

History 154

Who is an American?

Department of History
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall 2024
Lectures: Tues. & Thurs., 11:00-12:15
2650 Mosse Humanities

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This is the course syllabus. It lays out our expectations, requirements, assignments, and schedule for the semester. We've put a hardcopy in your hands on the first day to emphasize its importance, but it is also available to download or print on the course Canvas page, <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/427779>. The online version contains live links and will be updated periodically; therefore, where the paper and online versions diverge, follow Canvas. **Carefully consult the syllabus for answers to your questions. Look here before writing to the teaching staff.**

Introduction

The course is organized around the title question: Who is an American? It explores how answers to that question have changed over time, focusing on people whose actions and ideas shaped those answers. It is not a traditional survey of U.S. history. Instead, it focuses on a variety of topics related to our central theme, moving roughly chronologically from the Revolutionary era to the present. Each week is organized by a question (see "Schedule of Readings, Lectures, and Assignments," below) that you should consider as you read and take part in class meetings.

As an organizing theme, the question "Who is an American?" invites many kinds of historical investigations. This course focuses on a few while touching on others. Among our central themes will be:

- How have laws, ideas, and social movements shaped how people have answered the question, "Who is an American?"
- When has "American" meant a legal category (for example, "citizen"), and when has it meant something else?

A note on content: Words, images, and ideas drawn from the national past may surprise, shock, or upset you. A history course that ignores or suppresses ugly or uncomfortable aspects of the past is an exercise in propaganda. We will do our collective best to contextualize and interpret these materials without embracing or perpetuating their ugliness.

Course Learning Outcomes

This course is meant to deepen your understanding both of the United States and of history as a method of inquiry. Studying history is not about memorizing names and dates, but about thoughtfully weaving those specifics into verifiable stories (narratives) that reveal or illuminate broader patterns of interaction, continuity, and change (analyses). Every story should convey meaning. Every story will be incomplete.

This course is designed to help fulfill elements of the History Department's [Goals of the History Major](#):

- 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 from the Revolutionary era to the present
- Evaluate contemporary arguments and debates about the history of citizenship

This course fulfills the university's [Ethnic Studies Requirement](#) by:

- Investigating how the past has affected present-day circumstances regarding race and racial inequities in the U.S.
- Exploring how cultural assumptions and knowledge claims about race, ethnicity, and other markers of difference have been contested and have changed across U.S. history
- Cultivating historical awareness and empathy toward unfamiliar perspectives and worldviews
- Modeling how to act as a community of equals in a multicultural civic nation

Course Expectations

ATTENDANCE: You have three class meetings each week: two 75-minute in-person lectures on Tuesday and Thursday at 11:00, and a 50-minute discussion section on Thursday or Friday (see your enrollment package for date/time) that wraps up the week's work. Lectures provide the empirical and interpretive spine of the course and are where the in-class writing exercises (40% of your course grade) take place. The weekly discussion sections (including participation in discussion and writing) are your best opportunity to dig more deeply into the material and get personal feedback from an instructor. (Section participation and adherence to course requirements and expectations comprise a further 25% of your grade).

We will upload the PowerPoints from lecture at the end of each week, but we do not provide class notes. If you must miss a class meeting, make sure to obtain a classmate's notes.

Please don't ask the teaching staff to clarify what happened in a lecture that you missed until *after* you have gone over the relevant PowerPoints and closely read a classmate's notes.

A note on missed in-class assignments: Stuff happens, including missing lectures during which we have in-class exercises. That's why we will drop the lowest two scores on your in-class assignments in calculating that part of your grade.

ILLNESS AND UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE: First and foremost, **don't show up if your health doesn't permit it, and especially if you have reason to think you are contagious.** 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 functioning. When you must be absent for medical reasons, send an email to Prof. Kantrowitz **and** your TA explaining that you are ill. We will help you keep up. Your key responsibility, beyond informing us, is to have access to a classmate's notes from lecture.

If you must be absent for another pressing reason (for example, a family emergency), the same principle applies: we will do our best to help you keep up, but you must keep us informed and do your best to keep up (especially by having access to a classmate's lecture notes).

READINGS: Your **primary responsibility in this course, beyond attendance, is to do the relevant readings before lecture and have them with you in lecture and in that week's section.** This course can't work, and you won't be able to get full credit for many assignments, unless you have done the readings ahead of the relevant lectures *and* brought those readings with you to class. Bring them to lecture and section meeting either 1) downloaded to your laptop or tablet with keyboard (not a phone - see below) or 2) as printouts. All course readings are available in PDF in Canvas.

To help focus your reading and prepare you for in-class writing and discussion, we have prepared a **Reading Guide** for each week. It will be posted to Canvas the Thursday before the relevant course week under "Announcements."

ELECTRONICS: You are encouraged to bring a laptop or tablet, but that device is only for notetaking, in-class writing, and other legitimate classroom purposes. We will normally begin lecture by asking

everyone to turn off their internet connection; you may only turn that back on when it's time to do an in-class writing assignment based on a prompt that I will announce shortly before you begin (approximately once a week), and while that connection is live you may only use it for this single purpose.

