
AP[®] United States History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

Inside:

Long Essay Question 4

- ☒ **Scoring Guidelines**
- ☒ **Student Samples**
- ☒ **Scoring Commentary**

Question 4: Long Essay Question, US Foreign Policy and Changes in the World

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the timed nature of the exam, essays may contain errors that do not detract from their overall quality, as long as the historical content used to advance the argument is accurate.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 United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis/Claim (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: <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. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a historically defensible thesis or claim about how United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930. The thesis or claim must either provide some indication of the reason for making that claim OR establish categories of the argument.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Provide a restatement of the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930.”</i> Provide a historically defensible claim, but do not establish a line of reasoning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The United States fought the Spanish-American War.”</i> Do not respond to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The United States economy grew tremendously during this period.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Over the forty-year period between 1890 and 1930, global conflicts pushed the United States to alternate between foreign policies of isolationism and interventionism.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt with analytic categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Between 1890 and 1930, the United States sought to establish itself as a world power by protecting the Western Hemisphere from European influences, expanding American business influences in foreign territories, and fighting against global threats to democracy.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The United States adopted a more active foreign policy because it wanted to gain global influence.”</i> [Minimally acceptable thesis/claim]
Additional Notes: <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	
Row B Contextualization	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
(0–1 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	<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>“Between 1848 and 1890 the influence of the women’s movement grew.”</i> <p>Provide a passing reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“After 1900, foreign policy changed further.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurately describe a context relevant to United States foreign policy from 1890 to 1930. <p>Examples of relevant context that earn this point include the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Washington’s Farewell Address • Westward expansion • Civil War • Reconstruction • The Industrial Revolution • Immigration from Asia, southern and eastern Europe • New Deal • Second World War • Cold War <p>Example of acceptable contextualization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“George Washington’s Farewell Address encouraged Americans to stay out of foreign alliances.”</i> • <i>“During the nineteenth century the United States expanded west across North America.”</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		
Row C Evidence (0–2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides specific examples of at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.	2 points Supports an argument in response to the prompt using at least two pieces of specific and relevant evidence.
	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 or region specified in the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The Monroe Doctrine was established to keep European influence out of the Western Hemisphere.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify at least two specific historical examples relevant to United States foreign policy from 1890 to 1930. <p>Examples of evidence that are specific and relevant include the following (two examples required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imperialism / Anti-imperialism “Closing of the Frontier” Spanish-American War Philippine-American War Puerto Rico Annexation of Hawaii Theodore Roosevelt Roosevelt Corollary Gentlemen’s Agreement Dollar Diplomacy Woodrow Wilson First World War League of Nations Treaty of Versailles First Red Scare National Origins Act Isolationism <p>Example of a statement that earns one point for evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“After the Spanish-American War, imperialists promoted the annexation of overseas territories such as the Philippines.”</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 United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930. <p>Examples that successfully support an argument with evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The acquisition and annexation of island territories abroad following the Spanish-American War expanded and created a United States presence abroad, making the United States government more involved in global affairs.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how the annexation of island territories increased United States involvement in the world] <i>“United States politicians like President Theodore Roosevelt sought to increase United States influences over Latin American countries with such foreign policy platforms as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1905.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how United States presidents sought to increase influence in Latin America] <i>“The First World War thrust the United States out of its desired isolationist tendencies, allowing politicians like President Woodrow Wilson to take a leadership role in international affairs.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how the United States turned away from isolationism during the First World War]
	<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		
Row D Analysis and Reasoning Complex Understanding	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses historical reasoning [e.g. comparison, causation, continuity and change] to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt.	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.
(0–2 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: <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. Examples that do not earn points: May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The First Red Scare occurred in the early twentieth century.”</i> 	Responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument about how United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930. The reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking specificity. Using a historical reasoning process to frame or structure an argument could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining how disillusionment with the outcome of the First World War contributed to isolationist sentiment. Discussing how advocacy for imperialism caused debates over the role of the United States in world affairs. Example of acceptable use of historical reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Foreign policy approaches such as Dollar Diplomacy contributed to increased United States international influence, as it projected economic</i> 	Responses that earn 2 points: 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: <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. 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: <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. Demonstrating a complex understanding might include any of the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A response may argue that the growth of United States involvement overseas was a response to growing competition with imperialist European powers for economic influence. It then argues that United States growth as a world power was primarily motivated by desire to spread American national ideals and protect democratic values overseas, as during the First World War and Woodrow Wilson’s involvement in negotiating the Treaty of Paris. [Explains multiple themes] A response may argue that the motivations for changes in United States foreign policy between 1890 and 1930 were similar. It compares United States Open Door policy in China, growing business influence in Latin America, and imperialism in the Pacific, arguing that

	<i>power over other countries.”</i> [Indicates a cause of increased United States global influence]	all of these actions furthered the economic growth of the United States. [Explains connections across geographical areas]
Additional Notes: <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.		

