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AP classes are typically more challenging than regular high school classes, but did you know that some APs are harder than others? Based on testing statistics and an examination of the curriculum, we can come up with accurate assessments of the true difficulty level of each AP class. In this article, I'll analyze AP US History exam scores, student testimonials, and course content to give you a clear picture of how hard this popular AP class really is! What Determines the Difficulty of an AP Class? 5 Key Factors There are five factors we must consider when deciding whether AP US History is a difficult class compared with other APs. We'll give you a quick rundown of these below before answering our main question: is AP US History hard? Factor 1: Pass Rate This first factor is the percentage of students who earn a 3 or above on the exam. Lower pass rates might indicate a more difficult class; however, sometimes pass rates in the hardest subjects are unexpectedly high because only the most dedicated students take those classes. A smaller group of more serious students makes for a larger percentage of passing scores overall. Factor 2: 5 Rate The 5 rate is the percentage of students who earn 5s (the highest possible score) on the AP test. If the 5 rate is on the lower side, it could indicate that the material is more difficult to master. A low 5 rate can also sometimes happen with very popular classes. The proportion of students who are prepared for an AP test tends to decrease as the total number of students taking it increases. Factor 3: Content Difficulty This boils down to the amount of material the AP course covers and how advanced that material is. Some courses have high 5 and pass rates because their content is extremely challenging and only very driven students will take them—not because they're easy classes. Factor 4: Student Testimonials What do students say about the class? There should be some consistency based on the fact that everyone learns essentially the same curriculum, and everyone ends up taking the same test. Student feedback can provide more information about the day-to-day challenges of the AP class and the nature of the workload. Factor 5: Timing of the Class The final factor to consider is when students usually take the AP class. Classes that students take later in high school will be more difficult overall, though some students perceive them as being easier than other AP classes that they took when they had less experience. The reverse is true of classes that students take as underclassmen. When you've taken too many AP tests in your time. What Do Statistics Say About the AP US History Exam? To start off, I'll examine the statistics for pass and 5 rates on the AP US History exam in 2020. AP US History Pass Rate The 2021 pass rate for AP US History was 47.1%. Only a handful of other AP exams have lower pass rates. This comparatively low pass rate would suggest that the US History test is difficult, but we can't say that for sure yet. For AP US History, since it's one of the most popular AP classes (the number of students enrolled was second only to AP English Language and Composition in 2021), the pass rate might likewise be skewed slightly lower because there are so many students at different levels of preparation who take it. That said, students who take AP US History also tend to be students who are better prepared and have probably taken other AP and/or honors classes as well. The low pass rate might be slightly illusory because of the sheer number of people taking the test, but students who take it are (overall) high-achieving, so the data still points to the test being pretty hard. This fact is strongly linked to the difficulty of the content and intensity of the workload in AP US History, which I'll describe in more detail later in this article. AP US History 5 Rate The 5 rate for AP US History in 2021 was 10.1%. Nine other AP exams had lower 5 rates than AP US History (while 29 had higher 5 rates). This would again suggest that the US History test is more difficult compared with other AP tests; however, 5 rates can also be skewed high or low depending on the popularity of the class and the types of students who take it. Some objectively difficult classes have high 5 rates because they're less popular, and the students who do take them are more well prepared and dedicated to the subject (Chinese Language, for example). AP US History is a popular class, so there might be a wider spectrum of preparedness among students, bringing down the 5 rate. As I mentioned in the first part of this section, though, it's also a class that's usually taken by the most high-achieving students, so there shouldn't be wide-ranging problems with a lack of preparation. The low 5 rate combined with the types of students who take AP US History suggest that it is a difficult test. Looking for help studying for your AP exam? Our one-on-one online AP tutoring services can help you prepare for your AP exams. Get matched with a top tutor who got a high score on the exam you're studying for! So far, based on testing statistics, we're leaning toward the conclusion that AP US History is hard. Let's take a look at the other factors to see whether they line up or not. Besides being the best AP score, 5 is also the ideal number of fingers for a human. What a kooky coincidence! Is the APUSH Content Difficult? AP US History covers the past few hundred years of history in the United States, so there's a lot to remember for the exam; however, memorization isn't the main challenge. Throughout the test, you're asked to analyze historical documents, demographic charts, and political illustrations from various historical periods. You have to apply your background knowledge to these sources and draw conclusions by blending skills of factual recall and deeper analysis. The free-response section is particularly challenging in this regard. Writing a coherent, well-supported argumentative essay on such a high-pressure test isn't easy. And for the Document-Based Question, you also have to incorporate at least six of the seven sources into your essay while using outside knowledge to bolster whatever point you're making. I would argue the content is challenging because of the way you're asked to synthesize what you've learned and relate it to themes that span multiple periods in history. These types of assessments are usually reserved for college classes because of the high-level thinking skills required. You have to look beyond