

AP WORLD HISTORY: MODERN – ULTIMATE CRAM SHEET

2026 Exam • Periods c. 1200–Present • All 9 Units • Strategies • Key Terms • Everything You Need

EXAM FORMAT & SCORING

SECTION	DETAILS	WEIGHT
Section I, Part A Multiple Choice	55 questions, 55 min Sets of 3–4 Qs per stimulus (text, image, map, chart)	40%
Section I, Part B Short Answer (SAQ)	4 questions (answer 3), 40 min Q1–Q2 required; choose Q3 or Q4	20%
Section II, Part A Document-Based Q (DBQ)	1 question, 60 min (15 min reading + 45 min writing)	25%
Section II, Part B Long Essay (LEQ)	3 prompts (choose 1), 40 min	15%

Score targets: ~55–60% total = 3 • ~65–72% = 4 • ~73%+ = 5. **You do NOT need a perfect score.** Every point matters—partial credit on essays adds up fast.

THE 6 COURSE THEMES (USE IN ESSAYS!)

ABBREV	THEME	THINK ABOUT...
ENV	Humans & Environment	Disease, migration, agriculture, climate, deforestation, Columbian Exchange
CDE	Cultural Developments & Interactions	Religion, art, philosophy, syncretism, printing, education
GOV	Governance	Empires, states, nation-building, revolutions, laws, legitimacy, democracy
ECN	Economic Systems	Trade networks, capitalism, mercantilism, industrialization, labor
SOC	Social Interactions & Organization	Class, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, slavery, social hierarchies
TEC	Technology & Innovation	Maritime tech, weapons, communication, transport, Green Revolution

UNIT 1: THE GLOBAL TAPESTRY (C. 1200–1450) • 8–10% OF EXAM

Key Developments

- **Song Dynasty China** (960–1279): Neo-Confucianism, civil service exams, champa rice (population boom), gunpowder, movable type, compass, paper money. Most advanced economy globally.
- **Dar al-Islam:** Abbasid Caliphate (declining), spread of Islam via trade & Sufism. House of Wisdom → preserved Greek texts.
- **Delhi Sultanate** (1206–1526) in India.
- **Mongol Empire** (1206–1368): Genghis Khan unifies steppe. Pax Mongolica facilitated Silk Road trade. Spread of Black Death. Religious tolerance. Yuan Dynasty in China.
- **Byzantine Empire:** Orthodox Christianity, Justinian's Code, fall of Constantinople (1453).
- **European feudalism:** Decentralized, manorialism, Catholic Church dominant. Crusades (1095–1291) increased contact with Islamic world.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Mali Empire (Mansa Musa, Timbuktu), Great Zimbabwe, Swahili coast trade cities. Trans-Saharan & Indian Ocean trade.
- **Americas:** Aztec (tribute, chinampas), Inca (quipu, mit'a labor, road system), Maya. No contact with Afro-Eurasia yet.
- **South/SE Asia:** Vijayanagara Empire (Hindu), Khmer Empire (Angkor Wat), Majapahit.

UNIT 2: NETWORKS OF EXCHANGE (C. 1200–1450) • 8–10%

Key Developments

- **Silk Road:** Luxury goods (silk, porcelain, spices). Caravanserai's. Mongol protection boosted trade. Spread of plague, religions, technologies.
- **Indian Ocean Trade:** Monsoon winds, dhows & junks. Swahili city-states, Gujarat, Malacca, Zheng He (1405–1433). Diasporic communities formed.
- **Trans-Saharan Trade:** Gold-salt exchange. Camel caravans. Spread Islam to W. Africa. Mali & Songhai empires.
- **Effects of trade:** Cultural diffusion (religions, languages like Swahili), technology transfer (compass, gunpowder to Europe), biological exchange (Black Death killed ~1/3 of Europe).
- **Key tech for trade:** Magnetic compass, astrolabe, lateen sail, stern-post rudder, camel saddles, credit (bills of exchange, flying money).
- **Marco Polo & Ibn Battuta:** Travelers whose accounts document cross-cultural interaction.

