economic realities and incentives, and social trends and conditions. Connect these themes, and you'll connect to success on exam day.

Don't make exam essays all about you. Just because graders recognize social trends and economics as an important part of history doesn't mean you'll get a good grade for an emotional reaction to the Compromise of 1850. History is still about what happened, not your feelings about it. Save that for drama class.

Applying politics

The old school of white-men-go-to-meetings-and-fight-battles history that your parents had to learn began to open up when a new generation of historians noticed that the past has always been influenced by the beliefs and actions of ordinary people, not just by leaders. Now people

also concentrate on economic and social factors when they study history. Political events do serve as landmarks in history, so it's still important to have a general chronological sense of these landmarks.

In this context, *political events* include presidents and other important leaders, laws, legal decisions of the Supreme Court, civil conflicts, international relations, and wars. As you're studying your way through U.S. History, ask yourself:

- How did the government react to events?
- How and when did the leadership change?
- How were U.S. relationships with foreign governments affected?

You need to be armed with a reasonable idea of events and people in Congress and the Supreme Court. I give you a list of the ten most important Supreme Court decisions in Chapter 27.

Understanding the impact of economy

So, if big-dog leaders weren't the historical be-all and end-all, what did shape the past? Ever go to work even when you didn't want to, just to make money? Ever run after a sale to save some bucks or pass up something you wanted because it cost too much? Thinking about economics helps explain human behavior.

Economics led to the settlement of most of the United States. The settlers didn't move inland from the Atlantic coast just so they could watch the birdies in the country. They needed rich land to farm so that they could make money and support their families. Many of them had left Europe because they were starving back home.

Before that, Britain's annoying economic taxes pushed the colonists toward revolution. In the decades before the Civil War, the South hung on to slaves because each slave was worth as much as $50,000 in modern money, and slaves picked cotton, which was the basis of the Southern economy. In the 1930s, the Great Depression changed the politics of the country.

Economics includes prosperity, recessions, depressions (sometimes called *panics* in the past), taxes, tariffs on imported goods, inflation, corporate expansion, and profit incentives. Questions to ask as you read include

- How did economic fear or greed influence national politics?
- How did the nation's economic health determine or shape historical events?
- How did sectional economic interests influence national decisions?

Social history

Social understanding has been the big winner in the new vision that influences modern history writing and (most important for us AP U.S. History fans) test design. The announced goal of the College Board is to make the big exam multiple-choice questions be

- 35 percent on political institutions and policy
- 40 percent on social history, including cultural developments
- 25 percent on economic and international relationships

This breakdown means that social history has taken over as the new focus of the AP U.S. History exam. *Social history* includes beliefs about religion, race, national origin, and the roles of men, women, and families. Social developments also include the influence of literature, science, art, and philosophy on events.

Questions to ask while you're reading include

- How did the social structure change during this era?
- How did the choices people made demonstrate their cultural beliefs?
- What specific examples can you cite to show social beliefs?
- What role did religion play in the development of government and society during this era?
- Who were the major religious leaders and trends?
- How did the literature and art of this period reflect what was going on and shape what was about to happen?

Here are a few examples of the strong social currents in American life:

- The first permanent settlements in Massachusetts consisted of Pilgrims and Puritans, groups who made the dangerous voyage to the unknown New World for presumably religious, not economic, reasons. In fact, the Pilgrims' original decision to leave Europe was as much social as religious: They had religious freedom in Holland, but they couldn't stand the idea that their children were growing up Dutch. (See Chapter 8.)
- Perhaps the greatest example of the power of literature and social thought was the best-selling novel of the 1800s: *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The depictions of the evils of slavery in this book helped send hundreds of thousands of men off to fight and die in the Civil War. (See Chapter 13.)
- Sensationalized newspaper stories and pictures helped launch the U.S. into war with Spain in 1898. (See Chapter 15.)
- The Democratic Party's increasing support of civil rights helped lead both to the loss of its traditional political hold on the South and to the fact that the Democrats managed to elect only one two-term president in the last half of the 1900s. (See Chapter 20.)

PES-ing your way through multiple-choice and essays

Half the credit on the AP U.S. History test comes from 80 multiple-choice questions. Your score on this section depends on preparation and reasoning skill. You get preparation in Parts III and IV of this guide to back up the preparation you already have from your AP U.S. History course and/or study. You can beef up on your reasoning skills in Chapter 4.

The other half of the credit on the big test comes from just three essay questions. This section is where the CB separates the Jedi Masters from the guys who don't know where to plug in their light sabers. Anybody can memorize facts; leaders are the people who can use those facts successfully. That's where PES comes in.

No, PES isn't a cute hard-candy dispenser, as fun as that may be. *PES* is the way of combining political, economic, and social information on an essay question to make test graders dispense high grades. Every essay needs to contain each of the three magic PES ingredients. The good news is the same set of ideas that prepares you for multiple-choice glory can, if used wisely, set you up for essay success. You can find more about PES in Chapters 5 and 6.

How it all applies to the AP

Here's a rundown of what you need to know about the Ultimate History Exam. After you understand what's on the big test, you can use the Challenge Question and PES techniques to amp up your study sessions.

So, what can you find out about the test ahead of time? Every essay question the CB has ever asked is public knowledge, so your review can be informed by that comforting I-know-what-was-on-the-test-last-year feeling. You can find some of the questions that have been asked on multiple-choice sections over the years, but the CB has mostly kept that part of the test officially secret. No matter how you try to crack the big test, the College Board is a moving target — it changes questions every year. The best preparation is to set up in the direction the test is going and be prepared for a few surprise turns.

