143-11 United States History I

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I. Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide a broad survey of American history from its colonial beginning until the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865. In particular we will focus on the development of democracy and the American political tradition in the early American republic, the development of capitalism and the emergence of the self-made man, and the political and economic issues that helped to create the conditions that led to civil war in 1861.

This course is also designed to promote habits of critical thinking, reading, speaking, and writing. The method for promoting these habits is the reading of historical documents and historical arguments, followed by thinking, speaking, and writing about the issues they raise. Since the assigned texts are central to the course it is particularly important that students keep up with the reading. **It will be difficult to do well in this course without careful and timely reading.**

The course also serves to acquaint students with “history” as a field of inquiry. History is centrally concerned with **change over time.** Historians describe and, as fully as possible, explain how things change over time. A major concern of historians, therefore, is cause and effect. Historians prefer multicausational, rather than monocausational explanations because we believe things are generally more complex than they might superficially appear. (A major benefit of historical study is a greater appreciation of complexity and ambiguity.) This particular historian prefers historical descriptions and explanations that emphasize active agents rather than impersonal historical forces because I believe men and women play a significant role in making their own history.

Historical inquiry is dependent upon good questions about change over time and logical arguments about cause and effect. History is something very different than “the past” (a chaotic jumble of everything that has ever happened). History is an interpretation of selected aspects of the past. To guide our way through the maze of details and events in the past, we need good questions that clarify what it is we want to know and that, therefore, help us select what is important to our inquiry. These questions inevitably are shaped by our own concerns and values, fears and ambitions. To answer our questions (questions that generally do not have single, simple or obvious answers), we construct arguments that marshal as much evidence and logic as possible to develop convincing explanations of change over time. Everything in this
course, from lectures and readings to tests and papers, will involve questions and arguments concerning change over time.

Historical arguments, like the questions they address, are infused with moral and political judgments, values and implications. History is, therefore, closely linked to the capacity of humans to act as moral and political agents. Historians attempt to clarify where we have been, suggest where we are going, alert us to choices we have made in the past, and inform the choices we will make in the future. In this sense every thinking person is something of an historian. We may think about the future but we cannot know anything for certain about it. We can only know about the past and more fully we understand the past better are chances of seizing the opportunities the future may hold. This is what history helps us do. Thus history is not something dead and gone, something merely in the past; history is with us as both a resource and a burden.

This is why history is at the heart of a liberal arts education. As the great observer of American democracy Alexis de Tocqueville said, a liberal arts education is an apprenticeship in liberty; it helps us to learn how to be free. We are not born free but we become free in the course of making collective decisions about our future and acting on those decisions. This is what it means to be a citizen. In a democracy, a liberal arts education must play a major role in creating citizens. This is why Thomas Jefferson ranked his role in the founding of the University of Virginia among his three greatest accomplishments. As Jefferson’s generation understood, the overriding challenge and burden of our great experiment in democracy would be to make citizens of us all. So this course encourages you to look seriously at our history and to consider carefully a series of arguments about it and ultimately to take responsibility for making your own informed judgments about that history.

II. Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this course will be the result of the following:

A. Class attendance and participation; attendance is required and repeated absences will lower your grade; participation is also required, which includes keeping up with the reading, as well as asking and answering questions in class.

B. short homework assignments.

C. 2 Midterm Examinations. These examinations will be take-home exams and will be essay in nature.

D. Booknote (Instructions are attached)

E. Final Examination. (This examination will be take-home and will be essay in nature.)

**Late assignments will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor.
**Your grade will be based on the number of points you have accumulated and divided by the total number of points possible.

The grading scale for the class is as follows:

A+ 98-100%  
A  95-97%  
A- 93-94%  
B+ 90-92%  
B  87-89%  
B- 85-86%  
C+ 82-84%  
C  78-81%  
C- 76-77%  
D+ 74-75%  
D  72-73%  
D- 70-71%  

Please note the following policy from the Xavier University Catalog which is taken very seriously by the History Department and this instructor:

“The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.”

“All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.”

Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an “F” in the course, and expulsion from the University.”

**III. Texts**

2. Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*  
3. Countryman, *The American Revolution*  
4. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*

**IV. Course Outline and Reading Assignments**

As a survey of U.S. history, this course covers a great deal of ground. As a means of providing a focus for the course, I will use the first several classes to examine how America’s colonial development and the events of the American Revolution help to create the foundations of the American political tradition and its economic system. Edward Countryman’s
The American Revolution, will focus our attention on the events that caused the American colonists to revolt in 1774 against British rule and on the creation of a new system of government in the newly created nation.

