

U.S. History Final Exam Review

Everything on a typical U.S. History final, one unit at a time: the facts, causes and effects you need, the mix-ups that cost the most points, and three practice questions per unit with answers. Start with the quick checks to find your weak units, then use the linked lessons and the timeline to fix them.

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What’s on the U.S. History final

Courses that cover the whole survey usually split around 1877: colonial America through Reconstruction in the first semester, then industrialization through the Cold War and civil rights era in the second. Many courses are not built that way, though. Grade 8 U.S. History often ends at Reconstruction, and many high school courses start at Reconstruction or the late 1800s and spend the whole year on the units marked Semester 2. Check your syllabus and study the units your class actually covered.

Unit	Usually on	Lessons
1. Colonial America & the road to revolution	Semester 1	The American Revolution
2. The American Revolution	Semester 1	The American Revolution
3. The Constitution & the early republic	Semester 1	U.S. Constitution & Civics
4. Expansion & the sectional crisis	Semester 1	Slavery & the Road to the Civil War
5. Civil War & Reconstruction	Semester 1	American Civil War
6. Industrialization & the Progressive Era	Semester 2	Covered here
7. World War I through the Great Depression	Semester 2	World War I
8. World War II	Semester 2	World War II
9. Cold War & the civil rights era	Semester 2	The Cold War, The Civil Rights Movement

A two-week study plan

DAY 14

Find your weak units

Do the quick checks for all 9 units without notes. Mark each unit solid, shaky or lost. This tells you where your study time goes.

DAYS 13–6

Fix the lost and shaky units, one a day

Start with the units you marked lost, then shaky. For each one, read the must-know list, work through the linked lesson, and redo that unit's quick checks until you get all three right.

DAYS 5–3

Mixed practice

Finals mix eras and topics together, so practice that way: answer quick checks from different units in random order, and explain how events connect across units.

DAY 2

Timeline and key terms

Put the major events of each unit in order on a timeline, and say each key term and person out loud with why they matter.

DAY 1

Light review and sleep

Redo only the questions you missed before. Then stop: a full night of sleep helps your memory more than a late cram session.

Colonial America & the road to revolution

MUST KNOW

- Jamestown, Virginia (1607) was the first permanent English colony; tobacco made it profitable, and the House of Burgesses (1619) was the first elected assembly in the English colonies.
- The Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact in 1620 before landing at Plymouth, agreeing to make and obey laws for the common good: an early example of self-government.
- The three colonial regions: New England (small farms, fishing, shipbuilding), the Middle colonies (grain farming, the "breadbasket," many religions) and the Southern colonies (tobacco, rice and indigo grown on plantations by enslaved Africans).
- Under mercantilism, colonies existed to make the home country rich: they supplied raw materials and bought finished British goods, and Parliament controlled their trade.
- The French and Indian War (1754 to 1763) left Britain deep in debt. Britain then barred settlement west of the Appalachians (Proclamation of 1763) and began taxing the colonies directly.
- The road to war in order: Stamp Act (1765), Townshend Acts (1767), Boston Massacre (1770), Boston Tea Party (1773), Coercive or Intolerable Acts (1774), Lexington and Concord (1775).

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up Jamestown and Plymouth. Jamestown (1607, Virginia) was founded to make money; Plymouth (1620, Massachusetts) was founded by Pilgrims seeking religious freedom.
- Saying the Tea Act raised the price of tea. It made the East India Company's tea cheaper; colonists objected because it kept Parliament's tax and gave one company control of the trade.
- Putting the Boston Massacre after the Tea Party. The Massacre came first (1770); the Tea Party was in 1773.

