

2025



AP[®] United States History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Long Essay Question 2

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Question 2: Long Essay Question, British Colonies and the Environment

6 points

General Scoring Notes

- Except where otherwise noted, each point of these rubrics is earned independently; for example, a student could earn a point for evidence without earning a point for thesis/claim.
- **Accuracy:** The components of these rubrics require that students demonstrate historically defensible content knowledge. Given the timed nature of the exam, essays may contain errors that do not detract from their overall quality, as long as the historical content used to advance the argument is accurate.
- **Clarity:** Exam essays should be considered first drafts and thus may contain grammatical errors. Those errors will not be counted against a student unless they obscure the successful demonstration of the content knowledge, skills, and practices described below.

Evaluate how British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row A Thesis/Claim (0–1 points)</p>	<p>0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.</p>	<p>1 point Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not historically defensible. • Only restate or rephrase the prompt. • Do not respond to the prompt. • Do not establish a line of reasoning. • Are overgeneralized. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a historically defensible thesis or claim about how British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754. The thesis or claim must either provide some indication of the reason for making that claim OR establish categories of the argument.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Provide a restatement of the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environment from 1607 to 1754.”</i> <p>Provide a historically defensible claim, but do not establish a line of reasoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Access to rivers was important to British colonization.”</i> <p>Provide a claim that does not respond to the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“British colonists competed with the French for access to the fur trade.”</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“While British colonists usually settled around rivers to make trade easier, the biggest environmental factor that led to the expansion of their settlements was whether the climate allowed for the growing of cash crops like tobacco.”</i> <p>Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt with analytic categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Access to rivers for waterpower and transportation, harbors for trade, and flood plains for agriculture were the biggest factors that influenced where British colonists settled in the Americas.”</i> <p>Establish a line of reasoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“British colonists adapted to their environment by building their economies around the crops the soil would support.”</i> [Minimally acceptable thesis/claim]
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis or claim must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion (which may not be limited to the first or last paragraphs). • The thesis or claim must identify a relevant development(s) in the period, although it is not required to encompass the entire period. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row B Contextualization</p>	<p>0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.</p>	<p>1 point Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.</p>
<p>(0–1 points)</p>	<p>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</p>	
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an overgeneralized statement about the time period referenced in the prompt. • Provide context that is not relevant to the prompt. • Provide a passing phrase or reference. <p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Do not provide context relevant to the topic of the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Feudalism declined in Europe.”</i> <p>Provide an overgeneralized statement about the time period referenced in the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Native Americans and the British fought a lot.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurately describe a context relevant to British colonists in the Americas and their environments from 1607 to 1754. <p>Examples of relevant context that earn this point include the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-contact Native American lifeways • Intra-European competition • Early Spanish colonization • Columbian Exchange • Early French colonization • Seven Years’ War • American Revolution <p>Example of acceptable contextualization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Competition for land and resources between British and French colonists contributed to the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War.”</i> • <i>“The Columbian Exchange brought new animals to the Americas.”</i> [Minimally acceptable contextualization] 	
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The response must describe broader historical events, developments, or processes that occur before, during, or continue after the time frame of the question that are relevant to the topic of the prompt. • To earn this point, the context provided must be more than a phrase or reference. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
<p>Row C Evidence (0–2 points)</p>	<p>0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.</p>	<p>1 point Provides specific examples of at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.</p>	<p>2 points Supports an argument in response to the prompt using at least two pieces of specific and relevant evidence.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes			
<p>Responses that do not earn points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a single piece of evidence. Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt. Provide evidence that is outside the time period or region specified in the prompt. Repeat information that is specified in the prompt. <p>Examples that do not earn points:</p> <p>Provide evidence that is outside the time period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The invention of the cotton gin made cotton production more profitable.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify at least two specific historical examples relevant to British colonists in the Americas and their environments from 1607 to 1754. <p>Examples of evidence that are specific and relevant include the following (two examples required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plantation agriculture Cash crops [e.g., tobacco, indigo] Indentured servitude Transatlantic slave trade Fur trade Early English settlements [e.g., Jamestown, Plymouth] Subsistence farming Cereal crops Staple crops Specific colonial regions [e.g., New England, middle colonies, Chesapeake, southern colonies, Caribbean] <p>Example of a statement that earns one point for evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In Virginia they grew lots of tobacco. Indentured servitude was a major form of labor in the Chesapeake.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use at least two specific historical examples to support an argument regarding how British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754. <p>Examples that successfully support an argument with evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The rocky soils in New England meant that farming wasn’t as profitable, so many in the region relied on shipping and trade instead.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how geography influenced how the British settled different regions] <i>“Because of heat and diseases, British plantations in the Caribbean were especially dangerous, leading to a growing demand for labor and the intensification of the Transatlantic slave trade in the region.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how climate influenced the development of slavery in the Americas] <i>“As British settlements expanded, the demand for resources as part of the fur trade resulted in intensifying tensions with Native Americans and other Europeans.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how natural resource competition resulted in conflict and tension] 	
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically, statements credited as evidence will be more specific than statements credited as contextualization. If a response has a multipart argument, then it can meet the threshold of two pieces of evidence by giving one example for one part of the argument and another example for a different part of the argument, but the total number of examples must still be at least two. 			

