

History 2311
“Out of Many”: American History to 1865

J-Term, Spring, 2013

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This intense course will deal with three main problems in so-called “Early American” history, from first trans-Atlantic contact until the near break-up of the United States during the era of the Civil War. The course will be “problem” rather than “fact” oriented. Problem-oriented has two different meanings. The first and most important is the problems that our historical actors faced in their own lives and situations. The second is the problems that we face, now, in understanding them, then.

As much as possible, I want to use what they produced, the words they wrote or spoke, the images they created, the actions they took. We will have a textbook for background and continuity, but classes will be based on primary sources. We will use these sources to deal with three big issues. The first is the meeting of complete strangers in 1492, leading to a “colonial” world that was new for the Native people, the Europeans, and the Africans involved. The second is how one group in that colonial world, the east-coast English speaking colonists, broke with their British identity and with British power, created the United States, and took control of their world as “Americans.” The third is how those Americans tore themselves and their republic apart over and around the issue of slavery.

We will encounter many sorts of people, and one of our problems will be what to call them. Were the Native people “skraelings,” as the Vikings named them, or “Indians,” as Columbus named them half a millennium later? Or would we know them better by the names that they used for themselves, which sometimes are lost but sometimes are known? What happened to and among these people, as well as to and among the European invaders and their African captives as people who shared only “being human” met one another, started to learn about one another, and found that they had to deal with one another?

We will have a different set of questions about the era of the American Revolution. These questions will center on the Revolutionary Era’s two great documents, the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. The Declaration destroyed a strong bond that had taken eleven years to fray to the breaking point. It ended a whole way of understanding and organizing the world, around the concepts of kingship and subjection. It posed new problems, including survival in a dangerous and often hostile world, creating a society without kingship or aristocracy, and beginning to deal with the novel idea that all men are indeed “created equal.” The second if the era’s great documents, written in the name of “We the People,” created a republic around the concept of citizenship. In doing so, it created power where there had been none, and posed a fundamental problem with which Americans still wrestle: was that power there to be used for what the Constitution called “the general welfare” and the “blessings of

liberty?” Or was it there to be feared? It posed another basic problem too, and again we still wrestle with it. What did it mean to be among “we the people?” What did it mean to belong to this new order of the ages? These two documents amount now to American sacred scripture. I want to look at them as answers to desperate problems that people faced with intelligence and bravery.

What “the People” created proved a huge success. But it also contained the seeds of its own catastrophic failure. By the early nineteenth century “the People” were solving problem after problem, in a huge burst of creativity. But two issues dogged them. One, somewhat abstract, was what it meant to “belong” to America, now that belonging to Britain was dead. The other, increasingly pressing, was slavery in the land of the free. The third part of the course will explore both the great successes of the young republic and its great historic failure, leading to its near-destruction in the Civil War.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: The University requires a formal statement of course objectives, so here it is:

1. Students will acquire chronological and factual familiarity with the first great period of American history, from initial transatlantic contact to the eve of the American revolution. They will consider the concept of “discovery” by comparison of the Norse and Columbus-era encounters, the mutual adjustments of Native and European people, the coming of Africans and the beginnings of African-American life, and the development of cultures in North America that were uniquely American, out of the three-way Native/European/African collision.
2. Students will acquire critical skill in understanding historical sources, including documents, artifacts, and visual evidence.
3. Students will acquire the ability to integrate historical narrative and historical interpretation. They will demonstrate that ability through in-class discussion, a mid-term exam taken over the mid-course weekend and using the class material, and a final exam, taken on the last afternoon, after a morning review session. Students also will keep a daily journal based on their class readings. Each of these elements will count 25% of the course grade.

Because of the extremely intense nature of the course, with relatively little time for reading, I will have to teach in a different way from a normal semester. I will make heavy use of Blackboard, for readings and for course documents. That will save you a great deal of money. I will ask you to buy relatively few books. Here they are:

Jacqueline Jones *et al.*, *Created Equal*, Volume 1, Brief edition, (Longman). This is our textbook, the best, to my mind, on the market.

Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, ed. Neal Salisbury (Bedford St. Martins). A woman’s account of her captivity during King Philip’s War in New England (1675-1676).

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* ed. Edward Larkin (Broadview). Contains the important documents of the Independence crisis.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Bedford St. Martins) ed. David Blight. One of the most important books of African-American liberation.

All of our other readings will be on Blackboard.

Here is our schedule:

January 7

Morning: Encounter and Discovery, 1000-1600. Pre-class assignment, Jones, Chapter 1. In-class discussion: Saga of Eric the Red, Worlds About to Collide and What Columbus Saw Powerpoints, Christopher Columbus documents on Blackboard.

Afternoon: European Beachheads, 1600-1650. Pre-Class assignment, Jones, Chapter 2. In-class discussion: *Requerimiento*, “Earliest Virginia” Powerpoint, and John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charitie* on Blackboard.

January 8

Morning: Crossing Boundaries, Creating Colonies. Pre-class assignment: Rowlandson’s narrative. In-class discussion: “Colonized Continent” and “Native Space” Powerpoints, Spanish *Requerimiento* and Jonathan Edwards, “sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” (1741) on Blackboard.

Afternoon: Africans in America. Pre-class assignment: Jones, Chapter 4. In class discussion: “Africans in Early America” Powerpoint, and Countryman, “Enjoy the Same Liberty” Chapter One, on Blackboard.

January 9

Morning: What Went Wrong With Britain. Pre-class assignment: Jones, Chapter 6. In-class discussion: “Revolutionary People,” Joseph Brant’s World,” “George Washington’s World” and “Revolutionary American Space” Powerpoints on Blackboard.

Afternoon: Breaking Apart. In-class discussion: Larkin, pp. 43-98 and 217-222. PowerPoints as for the Morning

January 10

Morning: Building a New Republic. Pre-class assignment: Jones, Chapter 7 and 8.

Afternoon: What did the Founding Fathers Intend? In-class discussion: James Madison, “Vices of the Political System,” The United States Constitution (without amendments), and James

Madison, “The Federalist, Number 10” and Countryman, “Enjoy the Same Liberty,” Chapters Two and Three, on Blackboard.

I will hand out the first test at the end of class on January 6. It will be due by noon as an e-mail attachment on January 7.

January 11

Morning: An Encounter with “Firstness.” Pre-class Assignment: Jones, Chapter 9. In-class discussion: Washington’s World and Encounter with Firstness PowerPoints on Blackboard.

Afternoon. The New American Empire. Pre-class Assignment, Jones, Chapter 10. In-class discussion: Louisiana Purchase Documents and Republic and Empire PowerPoint on Blackboard.

January 14

Morning: The New Industrial America. Pre-class Assignment: Jones, Chapter 11. In class: Alexander Hamilton, Report on Manufactures (skim); John Quincy Adams, First Annual Address; Andres Jackson, Bank Veto Message on Blackboard

Afternoon: Tying a Shaky country Together. Pre-class Assignment: Jones, Chapter 11. In class discussion: “American Space, American Light” and “Republics and Empires” PowerPoints on Blackboard

January 15

Morning: The Beginnings of the Slavery Crisis. Pre-class Assignment: Jones, Chapter 12; Countryman, “Enjoy the Same Liberty.” Chapter 4 and Epilogue on Blackboard; In-class discussion: Anti-Slavery and Abolition PowerPoint, Anti-Slavery Timeline, William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*, and Sarah Grimke, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, On Blackboard.

Afternoon: Slavery from Both Perspectives. In class discussion: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Live of Frederick Douglass*; James Henry Hammond, “The Mudsill Speech” and “Cotton is King” on Blackboard.

January 16

Morning: Slavery Explodes the Political System. Pre-class assignment: Jones, Chapter 13. In class discussion: Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?;” Roger B. Taney, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*;;” and Abraham Lincoln, Cooper Union Speech (1859), on Blackboard.