QUICK CHECK

1.1 Why did Britain start taxing the colonies after 1763?

1.2 What was the colonists' main objection to the Stamp Act?

1.3 Which 1620 document is an early example of self-government in the colonies?

UNIT 2 · SEMESTER 1

The American Revolution

MUST KNOW

- The war began at Lexington and Concord in April 1775. The Second Continental Congress then made George Washington commander of the Continental Army.
- Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (January 1776) argued in plain language for independence and turned many colonists against the king.
- The Declaration of Independence, mainly written by Thomas Jefferson, was adopted July 4, 1776. It drew on John Locke: people have unalienable rights, government rests on the consent of the governed, and people may abolish a government that violates their rights.
- Saratoga (1777) was the turning point because the American victory convinced France to sign an alliance in 1778 and send money, troops and ships.
- The army survived the winter at Valley Forge (1777 to 1778), where Baron von Steuben trained it. The British general Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in 1781 after American and French forces trapped him.
- The Treaty of Paris (1783) recognized American independence and set the western border at the Mississippi River.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up Saratoga and Yorktown. Saratoga (1777) was the turning point that brought in France; Yorktown (1781) was the last major battle.
- Thinking the war started with the Declaration. Fighting began at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, more than a year before July 1776.
- Confusing the two Treaties of Paris. The 1763 treaty ended the French and Indian War; the 1783 treaty ended the Revolution.

QUICK CHECK

2.1 Why is the Battle of Saratoga called the turning point of the Revolution?

2.2 Which Enlightenment thinker most influenced the Declaration of Independence, and which of his ideas appear in it?

2.3 What two things did the Treaty of Paris of 1783 do?

UNIT 3 · SEMESTER 1

The Constitution & the early republic

MUST KNOW

- The Articles of Confederation (ratified 1781) created a weak national government: no power to tax, no president to enforce laws, no national courts, and changes needed all 13 states. Shays' Rebellion (1786 to 1787) exposed these weaknesses.
- At the Constitutional Convention (1787), the Great Compromise created a two-house Congress: the House based on population and the Senate with two members per state. The Three-Fifths Compromise counted three-fifths of enslaved people for representation and taxes.
- Federalists supported ratification; Anti-Federalists feared a strong central government. The Federalist Papers (Hamilton, Madison, Jay) argued for it, and the promise of a Bill of Rights (ratified 1791) won it support.
- Key principles: popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and limited government.
- Washington set precedents such as the cabinet and serving two terms. Hamilton's financial plan, including a national bank, split leaders into the first parties: Federalists and Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans.
- Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, doubling the country's size. Marbury v. Madison (1803) established judicial review, and the War of 1812 was fought against Britain.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up the Great Compromise and the Three-Fifths Compromise. The Great Compromise was about how states are represented in Congress; the Three-Fifths Compromise was about counting enslaved people.
- Thinking Federalists opposed the Constitution. Federalists were for it; Anti-Federalists were the ones who opposed it without a bill of rights.

QUICK CHECK

3.1 Name two weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

3.2 How did the Great Compromise satisfy both large and small states?

3.3 Why did Anti-Federalists demand a Bill of Rights?

UNIT 4 · SEMESTER 1

Expansion & the sectional crisis

MUST KNOW

- Manifest Destiny was the belief that the United States was meant to spread across the continent. The Mexican-American War (1846 to 1848) gave the U.S. California and much of the Southwest.
- The Indian Removal Act (1830), signed by Andrew Jackson, forced Native nations west of the Mississippi; the Cherokee's forced march in 1838 and 1839 is called the Trail of Tears.
- The Missouri Compromise (1820) admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state and banned slavery north of 36°30' in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase. The Compromise of 1850 admitted California as free and passed a stricter Fugitive Slave Act.
- The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) let settlers decide on slavery by popular sovereignty, erasing the Missouri Compromise line. The violence that followed was called Bleeding Kansas, and the Republican Party formed to stop the spread of slavery.
- Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857) ruled that Black Americans were not citizens and that Congress could not ban slavery in the territories.
- After John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry (1859) and Abraham Lincoln's election (1860), South Carolina seceded in December 1860, and other Southern states followed to form the Confederacy.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Thinking the Dred Scott decision freed Dred Scott. The Court ruled against him and said he could not even sue in federal court.
- Saying Lincoln ran in 1860 on ending slavery in the South. He ran on stopping slavery from spreading into the western territories; many Southerners believed that was the first step toward ending it.
- Confusing popular sovereignty with a compromise line. The Missouri Compromise used a map line; the Kansas-Nebraska Act replaced the line with a vote by settlers.