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
<p>Row D Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points)</p>	<p>0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.</p>	<p>1 point Uses historical reasoning [e.g. comparison, causation, continuity and change] to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt.</p>	<p>2 points Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt through sophisticated argumentation and/or effective use of evidence.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes			
<p>Responses that do not earn points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument. • May assert the use of historical reasoning but does not use it to frame or structure an argument. <p>Examples that do not earn points:</p> <p>May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Sugar cane and rum were major exports from the British colonies in the Caribbean.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument about how British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754. The reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking specificity. <p>Using a historical reasoning process to frame or structure an argument could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining how the intensification of cash crop agriculture contributed to the shift from indentured servitude to chattel slavery. • Explaining long-term continuities in the ways climate dictated which plants could be grown. <p>Example of acceptable use of historical reasoning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Because their climate was very similar to that of Europe, many of the middle colonies succeeded by growing European grain crops.”</i> [Indicates an effect of climate on the growth of European crops in the Americas] 	<p>Responses that earn 2 points:</p> <p>May demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated argumentation that is relevant to the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining multiple themes or perspectives to explore complexity or nuance; OR • Explaining multiple causes or effects, multiple similarities or differences, or multiple continuities or changes; OR • Explaining both cause and effect, both similarity and difference, or both continuity and change; OR • Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods or geographical areas. These connections should clearly relate to an argument that responds to the prompt. <p>May demonstrate a complex understanding through effective use of evidence relevant to an argument that addresses the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways that might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining how multiple pieces of specific and relevant evidence [at least four] support a nuanced or complex argument that responds to the prompt; OR • Using evidence effectively to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of different perspectives relevant to the prompt. <p>Demonstrating a complex understanding might include any of the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A response may argue that the availability of agricultural land in Virginia and the Carolinas was the primary factor for British settlement in the region, while access to harbors for trade was more important in New England. [Explains relevant and insightful connections across geographical areas] • A response may argue that the introduction of particular European crops to the Americas made British settlement profitable within North America. It then qualifies the argument with evidence that the transatlantic trade of cash crops from the Americas was the main economic driver in the region. [Explains multiple causes] • A response may argue that agricultural expansion due to the availability of land was the primary driver for migration from Britain to 	

			the Americas. It then qualifies the argument with evidence of religious toleration and independence in the Middle Colonies and New England as major contributors. [Explains multiple causes]
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To earn the first point for analysis and reasoning, the response must use historical reasoning to structure a response to the prompt, although the reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking in specificity.• This complex understanding must be part of the argument and may be demonstrated in any part of the response.• While it is not necessary for this complex understanding to be woven throughout the response, it must be more than merely a phrase or reference.			

After Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492, he began an era of European exploration in the New World. Countries like Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Britain sent groups to establish colonies and settle on the newly discovered land to generate profit, spread religion, and establish territorial dominance. From Britain, a wide variety of people came to the Americas for different reasons, from family groups escaping religious persecution to joint-stock-company-funded ventures aiming to find economic profit. Each of these groups established societies along the East Coast of the United States, forming the early American colonies. While British colonists developed different economic systems to support themselves due to their different environments, they all relied on slavery and adapted to living with Native Americans neighbors to survive.

Different British colonies relied on different economic systems to support themselves due to their varying environments. In the South, the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland established the practice of large plantations that used the cash crop tobacco as their main source of revenue. Because Southern colonies experienced fertile land, abundant rainfall, and long growing seasons, their environment was perfect for the growth of cash crops. Other southern colonies followed by growing rice and indigo as alternative cash crops to support their colonies. In the New England colonies like Massachusetts, colonists faced a much colder and rocky environment that was not conducive to establishing large plantations. They mostly supported themselves on smaller family farms and a manufacturing industry that allowed for trade, ultimately leading to the rise of a wealthy merchant class. The Middle Colonies like Pennsylvania used the many rivers throughout their region to establish an export economy based on grains and cereals, and they also developed prosperous shipbuilding and shipping industries. Each area along the Atlantic coast faced different geographical and environmental conditions, leading different colonies to adapt in different ways to support themselves economically. Additionally, the British colonies in the West Indies established even larger sugar cane plantations that prospered due to the large demand for sugar and generated enormous profit for the British Empire.