Non-class screen activities create a cone of distraction around and behind you, impacting many students besides yourself. Repeated violations of the WiFi policy will significantly impact your course-participation grade. If you choose not to use a tablet or laptop, you may complete and submit in-class assignments on paper. Make sure to include your name and section day/time, and turn these in to your TA at the end of the lecture.

Apart from documented medical needs (for example, for blood-sugar monitoring), you may not use a phone for any purpose during lecture or section meetings. All phones, headsets, and earbuds must be on silent, out of sight, and out of reach during class time.

ACCOMMODATION: We will make every effort to accommodate students' documented needs. Students requiring accommodation must work through the McBurney Center. After reading the syllabus and determining what accommodations may be relevant, contact the professor during the first two weeks of the semester. **Please note that 1) in-class writing activities are on a pass/fail basis, and 2) there are no timed exams.**

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY: All work that you turn in should be your own, and you may not appropriate another person's work. (This is called plagiarism, and it is a form of academic misconduct that can lead to serious penalties.) You may not use online resources (including but not limited to ChatGPT or similar products) for any assignment, including in-class writing, unless explicitly instructed otherwise. We will pursue all cases of possible academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, through the Office of the Dean of Students.

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. Because this course is at the 100 level, it does not meet the requirements for graduate study.

Assignments and Grading

1. About 12 short writing assignments, one or more per week. Most of this writing will take place during lecture and will assume that you have done the reading assigned for that class meeting (and that you have done so after considering the background and questions in the relevant Reading Guide). These are open-book, open-note exercises that ask you to distill a text's argument, use it to provide evidence for a thesis, or do some other work that is central to the discipline of history. You may compose these on paper or (using a laptop or tablet with keyboard) in Canvas. You will almost certainly want to refer to the relevant reading (on paper or downloaded PDF) while writing. You may not use any online resources. These are each worth 4% of your final grade. We will drop your lowest two grades from the final calculations. **40% of final grade.**

2. Midterm assignment, submitted to Canvas no later than THURSDAY, 10/24, by 12:15 PM. This short essay will ask you to use at least three weeks of course readings (from Weeks 1-6) to answer a broad question about our course topic. **10% of final grade.**

3. Final Essay, submitted to Canvas no later than MONDAY, 12/16, by 4:45 PM. 25% of final grade.

4. Discussion section and adherence to course requirements. 25% of final grade.

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

Introductions

9/5 Thurs What are we doing here?

NOTE: Discussion Sections will meet on Thursday, 9/5 and Friday, 9/6

Week 1 Who are “We, the People”?

9/10 Tues Read: Declaration of Independence (1776), U.S. Constitution (1787)

9/12 Thurs Read: Foner, "Who is an American?"

Week 2 Where do Native Americans belong in “American History”?

9/17 Tues Read: Treaty with the Winnebago (1832); Singer, “Indian States of America”

9/19 Thurs Read: Turner, “Significance of the Frontier” (1893)

Week 3 How did slavery and resistance shape African Americans’ relationship to the U.S.?

9/24 Tues Read: Douglass, “Oration (What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?)” (1852)

9/26 Thurs Read: Stephens, “Corner-Stone Speech” (1861)

Week 4 Where did the idea of equal, national citizenship come from?

10/1 Tues Read: Civil Rights Act (1866); Fourteenth Amendment (1866, 1868)

10/3 Thurs Read: Elliott, Speech on the Civil Rights Bill (1874)

Week 5 How did women become equal citizens?

10/8 Tues Read: “Declaration of Sentiments” (1848)

10/10 Thurs Read: Kerber, “Women, Civic Obligation, and Military Service”

Week 6 What happens in a “melting pot”?

10/15 Tues Read: Wolff, *How to Become an American*, 1-41

10/17 Thurs Read: Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-12

Week 7 What doesn’t melt in a melting pot?

10/22 Tues Read: Grant, “The Passing of the Great Race” (1916)

10/24 Thurs **MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT DUE:** detailed assignment available in early October.

Week 8 What doesn’t melt in a melting pot? (continued)

10/29 Tues Read: Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” (1903)

10/31 Thurs Read: Evans, “The Klan’s Fight for Americanism” (1926)

Week 9 When is citizen not a citizen?

11/5 Tues Read: Ramírez, “Gendered Banishment”

11/7 Thurs Read: Ngai, “Birthright Citizenship and the Alien Citizen”

Week 10 Who decides what is “Un-American”?

11/12 Tues Read: Ngai, “The World War II Internment of Japanese Americans”

11/14 Thurs Watch: *Red Nightmare* (1962)

Week 11 Who defines the borders of belonging?

11/19 Tues Read: Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” (1953)

11/21 Thurs Read: King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)

[No lecture or section meetings, 11/26-29]

Week 12 What does it mean to belong?

12/3 Read: Report to the Chancellor on the Ku Klux Klan at the University of Wisconsin (2018)

12/5 Read: Kerber, “Toward a History of Statelessness in America”

Conclusions

12/10 Final lecture

FINAL ESSAY DUE MONDAY, 12/16, BY 4:45 PM (in Canvas). We will share details about this assignment in November.