UNIT 3: LAND-BASED EMPIRES (C. 1450–1750) • 12–15%

Key Empires & Developments

- **Ottoman Empire** (1299–1922): Devshirme system, janissaries, millet system (religious tolerance), Suleiman the Magnificent, gunpowder empire. Controlled E. Med trade.
- **Safavid Empire** (1501–1736): Shia Islam as state religion. Conflict with Sunni Ottomans. Isfahan as capital. Ghulam system.
- **Mughal Empire** (1526–1857): Akbar's religious tolerance (Din-i Ilahi), zamindari tax system, Taj Mahal. Later Aurangzeb's intolerance weakened empire.
- **Qing Dynasty** (1644–1912): Manchu rulers. Queue order. Banner system. Kangxi & Qianlong emperors. Expanded territory. Kept Chinese bureaucracy.
- **Russian Empire:** Ivan IV (Tsar), Peter the Great (westernization, St. Petersburg), expansion east (fur trade), serfdom.
- **Songhai Empire** (W. Africa): Sunni Ali, Askia Muhammad. Timbuktu. Islam & trade.
- **How empires legitimized rule:** Divine right, mandate of heaven, religious authority, monumental architecture, bureaucracies, legal codes, military force.
- **Gunpowder weapons** transformed warfare and enabled empire expansion globally.

UNIT 4: TRANSOCEANIC CONNECTIONS (C. 1450–1750) • 12–15%

Key Developments

- **European exploration:** Motivated by God, Gold, Glory + desire to bypass Ottoman-controlled trade. Portuguese (Dias, da Gama) → Indian Ocean. Spanish (Columbus 1492, Magellan) → Americas.
- **Columbian Exchange:** **HIGH YIELD** Americas → Europe: potatoes, maize, tomatoes, tobacco, cacao. Europe → Americas: wheat, horses, cattle, smallpox, measles. Caused massive Native American population decline (up to 90%). Potatoes/maize boosted global population.
- **Atlantic Slave Trade:** Triangular trade. ~12.5 million Africans forcibly transported. Middle Passage. Chattel slavery. Devastated African demographics & societies. Plantation economies (sugar, tobacco, cotton).
- **Mercantilism:** European economic policy. Colonies exist to enrich mother country. Export > import. Led to competition & wars.
- **Spanish colonial system:** Encomienda → hacienda. Casta system (racial hierarchy). Forced Native labor (mita). Catholic conversion missions.
- **Maritime empires:** Portugal (trading posts in Africa/Asia), Spain (Americas), Dutch (East Indies, VOC), England, France. Joint-stock companies.
- **Coerced labor systems:** Slavery, encomienda, mita, indentured servitude, serfdom (Russia).
- **Effects on Africa:** Kingdoms like Kongo weakened. Asante & Dahomey grew via slave trade participation.

UNIT 5: REVOLUTIONS (C. 1750–1900) • 12–15%

Key Developments

- **Enlightenment:** Locke (natural rights), Rousseau (social contract), Voltaire (free speech), Montesquieu (separation of powers). Challenged divine right & absolutism.
- **American Revolution** (1776): Influenced by Enlightenment. "No taxation without representation." Constitutional republic. Inspired later revolutions.
- **French Revolution** (1789): Estates system, storming of Bastille, Declaration of Rights of Man. Reign of Terror. Napoleon rose to power, spread revolutionary ideals across Europe.
- **Haitian Revolution** (1791–1804): **HIGH YIELD** Only successful slave revolution. Toussaint L'Ouverture. Influenced by French Revolution. Challenged racial hierarchy globally.
- **Latin American Revolutions:** Simon Bolivar, Jose de San Martin. Creole-led independence from Spain/Portugal. Inspired by Enlightenment & other revolutions.
- **Industrial Revolution** (started ~1760s Britain): **HIGH YIELD** Steam engine (Watt), textile factories, coal/iron. Urbanization, factory system, child labor. Spread to W. Europe, US, Japan. Transformed global economy.
- **Effects of industrialization:** New social classes (bourgeoisie vs. proletariat), labor movements, socialism (Marx), feminism, urbanization, pollution, global wealth inequality.
- **Nationalism:** Unification of Italy (Garibaldi) & Germany (Bismarck). Also caused instability in multi-ethnic empires (Ottoman, Austrian).
- **Abolition movements:** British abolition (1807/1833), US 13th Amendment (1865), gradual abolition in Latin America. Replaced by other coerced labor (indentured servitude, sharecropping, convict leasing).

