HIST 102: United States History from 1865

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(775) 784-6124
Office Hours: Wed., 12-2 or by appointment, MSS 211

Course Description

This course is an introduction to United States history from the end of the Civil War until the present. In particular, we will follow the evolution of the key American ideals of freedom and equality. These ideals, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, have been foundational to national identity and Americans’ sense of themselves, but their meanings and consequences have never been fixed and singular. Instead, we will examine their changing and indeed divergent definitions, and the struggles, debates, and conflicts that helped to produce them. Several developments especially informed these definitions after the mid-nineteenth century: the abolition of slavery, the expansion of the industrialized economy, the growing role of the US in the world, the growth of the American state, and the contested meanings of ethnicity and race in national identity.

This class is also an introduction to the ways historians approach the past. We will examine how and why historians’ interpretations of the past have changed over time. We will also explore the historical analysis that leads to these changing interpretations and so spend considerable time thinking like historians: asking questions of the past and looking through primary sources to answer those questions. By reading secondary texts and analyzing different kinds of primary texts, students will come up with our own interpretations of the past.

This course satisfies Core Objective 8 of the Silver Core Curriculum:

CO8. Constitution
Students will demonstrate familiarity with the origins, history, and essential elements of the Constitutions of the United States and Nevada, as well as the evolution of American institutions and ideals.

The ideals of freedom and equality are foundational to Americans' sense of themselves as a country and central to American nationalism. This course uses changing and conflicting conceptions of those ideals as the organizing structure to tie together otherwise disparate topics. Central to my approach is the idea that these ideals have been constant, but their meanings and deployment have changed over time in conversation with institutional, social, economic, and cultural transformations. For example, the course begins in 1865 during the nation's "new birth of freedom" with amendments to the US Constitution that abolished slavery and extended citizenship to African Americans. In this same era Nevada became a state, and its Constitution reflected the political and social shifts that occurred during the Civil War — the document specifically prohibits slavery and asserts the supremacy of federal authority over the states. From that point on the course examines shifting definitions of freedom and equality and
Constitutional issues posed by developments such as industrialization and corporatization (made possible by business-friendly interpretations of the 14th Amendment), the role of the US in the world (which expanded the power of the presidency), immigration (which raised questions about who could be a citizen), the Great Depression (which sparked ongoing debates over the role of the federal government in the economy), and the freedom struggles of African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups (which used the Constitution and the courts to assert their right to full citizenship).

This course also helps students to develop the skills described in Core Objectives 1 and 3 of the Silver Core Curriculum. These objectives are reinforced throughout the curriculum in other courses students take to fulfill core and major requirements:

**CO1. Effective Composition and Communication**
Students will be able to effectively compose written, oral, and multimedia texts for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.

**CO3. Critical Analysis and Use of Information**
Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Students successfully completing the work in this course will be able to:
1. Outline the development and transformation of the key ideals of freedom and equality and the institutions those ideas helped to shape in the US from 1865 to the present. (CO3, CO8)
2. Explain the origins, philosophical foundations, and core principles of the United States and Nevada Constitutions and how they were enacted over time. (CO3, CO8)
3. Analyze and interpret primary sources in different forms, including documents, film, popular media, photographs, and autobiography. (CO1, CO3, CO8)
4. Identify how historians have interpreted historical problems and use secondary and primary sources to provide logical, substantiated arguments in support of or in opposition to those interpretations. (CO1, CO3)
5. Clearly and effectively articulate an original interpretation or argument in verbal and written form. (CO1, CO3)

**Skills-Based Curriculum**
The history program at UNR helps students to develop proficiency in broadly applicable skills while mastering specific subject areas. In addition to learning about US history from 1865, students be able to practice and improve the following skills in this course:

