

# History 109

## Who is an American?

Department of History  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Fall 2021  
TR 9:30-10:45  
Social Science 5206

**Prof. Stephen Kantrowitz**

Student Hours:  
Th 1-3 via Zoom  
or in 5119 Humanities  
[skantrow@wisc.edu](mailto:skantrow@wisc.edu)

**Zada Ballew (TA)**

Student Hours:  
T 8:15-9:15 at Peet's (MU)  
Th 1-2 via Zoom  
[zballew@wisc.edu](mailto:zballew@wisc.edu)

**Winnie Redfearn (TA)**

Student Hours:  
M 2-4 via Zoom  
[wredfearn@wisc.edu](mailto:wredfearn@wisc.edu)

This is the course syllabus. It explains the expectations, requirements, assignments, and schedule of class and section meetings that together constitute the semester's work. **Look here first for answers to your questions about the course.** We've put a hardcopy in your hands on the first day to emphasize its importance. All the material here is available on Canvas in somewhat different formatting and with live links to class resources. However, we haven't yet figured out a way to update an existing paper copy when course terms or requirements must be adjusted, so where this syllabus and the material on Canvas diverge, follow Canvas.

### History at the College Level

This course is meant to deepen your understanding of United States history and of history as a method of inquiry. It is not an overview of U.S. history. Instead, it focuses on a variety of topics, moving partly chronologically from the Revolutionary era to the present. Each week is organized by a question, which is also the 50-word writing assignment, that you should consider as you read and as you take part in class meetings.

The course is organized around the title question: Who is an American? It asks how the answers to that question have changed over time, and whose actions and ideas have shaped those answers. It approaches these questions through two distinct but related concepts. The first is *citizenship*: the laws, institutions, and practices that determine formal membership in a nation. The second is *belonging*: the informal but powerful sense, shaped by emotion, experience, and interaction, of the degree to which one is (or feels oneself to be) recognized as a member of the national community.

Studying history is not about memorizing names and dates, but about thoughtfully weaving those specifics into verifiable stories (narratives) that illuminate broader patterns of interaction, continuity, and change (analyses). Every story should convey meaning. Every story will be incomplete. (For more on what History Department courses are designed to teach you, see "Goals of the Major" at [history.wisc.edu](http://history.wisc.edu).)

This understanding of history as narrative and analysis shapes many aspects of the course. There is no exam such as you may be familiar with from your previous courses. When you come to class or section, or when you sit down to do the reading, your undivided attention should be on the material's arguments, methods, and complexities—not whether a particular fact will be on the exam.

History can be ugly. As this course proceeds you will confront upsetting words, images, and ideas drawn from the national past. We will do our collective best to contextualize and interpret these materials without embracing or perpetuating their ugliness.

### Course Expectations

Here are some important things to know about this course. If these expectations seem unreasonable, this probably isn't the course for you.

**1) It's important to show up.** This course meets three times a week: there will be 75-minute in-person lectures on Tuesday and Thursday at 9:30, and a 50-minute discussion section on Tuesday or Wednesday, depending on your course schedule. The "week" (see Modules, above) begins with Thursday's lecture, continues with the next Tuesday's, and concludes with the Tuesday or Wednesday section meeting. So "Week 1" of the course begins with the lecture on Thursday, 9/9 and wraps up with the first section meeting (either Tuesday 9/14 or Wednesday 9/15).

It will be very difficult to make sense of the readings or do the required assignments without the context provided by lecture. We will have regular impromptu writing responses during class, which will collectively be worth 10% of your grade. Sections will be your best opportunity to try out ideas, learn from your classmates, and benefit from your TA's perspective as a historian and teacher.

The professor will upload PDFs of lecture PowerPoints at the end of each week, but we do not provide class notes. If you do have to miss a class meeting, you should make sure to obtain a classmate's notes. The professor will upload PDFs of lecture PowerPoints at the end of each week, but we do not provide lecture notes. If you do have to miss a class meeting, you should make sure to obtain and study a classmate's notes, do the reading, and study the PowerPoints. Only after doing all of these things should you turn to your TA or professor for further clarification.

**2) That said, don't show up if you're sick or think you might be.** We have a "COVID off-ramp" (See item 8, below) for students who test positive, are required to quarantine, or for any other legitimate reason cannot attend the lecture or discussion meeting. You will not lose credit. You will not be penalized. Indeed, we will be grateful to you for playing your part in keeping the class and the university working.

