

Why That Year? A quick guide to College Board "Turning Points" and Periods:

Period 1:

1491 Used as a placeholder to represent what the North American continent looked like before the arrival of Europeans.

1607 The founding of Jamestown in Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in "The New World."

Unifying notions:

Life in North America under early Spanish colonization and the reactions of the native peoples of America..

Period 2:

1607 The founding of Jamestown in Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in "The New World."

1754 The beginning of the French and Indian War, the North American theater of the Seven Years War between England and France and the end of salutary neglect.

Unifying notions:

Life in the American colonies before there was a notion of "America" as a place. The differences between New England, the Middle Atlantic, Chesapeake, and Southern Colonies, especially the reasons that people came to those regions.

Period 3:

1754 The beginning of the French and Indian War, the North American theater of the Seven Years War between England and France and the end of salutary neglect.

1800 Jefferson's "Revolution of 1800", marking the peaceful transition of power between rival factions (even after an ugly electoral campaign) and the end of the "early federal period."

Unifying notions:

George Washington writ large, his fingerprints are all over this time, from his earliest work in the F&I War, to his leadership of the Continental Army in the Revolution, to the Constitutional Convention, to his Presidency, his Farewell Address, and finally his death in 1799. The move from England's American colonies to the colonies in rebellion to the United States under the Articles to the United States of America under the U.S. Constitution.

Period 4:

1800 Jefferson's "Revolution of 1800", marking the peaceful transition of power between rival factions (even after an ugly electoral campaign) and the end of the "early federal period."

1848 The end of the Mexican-American War, the revival of the debate over slavery, and increased sectional tensions.

Unifying notions:

The Market Revolution/Market Economy, America moves away from an agrarian focused past (even with the Louisiana Purchase) and takes its first steps into a manufacturing economy. The issue of slavery is present, but keeps getting kicked down the road (Period 5). America figures out more of what it thinks it wants to be (as seen by de Tocqueville).

Period 5

1844 The election of James K. Polk and the symbolic beginnings of Manifest Destiny, exemplified by the annexation of Texas, the decision on the Oregon Country, and the Mexican-American War.

1877 The official end of Reconstruction with the removal of the last federal troops from the states of the former Confederacy as per the Compromise of 1877.

Unifying notions:

The Civil War, with prologue (1848-1860's "Road to the Civil War"), the War itself (1861-1865), and the epilogue (Reconstruction, 1865-1877). How did we get here, what happened, and what happened when it was over?

Period 6

1865 The end of the Civil War and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

1898 The Spanish-American War (aka The War of 1898) in its entirety.

Unifying notions:

The Gilded Age, the Industrial Revolution in America, Immigration and Urbanization, the "romantic" West, the Machine Age, machine politics, the Victorians create a "mass culture" the New South, Reform movement, social and political.

(Note: This is the era of American history where everything is seemingly happening all at once, so history books tend to go thematic here rather than chronological. Be aware of this when reviewing)

Period 7

1890 The Sherman Anti-Trust Act, "The Billion Dollar Congress", and the nascent formation of the Populist Party, 1890 Census and the "closing of the Frontier" (Turner's Frontier Thesis)

1945 The end of the Second World War, the death of FDR, and the formation of the United Nations.

Unifying notions:

The era of two Roosevelts, both progressive politically, but in opposite parties. The notions of a non-isolationist America, taking its place among the great nations of the world. The birth of the Modern, and the shift from a rural country to an urban one (1890 Census, closing of the Frontier-Turner's Frontier Thesis). The

Period 8

1945 The end of the Second World War, the death of FDR, and the formation of the United Nations.

1980 The election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency

Unifying notions:

The post-War boom. America as Superpower. The Atomic Age. The Baby Boom.

Period 9

1980 The election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency.

Present Well, I mean, it's not AP U.S. Future.

Unifying notions:

The rise of the conservatives, the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. Personal Computers/The Information Age.

(Note, the selection of 1980 also allows The College Board to place the last thirty years, give or take, in Period 9, which only comprises 5% of the exam. This is generally considered to be under the purview of political science more than history, as many of the issues raised by this era are still not yet settled. It is my speculation that within a decade, they will move the goalposts on this era to end in 1989/1991, which would mark the end of the Cold War, and allow Period 9 to discuss the post-Cold War era as a whole. This is speculation, but based in historical trends.)