Afternoon: The Death of American Slavery. P:re-class assignment: Jones, Chapters 14 and 15. In-class discussion: South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas Secession Documents,

Alexander Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech,” Abraham Lincoln, First and Second Inaugural Addresses and Emancipation Proclamation, and 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments on Blackboard.

End of Class: Distribution of Take Home Final Exams. Due by noon as e-mail attachments, January 17.

Learning Outcomes:

A: Required for University Curriculum Historical Pillars, Level 1

- Students be able to identify the main events, actors, and evidence involved in a defined Historical Period
- Students will be able to describe in their own prose the major changes that took place over time in a defined historical period.

B: Specific to This Course

- Students will explore the beginnings of a world that became “new” for all involved after the Columbian encounter, the creation of the United States out of the wreckage of British identity and belonging, and the development until its great crisis of 1861-65. They will come to appreciate that American history is just as “layered” as, say, the history of an English countryside where a Roman road, a medieval castle, the industrial revolution, and modernity all have made their imprints upon the landscape. They will see that American history is as complex and, in many ways, tragic, as the history of any people on the earth.
- Students will gain an appreciation of the high creativity that went into the founding and the continuation of the American Republic. They will encounter such notable figures as Columbus, Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lincoln on those figures’ own terms.
- Students will see the perspectives of many different sorts of people in American history, including women and men, Natives, Africans, and Europeans, northerners and southerners, country and city folk, easterners and westerners. Different perspectives count. So, ultimately, does shared American identity, which has developed out of encounter and conflict.
- Students will encounter these people in the people’s own ways, through study of the records and fragments that they left behind. They will learn to make their own sense of historical evidence, as opposed to relying on textbook information and a textbook writer’s opinions.
- By the end of the course students will be able to understand historical problems, to form reasoned historical opinions based on evidence, and to articulate those opinions

Course Requirements:

IV. Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and participation policy:

Class attendance is compulsory. Failure to attend on a regular basis will result in an administrative drop or a decrease in the final grade. All students are expected to carry out the assignments for each class and to participate in all discussions. Continuing failure to do so will result in an administrative drop. Absence from a class is not an excuse for not being familiar with the material from that class if it is relevant to your answers on the mid-term and final exam.

2. Writing, Tests, and Grading:

Students will write one out-of-class essay of seven to eight pages, on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. This paper will be due on Wednesday, January 11. Students will have a take-home mid-term test at the end of the first week and a take-home final examination at the end of the second week. Both the mid-term and the final exam will be open-book with the expectation that students will make active use of their course material. Students are responsible for studying and mastering all assigned material. Students will also be required to participate in all discussions posted on Blackboard as well as in all class discussions. The final grading policy will take account of significant improvement over the semester, if students demonstrate such improvement, but normally will be based on twenty percent for the mid-term, twenty percent for class participation, and thirty percent each for the independent essay and the final examination. The expectation is that good class participation can raise but not lower a marginal final grade.

3. Required notices:

First, if you have special needs in terms of exam time, please notify the Professor and supply documentation. I will accommodate you. The same applies to religious holidays. Second, I call your attention to the University's policy on plagiarism, as stated in the Student Handbook. If you have not yet read it, please go to this URL:

http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_05_HC.asp. I will enforce the code in cases of suspected cheating. If you are in trouble, tell us and I will work with you. But do not try to pass off as your own the work of anybody else.

A final note: I see "doing History" as a conversation. You're involved. So are the people we are trying to know, in all of their complexity. So are the historians who have tried to recover those people's lives. Sometimes we will talk at you in class, but mostly, we hope, we will talk with you. All three of us are really happy to keep the conversation going outside class, in person, by phone, or by e-mail. Please join in.

We want this course to challenge and interest you. Most of all, I hope you will find it fun. We have a wonderful subject and an amazing cast of characters. Let's get to know them.