Through Richard Hofstadter’s The American Political Tradition, a classic work about the men who built the American political tradition from its earliest period until the New Deal of the 1930s, we will examine the relationship between power and ideas in our national experience. This book will form the basis of many of our classroom discussions relating to the character of American democracy and its relationship to the economic system known as capitalism.

A significant re-evaluation of the causes of the Civil War, Eric Foner’s study looks beyond the North’s opposition to slavery and its emphasis upon preserving the Union to determine the broader grounds of its willingness to undertake a war against the South in 1861. Its search is for those social concepts the North accepted as vital to its way of life, and it finds these most clearly expressed in the ideology of the growing Republican Party in the decade before the war’s start. By a careful analysis of the attitudes of leading factions in the party’s formation—northern Whigs, former Democrats, and political abolitionists—Foner is able to show what each contributed to Republican ideology and also how northern ideas of human rights— in particular a man’s right to work where and how he wanted— and of the goals of American society were implicit in that ideology.

America: A Narrative History, written by George Brown Tindall and David Shi is our basic text and is a fine introduction to American history.

In examining these works, I plan to be contentious about the material and the issues raised. My purpose is to provoke you to think about these things yourself. You need to understand the arguments made in the works that are assigned, but you do not need to accept them. You need to be able to make your own arguments. Learning history is not simply a matter of repeating what I or any other historian says, but a matter of thinking for yourself, developing your own arguments and conclusions, and developing the ability to present those arguments and conclusions clearly and persuasively, backed by evidence and examples.

The rest of the course is designed to help you make up your own mind about these questions with reference to a series of issues, problems and events in U.S. history. At the end of the semester I hope not so much that you have arrived at final answers to the questions raised—least of all my answers— but that you will understand more about the key issues they raise and be able to discuss them at a higher level than when the course began. I hope also to interest you enough in your own history that this will not be the last time you think, read, speak, and write about it.
Instructions For Writing a Booknote

A booknote will be completed on three type-written pages. It will be single-spaced. The note will begin with a full bibliographical citation similar to the following example:


THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF THE BOOKNOTE IS TO PROVIDE A USEFUL REFERENCE FOR YOUR FUTURE USE SO THAT YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL HAVE A DOCUMENT WHICH WILL RECALL FOR YOU WITH SOME VIVIDNESS WHAT THE BOOK WAS ABOUT.

The body of the booknote should include the following information:

1. The main subject of the book and the limits which the author places on his/her materials: Biography, economic and social history, institutional history.

2. The special nature of the book: A collection of essays, one of several volumes, a novel or any other unique characteristics.

3. A synopsis of the contents which will be a synthesis of the subject material rather than an outline of the book or a summary of the table of contents.

4. An analysis of the work which will include statements on the thesis, opinion or bias (or all three) of the author. For example: Does the author support a particular political point of view? Is he/she friendly or hostile to his subject? Does he take a stand which challenges the position of others who have written on the subject? Does he/she fulfill the promises he/she makes at the start of the book? Did he/she make good use of source materials? Did he/she miss any important sources? A brief biographical sketch of the author is also important. What is the background or qualification of the author to write this book? What other works has this author completed? Is he/she a journalist or an academic?

5. Importance of the book, if any. Is the book valuable or trivial to the serious student of history? Did it have any special impact when it was published? Does it continue to have value today? Is the book to be recommended over other works on the same subject?

The body of the booknote should have the distinct flavor of a book review rather than a book report. You must tailor the booknote to the book you are writing about. If there is something about the book which is not anticipated in the guidelines above, be certain to include such information. If a part of these guidelines is not relevant to the book you read, ignore it.