Despite the colonies' varying economic systems, each used slave labor to support their colonies. The most prominent example of this is in the British colonies in the West Indies and Caribbean. Because their sugar cane plantations required an enormous source of labor, they imported a huge amount of slaves from Africa through the Atlantic slave trade. In fact, in Barbados, the Black population exceeded the white population. This practice was carried over to the North American colonies as the first slaves arrived in the colonies in 1619. Soon, the Southern colonies relied on slaves as the labor source for their tobacco and rice plantations. A large part of this was due to their decreasing reliance on indentured servants, as indentured servants could be freed after working for a certain number of years and they sometimes rebelled. Although slavery was not as widely used in the middle colonies and New England colonies, they still relied on slaves for domestic jobs, farming, and shipbuilding industries. Overall, all the British colonies in the Americas used slavery as a method of adapting to their environments and supporting themselves economically.

Finally, British colonists all adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754 through their relationships with Native Americans. Many colonists, when first arriving in America, relied on Native American help to survive. For example, the Jamestown colony almost died in their first two years in North America and were saved with the help of the Powhatans. John Rolfe, a Jamestown settler, even married Pocahontas, the daughter of a Powhatan chief, to establish an alliance between the two groups. In New England, the Pilgrims similarly received invaluable help from Native Americans, who taught them about the land and how to farm. However, despite the cooperative

beginnings, many colonists eventually came into conflict with Native Americans as they increasingly encroached on Native land. In the north, Metacom's War, or King Philip's War, was a violent conflict between the Wampanoags and the New England colonies. In the South, colonists also fought with the Powhatans, resulting in the death of many people on both sides. Many of these conflicts ultimately resulted in the subjugation of Native Americans and their removal from their homelands. Although British colonies all had different experiences with different Native groups, colonists rarely saw Native Americans as "equal" people and thus continually encroached on their land.

Ultimately, British colonists responded to their different environments by developing diverse economic systems, but they all used slave labor to support themselves and adapted by collaborating with or fighting against Native Americans.

British colonists in 1607 to 1754 adapted to their environments in a variety of ways including making connections with the Native Americans and by using the land to grow beneficial crops. At the time the Americas were new to the British colonists. They had just come across the ocean to find an entire continent they never knew existed. They decided to try to settle it in order to get the things they wanted; land, gold, religious freedom. Not knowing how to develop the new land they had to go through trial and error to see how they could survive.

One of the first settlements to try and succeed in the Americas was Jamestown. Upon landing they found people already living in the area; Native Americans. Half starved and sick, the Native Americans decided to help them and they formed a friendly relationship where helpful tools were exchanged for food from the Native Americans. Although these relations didn't last forever, they did help the colonists get started in the Americas and adapt to their environments. Later the relations turned violent, and in spite of the Native's originally helping the colonists, they were killed and pushed off of their land.

Settlements started more South found that the ground was useful for growing crops. While most people that landed there might have been looking for gold, the need to produce food to survive was too great. In the Mid America colonies people grew staple crops like wheat and other grain to supply the colony with food. In the more southern regions colonists found temperate climates, perfect for growing cash crops like tobacco, cotton, and indigo. They then sold these crops back to England in order to buy food or slaves to build their plantations even more. Later these plantations caused problems because of the slaves they used to work on them.

In order to understand how the British colonists in the Americas adapted to their environment one must understand the context how the British colonies adapted to their environment. The Columbian exchange was where the colonies would export different values back to British such as corn. The British colonist in the Americas significantly adapted to their environments from 1607 to 1754 due to the social and economic events such as trading with the American Indians and growing crops.

The social event that helped the British colonies adapt in the Americas is trading with the American Indians. They would trade things to get what they needed for survival. This was a continuity over time because trade became a big thing for the British and American Indians and is used for a long time to get the things that are needed to adapt to the environment. Another social event that helped the British colonists is the drive for religious freedom. The British colonies came to the Americas for their religious freedom and they didn't go back to Britain. This helped the British colonies in the Americas adapt their environment because they wanted religious freedom.

