

100 Years in a Day

- Becky Twaalfhoven

Ask any AP U.S. History student what they think of the course, and they will most likely give you an answer comparable to one of the many definitions given by Urban Dictionary:

1. “A class that you only take solely to boost your GPA, although many people's GPAs decrease substantially.”
2. “A class to prepare you for the AP exam that probably 35% of the student population passes in the United States depending on the teacher you have.”
3. “A course designed to cause brain implosion/explosion immediately before finals and AP test. Topics covered include everything from 1500 to today. Students sit and listen to lectures during class daydreaming about how death must be much better than AP U.S. History.”

The latter description most closely resembles how I felt throughout the week leading up to the AP Exam. I took three exams this year, but as the only subject requiring memorization, naturally United States History took up most of my attention. Last year I experienced the “AP process” for the first time with AP World History, which I assumed would be similar to U.S. History. I was so, so wrong. First, as a sophomore I still possessed the insatiable eagerness to prove my academic merit and maturity, and to do more than necessary purely for self improvement. Because of this, I approached the AP test confident in my ability to name the Chinese dynasties and write an essay on the development of Swahili as a language.

Junior year killed that spirit. Instead of poring over the textbook and meticulously coloring maps of ancient Australia, I resorted to writing notes to my teacher on my quizzes, apologizing for my stupidity. So it was no surprise that, as “AP Week” approached this year, I found myself struggling to recall the second president of the United States, a key fact which set the tone for my study “boot camp”: a hand-cramping, snooze-inducing week of taking notes about John Tyler, who was apparently the tenth president. I could write the phrase “white, landowning men” in my sleep. My crowning achievement was covering 100 years of United States history over the course of one day. The cherry on top was the changed test setting to accommodate the increased numbers of students: the school gym, in all its buzzing, squeaky glory.

Though I cannot say for certain, I think the test went surprisingly well. I cannot exactly discuss the questions, but the fact that essays involved such topics as women’s rights in World War II and causes of the Revolutionary War should say enough. Granted, it would have been nice to remember what exactly happened during the First World War in order to discuss its effects. However, if there’s one thing I’ve learned from the AP History tests, it’s that 75% percent of success is faking it. And, if you really have no idea, you can always draw a picture of a dinosaur. You might still get a 2.