the facts to draw larger informed conclusions. You want me to synthesize the what now? Do Students Think AP US History Is Hard? History was my best subject in high school, but I definitely didn't think AP US History was an easy class. The tests were always challenging because my teacher had us take them with the same time constraints as those on the real AP exam. We would have one 50-minute class period to answer a bunch of multiple-choice questions and write a long essay. I remember the tests being stressful, but most people did well on the final AP exam because they knew what to expect. APUSH was time-consuming outside of class because of the number of textbook reading assignments and outside projects. We had "seminars" every couple of weeks in which we were assigned to different sides of a historical issue and made to have a class debate. We had to do write-ups of each seminar and were graded for participation in the debate. There were also quizzes on the nightly readings at the beginning of every class, so your grade would suffer if you didn't do the homework. The consensus among other students (based on what I've seen in online forums) is reflective of my experience. Most say that AP US History is a lot of work. Not all of it is difficult, and much of it is interesting, but it will take up a big chunk of your time. You have to be prepared to put in the effort, especially if you prefer science and math to the humanities, and the type of work you do in the course doesn't come as naturally to you. I'd also like to consider briefly the last of the five factors I mentioned in the first section, which is when students tend to take this class. AP US History is typically taken later in high school (during junior or senior year). Many students have already experienced other AP classes, and all are familiar with the high school workload. Still, they find AP US History challenging in comparison with other AP classes. Our theory in the section on testing statistics has held true here as well: it seems that APUSH is a tough class from any angle. You're required to use authentic study materials and methods from each period. Sorry, electricity didn't go mainstream until the 1920s. One of the single most important parts of your college application is what classes you choose to take in high school (in conjunction with how well you do in those classes). Our team of PrepScholar admissions experts have compiled their knowledge into this single guide to planning out your high school course schedule. We'll advise you on how to balance your schedule between regular and honors/AP/IB courses, how to choose your extracurriculars, and what classes you can't afford not to take. Will AP US History Be Hard for You? 3 Ways to Find Out It seems like APUSH is a hard class overall, but every student is different. You might have to do more research and self-reflection before you decide definitively whether this class will fit comfortably into your schedule. Here are a few measures I recommend taking if you want to get a clearer picture of what your experience with APUSH might be like. #1: Ask Teachers and Past Students About the Class The most reliable way to decide whether AP US History will be difficult for you is to ask students and teachers who are familiar with the class and exam to give you their perspectives. If you know any older students who have similar academic records to you, ask them what they thought of the class and overall workload. You can also ask your current history teacher if they think you'll be able to handle AP US History based on your performance this year. Alternatively, you could ask your guidance counselor what their opinion is of the class based on the performance of past students. Every AP US History class is slightly different because teachers have the freedom to design their own curriculum within the course framework. #2: Be Aware of Your Academic Strengths and Weaknesses Which subjects challenge you the most? If you're better at quantitative subjects such as math and science and struggle with subjects that require lots of reading, writing, and memorization of facts, you can assume that AP US History will be difficult for you. On the other hand, if you prefer subjects that incorporate critical-reading skills and essay writing (and you have some interest in history), the class will probably be much easier for you. Keep in mind that AP US History might be different from other history classes you took earlier in high school. Lower-level history classes are about factual recall, whereas the skills you need for AP US History are more analytical. In other words, it's about applying your knowledge rather than just restating it. #3: Check Your Class Schedule AP US History is a time-consuming class, so you should consider your schedule to make sure you aren't overloading yourself by adding it into the mix. If you're taking other challenging AP classes at the same time, be prepared for a daunting workload. Don't take on too much, or you'll end up sacrificing your sanity and/or GPA. Pay attention to warning signs that your eyes might be bigger than your academic stomach. Conclusion: So Is AP US History Hard? Based on all the factors we've examined in this article, it's safe to say that AP US History is a hard class compared to most other APs. It has lower pass and 5 rates, the content is as a whole quite challenging, students testify to a heavy workload, and most students don't take it until their junior or senior year. Think carefully before you decide to enroll in APUSH, but don't underestimate yourself. Even if it's a challenge, most students also think it's an engaging and interesting class. There's also no denying that you'll learn valuable analytical skills that'll definitely come in handy later on in your academic career! What's Next? Looking for resources to help you get through APUSH with minimal suffering? Check out our list of the best review books available for AP US History. You can also read our ultimate AP US History study guide for advice and links to tons of online practice questions! US History is on the more difficult end of the AP spectrum. But are there any easy AP classes to balance out your schedule? Read this guide to find out which AP classes will be easiest for you. Want to improve your SAT score by 160 points or your ACT score by 4 points? We've written a guide for each test about the top 5 strategies you must be using to have a shot at improving your score. Download it for free now:

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