

**University of Pennsylvania
Department of History**

**History 0100
Deciphering America: Telling Moments in American History
Spring 2024**

Professors Kathleen Brown and Amy C. Offner

Teaching Assistants:

Contact information and office hours can be found on CANVAS Modules

M-W 12-1

Weekly recitation sections on Thursdays and Fridays. Check Courses@penn for times and locations

This course examines American history from the first contacts of the indigenous peoples of North America with European settlers to our own times by focusing on several telling moments in this history. The course treats thirteen of these moments and each unit begins with a specific primary document, historical figure, image, or cultural artifact to commence the delving into the American past. Some of these icons are familiar, but the ensuing deciphering will render them as more complicated; some are unfamiliar, but they will emerge as absolutely telling. The course meets for two in-person lectures each week and a required recitation. Course requirements include: student's choice of ten "before" journal entries (1-2 sentences) and ten end of the week "after" journal entries (300-word maximum per entry); a take home mid-term exam; a part take home and part in-class final exam; and recitation attendance and participation. All course readings can be accessed on-line on the course's CANVAS website; no books have been ordered or placed on reserve. Instructions for the journal entry exercise are posted on the course's CANVAS website as "Protocol for Journal Entries." Students should post all journal entries on CANVAS Assignments.

On Sundays, students should expect to examine a prompt (image or short text) mounted on CANVAS before noon and post a 1-2 sentence initial Journal A ("before") entry by midnight EST. This entry, which will not be graded, should be based on hunches and not involve research. During the week, students should complete the assigned readings on CANVAS, and attend the course's two lectures and a recitation section. On Sunday by midnight EST, a week after the initial posting, students will write a 300-word Journal B ("after") entry that reflects the context learned from lectures, reading assignments and recitation sections. Students will choose the weeks for which they post Journal B entries for a total of ten entries. ONLY TEN Journal B entries per student will be graded during the semester. Students will be graded on their ability to interpret the prompt using the context (readings, lectures, and recitation discussion) that we have provided; correctly identifying the prompt, in and of itself, will not be sufficient, nor will

students be rewarded for doing additional online research. Students whose journal entries reveal their consultation of Wikipedia or other Google resources will be penalized. Those students interested in pursuing additional research on any given prompt can choose to do so as part of the take-home portion of the final examination

What will this course teach me?

- Introduction to early American and U.S. History
- Introduction to historical methods
- Interpretation of primary sources
- Basic analytical skills: reading, writing, critical thinking
- The stakes of historical interpretation and analysis for understanding our own times

Grading:

Journal Entries: 30% (See Protocol for Journal Entries on Canvas)

Mid-Term Exam: 20%

Recitation Attendance and Contribution: 20%

Final Exam: 30%

Important notice about grading policy:

- **Failure to attend lecture will impinge on your ability to succeed in the Journal B posts and the mid-term and final exams**
- **Missing more than two recitations may result in a failing grade for recitation attendance and contribution**
- **Journal B posts must be submitted by the weekly deadline to be counted; please plan your posts accordingly**
- **All elements of the course must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course**

Schedule of Lectures and Weekly Reading Assignments

UNIT 1: Native Inhabitants of the Americas

Jan. 22: Course Introduction/Indigenous Politics and Cultures in the Americas (KB)

Jan. 24: Dispossession: War, Disease, and Slavery (KB)

Readings: William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1634)

Margaret Newell, *Brethren by Nature*, 17-42

Elizabeth Fenn, "Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America:

Beyond Jeffrey Amherst,” *Journal of American History*, 86 (March 2000): 1552-1580

UNIT 2: Slavery: Labor in Early America and the Construction of Racial Difference

Jan. 29: Servitude, Slavery, and Households: The Mobilizing of Labor in Early America (KB)

Jan. 31: Slavery: Birth, Property, and Race (KB)

Readings: Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, “The Political Economy of the Slave Ship” and “Turning American Commodities into Slaves”
David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, “Europeans and African Slavery in the Americas”
“‘As much land as they can handle’: Johann Bolzius Writes to Germany About Slave Labor in Carolina and Georgia, 1750”

UNIT 3: Imperial Wars: The Seven Years War and the American Revolution

Feb. 5: Imperial Wars: The Seven Years War (KB)

Feb. 7: The American Revolution: The First Successful Colonial War Against Empire (KB)

Readings: Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall, “Clash of Empires” and “Backcountry Revolution” in *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America*
Andrew O’Shaughnessy, “The Prime Minister Lord North” in *The Men Who Lost America*
Declaration of Independence

UNIT 4: The New Nation

Feb. 12: Constitutionalism (KB)

Feb. 14: Expansion (KB)

Readings: The Constitution
Greg Ablavsky, “The Savage Constitution” *Duke Law Journal* (February 2014), pp. 999-1050 and 1076-1089
Brian Schoen, “The Threads of a Global Loom: Cotton, Slavery, and Union in an Interdependent Atlantic, 1789-1820” in *Fragile Fabric of Union*
Excerpts from James Monroe’s address to Congress (1823)

UNIT 5: Philadelphia, 1830-1860: The Antebellum City

Feb. 19: Philadelphia: Social Reform and Anti-Black and Anti-Catholic Violence (KB)

Feb. 21: Sectional borderlands (KB)

Readings: Brophy, "The Market," in Beckert and Rothman
 Jeffrey Davis and Paul Newman, eds. *Pennsylvania History*, 179-180
 Excerpt from Lucretia Mott, "The Law of Progress," Speech delivered at the
 Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, New York,
 May 9, 1848
 Daniel Kilbride, "Southern Medical Students"
 Fugitive Slave Act (1850), sections 4, 7, 9