In the late 1800s, the United States went through many changes as a country. A main one was the newfound constitutional freedom of all of its citizens. Although segregation and discrimination was still widely practiced, other nations took the abolishment of slavery and their citizen status as a sign that the US had reunited as one and guaranteed freedom to all. This improved its world wide reputation as a democratic superpower. Trade and economic policies connected the country to the world. Because the country now played a bigger role in foreign affairs, it's foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930 by adopting a role of interventionism to adopting policies of isolationism.

Ending in 1898, the Spanish-American war was a major turning point in U.S. history. The Treaty of Paris caused America to emerge as a new global superpower, and it virtually wiped out Spanish influence in the Western hemisphere, because the treaty gave America Cuba, Guam, and also the Philippines. This newfound role as a global superpower directly influenced the country's foreign policy by making it take on a role as interventionists. For example, coming as an add-on to the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary (drafted by President Theodore Roosevelt), authorized the government to intervene in Latin America under the justification of preserving and saving democracy. This fell under President Roosevelt's philosophy of "carrying a big stick," with which he would enforce his policies. Mindsets like this are especially evident with the construction of the Panama Canal (which although in Panama, was US owned). The Canal continued to further entrench itself in Latin American affairs. In addition to being "protectors of democracy," the gain of Cuba from the Spanish-American War led to the rise of imperialism in the United States. Although Cuba's sovereignty was initially respected with the passage of the Teller Amendment, a new Platt Amendment prohibited Cuba from making treaties and getting involved in foreign areas it could possibly not afford, and it allowed the US government to stay very involved in a country they had originally promised would remain free. These interventionist policies continued, and represented part of the reason that the United States entered into World War 1. They felt it was their duty to protect democracy abroad, and that the preservation of other countries' democracy would continue U.S. democracy.

However, with World War 1, US foreign policy changed, and the 1920s show a decade of isolationism. World War 1 was very costly, in finances and in human life, which already made the country want to avoid any other major foreign entanglements. A committee called the Nye Committee confirmed the nations hatred of the war by publishing a report showing that World War had been entered not to protect democracy, but as result of bankers and the rich people's greed. This fueled the isolationist feelings in the country and made Americans even more opposed to any instances of getting involved in foreign affairs. Initially, the new isolationists mindsets could be seen by the Senate rejection of Woodrow's Wilson's Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. The country worried that joining the League of Nations would potentially involve the country in more wars it didn't want to be in, and threaten US sovereignty. In addition, after the war, the US immediately stepped out of foreign affairs and adopted isolationism which Europe, especially Germany in ruin. By the time that the Dawes plan (a plan to loan money to Germany) was drawn up, it was already too late to help. This economic crisis was one of the major reasons of the Bolshevik Revolution and communist government establishment in Russia. A period of fear of communism (known as the Red Scare) swept through the United States in a fear response to governments like the Russian one falling to communism. This only furthered the US isolationist policies and made them want to stay out of foreign affairs even more, so that the US would not be the next to fall to communism. The deep

fear of foreign aliens and fear of potential attempts to crumbe the US government were won of the strongest protectors of the isolationist policies after World War 1.

During the Antebellum time period the United States had basically no foreign policy as it was still recovering from the Civil war and was in Reconstruction. These ideas were continued from the early 1800s where many presidents promoted the idea of isolationism. However when new territory was gained from the Mexican American war heads started to turn towards a international power that is the United States. While many people argued for the United States to follow isolationism and anti-imperialist ideals, the US responded to changes in international disputes by becoming involved in imperialism and creating the Big Stick policy to increase the strength of their foreign policy.

The US in the late 1800s did not respond to many international issues as it was still focused on many internal improvements like the end of Reconstruction, many Americans sought the continuation of this isolationism and not get involved with any international affairs. This was fiercely debated in the argument of whether the US should join the League of Nations post World War 1 where the anti-imperialist side argued that the US should not get involved in European issues because it would rope them into the issue. The League of Nations is an international organization created post World War 1 to try and prevent anything like it from happening again. While the anti-imperialists did win that debate and kept the US out of the league of nations, they failed at stopping the US from shifting its foreign policy to become a strong world power.

The US response to change in the early 1900s was the creation of the Big Stick. The creation of the Big Stick policy was Teddy Roosevelt meeting European conquest in central and south america with force; meaning he would threaten conflict if any European nations decided try to annex any colonies. This was a reaction to the increased imperialist conquests that many European countries were involved in and caused the United States to become involved as well, thus shifting United States foreign policy towards a stronger more involved country in international affairs.