QUICK CHECK

4.1 Put in order: Kansas-Nebraska Act, Missouri Compromise, Dred Scott decision, Compromise of 1850.

4.2 Why did the Kansas-Nebraska Act lead to violence?

4.3 Why did Northerners see the Dred Scott decision as a threat?

Civil War & Reconstruction

MUST KNOW

- The war began when Confederates fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861. The Union had more people, factories, railroads and a navy; the Confederacy fought on home ground with skilled generals like Robert E. Lee.
- The Union's Anaconda Plan combined a naval blockade of Southern ports with control of the Mississippi River to squeeze the Confederacy.
- The Emancipation Proclamation took effect January 1, 1863. It freed enslaved people in areas in rebellion, made ending slavery a war aim and opened the Union army to Black soldiers.
- July 1863 was the turning point: the Union won at Gettysburg and took Vicksburg, gaining control of the Mississippi. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in April 1865, and Lincoln was assassinated days later.
- The Reconstruction Amendments: the 13th (1865) abolished slavery, the 14th (1868) made everyone born in the U.S. a citizen and promised equal protection, and the 15th (1870) barred denying the vote based on race.
- Reconstruction (1865 to 1877) brought the Freedmen's Bureau and Black officeholders, but also Black Codes and Klan violence. The Compromise of 1877 pulled federal troops out of the South, and Jim Crow laws and sharecropping followed.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Saying the Emancipation Proclamation freed all enslaved people. It applied only to Confederate areas in rebellion, not the loyal border states; the 13th Amendment ended slavery everywhere.
- Mixing up the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. Remember the order: freedom (13), citizenship and equal protection (14), voting (15).

QUICK CHECK

5.1 Why did the Emancipation Proclamation not free enslaved people in the border states?

5.2 Which amendment made everyone born in the United States a citizen?

5.3 What ended Reconstruction, and what happened to Black Southerners afterward?

UNIT 6 · SEMESTER 2

Industrialization & the Progressive Era

MUST KNOW

- After the Civil War, railroads (the transcontinental railroad was finished in 1869), steel (Andrew Carnegie) and oil (John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil) made the U.S. an industrial power, and huge trusts and monopolies formed.
- Millions of new immigrants, many from Southern and Eastern Europe, arrived through places like Ellis Island (opened 1892) and crowded into city tenements. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) banned most Chinese immigration.
- Workers formed unions such as the American Federation of Labor (Samuel Gompers) to fight long hours, low pay and unsafe factories; strikes like the Pullman Strike (1894) were often broken by courts and troops.
- Progressives (about 1890 to 1920) used government to fix industrial problems. Muckraking journalists exposed them: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* led to the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906). Theodore Roosevelt broke up trusts and protected public lands.
- Progressive amendments: the 16th (income tax), 17th (direct election of senators), 18th (Prohibition) and 19th (women's right to vote, 1920).
- *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld "separate but equal" segregation. Booker T. Washington urged economic progress first, while W.E.B. Du Bois demanded full equal rights and helped found the NAACP (1909).

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up the 16th and 17th Amendments. The 16th allowed a federal income tax; the 17th let voters, not state legislatures, elect senators.
- Calling the muckrakers politicians. They were journalists and writers whose exposés pushed politicians to act.