- critical thinking (through reading and analyzing written documents and cultural sources, formulating arguments supported by historical evidence, and organizing information in a clear and logical manner)
- historical research (through finding information about historical topics in the primary-source essay)
- written communication (through essays and the primary-source essay and presentation)
- primary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented historical documents and cultural artifacts created during the time periods we are studying)
- secondary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented in scholarship)
- cultural text analysis (through thinking about the significance of cultural texts such as news reports, magazine articles, music, and films and placing them in historical context)
- oral expression (through small group activities, class discussions, and student presentations)

**Student Responsibilities**

**Brief Essay (15%)**  
(SLOs 1, 2, 3, 5)  
Due: Wednesday, 3/4 at the beginning of class  
3-4 page essay on the Nevada and US Constitutions. Identify a definition of freedom and/or equality from either and compare it to a definition from another topic addressed in class so far. How are the definitions similar? Distinct? How do they relate to their historical context?

**Primary Source Presentation (10%) & Essay (15%)**  
(SLOs 1, 3, 4, 5)  
Proposal due: Wednesday, 3/25  
Individual essays due: Wednesday, 4/22  
Presentations due: Wednesday, 4/22-Wednesday, 4/29  
Presentations will be done in groups of 4. Members of the group will be responsible for one primary source each, and your presentation will include both background of each document as well as a group analysis of all the documents together. The presentation and essay should address how the document/s define and use ideas of freedom and/or equality.

**Quizzes (10%)**  
(SLOs 1, 4)  
To help you keep on track and engage with the readings, we will have 4 quizzes. I will drop the lowest score.
Midterm Exam (20%): Wednesday, 3/11
Final Exam (25%): Wednesday, 12/13
(SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
Exams will assess your understanding of the readings, lectures, and other class materials. Prepare by actively listening and participating in class and by carefully completing all readings. The exams will include short-answers, brief essay questions, and primary-source analysis.

Participation (5% of your grade)
(SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
This will be a lecture and discussion course, with a regular discussion component to the class. Therefore, your preparation and active participation will be a significant part of your grade. I will evaluate this through both your individual contributions during class-time as well as your work in group activities. To aid your contributions, please complete the reading before the discussion classes and bring your copies of the primary sources with you to every discussion.

Grading Criteria

The Plus/Minus system of grading applies in this course.

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Essays Quality Guidelines

A is an exceptional grade reserved for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that have all the qualities of the B essay, and in addition are well written and display analytical skills and/or originality. The last two criteria are extremely important. A essays do not merely summarize material from the readings or lectures. In addition, ideas must be expressed clearly, no matter how insightful or interesting they are.

B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class and being analyzed, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, an argument, and a conclusion. Usually, either writing problems or a lack of analysis is what prevents a B essay from being an A.

C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material, answers the central questions posed, and is mostly accurate, but lacks the sophistication of either the B or A student. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence or details, or it might have problems with organization or writing style. Sometimes a C essay is merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It does not answer the central questions posed in the assignment. It suggests one of three things: 1) the student has barely been paying attention to the course, 2) s/he has problems understanding the material, 3) s/he has problems expressing ideas in writing. If you think you have been trying hard and receive a D grade for a writing assignment, please come and discuss it with me.
Statement on Academic Dishonesty

“Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses" constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and plagiarized assignments will receive an F. For more details, see the UNR General Catalog. In order to avoid accidentally plagiarizing another person’s ideas or writing, make sure you cite your sources. We will go over proper citation formats in class.

Statement on Disability Services

I welcome students with learning or other disabilities in this class. If you have a disability and need academic adjustments or accommodations, please speak with me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible for appropriate accommodations.

The Department of History Writing Center

The History Writing Center helps undergraduate history majors and all students taking history courses to hone their writing skills particular to the history discipline. In 30-45 minute consultations, students will address specific issues related to historical writing such as organization, argument, style, evidence, analysis, and citations.
MSS 109: M-W 9-1 pm, Th 1-3, and by appointment. Contact: Tim Smith (tpsmith@unr.edu).

