

# American History to 1865

## COURSE GUIDE

History 211.02

Fall 2001

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Hours: Tues./Thurs 10:00-11:00  
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### Scope of this Course

This course is designed to take you from the initial discovery and settlement of North America through the Civil War. We will explore major events and changes during the first four hundred years of American history, as a scattered collection of diverse colonies transformed themselves into a precarious union of states. Along the way, we'll study the impact of ordinary citizens as well as of famous individuals on the development of American society. Though we know the results of the major events of this period, it is important to keep in mind that the people who participated in the events we will study did not know what the consequences of their choices would be. One of the great challenges of studying history is trying to understand the past from the perspective of the people who lived it, rather than imposing our own present judgment on their choices.

Doing history requires much more than simply memorizing names and dates. In fact, there are many different kinds of history, and diverse, often conflicting, perspectives about what the past means. These different ways of understanding the past make the study of history more compelling than simply filling in blanks or listing endless facts. Therefore, beyond our investigation of what happened in the past, a primary goal of this course is to introduce you to skills used in the "historian's craft." These include recognizing the difference between primary and secondary sources, using library resources effectively, analyzing a variety of types of evidence, and constructing meaningful arguments.

### Goals of this Course

By the end of the semester, you should not only be able to speak knowledgeably about major events and people in American history; you will also have mastered the basic analytical skills historians use in the practice of history. Specific course goals include the following:

I. To evaluate the processes of change in the development of American society and culture before 1865. For each of the distinct periods we will study you should be able to:

- A. Compare and contrast the experiences of different groups of North Americans based on factors such as race, class, gender, religious belief, ethnic origin, regional variation.
- B. Assess the impact of ordinary citizens as well as of famous individuals on the development of American society.
- C. Identify the major forces for historical change and critically evaluate the significant consequences of those changes for the development of American society.

II. To acquire basic skills used by historians. By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- A. Recognize the difference between facts and interpretations.
- B. Critically analyze primary documents, keeping in mind the context in which they were produced.
- C. Be able to identify thesis statements, recognize the ways that historians employ historical evidence to defend a thesis, and evaluate arguments presented by historians in scholarly secondary sources.
- D. Assess differing interpretations of the same event or issue and form your own judgment based on evidence.
- E. Present your judgment logically and clearly using specific evidence to support your position.

### **Required Text**

Hollitz, John. *Thinking Through the Past, Volume I To 1877. A Critical Thinking Approach to U.S. History*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001,

### **Evaluation**

### Attendance Policy

Faithful attendance is essential for your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **one point will be subtracted from the student's final grade for each absence after the first 3.** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

Participation:		10%
Library Exercises	30%	
Unit Tests		60%

### **Participation: 10%**

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance--This is not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the course resources and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course.
2. Thorough preparation for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. I may evaluate your preparedness from time to time through unscheduled in-class writing assignments.
3. Regular contributions to class discussions--the success of this course for your learning depends on the quality of the debate you engage in with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class. In order to create a good climate for everyone to participate, please follow these discussion guidelines:
  - Be ready to share and explain your opinions. Feel free to disagree with others, but be specific in your own assertions and back them up with evidence.
  - Listen carefully and respond to other members of the group. Be willing to change your mind when someone demonstrates an error in your logic and use of facts.
  - Do not hesitate to ask for clarification of any point or term you do not understand.
  - Make your point succinctly, avoid repetition, and stick to the subject.

I will assess unrecorded participation grades at least once during the semester so that you will be aware of your performance before the final grade is determined.

### **Library Exercises: 30%**

You will complete two library exercises that will require you to identify and evaluate primary and secondary sources. Specific instructions will be provided well in advance of due dates (8 and 15 November).

### **Unit Tests: 60%**

There will be three tests during the semester given at the end of each unit. These tests will require you to demonstrate your understanding of the major learning objectives for the unit. Tests will be short answer and essay and may have an open book component.

### **Evaluation** (continued)

The tests are scheduled as follows:

Unit 1 – 13 September  
Unit 2 – 11 October  
Unit 3 – 29 November

Please note these dates on your calendar and plan to be in class on scheduled test days. I only offer make-up exams in extreme cases and make-ups must be arranged well in advance of scheduled test days. You must have a compelling reason to arrange a make-up.

## Class Schedule

21 August      Introductions

### Unit 1: Colonial America

23-28 August      Chapter 1. The Truth About Textbooks:  
Indians and the Settlement of America

30 August      Chapter 2. The Raw Materials of History:  
Childhood in Puritan New England

4 September      A Midwife's Tale

6-11 September    Chapter 3. Evaluating Primary Sources:  
Was Pennsylvania "The Best Poor Man's Country?"

13 September    **Unit 1 test**

### Unit 2: Revolution and Early Republic

18-20 September    Chapter 4. Evaluating One Historian's Argument:  
Loyalists and the Meaning of the Revolution

25-27 September    Chapter 5. Motivation in History: Charles Beard and the Founding Fathers

2-4 October      Chapter 6. Ideas in History: Race in Jefferson's Republic

9 October      FALL BREAK

11 October      **Unit 2 Test**

16-18 October      Chapter 7. The Problem of Historical Causation:  
The Second Great Awakening

23-25 October      Chapter 8. Grand Theory and History: Democracy and the Frontier

30 Oct.-1 Nov.      Chapter 9. History as Biography: Historians and Old Hickory

6-8 November      Chapter 10. History "From the Bottom Up": Historians and Slavery

8 November	<b>Library Exercise #1 due.</b>
13-15 November	Chapter 11. The Emergence of an Ideology: Antislavery and the Bounds of Womanhood
15 November	<b>Library Exercise #2 due.</b>
20-27 November	Chapter 12. Grand Theory, Great Battles and Historical Causes: Why Secession Failed
22 November	THANKSGIVING
29 November	<b>Unit 3 Test</b>
4-6 December	No class



## **Critical Thinking Exercises: 30%**

These writing assignments are based on the core problem of each chapter in *Thinking Through the Past*. These assignments are designed to prepare you for class through active engagement with and careful thinking about course materials and concepts. The format of assignments may vary but will typically involve short answer responses to evaluate evidence presented in each chapter and may include in-class as well as out-of-class assignments. If you perform this work thoroughly and complete it on time, you will improve your learning and be an informed class participant. You should use these assignments to clarify your thinking on the significant historical issues and events we will discuss during each class period and as study guides for the unit tests. Exercises should be typed when possible or written legibly in pen. Do not use paper torn out of a spiral notebook.

### **Late exercises will suffer the following penalty:**

3 points deducted for each day after the due date.

Exercises that are more than one week late will not be accepted.