QUICK CHECK

6.1 Which book exposed conditions in Chicago meatpacking plants, and what laws followed?

6.2 What is a monopoly, and why did Progressives want to break them up?

6.3 Which amendment gave women the right to vote, and in what year?

World War I through the Great Depression

MUST KNOW

- World War I began in 1914, caused by militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism (M.A.I.N.) and sparked by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.
- The U.S. stayed neutral at first but entered in April 1917 after Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare and the Zimmermann Telegram proposed a German alliance with Mexico.
- Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points called for a League of Nations, but the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles, and the U.S. never joined the League.
- The 1920s brought cars built on Henry Ford's assembly line, buying on credit, radio, jazz and the Harlem Renaissance, along with Prohibition, a Red Scare and new immigration quotas (1924).
- The stock market crashed in October 1929. Deeper causes of the Great Depression included overproduction, buying stocks on margin, bank failures, unequal income and high tariffs; the Dust Bowl made life worse on the Plains.
- Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (from 1933) aimed at relief, recovery and reform: programs like the CCC and WPA created jobs, the FDIC insured bank deposits, and the Social Security Act (1935) created old-age pensions and unemployment insurance.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Saying the stock market crash alone caused the Great Depression. The crash was the trigger; weak banks, overproduction, debt and unequal income turned it into a long depression.
- Saying the sinking of the Lusitania (1915) brought the U.S. into the war. It turned opinion against Germany, but the U.S. entered two years later, in 1917.

QUICK CHECK

7.1 Give two reasons the United States entered World War I in 1917.

7.2 What was buying on margin, and how did it make the 1929 crash worse?

7.3 Why did the United States never join the League of Nations?

UNIT 8 · SEMESTER 2

World War II

MUST KNOW

- Dictators rose in Germany (Hitler), Italy (Mussolini) and Japan (military leaders). Britain and France tried appeasement, letting Hitler take the Sudetenland at Munich in 1938, but Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.
- The U.S. stayed officially neutral but sent aid to Britain through Lend-Lease (1941). Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought the U.S. into the war.
- On the home front, factories switched to war production, goods were rationed and women took factory jobs ("Rosie the Riveter"). Executive Order 9066 (1942) forced about 120,000 Japanese Americans into incarceration camps, and the Supreme Court upheld it in *Korematsu v. United States* (1944).
- In Europe, the Allies landed at Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and Germany surrendered on V-E Day, May 8, 1945.
- In the Pacific, Midway (June 1942) was the turning point, and the U.S. used island hopping to move toward Japan. After atomic bombs hit Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, Japan surrendered, signing on September 2, 1945.
- Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews and millions of others in the Holocaust. After the war, the Nuremberg Trials prosecuted Nazi leaders and the United Nations was founded (1945).

COMMON MISTAKES

- Saying the U.S. entered the war in 1939. The war in Europe began in 1939; the U.S. entered after Pearl Harbor in December 1941.
- Mixing up D-Day and V-E Day. D-Day (June 1944) was the invasion of France; V-E Day (May 1945) was Germany's surrender.
- Confusing Pearl Harbor and Midway. Pearl Harbor (1941) was Japan's surprise attack; Midway (1942) was the American victory that turned the Pacific war.

QUICK CHECK

8.1 What was appeasement, and why is the Munich Agreement seen as its failure?

8.2 Why was the Battle of Midway a turning point?

8.3 What did Executive Order 9066 do?

UNIT 9 · SEMESTER 2

Cold War & the civil rights era

MUST KNOW

- Containment was the U.S. policy of stopping the spread of communism: the Truman Doctrine (1947) aided Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan rebuilt Western Europe, the Berlin Airlift (1948 to 1949) supplied West Berlin, and NATO formed in 1949.
- The Cold War turned hot in proxy wars: Korea (1950 to 1953) ended near where it began, and Vietnam escalated after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964). In the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), Kennedy's naval quarantine forced the Soviets to remove missiles from Cuba.
- At home, fear of communism fed a second Red Scare and McCarthyism. The Soviet launch of Sputnik (1957) started the Space Race, and Apollo 11 landed on the Moon in 1969.
- Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruled school segregation unconstitutional. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955 to 1956), the Little Rock Nine (1957), the sit-ins (1960) and the March on Washington (1963) built pressure for change.
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned segregation in public places and job discrimination. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, passed after the Selma marches, attacked barriers like literacy tests, and the 24th Amendment (1964) banned poll taxes in federal elections.
- The Berlin Wall fell in 1989, and the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991, ending the Cold War.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Mixing up the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The 1964 law ended legal segregation in public places and jobs; the 1965 law protected the right to vote.
- Thinking Brown v. Board ended segregation right away. Many districts resisted for years, and in 1957 Eisenhower sent federal troops to protect the Little Rock Nine.
- Saying the U.S. and the Soviet Union fought each other directly. They never did; they competed through arms races, the Space Race and proxy wars.