**3) There are no timed tests, only open-book, open-note, untimed writing assignments.** The course relies on many brief writing assignments and a few longer ones to develop your thinking and measure your progress. All of these are open book, open note exercises, just like the practice of history itself. The most common writing assignment - the "50-word assignment" - is due Tuesday morning at 9 a.m., just before lecture. Like all other assignments (except in-class responses from students not using a laptop), this should be submitted through Canvas. More information on these assignments can be found [here](#); we'll also discuss them at length in lecture and section meetings.

**4) Reading is crucial.** All of the [course readings are available in PDF](#); they can also be ordered as a printed course packet through the [L&S Copy Center](#). You will need these readings during many lectures and all discussion section meetings. You should bring them to each lecture and section meeting as downloaded PDFs on a laptop or tablet with keyboard (not a phone - see below), or you may purchase a printed course packet and bring that with you each day. You will be lost without them.

**5) You are permitted to bring a laptop or tablet, but that device is only for note-taking and other legitimate classroom purposes,** not for watching videos, shopping, social media, etc. Your WiFi or other internet connection must be turned off and must remain off during the entire period of the lecture or discussion, except when the professor or section leader explicitly tells you it is okay to turn it back on. This policy seeks to balance the legitimate access needs of many students (and the preferences of many more) with the inevitable cone of distraction around and behind a web-surfing or video-watching classmate. Violations of this policy--the use of screens for non-class purposes during class meetings--will result in a loss of laptop privileges for the rest of the semester. **We may amend or adjust these policies as the semester goes on.**

**6) You may not use a phone for any purpose during lecture and section meetings; all phones, headsets, and earbuds must be silent, out of sight, and out of reach during class time.**

**7) Accommodation.** We will make every effort to accommodate students' documented needs. Students requiring accommodation must work through the McBurney Center and alert the professor and TA well before the first time they require such accommodation, ideally during the first two weeks of the semester.

**8) COVID realities and the "COVID off-ramp."** We all want instruction to continue in person, but this will require individual and collective effort. Don't come to class if you are ill (with COVID or any other illness) or if you have good reason to believe you are contagious. As long as the mask order is in effect, everyone (except those who have previously provided the professor with documentation of their university-approved exemption) must wear a mask, properly covering both mouth and nose, throughout lectures and section meetings. Masks will be available in the lecture hall for students who need one. If a student without a documented exemption refuses to properly wear a mask after being reminded to do so, lecture will immediately be canceled for that day, and other consequences may follow. It is possible that there will be students in the course with documented exemptions. The teaching staff will be aware of this; please do not try to police one another's compliance.

Here's how we'll proceed:

- During the first week, you should find a course buddy (ideally someone in the same discussion section) with whom you will share course notes and information; that way, if you must miss class, you will know where to turn to keep up. Having a good set of notes, alongside the course PowerPoints that we'll make available, should enable you to keep up reasonably well for a short period.
- If you must quarantine or be absent from a series of course meetings for any reason, alert your TA as soon as possible.
- If you end up missing a small percentage of the course and/or course assignments (e.g., 1 or 2 50-word assignments, 1 or 2 notecards) during the first half of the course, it will be easy to make these up later in the semester. If you miss later assignments, more assignments, or the longer essays due in December, we will extend every reasonable flexibility, including allowing you to take an Incomplete in the course if necessary.

Should we be forced to switch from face-to-face to online instruction, lectures will continue to be delivered synchronously at 9:30 Tuesday and Thursday through Zoom (built into Canvas); sections will also take place synchronously via Zoom at the scheduled hours. Other elements of the course may change. **No one wants this. Please do everything you can to help keep it from happening.**

**9)** Here's how the accreditors want us to describe the workload: "This 4-credit course meets as a group for 4 hours per week (according to UW-Madison's credit hour policy, each 50-minute class counts as one hour). The course also carries the expectation that you will spend an average of at least 2 hours outside of class for every hour in the classroom. In other words, in addition to class time, plan to allot an average of at least 8 hours per week for reading, writing, preparing for discussions, and/or studying for quizzes and exams for this course."

### Course Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to teach you to

- Read, interpret, and contextualize historical sources and historical scholarship
- Write clear and effective historical arguments based in evidence and scholarship

- Understand the complexities and transformations of American citizenship since the Revolutionary era
- Evaluate contemporary arguments and debates about the history of citizenship

These outcomes can in turn help you develop the skills described in the History Department's [Goals of the History Major](#).