UNIT 6: CONSEQUENCES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION (C. 1750–1900) • 12–15%

Key Developments

- **New Imperialism** (1870s–1914): **HIGH YIELD** European scramble for Africa & Asia. Berlin Conference (1884–85) divided Africa with NO African input. Motivated by raw materials, markets, Social Darwinism, "civilizing mission."
- **British in India:** East India Company → British Raj (direct rule after 1857 Sepoy Mutiny). Deindustrialized Indian textiles. Cash crops replaced food crops.
- **Opium Wars** (1839–1842, 1856–1860): Britain forced China to accept opium trade. Unequal treaties. Treaty of Nanjing → Hong Kong ceded, extraterritoriality. Beginning of "Century of Humiliation."
- **Meiji Restoration** (1868): **HIGH YIELD** Japan industrialized rapidly. Abolished feudalism, built railroads, modern army. Became imperial power (defeated China 1895, Russia 1905).
- **Responses to imperialism:** Boxer Rebellion (China), Sepoy Mutiny (India), Ghost Dance (US), Yaa Asantewaa War (Gold Coast). Some adopted Western ways (Siam/Thailand stayed independent through modernization).
- **Migration patterns:** Irish to US (famine), Chinese/Indian indentured workers globally, European emigration to Americas & settler colonies (Australia, S. Africa).
- **Ideologies developed:** Marxism, liberalism, conservatism, feminism, Social Darwinism, nationalism.
- **Technology:** Steamships, railroads, telegraph, Suez Canal (1869), Panama Canal (1914), quinine (anti-malaria), Maxim gun.

UNIT 7: GLOBAL CONFLICT (C. 1900–PRESENT) • 8–10%

Key Developments

- **World War I** (1914–1918): MAIN causes (Militarism, Alliances, Imperialism, Nationalism). Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Trench warfare, total war. Treaty of Versailles → punished Germany, created League of Nations, redraw borders.
- **Russian Revolution** (1917): Tsar overthrown. Lenin & Bolsheviks → USSR. Marxist-Leninist state. Collectivization, industrialization under Stalin. Totalitarianism.
- **Interwar period:** Great Depression (1929), rise of fascism (Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany), Japanese militarism, Spanish Civil War.
- **World War II** (1939–1945): Axis vs. Allies. Holocaust (6 million Jews). Atomic bombs on Hiroshima/Nagasaki. ~70–85 million dead. Led to UN, decolonization, Cold War.
- **Chinese Revolution:** Mao Zedong & CCP defeated Nationalists (1949). Great Leap Forward (famine), Cultural Revolution. Mao's China reshaped society.
- **Genocide:** Armenian Genocide (1915), Holocaust, Cambodian Genocide (Khmer Rouge), Rwandan Genocide (1994).

UNIT 8: COLD WAR & DECOLONIZATION (C. 1900–PRESENT) • 8–10%

Key Developments

- **Cold War** (1947–1991): US (capitalism, democracy) vs. USSR (communism). Proxy wars: Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan. Arms race, space race, NATO vs. Warsaw Pact. MAD (mutually assured destruction).
- **Decolonization:** **HIGH YIELD** India (Gandhi, nonviolence, 1947 → partition), Algeria (violent, 1962), Ghana (Nkrumah, 1957), Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh). Factors: WWII weakened Europe, nationalist movements, UN pressure, Cold War competition.
- **Non-Aligned Movement:** Bandung Conference (1955). Countries like India, Indonesia, Egypt refused to align with US or USSR.
- **Movements for equality:** US Civil Rights, Anti-Apartheid (Mandela, S. Africa), feminist movements globally.
- **Communist revolutions:** Cuba (Castro, 1959), Nicaragua (Sandinistas), Angola, Mozambique.
- **End of Cold War:** Gorbachev's glasnost & perestroika. Fall of Berlin Wall (1989). Dissolution of USSR (1991).