And Finally…

A few remaining notes on classroom courtesy. Do not use cell phones or laptops during class for non-scholastic purposes. Do NOT pack up your bags before the end of class – the final minutes of class are often the most important, so please do not disturb your peers during this time. Last but definitely not least, remember that discussion and learning depends on mutual respect and a willingness to engage ideas different from your own. Any form of derision or harassment towards your peers will not be tolerated.

Required Books

Class Schedule
Schedule is subject to change by the instructor.

**Week 1**  W 1/21: Introduction

**Week 2**  M 1/26: Negotiating Freedom in Reconstruction & Historical Thinking
  Readings:  - Foner, chapter 5
A freedman’s letter for his former master (1865) (on Webcampus)
- Fernlund:
20-7 Ida B. Wells, Lynching at the Curve (1892)
20-8 Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Exposition Address (1895)
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 3
M 2/2: The West: Nevada State-making in the American Context
W 2/4: The Chinese Must Go! Closing the American “Open Gates”
Readings:
- Foner, p. 115-130
  Nevada Constitution (on Webcampus)
  US Constitution (on Webcampus)
  * Quiz 1
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Week 4
M 2/9: “Our Little Brown Brothers”: The American Empire
W 2/11: The Industrial City
Readings:
- Foner, p. 130-137
- Fernlund:
  21-2 Alfred Thayer Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power (1890)
  21-3 Albert J. Beveridge, The March of the Flag (1898)
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 5
M 2/16: President’s Day (no class)
W 2/18: Reforming America, Reforming the World
Readings:
- Foner, chapter 7
  * Quiz 2
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 6
M 2/23: Equal in Our Choices: The Rise of the Consumer Society
W 2/26: WWI at Home & Abroad
Readings:
- Foner, chapter 8
SLOs: 1, 4, 5

Week 7
M 3/2: Prohibition and the Culture of the 1920’s: Free to be Moral
W 3/4: The Great Depression’s Challenge to Freedom
Readings:
- Foner, chapter 9
- Fernlund
  22-2 Bryan and Darrow, Transcript of the Scopes Trial (1925)
  22-10 Lynd and Lynd, Remaking Leisure in Middletown (1929)
  * Brief Essay due
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 8
W 3/11: * Midterm
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Week 9  
3/16-3/20: Spring Break

Week 10  
M 3/23: WWII on the Homefront  
W 3/25: Free and Clear? The US after the War  
* Presentation Proposals due  
- Film: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)  
Readings: - Foner, chapter 10  
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 11  
M 3/30: Free and Clear? The US after the War  
W 4/1: Anxiety and Optimism in Cold War Freedom and Equality  
Readings: - Foner, chapter 11  
- Fernlund  
  26-3 *Green Acres* (1950)  
  26-6 Herbert Gans, *Boston’s West Enders* (1962)  
  26-7 What Does Chicago’s Renewal Program Mean? (1963)  
* Quiz 3  
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 12  
M 4/6: The Landscape of Postwar Freedom: Suburbia & the City  
W 4/8: Jim Crow America: The Freedom Struggle in the North and West  
Readings: - Foner, chapter 12  
- Fernlund  
  27-7 Malcolm X and Yusef Iman, *Black Nationalism* (1964)  
  27-8 Inés Hernández, *Para Teresa*  
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 13  
M 4/13: Defining Freedom in Asia and the US: Vietnam  
W 4/15: “Traditional America”: Conservatism Freedoms  
Readings: - Foner, chapter 13  
- Fernlund:  
  30-1 Barry Goldwater, Acceptance Speech (1964)  
  30-3 Ronald Reagan, Acceptance Speech (1980)  
* Quiz 4  
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 14  
M 4/20: Braceros to Astronauts: Freedom and Equality in Recent Migration  
W 4/22: *Primary Source Presentations*  
* Individual papers due  
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

Week 15  
M 4/27: *Primary Source Presentations, continued*  
W 4/29: *Primary Source Presentations, continued*
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

**Week 16**  M 5/4: Conclusion

**Final Meeting Week** W 12/13: *Final exam*, 12:30-2:30 pm
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5