

How APUSH Changed My World

Honors Scholarship Essay
Submitted by Graduating Senior

Clarissa Petres

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My junior year of high school I decided to take a risk and step out of the typical seventeen-year-old student norm—I enrolled in an Advanced Placement United States History class. Every student hears the formidable rumors of this APUSH class every year: “you can never stop studying,” “no one passes the [class] exams,” and “you think [all students get automatic] college credit—ha!” Well, I decided to climb that mountain, just expecting to pass the class and perform well on the National Exam in May. What I experienced has both shaped my study habits and given me a broader outlook on the history of our country. Today it still provides usefulness in my awareness of how our past affects our future.

My knowledge expanded from pre-Columbus time in the Americas all the way to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center during the George W. Bush administration. Over a course of nine months I began to have a relationship with my beloved textbook by John A. Garraty (which I read cover to cover). While this may be impressive to the average high school student, it is only the beginning of how this class came to shape me as a student. I read and absorbed, putting events together instead of compartmentalizing each event and applying it only to a piece of paper when needed for testing purposes. It proved beneficial in mid-November of 2012 when I wrote an essay on different machinery companies during World War II and which one would have been a better investment. My economics teacher entered my essay in the SIFMA Foundation national essay

competition, InvestWrite. I finished fifth overall in the nation, and I took first place in South Dakota, the first South Dakota student ever to place nationally. Without the knowledge I had gained through my history class I'm certain this would not have been possible.

Along with the new study habits I had learned with such a class, I became acutely aware of my peers' unfamiliarity about our nation's history. The unnerving fact was that only months before I signed up for APUSH, I had been just as unaware. Edmund Burke's statement, "those who do not know history are bound to repeat it," rings with validity. As a young adult emerging in this world, it is important to know the roots of our country and understand the principles on which the United States was created and why as a society we need to be able to realize the mistakes we've made, yet also appreciate our overwhelming number of successes and triumphs.

From the formation of the Constitution to the Little Bighorn massacre to the failure of Prohibition to the D-Day victory to the legendary Woodstock concert, each event holds a key to tomorrow's future. How can we know what our country is unless we know what it has been through? Forty-two of my classmates and I found out in my junior year. For that information I will always be grateful to my teacher for challenging us to rise above being indolent high school students. I am thankful for the insights I have come to see about my nation as well as other countries around the world.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon: "Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they're supposed to help you discover who you are." My APUSH class didn't paralyze me; it challenged me to understand my world.