UNIT 9: GLOBALIZATION (C. 1900–PRESENT) • 8–10%

Key Developments

- **Globalization:** Increased interconnectedness through trade, technology, migration. WTO, World Bank, IMF. MNCs (multinational corporations). Global supply chains.
- **Technology & communication:** Internet, cell phones, social media transformed culture & politics. Green Revolution (high-yield crops) increased food production but created dependency on chemicals.
- **Economic changes:** Neoliberalism, free trade (NAFTA, EU). Rapid growth in China (Deng Xiaoping's reforms), India, "Asian Tigers." Global wealth inequality persists.
- **Challenges:** Climate change, pandemic disease (HIV/AIDS, COVID-19), terrorism (9/11), refugee crises, ethnic conflicts (Yugoslavia, Rwanda).
- **Resistance to globalization:** Protests (WTO Seattle 1999), religious fundamentalism, cultural preservation movements, populism/nationalism.
- **Demographic shifts:** Urbanization, aging populations in developed nations, youth bulges in developing nations, mass migration.
- **International organizations:** UN, WHO, World Bank, IMF, NGOs (Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders).

MOST-TESTED TOPICS (FOCUS HERE!)

These appear most frequently on AP exams:

1. **Columbian Exchange** — biological, economic, social effects
2. **Atlantic Slave Trade** — causes, effects on Africa & Americas
3. **Imperialism & its consequences** — motives, methods, resistance
4. **Industrial Revolution** — causes, effects on society, labor, environment
5. **Comparison of empires** (Ottoman/Mughal/Qing legitimacy strategies)
6. **Decolonization** — violent vs. nonviolent, effects
7. **Revolutions** — causes, Enlightenment influence, comparisons
8. **Trade networks** (Silk Road, Indian Ocean, Trans-Saharan)
9. **Cold War proxy wars** & superpower rivalry
10. **Globalization** — economic, cultural, environmental effects

AP WORLD HISTORY: MODERN — STRATEGIES, TERMS & TIPS

DBQ STRATEGY & RUBRIC (7 POINTS TOTAL)

CATEGORY	PTS	HOW TO EARN
Thesis	1	Must be in intro or conclusion. Take a defensible position that answers ALL parts of the prompt. Don't just restate the prompt. Must establish a line of reasoning (e.g., "X occurred because of A, B, and C").
Contextualization	1	Describe broader historical context BEFORE the topic. Write 2-3 sentences about what was happening in the world that connects to the prompt. Not just one sentence. Be specific with dates/events.
Evidence (Docs)	1-2	1 pt: Accurately describe content of 3+ docs. 2 pts: Use content of 6+ docs to support your argument. Don't just summarize—connect each doc to your thesis.
Sourcing (HAPP)	1	For 3+ docs, explain how/why ONE of the following is relevant: Historical situation, Audience, Purpose, or Point of view. Say HOW it affects the doc's meaning or reliability.
Outside Evidence	1	Use at least ONE specific, relevant historical example NOT found in any document. Must be explained and connected to argument.
Complexity	1	Hardest point. Options: explain nuance, analyze multiple variables, consider both similarities AND differences, explain relevant connections across time/geography, or qualify/modify your argument. Must be throughout essay, not just one sentence.

DBQ Template: Para 1: Contextualization (2-3 sentences) + Thesis. Para 2-4: Group docs by theme (2-3 docs each), analyze with HAPP sourcing, add outside evidence. Para 5 (optional): Brief conclusion restating thesis with complexity/nuance.

LEQ STRATEGY & RUBRIC (6 POINTS TOTAL)

CATEGORY	PTS	HOW TO EARN
Thesis	1	Same as DBQ. Defensible claim + line of reasoning. In intro or conclusion.
Contextualization	1	Same as DBQ. Broader historical context. 2-3 specific sentences.
Evidence	1-2	1 pt: Identify 2+ specific, relevant historical examples. 2 pts: Use those examples to support your argument with explanation.
Analysis & Reasoning	1-2	1 pt: Use the skill in the prompt (comparison, causation, or CCOT). 2 pts (Complexity): Demonstrate complex understanding (same as DBQ complexity point).

LEQ Tips: Choose the prompt you can write the MOST evidence for. Outline for 5 min before writing. Aim for 5 paragraphs: intro (thesis), context, body 1, body 2, conclusion. Use specific names, dates, places—vague = fewer points.