As you can see in the earlier section "Social history," the breakdown of the multiple-choice questions are about 35 percent on political institutions and events, 40 percent on social developments, and the remaining 25 percent on economics and international relationships. You can count on the fact that the three essay questions you answer will contain all of the PES ingredients.

The time periods covered by the multiple-choice questions include

- 20 percent from the period between the American Indians and the ratification of the Constitution in 1789
- 45 percent from the period between Washington's first government in 1790 and the outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914
- 35 percent from the period between 1915 and the present.

Because the AP test writers know that most teachers don't get through the whole history book by May, they usually go easy on asking questions about events that happened after 1980.

How the Exam Is Graded

Reality check time. You're going to be taking the biggest single-subject test in the history of the CB in the not-so-distant future. The number of students taking AP tests increases every year; this year, about a third of a million students will take the AP U.S. History test.

Machines score the multiple-choice questions. No problem there; machines never make mistakes, unless of course the machine is your computer, crashing when you really need it. The essay questions, on the other hand, are hand-graded by History Readers. Each test contains three essays; 3 essays times ⅓ million test takers equals 1 million essays. Even if the CB manages to draft every teacher between here and Rattlesnake Junction as a History Reader, that still doesn't leave enough time in the few weeks between test day and grades day to slowly savor each essay.

Your essays are going to be scanned by a very busy teacher, who will very quickly decide your grade fate. To make grading work for you, you have to figure out how to write essays that show key political, economic, and social (PES) points so clearly that a grader couldn't miss them from a speeding train.

Plan from the beginning to make your essays look grader-friendly. Practice writing short papers of about five paragraphs by using easily spotted key terms. Never guess at dates. You won't lose points for using an approximate time period, but you'll be marked down for trying to nail an exact year and getting it wrong. Your AP History teacher in school may help give you feedback on your work. Study the examples in this book. Remember — less fluff and more key terms equals higher grades.

Score! What Does Your Grade Mean?

It'd be great if you became an Oxford Pro History Guru, dropping in for lunch at the White House and giving the Nobel prize committee a laugh with your droll history wit. Failing that, I want you to at least pass this darn test with a high enough score to get some college credit. AP U.S. History test results break down on the 5 point scale shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Average AP U.S. History Exam Scores

Grade	*Meaning*	*% Earning this Grade*
5	Extremely well-qualified	9%
4	Well-qualified	20%
3	Qualified	22%
2	Possibly qualified	36%
1	No recommendation	13%

So what grade do you need to get college credit? The answer is usually a *3* (qualified), unless you want to go to a selective school; then the answer is a *4* (well-qualified). A *5* gets you credit and a pat on the back anywhere in the galaxy and won't hurt your chances of admission to a good school, either. Go to `collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp` to find out what the magic score is at the college you crave.

Gee, look — just over half of the people who take this test are eligible for college credit at most schools. Of course they are; the CB curves the test every year to make it come out that way. So ask yourself, do you feel lucky? How many really smart kids are already into their sixth month of cramming for AP U.S. History, with Wilson's 14 Points pinned to their lapel? How many dumb kids are hanging around the parking lot planning to wait for the last minute to study so it can be fresh in their well-ventilated minds? Can you be sure you're above the middle of those packs?

How Much Time Do You Have to Prepare?

Okay, so the test is in May. That gives you several months to prepare, right? Oops — your time is a little shorter than that? No problem. Every day, after you finish your high-school courses, extracurricular activities, jobs, chores, exercise, and attempts to have a social life, just devote three hours to a rigorous review of everything that ever happened in North America. Oops, again. Not going to happen, is it?

You think you've got it hard?

Students working toward a college education in medieval Europe were called *bajan* and had to have the top of their head shaved. After studying for a whole year (with no guarantee of admission), they gave a speech to the college. If the speech was good enough to get them in, they were washed clean from head to foot and paraded through town on a donkey.

Figure out your optimal study strategy by dividing the material in this *AP U.S. History For Dummies* book by the number of days you have to study before the test. If the answer comes out to one chapter a day over about a month left before the big test, make do with that. The secret is that you're going beyond reading; you're going to Challenge Question your way through U.S. history. (See Chapter 2 for more on the Challenge Question technique.) The following list gives you some more suggestions on how to proceed based on how much time you have:

- **If you have more than a month,** spend extra time with your high-school AP U.S. History teacher. Ask him for copies of past AP U.S. History exams and practice taking them. Use the Challenge Question study technique on your own high-school textbook. Check out some other AP History texts from the school library and Challenge Question your way through them.
- **If you have less than a month** before the killer exam, do a sample test from Part V. After you pick up the kinds of questions that will be on the test, apply them to the history information in Part III and Part IV, using the Challenge Question method described in Chapter 2. Mark the sections you're weak on and go back and do the problems from those weak sections three times.
- **If you have less than a week** before the test, read the Cheat Sheet and pray. Concentrate the little time you have on reading about the most heavily tested period — 1800 to 1970. You'll have to skip studying the 20 percent of the questions that don't cover that period, but you may get lucky. You're doing emergency salvage studying, and sacrifices are inevitable.
- **If you're first reading this book on the way to the exam,** don't make any marks in it; you may be able to give it as a gift. Practice breathing steadily through panic, which I discuss in Chapter 3, and trust that the time you spent watching the History Channel will pull you through.