

NEW CANAAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**SOCIAL STUDIES - UNITED STATES HISTORY/AP US  
History/American Studies  
CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

All Social Studies classes are aligned in terms of skill development. The emphasis is on higher order thinking skills, such as close reading of primary sources and the analysis of pro-con, continuity and change over time, compare and contrast, and point of view. Students consistently learn to make connections between past and present. In addition, all students engage in research to solve problems and demonstrate life skills, such as oral presentation skills and their analysis of visual literacy, including charts, graphs, political cartoons, and art. The major difference between regular sections and advanced placement is the complexity of rubrics, readings and documents, content, materials and the rigor of scoring. Full AP course descriptions can be found at the website [advancedplacement.collegeboard.com](http://advancedplacement.collegeboard.com). The curriculum is aligned with the [Connecticut Secondary Social Studies Frameworks](#).

**Course Text**

*The Americans*, Danzer, de Alva, et al.  
*American Pageant*, Bailey

**Unit 1 – INDUSTRIALIZING AMERICA (1870 – 1905)**

How is status defined?

During this period, the United States undergoes industrialization and experiences revolutionary changes to its economy and the nation's demographics.

**Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, diversification of the nation's population brought into question whether immigration has been the key to America's success.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Why do people move?  
Did America fulfill the dreams of immigrants?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

Industrial working conditions led to the growth of labor unionism.

**Sample Essential Questions**

What tensions led industrial workers to unionize?  
Can workers attain economic justice without revolution?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

The rapid growth of cities forced people to contend with problems of housing, sanitation and political corruption.

**Sample Essential Questions**

What was the response to the influx of immigrants to the United States?  
Why did machine politics become common in cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

New technologies (methodologies and machinery) paved the way for industrial expansion.

**Sample Essential Questions**

What factors account for the scope and speed of industrialization in the United States?  
Were big business leaders 'captains of industry' or 'robber barons'?  
Has rapid industrial development been a blessing or a curse for Americans?

## Unit 2 – PROGRESSIVISM and the ROARING TWENTIES (1900 – 1929)

### How is status achieved?

Political, economic and social change in late-19<sup>th</sup> century America led to broad progressive reforms. The challenges created by an expanding commercial and industrial economy led many people to believe that social issues needed to be addressed.

**Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:****Topical Enduring Understanding**

The birth of modern American culture can be traced to the 1920s.

**Sample Essential Questions**

How did the status of African-Americans and women change during the 1920s?  
How did technology impact the lives of Americans?  
What themes were reflected in the popular culture of the post-World War I era?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

Various reform efforts give rise to the Progressive Movement, which aimed to restore economic opportunities and correct injustices in American life.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Should Americans expect a certain standard of living?  
What role should the government play in the lives of its citizens? What role do citizens play in reforming government?  
Was America's commitment to capitalism consistent with its commitment to democracy?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

Efforts to reform politics stemmed in part from the desire to make government more efficient and responsive to its constituents.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Is a strong president good for our nation?  
Should business be closely regulated by government?

Is government regulation of business radical or conservative?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

The Progressive Movement and the 1920s did not equally improve the lives of all Americans.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Why do you think women won the right to vote in 1920 when earlier efforts had failed?

How did the status of African-Americans and women change during the 1920s?

Accommodation or agitation: which approach is more effective in attaining the goals of the Progressives?

Were the 1920s 'roaring?'

## **Unit 3 – A GROWING GLOBAL POWER (1870 – 1941)**

### **Why does America fight?**

Economic motives and a belief in American superiority gave rise to imperial ambitions. America's evolving definition of itself led to domestic and international conflict.

#### **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

The powers of the U.S. government expand during periods of conflict.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Does war have a positive or negative effect on American society?

Should a democratic government tolerate dissent during times of war and other national and international crises?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

As events in Europe and around the world led to global conflict, the U.S. found itself having to decide between isolationism and involvement.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Should the U.S. fight to make the world 'safe for democracy?'

Was the Treaty of Versailles a fair and effective settlement for lasting world peace? Should the U.S. have ratified it?

Was American foreign policy during this period isolationist or internationalist?

What are the benefits and drawbacks of international alliances?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

A nation's character becomes defined by its frontiers?

**Sample Essential Questions**

Does America have a 'manifest destiny?'

What is America's frontier?

Is inequality ever justified?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

By the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some American leaders had become convinced that the U.S. should compete with European empires.

**Sample Essential Questions**

How do capitalism and nationalism contribute to empire?  
Should one nation's self-interest override another's?  
Can empire be reconciled with democracy?

## **Unit 4 – FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE (1929 – 1945)**

What should be the interaction between government and its citizens?

Facing the Great Depression of the 1930s and the rise of totalitarianism around the world, the government took on primary responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. The New Deal and World War II fundamentally changed the relationship between the American people and the federal government.

### **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

World War II caused great hardship for many groups of citizens.

**Sample Essential Questions**

How can military conflict both promote equality and justify persecution?  
Should the U.S. do more to prevent genocide?  
What were the sacrifices of the 'Greatest Generation'?"

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

In combating the Great Depression, the federal government redefined its role in the lives of the American people.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Was the New Deal an effective response to the Depression?  
Did all Americans receive a New Deal in the 1930s?  
How did liberal and conservative critics differ in their views of the New Deal?  
To what extent is war 'good' for business?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

In the late 1920s economic problems brought an end to an era of prosperity.

**Sample Essential Questions**

Was the Great Depression inevitable?  
How important do you think monetary and fiscal policies are to the health of economy?  
How do environmental conditions affect the country?

## **Unit 5 – WARTIME TENSIONS AND THE COLD WAR (1940 – 1989)**

How does a nation reconcile short-term goals with long-term aims?