SAQ STRATEGY (3 POINTS EACH — NO THESIS NEEDED)

- **Format:** Each SAQ has parts (a), (b), (c). Each part = 1 point. Answer ALL parts.
- **No thesis required.** Just directly answer each part in 2-4 sentences.
- **ACE it:** Answer the question directly (1st sentence). Cite a specific example (names, dates, events). Explain how it connects to the question.
- **Q1 & Q2** are required (include a source/stimulus). **Choose Q3 OR Q4** (no stimulus; Q3 covers earlier periods, Q4 covers later).
- Don't write essays. Be concise, specific, and direct. Label (a), (b), (c) clearly.
- If the question says "identify," name it. If it says "explain," describe why/how.

KEY VOCABULARY & TERMS

Syncretism: Blending of cultural/religious traditions (e.g., Vodun, Sikhism)	Encomienda: Spanish system granting colonists Native labor rights
Mercantilism: Economic policy: colonies enrich mother country; export > import	Mandate of Heaven: Chinese belief that rulers govern with divine approval
Devshirme: Ottoman system of taking Christian boys as soldiers/officials	Joint-stock company: Investors share risk/profit (VOC, British East India Co.)
Laissez-faire: "Hands-off" gov't approach to economy (Adam Smith)	Social Darwinism: Misapplied evolution to justify imperialism & racism
Self-determination: Right of peoples to govern themselves (Wilson's 14 Points)	Total war: Entire nation's resources mobilized for war (WWI, WWII)
Proxy war: Cold War conflicts fought through smaller nations (Korea, Vietnam)	Nationalism: Loyalty to one's nation; drove unification & independence movements
Neoliberalism: Free markets, deregulation, privatization (late 20th c.)	Green Revolution: High-yield crops + tech increased food supply (1960s-70s)
Diapora: Scattered population sharing common origin (African, Jewish, Chinese)	Extraterritoriality: Foreigners exempt from local law (Unequal Treaties in China)
Casta system: Spanish colonial racial hierarchy (peninsulares → mestizos → etc.)	Zemstvo: Russian local government councils (Alexander II reforms)
Glasnost/Perestroika: Gorbachev's openness & restructuring policies (1980s)	Non-Aligned Movement: Cold War nations refusing to join US or Soviet blocs
Collectivization: State control of farms (Stalin's USSR, Mao's China)	CCOT: Continuity & Change Over Time (key AP skill)
Maroon communities: Settlements of escaped enslaved people in the Americas	Cahokia/Great Zimbabwe: Pre-colonial urban centers often overlooked

MULTIPLE CHOICE STRATEGY

- **Read the source/stimulus FIRST**, then the question. Many answers come from the source.
- **Eliminate 2 answers** immediately. AP uses strong distractors—look for the BEST answer, not just a "right" one.
- **Watch for absolutes** ("always," "never," "all") — these are usually wrong.
- **Time management:** 1 min per question. Flag and move on if stuck. Return at end.
- **No penalty for guessing.** NEVER leave a question blank.
- **"Best supported by the evidence"** = look at the source, not your memory.
- If two answers seem correct, choose the one more directly supported by the source.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. **No thesis or weak thesis:** "There were many causes of X" is NOT a thesis. You must make a CLAIM with a line of reasoning.
2. **Skipping contextualization:** Free point! Write 2-3 sentences of background. Don't just restate the prompt.
3. **Summarizing docs instead of analyzing:** Don't retell the document. Explain what it means, why the author wrote it, or how it supports your argument.
4. **Forgetting HAPP sourcing on DBQ:** For 3+ documents, explain Historical situation, Audience, Purpose, or POV. Say WHY it matters.
5. **Being too vague:** "People traded goods" → NO. "Swahili merchants traded gold and ivory with Arabian traders via monsoon-driven Indian Ocean routes" → YES.
6. **Not answering all parts of SAQs:** Label (a), (b), (c). Each is worth 1 point. Skipping one = throwing away a point.
7. **Choosing the wrong LEQ:** Pick the one where you have the MOST specific evidence, not the one that "sounds easiest."
8. **Running out of time on the DBQ:** Spend 15 min reading/planning, 45 min writing. Don't overthink the outline.
9. **Confusing similar events:** Distinguish Haitian vs. French Revolution, Qing vs. Ming, WWI vs. WWII causes.
10. **Ignoring continuity:** CCOT questions ask what STAYED THE SAME too, not just what changed.