In conclusion, many US citizens argued for an isolated United States that did not get involved in international affairs like the League of Nations. Yet when European nations began pursuing imperialistic ideas, they were met with harsh foreign policy from the United States.

The United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930 by getting involved in World War I. In George Washington's Farewell Address he warned the country to not engage in relationships with other countries and to stay neutral.

When America got involved in World War I, it created alliances with some countries and bad relationships with others. One specific bad relationship was with Germany because after the war was over, Germany had to pay reparations for what they did in starting the war after it was ended by the Treaty of Versailles. This put Germany in debt and they blamed America. The league of nations was suggest to form alliances between multiple countries. United States ended up not joining the league of nations and instead joined NATO. This was a change in the foreign policy because there was never a formal alliance before.

Many countries were getting into arguments with others that put both countries in bad shape. America thought a foreign policy was needed to keep them from having a problem with another country. With a foreign policy in place America wouldn't have to get involved in wars. In the 1920s, America was doing well. They had no issues with other countries and the economy was very high. The foreign policy helped America achieve that goal of being prosperous.

Overall, the foreign policy improved the well being of America between 1890-1930.

Long Essay Question 4

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: 4A

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 thesis/claim. The thesis is historically defensible and can be found in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph: “Because the country now played a bigger role in foreign affairs, it’s foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930 by adopting a role of interventionism to adopting policies of isolationism.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization. In the opening paragraph, the response describes the broader historical context of the end of slavery and the subsequent growth of the trade and economic policies that “connected the country to the world.”

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for providing at least two pieces of specific evidence relevant to the prompt. Examples include the Spanish-American War, the Roosevelt Corollary, the Panama Canal, the First World War, and the Treaty of Versailles.

The response earned the second evidence point because it uses evidence to support an argument in response to the prompt. In the second paragraph, the Spanish-American War is used to defend the argument that the war led to increased United States involvement overseas through imperialism. In the third paragraph, the First World War is used to defend the argument that the outcome of the war led to the United States shifting to a more isolationist foreign policy.

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

The response earned 1 point for using historical reasoning. The response uses the historical reasoning skill of causation to structure an argument that addresses the prompt when it argues that disillusionment with the results of the First World War led to increasing policies of isolationism.

The response earned 1 point for demonstrating a complex understanding by explaining multiple perspectives to explore nuance. It explains how the United States, as evidenced by its involvement in both the Spanish-American War and the First World War, exhibited instances of both interventionism and isolationism during the period of the prompt rather than a single orientation in foreign policy.

Long Essay Question 4 (continued)**Sample: 4B****Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 1****Evidence Score: 1****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 1****Total Score: 4****A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis/claim. The response makes an argument about changes in the United States' responses to international disputes in the final sentence of the first paragraph: "While many people argued for the United States to follow isolationism and anti-imperialist ideals, the US responded to changes in international disputes by becoming involved in imperialism and creating the Big Stick policy to increase the strength of their foreign policy."

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization. The opening paragraph of the response discusses the United States' focus on isolationism and involvement in the Mexican-American War. The overly broad claim that during a certain period the United States "had basically no foreign policy" does not detract from the response earning the point.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. The response correctly provides evidence, including the First World War, the League of Nations, and Theodore Roosevelt's Big Stick policy, which are all relevant to the topic of the prompt.

The response did not earn the second evidence point. The response attempts to make an argument about the United States rejecting membership in the League of Nations, however, the identification of anti-imperialists as the leaders of the opposition is historically inaccurate. In addition, the discussion about the Big Stick policy erroneously connects it to the use of military force to prevent European conquest in the Americas.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using historical reasoning. The response earned this first point because it frames an argument about the change in United States foreign policy from isolationism to becoming a world power, despite opposition to joining the League of Nations.

The erroneous identification of anti-imperialism as the objection does not detract from the use of the historical thinking skill.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding. The response attempts to make a complex argument by addressing multiple perspectives but it does not earn the point because the discussion is vague and contains historical inaccuracies.

Long Essay Question 4 (continued)**Sample: 4C****Thesis Score: 0****Contextualization Score: 1****Evidence Score: 1****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 0****Total Score: 2****A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 0**

The response did not earn the point for thesis/claim. The attempted thesis statement is offered in the first sentence, “The United States foreign policy responded to changes in the world from 1890 to 1930 by getting involved in World War I.” This statement is a historically defensible claim, but it does not establish a line of reasoning.

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization. The second sentence of the first paragraph describes George Washington’s Farewell Address.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. It identifies United States involvement in the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles as two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.

The response did not earn the second evidence point as it does not use evidence to support an argument relevant to the prompt.

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

The response did not earn the point for using historical reasoning. The attempt to show how the First World War caused a change in United States foreign policy inaccurately claims that the “United States ended up not joining the league of nations and instead joined NATO.”

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.