

2017 AP® UNITED STATES HISTORY FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

“An arrogant and stubborn faith in America’s power to shape the course of foreign events compounded the dangers sown by ideological rigidity. Policymakers . . . shared a common . . . conviction that the United States not only should, but could, control political conditions in South Vietnam, as elsewhere throughout much of the world. This conviction had led Washington to intervene progressively deeper in South Vietnamese affairs over the years. . . . This conviction prompted policymakers to escalate the war. . . . Domestic political pressures exerted an equally powerful . . . influence over the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. . . . Another ‘loss’ to communism in East Asia risked renewed and devastating attacks from the right.”

Brian VanDeMark, historian, *Into the Quagmire*, 1995

“The escalation of U.S. military intervention [in Vietnam] grew out of a complicated chain of events and a complex web of decisions that slowly transformed the conflict . . . into an American war. . . . [President Lyndon Johnson] made the critical decisions that took the United States into war almost without realizing it. . . . Although impersonal forces . . . influenced the president’s Vietnam decisions, those decisions depended primarily on his character, his motivations, and his relationships with his principal advisers. . . . The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of *The New York Times* or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C., even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting.”

H. R. McMaster, historian, *Dereliction of Duty*, 1997

4. Using the excerpts, answer (a), (b), and (c).
- a) Briefly explain ONE major difference between VanDeMark’s and McMaster’s historical interpretations of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War.
 - b) Briefly explain how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945 to 1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support VanDeMark’s interpretation.
 - c) Briefly explain how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945 to 1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support McMaster’s interpretation.

END OF SECTION I

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UNITED STATES HISTORY SECTION II

Total Time—1 hour, 30 minutes

Question 1 (Document-Based Question)

Suggested reading and writing time: 55 minutes

It is suggested that you spend 15 minutes reading the documents and 40 minutes writing your response.

Note: You may begin writing your response before the reading period is over.

Directions: Question 1 is based on the accompanying documents. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.

In your response you should do the following.

- **Thesis:** Present a thesis that makes a historically defensible claim and responds to all parts of the question. The thesis must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion.
- **Argument Development:** Develop and support a cohesive argument that recognizes and accounts for historical complexity by explicitly illustrating relationships among historical evidence such as contradiction, corroboration, and/or qualification.
- **Use of the Documents:** Utilize the content of at least six of the documents to support the stated thesis or a relevant argument.
- **Sourcing the Documents:** Explain the significance of the author's point of view, author's purpose, historical context, and/or audience for at least four documents.
- **Contextualization:** Situate the argument by explaining the broader historical events, developments, or processes immediately relevant to the question.
- **Outside Evidence:** Provide an example or additional piece of specific evidence beyond those found in the documents to support or qualify the argument.
- **Synthesis:** Extend the argument by explaining the connections between the argument and ONE of the following.
 - A development in a different historical period, situation, era, or geographical area.
 - A course theme and/or approach to history that is not the focus of the essay (such as political, economic, social, cultural, or intellectual history).

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Short Answer Question 4

“An arrogant and stubborn faith in America’s power to shape the course of foreign events compounded the dangers sown by ideological rigidity. Policymakers . . . shared a common . . . conviction that the United States not only should, but could, control political conditions in South Vietnam, as elsewhere throughout much of the world. This conviction had led Washington to intervene progressively deeper in South Vietnamese affairs over the years. . . . This conviction prompted policymakers to escalate the war. . . . Domestic political pressures exerted an equally powerful . . . influence over the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. . . . Another ‘loss’ to communism in East Asia risked renewed and devastating attacks from the right.”

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Scoring Guide

0–3 points

Score 3

Response accomplishes **all three** tasks set by the question.

Score 2

Response accomplishes **two** of the tasks set by the question.

Score 1

Response accomplishes **one** of the tasks set by the question.

Score 0

Response accomplishes **none** of the tasks set by the question.

Score NR

No response. Response is completely blank.

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Short Answer Question 4 (continued)

Scoring Notes

- a) Response briefly explains ONE major difference between VanDeMark's and McMaster's historical interpretations of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War.

Examples of responses to (a) that would earn the point:

- VanDeMark credits Cold War foreign policy and domestic politics, as well as institutional forces, for the United States deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict.
- McMaster credits the decisions made consciously and unwittingly by President Lyndon Baines Johnson and the advisors who surrounded him for the United States deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict and/or the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam.

- b) Response briefly explains how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945–1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support VanDeMark's interpretation.

Examples of responses to (b) that would earn the point:

- Development of United States Cold War policy in the postwar era.
- United States Containment policy after 1947; NSC-68 1950.
- Commitment of United States to Cold War ally, France, after the end of Second World War
- United States helped France to maintain its colonial possessions in Indochina after 1945 (First Indochina War); United States paid for 80 percent of the conflict by early 1950s.
- United States refused to allow elections for reunified Vietnam to take place in 1956.
- Korean War, 1950–1953, confirmed some policymakers' beliefs about containment as a useful strategy.
- United States initial support of South Vietnamese premier, Ngo Dinh Diem.
- United States policy shaped by belief that war against communism was one of good versus evil or enslaved versus the free world.
- United States belief that North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh were influenced by communism.
- Fear of communism domestically shaped policies in Truman and Eisenhower administrations, forced hard line stance by Democrats and Johnson, proving they were strong on communism to maintain political power in the Congress and achieve approval of legislation
- The specter of McCarthyism shaped anticommunism in United States.
- Belief in spreading the democratic values and ideology of the United States worldwide.
- Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had already deeply involved United States in conflict prior to Lyndon Johnson.
- Truman, blamed for the loss of China in 1949, drove a hard line to contain more territory from turning communist.
- CIA involved in/led the overthrow of the Iranian and Guatemalan governments in 1954, long-time commitment of some United States policymakers against suspected communist inroads.

- c) Response briefly explains how ONE historical event or development in the period 1945–1975 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support McMaster's interpretation.

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Short Answer Question 4 (continued)

Examples of responses to (c) that would earn the point:

- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 spurred by “manufactured” or fabricated incident.
- President Lyndon Johnson’s need for approval and votes for Great Society domestic legislation and programs resulted in his acquiescence on Cold War foreign policy or his willingness to take a hard line.
- Efforts to manage United States involvement in Vietnam through gradual escalation of funds and finally combat troops.
- Johnson’s willingness to follow the directives of his policy advisors, especially the Department of Defense, his trust in their assurances that policy approaches to Vietnam would net gain.
- Johnson to blame for maintaining and escalating the policies of his predecessors.
- Johnson lost his presidency as a result of escalation of the Vietnam conflict — evidence that he was blamed by the American people.