LAST-MINUTE TIPS & TEST DAY STRATEGY

- The Night Before:**
- Review this sheet once. Don't try to learn new content. Focus on what you already know.
 - Lay out your supplies: #2 pencils, black/dark blue pens, watch (no smart watch!), ID, water, snack.
 - Sleep 7-8 hours. A rested brain scores higher than a crammed one.
- Test Day Morning:**
- Eat a real breakfast (protein + carbs). Avoid sugar crashes.
 - Arrive 15 min early. Use the bathroom before the exam starts.
- During the Exam:**
- **MCQ:** Don't spend more than 90 seconds on any question. Mark and return.
 - **SAQ:** Be direct. Don't write essays. Label (a), (b), (c).
 - **DBQ:** Spend the full 15 min reading period making a plan. Group docs by argument. Note HAPP for each. Plan outside evidence.
 - **LEQ:** Outline for 5 min. Thesis first. Pick 3-4 specific pieces of evidence.
 - If you blank on an essay, write ANYTHING relevant. Partial credit exists. A mediocre essay > a blank page.
 - **Pace yourself:** MCQ (55 min) → SAQ (40 min) → Break → DBQ (60 min) → LEQ (40 min).
- Essay Power Words:** Use "Furthermore," "However," "In contrast," "Consequently," "This demonstrates," "This is significant because" to strengthen analysis.

QUICK-REFERENCE: EMPIRE COMPARISON

EMPIRE	RELIGION	LEGITIMACY	KEY FEATURE
Ottoman	Sunni Islam	Sultan + caliph title	Devshirme, millet system
Safavid	Shia Islam	Shah as religious leader	State-imposed Shia Islam
Mughal	Islam (Hindu majority)	Military + tolerance (Akbar)	Din-i Ilahi, Taj Mahal
Qing	Confucianism	Mandate of Heaven	Manchu rulers, queue order
Russian	Orthodox Christianity	Divine right (Tsar)	Westernization (Peter), serfdom
Songhai	Islam	Military conquest + trade	Timbuktu learning center

QUICK-REFERENCE: TRADE NETWORKS (C. 1200-1450)

ROUTE	GOODS	TECH/IDEAS SPREAD	KEY PLAYERS
Silk Road	Silk, spices, porcelain, horses	Religions (Buddhism, Islam), gunpowder, plague	Mongols, Chinese, Persians
Indian Ocean	Spices, textiles, gold, ivory	Islam, Hinduism, monsoon sailing, Swahili language	Arab, Indian, Malay, Chinese, Swahili traders
Trans-Saharan	Gold, salt, enslaved people	Islam, Arabic script	Mali, Songhai, Berber traders

QUICK-REFERENCE: REVOLUTIONS COMPARED

REVOLUTION	CAUSE	KEY FIGURE(S)	OUTCOME
American (1776)	Taxation, no representation	Washington, Jefferson	Constitutional republic
French (1789)	Inequality, debt, famine	Robespierre, Napoleon	Republic → Napoleon → monarchy
Haitian (1791)	Slavery, racial oppression	Toussaint L'Ouverture	Independent Black republic
Latin Amer. (1810s-20s)	Colonial oppression, Enlightenment	Bolívar, San Martín	Independent nations (Creole-led)
Russian (1917)	War, famine, autocracy	Lenin, Trotsky	Communist USSR
Chinese (1949)	Civil war, foreign invasion	Mao Zedong	Communist PRC

REMEMBER: THE AP SCORING MINDSET

You don't need perfection. You need points.

- A 5 is typically 73% or above. That means you can miss a LOT and still get the top score.
- On essays, the rubric is your roadmap. Hit every category = maximum points even if writing is imperfect.
- DBQ: Thesis (1) + Context (1) + 6 docs used (2) + 3 HAPP (1) + Outside evidence (1) = 6/7 without complexity.
- LEQ: Thesis (1) + Context (1) + Evidence supporting argument (2) + Historical reasoning skill (1) = 5/6 without complexity.
- The complexity point is BONUS territory. If you can get all other points, you are already scoring a 5-level essay.
- **Every single point matters.** Never leave anything blank. Write something for every question.