Student Performance Q&A:
2013 AP® World History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® World History were written by the Chief Reader, Dean T. Ferguson, Texas A&M University–Kingsville, Texas; and the following Question Leaders and Exam Leaders: Tammy Proctor, Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio; William Zeigler, San Marcos High School, San Marcos, California; Deborah Wing-Leonard, Clear Lake High School, Houston, Texas; Kathy Callahan, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky; Richard Warner, Wabash College, Wabash, Indiana; Dixie Grupe, Hickman High School, Columbia, Missouri. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

Students were asked to analyze the connections between regional issues and European struggles for global power in the mid-18th century. The Seven Years' War was clearly the global struggle that was meant to frame student answers, yet this was not stated in the historical background or explicitly stated in the documents. Students with deep knowledge of 18th century world, United States, or European history successfully understood the context of the question. The wording of the question led some students to group the documents geographically or to frame their responses as a purely European phenomenon. Although a map was given to help the students place the global areas identified in the documents, a historical description of the Seven Years' War may have helped students better understand the context of the documents.

Most of the source attributions gave students ample opportunity to assess point of view and to explain the need for an additional document. A lack of visual or quantitative sources provided students with an obvious choice for an additional document.

The scoring guidelines asked students to make connections between regional issues and European struggles for global power only in the thesis, while all other score points could be earned by focusing on either regional issues or European struggles for global power.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students performed poorly on this question and lacked the overall framework of the 18th century and the Seven Years' War, which might have assisted them in responding to the question. Students with deep knowledge of the 18th-century world or with a solid grounding in United States, or European history were

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able to better contextualize the documents and effectively analyze point of view, but students without this background were at a disadvantage. The unadjusted mean was on a 0 to 9 score range. The mean score was 2.11 out of a possible 9 points. Although many students attempted to answer the question, they were confused by many of the documents and how to connect the documents to either a regional issue or a European struggle for global power. It is notable that many students chose to answer this question last and this may imply either that they lacked confidence in answering the question or that teachers have encouraged their students to answer the DBQ last as a strategy for finishing the exam.

Students who performed well on this question generally discussed the connections between regional issues and European struggles for global power, and used the connections to build an overall framework in which to discuss the documents. The better essays moved away from a formulaic grouping strategy (i.e., political, social, economic) and instead developed groupings that identified either regional conflicts that led to global struggles or global struggles that resulted in regional conflicts. It is gratifying to see that more and more students are attempting to perform all of the tasks demanded in the question (additional document, point of view, and grouping), although more work is needed to improve their abilities in completing these tasks successfully.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Generally, the errors or omissions clustered in two areas: lack of close reading of the documents and lack of understanding or information about the broader historical context. This led to concerns in each of the six core points.

- **Core point 1**: Although many students did attempt a thesis, in order to receive this point, students needed to make an explicit connection between regional issues and European struggles for global power. This proved to be a higher bar and one of the most difficult core points for students to demonstrate competence.
- **Core point 2**: Students tended to address all nine documents, although some students skipped a single document, often openly stating the omission. Students had difficulty understanding some of the more complex documents (documents 5, 6, 8, and 9), in many cases misreading either the attribution or the document itself. Students did not pay close attention to the document dates and did not use those dates to help categorize the documents for grouping.
- **Core point 3**: Students who understood the documents generally analyzed the documents in relationship to either a regional issue or a European struggle for global power. However, many students still used direct quoting of the document as sufficient to show evidence and therefore did not earn evidence points. Misreading of documents led to misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the states and people involved as well as their different allegiances.
- **Core point 4**: Although many students did attempt to discuss point of view for the documents, they still did not successfully provide analysis. A few confused interpretation of the document as explanations of the document's point of view or made vague statements about bias or reliability based simply on restating the attribution of the document without endeavoring to provide any form of analysis. As in previous years, students were expected to situate the author or tone of the document. Having done this in some cases, students still did not provide an adequate rationale for their claim about perspective. As a result, while students attempted to discuss the point of view of the documents, many still did not earn this point.
- **Core point 5**: Students had to place the documents in groups based on either a regional issue or European struggles for global power. The rubric allowed geographic and thematic grouping as a reflection of the wording of the question. As always, students did not receive this point for listing documents in a group; they needed to make explicit connections between the documents to show grouping.