### **Assignments, Grading, and Academic Responsibility**

**Writing Assignments** other than in-class responses must be submitted as a Word or Word-compatible document (.doc, .docx, or .txt). They must be carefully proofread (not just spellchecked). Include a word count (excluding any title) below the text.

Everyone—including your teachers—can sometimes use an extra set of eyes on their work. All students are encouraged to make use of the History Lab, a resource center for undergraduate students studying, researching, and writing about the past. It is staffed by experienced graduate students from the Department of History. Through individual tutoring, the Lab focuses on honing students' abilities to form topics, conduct research, develop arguments and thesis statements, cite evidence, and write effectively. The Lab is equipped also to support challenges faced by English-language learners. To make an appointment for an online consultation with the History Lab, begin [here](#).

Here are the assignments:

**1. The 50-word assignment** is central to this course. You will do 10 of these over the course of the semester.

Each 50-word assignment poses a question that you must answer with reference to that week's assigned readings. These are designed to teach you how to make evidence-based arguments about historical sources and scholarship. Limiting answers to fifty words forces you to make hard choices about meaning, language, and style—the essential qualities of effective writing. During the first five weeks of the course, as you are learning how to do this, each assignment will be worth 3% of your course grade. During the second half, each will be worth 5%. You must submit these to Canvas by 11:59 pm Monday of the relevant week.

This assignment draws on the work of my former colleague Prof. Charles Cohen; [his explanation of it is available here](#).

### **2. The Past as Prologue**

Sometime between Oct. 15 and Dec. 2, submit an essay of 200-250 words that uses one or two course readings to illuminate, explain, contextualize, or challenge a current newspaper or magazine story that involves our key topics and/or concepts. Make sure to use the skills you have developed through the 50-word assignments—i.e., make a concise argument and sustain it with evidence. **Required. 10%**

### **3. Final Take-Home Assignment**

This open-book, open-note essay assignment will cover material from the entire course and will ask you to synthesize what you have learned. You may confer with classmates as you prepare to write, but once you begin writing all work must be entirely your own. The essay is due in Canvas no later than Dec. 22 at 12:05pm (the end of the scheduled exam block). Further information will be distributed after Thanksgiving. **Required. 20%**

**4. 10 in-class "notecards."** On at least 10 occasions during the semester, we will pause lecture and ask you to respond in writing to a prompt. Those students who are using laptops or tablets with keyboards may input their responses directly to Canvas; those taking notes by hand will write their answers on a 4x6 notecard, to be turned in at the end of lecture. All good-faith efforts to answer the prompt will receive full credit (1% of course grade).

#### Late Work and Missed Assignments

Things happen. You have two "free passes" to submit work a little late (48 hours) without further explanation. Unexcused late work will be graded down by 10% of its maximum possible value for each day that it is late.

#### Grades

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Discussion section attendance and participation                 | 20% |
| In-class notecard assignments                                   | 10% |
| 5 (no more than) fifty-word assignments @3% (Weeks 1-5)         | 15% |
| 5 (exactly) fifty-word assignments @5% (chosen from Weeks 6-14) | 25% |
| "Past as Prologue" (due Dec. 2)                                 | 10% |
| Final Take-Home Essay (due Dec. 22 at 12:05pm)                  | 20% |

Computation of final grades will be as follows:

|    |                |
|----|----------------|
| A  | >92.5%         |
| AB | >87.5% - 92.5% |
| B  | >82.5 - 87.5%  |
| BC | >77.5 – 82.5%  |
| C  | 70 – 77.5%     |
| D  | 60 – 69.9%     |
| F  | <60%           |

**Schedule of Lectures, Readings, and Assignments**

Our "weeks" begin with the Thursday morning lecture, continue with the Tuesday morning lecture, and conclude with section meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday.

All reading assignments should be completed ahead of the lecture for which they are assigned.

Weekly writing assignments ("50-word assignments") are due via Canvas no later than Monday night at 11:59 p.m.

**Week 1           Who were "the people"?**

9/9 Thurs       Introductions

9/14 Tues       Read: Foner, "Who is an American?"