UNIT 6: The (Unresolved) Civil War

February 26: The Civil War: Causes, Course and Shifting Purposes (AO)

February 28: The Civil War: The Question of Emancipation (AO)

Readings: Eric Foner, "Our Lincoln," *The Nation*, (January 26, 2009)
 Brian Schoen, "An Unnatural Union" in *Fragile Fabric of Union*
 Paul Quigley, "Dreams: Southern Nationalism before Southern Nationhood" in
Shifting Grounds
 Amy Murrell Taylor *Embattled Freedom* excerpt PDF
 General Butler letter (May 1861)
 Ira Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning"

SPRING BREAK March 2-10

Midterm exam posted on Canvas March 10

UNIT 7: Reconstruction: Land and Citizenship

March 11: Reconstruction in the South (KB)

March 13: The West, Indigenous Peoples, and the Dawes Act (AO)

Readings: 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution
 Hannah Rosen, "A Riot and Massacre" in *Terror in the Heart of Freedom:
 Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the
 Postemancipation South*
 Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, "Debt Peonage in the Cotton South After the
 Civil War." *The Journal of Economic History*, 32 (September 1972): 641-
 669
 David Chang, *The Color of the Land*, chapter 3 -4
 Congressional Record speech, 1873
 Dawes Act (1887)

UNIT 8: The Gilded Age

March 25: Capital, Labor, and Social Conflict (AO)

March 27: Constructing Free Laborers: Race and Immigration (AO)

Readings: Walter Licht, “Explosions: Social Unrest in the Late Nineteenth Century and the Remaking of America” in *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century*
 Beth Lew Williams, “The Exclusion Consensus” in *The Chinese Must Go*
 Preamble of the Knights of Labor (1886)
 The Omaha Platform of the People’s or Populist Party (1892)

March 17: Midterm Exam Due at 5 P.M. (EST); submit as paper copy, location TBA

UNIT 9: Overseas Empire and Progressive Reform

March 18: Race, Imperialism, and Reform, 1880-1920 (AO)

March 20: Progressive Era Reform (KB)

Readings: Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, “Immigrants and their Children”
 Eileen Boris, “The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the ‘Political’,” in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State*
 Mai Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History*, 86 (June 1999): 67-92
 Muhammad, *Condemnation of Blackness* excerpt

UNIT 10: The Great Depression, World War II, and the New Deal Era

April 1: The New Deal ((AO)

April 3: Radical Movements in the 1930s (AO)

Readings: Gary Gerstle, “Reconfiguring Labor-Capital Relations” in *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present*
 Ira Katznelson, “Introduction” in *Fear Itself*
 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, chapter 5
 Dorothy Ray Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red*, chapter 2
 Studs Terkl, *Hard Times*, excerpts by Frank Czerwonka, Louis Banks, Diane Morgan

UNIT 11: World War II and Post-War America

April 8: Race, Sex and Family in World War II and the Post-War U.S. (KB)

April 10: The Cold War Homemaking (AO)

Readings: Howard H. Chiang, "Sexuality and Gender in Cold War America," in Caroline S. Emmons, ed., Cold War and McCarthy Era: People and Perspectives (2010)
Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," The Atlantic (June 2014)
Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners*, chapter 2
Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America*, 408-432

UNIT 12: The Long 1960s

April 15: Reckoning with Poverty and Racism (AO)

April 17: Reckoning with Empire (AO)

Readings: Annelise Orleck, Introduction to *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History*,
Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, introduction
Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race Against Profit*, selection
Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America*, 432-445

UNIT 13: The U.S. In Our Own Times

April 22: Neoliberalism and its Challengers (AO)

April 24: From Colorblindness to "Race Realism" (AO)

Readings: Katherine Belew, "The Vietnam War Story" and "Race War and White Women" in
Bring the War Home
Lily Geismer, "Agents of Change," *Journal of American History*
Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer, *Both Hands Tied*, excerpt
Alexandra Minna Stern, "From 'Race Suicide' to 'White Genocide': White Nationalism, Nativism, and Eugenics over the Past Century," *Journal of American History*

April 29: History in the News: OPEN FORUM on Inequalities and Contested Histories

Suggested Readings:

National Immigration Forum, "Push or Pull Factors: What Drives Central American Migrants to the U.S.?"
Nikole Hannah-Jones, "The Idea of America" New York Times, August 18, 2019
Lily Geismer, "Napoleons in Pinstripes," *New Labor Forum*
Nicole Hemmer, "What History Reveals about the Biggest New Power Player in US

Politics,” CNN.com, July 7, 2023
Steven Greenhouse, “It Feels Like it’s Strike Summer,” *The Guardian*, July 26, 2023
Angus McLeod, “The Supreme Court Just Stopped the Latest Assault on Native American Sovereignty,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 2023
Greg Grandin, Introduction to *The End of the Myth*
Eric Levitz, “The Biden Administration Just Declared the Death of Neoliberalism,” *New York Magazine*, May 3, 2023 – I’m trying to find something accessible for students on the debate over whether the Inflation Reduction Act is Keynesianism industrial policy reborn, just more neoliberalism, an impetus to a new Cold War with China, or what. This is just one side of the debate but could open a conversation.

MAY 1 REVIEW

NO RECITATION SECTIONS THIS WEEK

Final Exam during Final Exams Period, May 1-9, Exam date TBD