Your booknote should convince your instructor that you are well acquainted with the book. Again, it should be written so that its ultimate value is as a document in your own bibliographic files.
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Tentative Schedule of Class Assignments

(W) August 27
Introduction (attendance and explanation of syllabus)
Topic: Exploration and Settlement of the New World
Assignments: Tindall & Shi *America: A Narrative History*, ch. 2 (pgs. 32-65); Countryman, *The American Revolution*, ch. 1 (pgs. 3-33)

(F) August 29
Topic: English Settlement: Conflict, Contest and Violence
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, chs. 3 (pgs. 68-99)

(W) September 3
Topic: English Settlement: Conflict, Contest and Violence
Assignments: Countryman, ch. 2 (pgs. 34-66)

(F) September 5
Topic: The Colonies as a Part of the British Empire
Assignments: Countryman, ch. 3 (pgs. 74-104); Worksheet, “The Path to Revolution” (due on 9/10)

(W) September 10
Topic: The Colonies as a Part of the British Empire
Assignments: Countryman, ch. 4 (pgs. 105-137); Tindall & Shi, ch. 4 (pgs. 102-139)

(F) September 12
Topic: Causes of the American Revolution
Assignments: Countryman, ch. 5 (pgs. 132-166);

(W) September 17
Topic: Causes of the American Revolution
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 5 (pgs. 148-177)

(F) September 19
Topic: The American Revolution and Independence
Assignments: Countryman, chs. 6-7 (pgs. 167-236); Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, ch. 1 (pgs. 5-21) (will form the basis for discussions on 9/24.)

(W) September 24
Topic: A New Nation and the Birth of American Politics
Assignment: Worksheet: “The Federalist Papers” (due 9/26)

(F) September 26
**Distribute First Midterm Examination (due on 10/3)**
Topic: Interpreting the Articles of Confederation/The New Constitution
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 6 (pgs. 180-203)

(W) October 1
Topic: The Constitution – Creating a Government
Assignment: **First Midterm Examination (due on 10/3)**
October 3
First Midterm Examination Due
Topic: Ratification of the Constitution/The Early National Period
Assignment: Tindall & Shi, ch. 7 (pgs. 206-233)

October 8
Topic: The Early National Period (1789-1794)
Assignment: Tindall & Shi, ch. 8 (pgs. 236-249)

October 10
Xavier Fall Holiday – No Class

October 15
Topic: The Early National Period (1794-1797)
Assignments: Hofstadter, ch. 2 (pgs. 22-58) Worksheet (due on 10/17)

October 17
Topic: The Adams Presidency and the Election of 1800
Assignment: Tindall & Shi, ch. 8 (pgs. 249-265)

October 22
Topic: Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republican Era
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 9 (pgs. 273-301)

October 29
Distribute Second Midterm Examination (due on 11/5)
Topic: An Economic Transformation: The Industrial/Market Revolution
Assignment: Tindall & Shi, ch. 11 (pgs. 330-357)

November 5
Second Midterm Exam due on 11/5
Topic: The First Industrial Revolution and the Era of Good Feelings

November 7
Second Midterm Examination due
Topic: The Second American Political Party System
Assignment: Hofstadter, Ch. 3 (pgs. 59-86) Worksheet (Due on 11/7)

November 12
Topic: The Age of Jackson and Jacksonian Democracy
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 13 (pgs. 384-415)
November 14
Topic: Andrew Jackson’s Historical Legacy
Assignment: Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, ch. 1 (pgs. 11-39); Hofstadter, ch. 4 (pgs. 89-118)
Worksheet (Due on 11/13)

November 19
Topic: The Second Great Awakening and Reform
Assignment: Foner, *Free Soil*...ch. 2 (pgs. 40-72)

November 21
**Booknote Due**
Topic: The Ferment of Reform: 1820-1860
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 14 (pgs. 424-451); Foner, *Free Soil*...ch. 3 (pgs. 73-102)

November 26
Thanksgiving Break – No Class

November 28
Thanksgiving Break – No Class

December 3
Topic: Manifest Destiny and Westward Expansion Re-ignite the Slavery Issue.
Assignments: Tindall & Shi, ch. 15 (pgs. 454-491); Foner, *Free Soil*...ch. 4 (pgs. 103-148)

December 5
Topic: The Mexican War Re-ignites the Issue of Slavery
Assignments: Foner, *Free Soil*, ch. 5 (pgs. 149-185); Hofstadter, ch. 5 (pgs. 121-173); Worksheet (due on 12/5)

December 10
Topic: The Rise of the Republican Party
Assignments: Foner, *Free Soil*...ch. 9 (pgs. 301-317)

December 12
Topic: Civil War and the Second American Revolution
**Distribute Final Examination Essay Questions**
**Instructor Evaluation**

December 19
**Final Examination Due**
e-mail exam or bring it to Hailstones 5 between 2:00-3:50 pm.