World War II and its aftermath ushered in an era of domestic prosperity and fears of Communism. The conduct of World War II gave rise to the U.S. and Soviet Union as rival 'superpowers' with vastly different economic and political systems.

### **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

#### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

American foreign policy of the 1970s and 80s swung from *realpolitik* to moral absolutes to a new form of containment

#### **Sample Essential Questions**

Should human rights and morality influence foreign policy?

Did the U.S. 'win' the Cold War?

Was the fall of Communism evidence of the success of American foreign policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

#### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

#### **Sample Essential Questions**

How did the U.S. 'fight' the Cold War? Were these effective means?

Was containment consistent with previous American policies?

Should a nation have the right to remove another nation's government or leader from power?

What were the significant turning points in the Cold War?

#### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

In the postwar years, material prosperity gave rise to the notion of an 'American Dream.'

#### **Sample Essential Questions**

Why do Americans migrate?

What is the American Dream and what is its relationship to reality?

Was suburbanization good for America?

Should the United States have feared internal communist subversion in the post-war years?

#### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Within the wartime alliance, the different priorities and ambitions of the United States and Soviet Union created a climate of tension and rivalry that defined the post-war world.

#### **Sample Essential Questions**

What were the ideological bases for our fear of Communism? How consistent was this fear with our rationale for our wartime alliances?

What did the U.S. do to aid its allies before, during and after the war?

What were the turning points of World War II?

Should the U.S. employ nuclear weapons to defeat its enemies in war?

## **Unit 6 – EGALITARIAN AMERICA (1945 – 1980)**

How do people bring about change in their society?

In the postwar era, a new awareness of social problems and political inequities emerged and gave rise to different types of protest movements. Motivated by the conviction that everyday citizens could bring about positive social change, movements and individuals challenged authority.

## **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

As minorities and women continued to experience prejudice and discrimination, groups formed to improve civil rights for all.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

Are all Americans entitled to the same civil rights?

What have been the most successful approaches to bringing about social and political change?

Should affirmative action programs be used as a means to make up for past injustices?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Americans became wary about the direction of the nation and began to lose trust in their government.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

Is secrecy more important than the public's right to know in implementing foreign policy?

Should the president be able to wage war without congressional authorization?

Should people who believe a war is unjust be required to fight?

What is meant by 'imperial presidency'?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

The emergence of the 'counterculture' in the 1960s challenged the traditional views of America.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

Does popular culture reflect social and political change or bring about change?

What unintended impact did the protests of the era have on many in mainstream America?

How does media coverage affect events?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

From the 'Fair Deal' to the 'Great Society' the federal government sought to address social issues in the postwar era.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

What is effective leadership?

To what extent did the dynamic between the three branches of government belie the democratic principles upon which the U.S. was founded?

Which pieces of legislation have had the greatest positive and/or negative impact on American society?

## **Unit 7 – CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY (1980 – present)**

How does American culture become more liberal and more conservative over time?

The re-emergence of political, economic and social conservatism has defined the national debate over how best to maintain a stable economy and our position within the global community. Since the 1980s, the nation and its political institutions have become increasingly polarized on social and economic issues, as well as on the purpose and role of government in everyday life.

## **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

The election of 1980 evidenced a shift in traditional regional voting patterns and demographic blocs.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

What defines a presidential election as revolutionary?

To what extent was the American society and politics in the 1980s a mirror of society and politics in the 1920s?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Conservative economic policies of the 1980s focused on reductions in entitlements and increased defense spending.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

How effective were the economic policies of this era?

Can the United States maintain prosperity?

How did the shift from an industrial economy affect the American people and our economic stability?

What do the decisions we make about the federal budget and national debt reveal about us as a people?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Technological innovation and 'information overload' continue to transform all dimensions of life in the United States.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

Have contemporary technological innovations had a greater impact on the American way of life than those at any other time in our history?

How does the media influence public opinion?

Do political parties, lobbies and special-interest groups serve the public interest and further the cause of democracy?

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

Beneath the prosperity of the last decades of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, inequities persisted.

### **Sample Essential Questions**

How do disagreements over immigration policy reflect the benefits and challenges of a diverse population?

How might improvements in the educational system help solve other social problems?

Should Americans be optimistic about our future?

## **Unit 8 – GLOBAL AMERICA (1989 – present)**

### **What is the role of the U.S. in the global community?**

As the U. S. emerged from the Cold War in the early 1990s, the process of globalization altered our relationships with the rest of the world. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21st centuries, the U.S. has sought to redefine its place within the global community.

## **Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:**

### **Topical Enduring Understanding**

The need for commodities and the emergence of Islamist theocracies increased American involvement in

the affairs of the Middle East

**Sample Essential Questions**

Are peace and stability in the Middle East vital to the economic and national security interests of the United States?

Why did the U.S. fight a war against Iraq?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

In the wake of the Cold War, globalization presented Americans with new challenges.

**Sample Essential Questions**

How did the shift away from an industrial economy affect America's foreign policy?

Is it constitutional for the U.S. to fight pre-emptive wars?

Should U.S. foreign policy differ from region to region?

In addressing global concerns, should the U.S. act independently or as part of the United Nations?

**Topical Enduring Understanding**

Foreign policy decisions in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks are driven by concerns about global and domestic security against terrorism as much as maintenance of our economic strength.

**Sample Essential Questions**

How have national security concerns been addressed throughout contemporary American society?

Should the U.S. utilize economic means (trade agreements, sanctions, aid) to its diplomatic ends?

How has the world's perception of the U.S. changed over time?

How and why has America's means of waging war changed over time?