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- **Core point 6**: Students often asked for another point of view or a document that was potentially relevant but often did not explain how the addition of this document would enhance understanding of either regional issues or European struggles for global power.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers should be commended for having their students address all of the requirements of the DBQ. However, teachers need to continue to model and allocate time to practice parsing the question and addressing all of the requirements within the context of the tasks posed by the question. For example, students understood the need to discuss the regional issues and European struggles for global power, but did not analyze the connections between the two in the thesis, evidence, grouping, or additional document. As has been stated in the past, more needs to be done to enforce the point of view and additional document requirements as analytical tools throughout the course and not just a requirement for this exam. The same should be said for document analysis, since many of the students presented a surface-level view of the documents, which often led to misstatements or outright misunderstandings.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to analyze how political transformations contributed to changes and continuities in the cultures of the Mediterranean region during the period circa 200 C.E. to circa 1000 C.E. Students were expected to provide historical evidence to support a discussion of change and continuity as impacted by political transformations in the Mediterranean within the time period. Further, students were to analyze world historical context by identifying regions outside the Mediterranean that shaped political transformations that contributed to cultural change and continuity. The AP® World History course is designed to support student learning of four key historical thinking skills, one of which is "the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the dynamics of historical continuity and change over periods of time of varying length, as well as relating these patterns to larger historical processes or themes." Additionally, AP® World History is anchored by five course themes. Although this question aligns with many of them, it is explicitly aligned with Theme 2: Development and Interaction of Cultures and Theme 3: State-Building, Expansion, and Conflict. The question provided an opportunity for students to demonstrate both an understanding of historical content and the application of historical thinking skills.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.03 out of a possible 9 points.

Students demonstrated considerable knowledge of political transformations in the Mediterranean region within the time period (i.e., fall of the Roman Empire, rise of the Byzantine Empire, rise and spread of the Islamic empires, and political fragmentation in western Europe) and some knowledge of how those political transformations contributed to changes and continuities in culture(s) in the region. Some essays contained sophisticated discussions of political changes that demonstrated understanding of the process of change and continuity over time in the culture(s) of the region. At times the change and continuity was accurately attributed to a political transformation, and essays were often able to analyze the world historical context of those changes and continuities. Unfortunately, many responses were comparisons of political transformations or cultural features between separate regions within the Mediterranean rather than analyses of changes and continuities in a culture within the region(s). Additionally, many responses were unable to link political transformations to either cultural change or continuity. Many essays also included a comparison of political transformations in regions outside the Mediterranean region with no specified

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connection to the Mediterranean region (i.e., the Mayan Empire or Han China). Many essays also included evidence and discussions of historical events outside of the specified time period or outside the Mediterranean region.

What were common student errors or omissions?

One of the most common errors was not addressing all parts of the question. Because of the two-tiered complexity of the prompt, many students failed to address both political transformations and their contributions to change and/or continuity in culture(s). Other students were able to effectively identify a change or continuity, but were unable to address both. Finally, many student responses compared political transformations between distinct regions within the Mediterranean, for example comparing the consequences of political change in Western Europe (the decline of Rome, emergence of feudal institutions) with political conditions in the Byzantine Empire (the persistence of Roman institutions) without clearly addressing change and/or continuity of the cultures affected by these political changes.

Some students restated the prompt as their thesis, pointedly including the words "political transformations," but without stating specific events. Changes and continuities were often unspecified as well. If students did not address the prompt in the thesis, this often, but not always, meant that they were likely to be unable to address all parts of the question in other parts of their response. For students to earn 1 point for thesis and 2 points for addressing the question, they had to specify at least one political transformation that contributed to one change **and** one continuity in the culture(s) in the region within the specified time period.

The vast majority of responses generally acknowledged key political transformations in the region within the time period. Students often referenced the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the fragmentation of power in western Europe, the beginning of the Byzantine Empire, the political expansion of the Umayyad Empire, and the shift of power from the Umayyad Dynasty to the Abbasids. Many responses likewise addressed changes in the ethnic composition of the region, changes in the religious beliefs of the region and emergence of new religious practices, changes in language and literacy, new art forms, and changes in architectural style and function during this time period. However, many students did not explicitly link these cultural changes to specific political transformations.

