

Parents

AP African American Studies Will Be Offered in US High Schools and Is Valuable for All Students

By [Pamela Appea](#)

The interdisciplinary course will focus on 400 years of African American history, civil rights, politics, art, literature, poetry, cinema, and more.

This year for the first time ever, teens at 60 high schools across the country will have the opportunity to take a new year-long AP African American studies course. The course will offer a wide range of interdisciplinary topics, including the study of African nations, African American civil rights, the study of art, literature, poetry, cinema studies, and more.

"We have a wide range of students who are curious to learn. African American history has not been given much of a place in the general history textbooks. Our students say they want to learn more. Who am I to tell them that they cannot learn more?" Carrye Holland, principal of White Station High School in Memphis, Tennessee asks rhetorically.

"I look at this course as a way to open doors. To have an entire course dedicated to this content is groundbreaking. Other history courses feature this content very briefly and don't take an interdisciplinary approach," says Holland, noting there is currently a diverse group of about 20 11th and 12th graders at White Station High School who are participating in the AP in African American studies classes this year.

10 Black History Facts Every Kid—and Parent—Should Know

Holland says while she was thrilled to hear that White Station High School was selected to participate in this program, it also makes perfect sense to her to be one of those who have the opportunity.

According to Holland, White Station High School was founded in the 1950s and is a large diverse school with 1,850 students in Memphis, Tennessee. Holland says that White Station High School and all Memphis-Shelby County Schools have been working to expand the number of AP and honors courses offered to allow more students access. Once the AP African American Studies course is expanded, Holland says, "The idea is to provide this course to as many students as are interested in the content, and willing to work hard and come in with an open mind."

While the College Board has not yet released an official list of participating high schools, school administrators in

Tennessee, Ohio, Florida, and elsewhere throughout the country, have shared that their high schools will be offering the AP course in African American Studies for this school year.

Since the AP in African American studies is a pilot program, students taking the course this year will not be able to get college credit. Instead, the class will be counted as an elective course at the high school level. Enrolled students will take a pilot AP exam in African American Studies in the spring of 2023. However, this year's AP in African American Studies exam results will not "count" for college credit or be part of a student's individual AP exam record.

All AP exams are typically three hours long and divided up into two sections—multiple choice and free response. After a previous switch to online testing in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19, the College Board recently announced this year's 2022-2023 AP exams will be administered in paper-and-pencil format.

"It feels like a step in a positive direction to move forward with the process of offering this course to high school students. I attended high school at a time and in a place where I did not have the option to learn about the significant history and contributions of Black people in the U.S. within school. This is [still] the case for so many students, but it is good to see that this is changing in some

spaces," said Dr. Christina N. Baker, associate professor of History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts at the University of California, Merced.

Black Parents Are Ignored in the Critical Race Theory Conversation—Here's How They're Taking Action

Baker says that she is eager to see this pilot program expand and be available to all high school students across the country, including—but not limited—to African American students.

"The AP course [in African American studies] would be valuable for all students. Period," she says.

When it comes to responding to potential critics of an AP course in African American studies, many academic experts say offering this course is long overdue.

"Everyone's a critic and that is not a bad thing. The solve for this is to teach truth to power and to teach people to think critically," says Dr. Lessie Branch, a Racial Policy Scholar, a Fulbright Scholar, Director Programs Community Relations at Citizens Committee for New York City and an Adjunct Instructor in the Executive Doctoral Leadership program at Saint John Fisher College.

"It is important to take an AP African American history course. African American history is American history, so all students should take such a course for the benefit of a

thriving democracy!" Branch says, the author of *Optimism at All Costs: Black Attitudes, Activism, and Advancement in Obama's America*. Branch notes the timing for this program is good since many school districts across the country have been debating curriculum issues for history, current events, and other topics. In 2022, political leaders in an estimated 36 states have introduced legislation aiming to regulate what K-12 school curriculums can cover, including restrictions on what children can learn about history, race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ topics.

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Plans are in the works for the AP class in African American studies to be expanded in the future. The College Board, a nonprofit, announced that it is anticipated the AP course would be widely available to many more high schools by 2024-2025. In a previous statement, the College Board says plans for an AP African American course have been in the works for nearly a decade.

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