QUICK CHECK

9.1 What was containment? Give one example.

9.2 Which earlier decision did Brown v. Board of Education overturn, and why?

9.3 Why was the Cuban Missile Crisis so dangerous, and how did it end?

Answer key

Unit 1: Colonial America & the road to revolution

1.1 To pay its debt from the French and Indian War and the cost of keeping troops in North America. Parliament thought the colonists should share the bill for their own defense.

1.2 "No taxation without representation." Parliament taxed them directly even though the colonies elected no members of Parliament.

1.3 The Mayflower Compact. The Pilgrims agreed to form a government and follow the laws it made.

Unit 2: The American Revolution

2.1 It convinced France the Americans could win. France signed an alliance in 1778, and French money, soldiers and ships helped win at Yorktown.

2.2 John Locke. The Declaration uses his ideas of natural rights, government by consent of the governed, and the right to replace a government that abuses its power.

2.3 Britain recognized the United States as independent, and the new nation got the land east of the Mississippi River between Canada and Florida.

Unit 3: The Constitution & the early republic

3.1 Any two: Congress could not tax, there was no executive to enforce laws, there were no national courts, Congress could not regulate trade between states, and amendments needed all 13 states.

3.2 It created two houses: the House of Representatives, based on population, pleased large states, and the Senate, with two senators per state, pleased small states.

3.3 They feared a strong national government would take away individual liberties and the power of the states, so they wanted those rights written down as limits on government.

Unit 4: Expansion & the sectional crisis

4.1 Missouri Compromise (1820), Compromise of 1850, Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), Dred Scott decision (1857).

4.2 Popular sovereignty meant the settlers would vote on slavery, so proslavery and antislavery settlers rushed into Kansas, stuffed ballot boxes and attacked each other.

4.3 It said Congress could not ban slavery in any territory, which meant slavery could spread into all the western lands.

Unit 5: Civil War & Reconstruction

5.1 Lincoln issued it as a war measure against states in rebellion, and he needed the slaveholding border states to stay loyal to the Union.

5.2 The 14th Amendment (1868), which also guarantees equal protection of the laws.

5.3 The Compromise of 1877 removed federal troops from the South. Southern states then passed Jim Crow segregation laws and used poll taxes, literacy tests and violence to keep Black men from voting.

Unit 6: Industrialization & the Progressive Era

6.1 The Jungle by Upton Sinclair. Congress passed the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.

6.2 A single company that controls a whole market. Without competition it can raise prices, lower quality and shut out new businesses.

6.3 The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, after decades of work by suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul.

Unit 7: World War I through the Great Depression

7.1 Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare against American ships, and the Zimmermann Telegram showed Germany asking Mexico to attack the U.S.

7.2 Buying stock with borrowed money. When prices fell, investors could not repay their loans, so they were forced to sell, prices fell further, and banks lost the money they had lent.

7.3 The Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Many senators feared the League would pull the U.S. into foreign wars without a vote of Congress.

Unit 8: World War II

8.1 Giving in to an aggressor to avoid war. Britain and France let Hitler take the Sudetenland in 1938, but he took the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1939 and then invaded Poland.

8.2 The U.S. sank four Japanese aircraft carriers, and Japan was on the defensive in the Pacific for the rest of the war.

8.3 It allowed the government to remove Japanese Americans from the West Coast and hold them in camps, even though most of them were U.S. citizens.

Unit 9: Cold War & the civil rights era

9.1 The policy of stopping communism from spreading to new countries. Examples: the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO, the Berlin Airlift or the Korean War.

9.2 Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). The Court ruled that separate schools are inherently unequal, which violates the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

9.3 Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba could reach most of the U.S., and both sides were close to war. The Soviets removed the missiles; the U.S. promised not to invade Cuba and later removed its missiles from Turkey.