In general, students provided historical evidence that demonstrated they had a generic knowledge of culture and politics in the Mediterranean region between 200 C.E. to 1000 C.E., but few students were able to integrate both components of the prompt to discuss the impact of political transformations on cultural change or continuity.

This year, as in previous years, most students struggled with analysis. Many essays did not sufficiently analyze or explain change or continuity across the specified time period. Some students ineffectively sought to explain a change or a continuity in culture(s) by coupling it with statement about political transformations, yet without explicitly stating how that political transformation led to the specified cultural change. For example, a statement about the fall of the Roman Empire might reference the spread of Christianity without specifying how the fall of the Roman Empire contributed to that spread. It was not enough to assume that the reader would recognize the connection.

Analysis of global historical context was tied explicitly to how outside regions shaped a political transformation's contribution to cultural change or continuity. Many students made references to outside regions with no connection to Mediterranean political transformations or cultural changes and continuities. Many students also made direct comparisons with events or developments outside the Mediterranean, which, while perhaps providing interesting parallels with developments within the Mediterranean region, did not have a direct bearing upon either the political transformations or changes and continuities of culture in the Mediterranean.

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Students often included terminology related to Christianity and Islam that placed their evidence outside the time period. For example, some essays inappropriately referred to Muslims as Turks or even Mongols. Often, students were unsuccessful in delineating between the political features of the Islamic empires and the cultural components of those empires. Many students confused economic behavior with political change and cultural transformation. For example, students who asserted that one of the changes resulting from political transformations in the Mediterranean was a decline in trade in Western Europe had not effectively linked political transformation to cultural change or continuity, unless they could demonstrate an understanding of the way in which declining trade reflected other features of cultural life. Although some students effectively demonstrated how political transformations contributed to change or continuity in economic features of Mediterranean cultural life, others concluded by simply identifying economic impacts of the political change, and thus did not complete the task.

Finally, among the primary pitfalls for students answering this question remained problems of periodization, chronological sequencing, and lack of basic geographical knowledge. Errors in each of these areas often sabotaged the evidence students sought to bring to bear to answer the question. Many students included historical evidence that was not only out of the specified time period, but also out of the specified regions (e.g., discussion of cultural changes in India or northern Europe, the Crusades, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, the building of railroads, the role of the Mongols, Turks, etc.).

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Pay particular attention to teaching students to deconstruct the question before they begin writing their responses. This year, many students seemed to miss or ignore the two-part nature of the prompt and instead wrote essays that addressed change and continuity in culture(s) in the Mediterranean within the time period without explicitly and directly linking those cultural changes or continuities to a specific political transformation. Or, students discussed in accurate detail the political transformations in the region without explicitly and directly linking them to changes or continuities in the culture of the region. There were also many essays that compared specific political transformations within the Mediterranean or compared regional cultural changes and continuities. Encourage students to read the prompt carefully and perhaps rewrite it word-by-word or circle . This strategy encourages students to focus on what the prompt is asking them to address and is fundamentally useful for all learners.

Continue to reinforce student understanding of periodization and chronology. Classroom strategies that support student learning about change and continuity over time include using timelines and creating change/continuity tables. Drawing on the curriculum framework, teachers should encourage students to create graphic organizers that will help them display the big picture globally, in relation to the main course themes, and simultaneously take notes on the illustrative examples or historical evidence of those themes. One approach may be to have students create change/continuity tables for each time period and each theme. For example, during a unit that covers the period 600 C.E.–1450 C.E., students might be required to identify, describe, and analyze changes and continuities in each of the five course themes. An activity or assignment like this may also be constructed to provide opportunities for students to work in cooperative learning groups; small groups may be assigned different themes and collaborate to complete the assignment. Each group could be required to create a poster with that information that could be displayed in the room for the remainder of the year and serve as a study tool later during review. If teachers engaged students in this type of activity during a unit, summative assessments at the end of the unit might include a change-and-continuity-over-time (CCOT) essay modeled after those used on previous exams. Further, charts identifying changes and continuities from prior and later periods may also be instructive, as this essay might suggest. Teachers should also encourage their students to develop a vocabulary which enables them to make assertions about change and continuity and to analyze those changes and continuities. Mere juxtaposition of information in contiguous sentences or phrases does not effectively demonstrate the evidence of connections or explanations of why or how changes take place or continuities

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