The economic events that helped the British colonies in the Americas is growing their own crops. They would grow crops like corn and tobacco. This will then lead to trading for the things they need to adapt to the environment. This helped the British colonies because it showed that growing things would help them get the things they need to adapt. Another economic event is plantations. Plantations are in the south where the slaves would grow things like cotton. Plantations are agriculture based so it grows the things needed like cash crops. This helps the British colonies adapt to their environment in the Americas.

Thank you for your time!

Long Essay Question 2

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses on AP Central*.

Sample: 2A

Thesis Score: 1

Contextualization Score: 1

Evidence Score: 2

Analysis and Reasoning Score: 2

Total Score: 6

A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for the thesis, arguing in the first paragraph that: “While British colonists developed different economic systems to support themselves due to their different environments, they all relied on slavery and adapted to living with Native Americans neighbors to survive.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization. In the introduction, the response situates British colonization with a discussion of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas and the European competition for colonies that developed in the years after. The response further discusses how Spain, France, and the Netherlands all established outposts along the Atlantic and that the British were the last group to establish permanent settlements.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for evidence through its inclusion of many pieces of specific evidence, including the growth of tobacco as a cash crop in the Chesapeake region and the development of a plantation economy in the southern colonies because of favorable environmental conditions.

The response earned 1 point for using at least two specific historical examples to support the argument. The response explains how the environment along the Atlantic Coast was conducive to the development of a variety of labor-intensive crops requiring a consistent source of labor. The response further explains the colonists’ use of indentured servants and later the forced migration of enslaved Africans.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)**D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 2**

The response earned 1 point for using historical reasoning. The response consistently uses causation reasoning, discussing how the various environmental conditions along the Atlantic seaboard contributed to the development of different economies, such as the maritime economy of New England and the cash crop plantations of the South.

The response earned 1 point for demonstrating a complex understanding. The response explains relevant and insightful connections across periods or geographical areas. In paragraph four, the response explains that even though the colonists had a peaceful beginning to their interactions with Native American groups such as the Wampanoag and the Powhatan people—through the marriage of Pocahontas to John Rolfe—these relationships evolved to become confrontational and eventually violent. The response supports this sophisticated argument with evidence of Metacom’s War as well as conflicts between the English and Powhatan people.

Sample: 2B

Thesis Score: 1

Contextualization Score: 0

Evidence Score: 1

Analysis and Reasoning Score: 1

Total Score: 3

A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for the thesis. The first sentence of the response responds to the prompt with a historically defensible line of reasoning: “British colonists in 1607 to 1754 adapted to their environments in a variety of ways including making connections with the Native Americans and by using the land to grow beneficial crops.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. The response attempts context in the first paragraph; however, this attempt is overly generalized.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for evidence. It describes a number of pieces of evidence relevant to the time period of the prompt, including the settlement of Jamestown, staple crops, and cash crops.

The response did not earn 1 point for using at least two pieces of evidence to support an argument in response to the prompt. The response does support an argument in relation to the prompt in its discussion of the growth of cash crops in the South, but its discussions of Jamestown and trade are not sufficiently connected to an argument.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)**D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for using historical reasoning. In the final paragraph, the response discusses a causal link between the temperate climate of the South, the growth of cash crops, and trade with England. At the end of the first paragraph, the response also establishes a minimally acceptable change over time argument that addresses the prompt by establishing that the colonists sought a friendly relationship with Native Americans that over time became violent because of disputes over land.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding because it makes no attempt at sophisticated argumentation or effective use of evidence.

Sample: 2C**Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 1****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 0****Total Score: 2****A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for the thesis. The last sentence of the first paragraph claims that “The british colonist in the americas significantly adapted to thier environments from 1607 to 1754 due to the social and economic events such as trading with the American Indians and growing crops.” This claim responds to the prompt with a historically defensible line of reasoning.

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn 1 point for contextualization. The passing reference to the Columbian Exchange is too vague.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for providing two specific pieces of evidence relevant to the prompt. In the second paragraph, the response provides a general discussion of two different aspects of European colonization and trade by mentioning religious freedom and trade with Native Americans. Paragraph three makes specific reference to growing corn and tobacco and discusses the development of plantation economies in the southern colonies, specifically mentioning the rise of slavery.

The response did not earn the second point for evidence as its attempts to use evidence to support an argument were either too vague or not connected to the prompt.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for historical reasoning. The response mentions continuity over time in paragraph two, but the explanation of trade development is not connected to the prompt.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding because it makes no attempt at sophisticated argumentation or effective use of evidence.