Read: Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Naturalization Act of 1790

Assignment: By **12 pm, Friday 9/10**, take the First Week Quiz on Canvas

**NOTE: Sections begin meeting Tuesday, 9/14 and Wednesday, 9/15**

Write: In one sentence of no more than 50 words, answer the following question: As best you can tell by reading these founding documents, whom did the Constitution's authors consider to be "the people"? Base your argument *entirely* on evidence from the texts. Due to Canvas no later than 9 a.m., Tuesday 9/14. **Required. 3%**

**Week 2           Native Americans and "America," pt. 1**

9/16 Thurs     **no lecture – Yom Kippur**

9/21 Tues       Read: Singer, "Indian States of America"; Treaty with the Winnebago (1832)

Write: Rewrite of Week 1 assignment. **Required. 3%**

**Week 3           Native Americans and "America," pt. 2**

9/23 Thurs     Read: "Speech of John W. Quinney" (1854); Turner, "Significance of the Frontier" (1893)

9/28 Tues       Read: Deloria, "American Master Narratives"

Write: How have Native Americans fit within the category "American"? In one sentence of no more than 50 words, answer this question with respect to one or more of the assigned readings. **Required. 3%**

**Week 4           How did slavery shape African Americans' relationship to the United States?**

9/30 Thurs     Read: Nikole Hannah-Jones, "America Wasn't a Democracy, until Black Americans Made It One" (2019)

10/5 Tues       Read: Douglass, "Oration (What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?)" (1852)

Read: Stephens, "Corner Stone Speech" (1861)

Write: How has slavery and/or resistance to slavery shaped African Americans' relationship to the United States? Answer this question in a sentence of no more than 50 words, basing your answer on the week's assigned readings. **Required. 3%**

**Week 5           The Invention of Civil Rights and National Citizenship**

10/7 Thurs     Read: Civil Rights Act (1866); Fourteenth Amendment (1866)

10/12 Tues      Read: Elliott, Speech on the Civil Rights Bill (1874)

Write: Why did Robert Elliott believe a new Civil Rights Act was required in 1874? Answer this question in a sentence of no more than 50 words. **Required. 3%**

Beginning with Week 6, you may choose which of the five remaining weekly 50-word assignments to do.

**Week 6**            **Were married women citizens?**

10/14 Thurs      Read: "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848)

10/19 Tues        Read: Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship"

Write: Were married women citizens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States? **5%**

**Week 7**            **What happens in a "melting pot"?**

10/21 Thurs      Read: Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-12; Haney López, *White by Law*, xiii-34

10/26 Tues        Read: Zangwill, "The Melting Pot" (1908)

Write: What is the relationship of the "melting pot" to whiteness? **5%**

**Week 8**            **What is "Double Consciousness"?**

10/28 Thurs      Read: Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," (1903)

11/2 Tues         Read: Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism" (1926); Du Bois, "The Shape of Fear" (1926)

Write: What is "double consciousness"? **5%**

**Week 9**            **What is an "Alien Citizen"?**

11/4 Thurs        NO LECTURE

11/9 Tues         Read: Ngai, "Birthright Citizenship and the Alien Citizen"; Volpp, "Citizenship Undone"

Write: What is an "alien citizen"? **5%**

**Week 10**          **What is "Un-American"?**

11/11 Thurs      Read: Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, chapter 5

11/16 Tues        Read: Canaday, "Building a Straight State"

[Watch: "Red Nightmare" \(1962\)](#)

Write: How is being accused of being "un-American" like and/or unlike being an "alien citizen"? **5%**

**Week 11**          **The Reinvention of Civil Rights and National Belonging**

11/18 Thurs      Read: Baldwin, "A Stranger in the Village"

[Watch: James Baldwin debates William Buckley \(1965\)](#)

11/23 Tues        Read: "Why the South Must Prevail" (1957); King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)

**SCHEDULE NOTE: Sections will not meet Tues. 11/23 and Weds 11/24; meetings on 11/30 and 12/1 will cover this material.**

Write: How do these materials (readings and video debate) reflect divergent understandings of "who is an American"? **5%.**

**Week 12**          **What does a border do?**

11/25 Thurs      NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break

11/30 Tues        Read: Hester, "Deportability and the Carceral State"

Listen: ["They got hurt at work. Then they got deported," NPR, 8/16/17](#)

**Week 13      What is white supremacy?**

12/2

Read: TBA

12/7

Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Write: How do previous readings for this course challenge, modify, or amplify Coates's concept of "plunder"? **5%**.

**Week 14      Who is a Badger? Who is an American?**

12/9

Klan report

12/14

Last class day

Write: Who is an American? **5%**