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# HIGHLIGHTS

The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in United States history continues a 25-year mandate to assess and report the educational progress of America's students. National results are provided that describe students' history achievement at grades 4, 8, and 12 and for various subgroups of the general student population.

This report is a *first look* at the results of the 1994 U.S. history assessment. It presents national findings of students' overall performance and summary data for the major demographic subpopulations in the nation. Results are reported on a 500-point scale, used to show comparisons and trends over time, and according to the achievement levels, which are in a developmental stage, established by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

## What's New About This Assessment?

- ▶ The NAEP 1994 U.S. history assessment extends the goal of the 1988 assessment to foster an integrated understanding of political, social, cultural, and intellectual factors in U.S. history. The test framework, adopted by NAGB after a national consensus process, provides for an assessment of knowledge, understanding, and applications in the major content areas of history education.
- ▶ History study, according to the assessment's framework, involves the investigation of connections among diverse people and events; the analysis of change and continuity over time; and a full range of social and economic activities that influence the way people live their lives. This assessment requires students not only to demonstrate knowledge of facts, events, and people, but also to display understanding, appreciation, reasoning, and a broad view of history. About 60 percent of the assessment was devoted to performance exercises, and the remainder to multiple-choice questions (see Appendix B). A wide variety of primary documents, graphs, political cartoons, charts, photographs, pictures, maps, and time lines are used to measure the ability of students to interpret and analyze historical materials.

## How Did We Do As A Nation?

- ▶ The pattern of average scores by grade — 205 for fourth graders, 259 for eighth graders, and 286 for twelfth graders — was typical of other subjects assessed by NAEP.
- ▶ Among the different regions of the nation, student scores varied at each grade level. Among high school seniors, for example, students in the Southeast had lower average scores than did those in the Northeast and Central regions.

The results are reported according to achievement levels established by the National Assessment Governing Board. For each grade there are three performance standards: *Basic* — partial mastery; *Proficient* — solid academic performance that demonstrates competency in challenging subject matter; and *Advanced* — superior performance.

- ▶ 17 percent of fourth graders, 14 percent of eighth graders, and 11 percent of twelfth graders reached the *Proficient* level. There are several hypotheses as to why student performance in U.S. history, particularly in the twelfth grade, appeared to be lower than expected (see Chapter 3).
- ▶ 64 percent of fourth graders, 61 percent of eighth graders, and 43 percent of twelfth graders attained at least the *Basic* level.
- ▶ Across the three grades, 1 to 2 percent reached the *Advanced* level.

## How Did The Various Subgroups Of Students Differ?

Although subsequent reports will provide a context for understanding subgroup differences, several differences are noted in this report:

Based on average scores:

- ▶ U.S. history scores at all grades were higher for students whose parents had more education.
- ▶ At grade 12, males scored higher than females in U.S. history. No differences between males and females in average scores were evident at grades 4 and 8.
- ▶ At grades 4, 8, and 12, White and Asian students had significantly higher U.S. history scores than did Black and Hispanic students.
- ▶ Fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students attending nonpublic schools displayed higher U.S. history scores than did their counterparts attending public schools.

The differences in proportions of students reaching the *Proficient* level among other subgroups of students (by parents' education, gender, race/ethnicity, and type of school) were generally similar to those observed with the average scores.

