

**University of Pennsylvania
Department of History**

**History 0100
Deciphering America: Telling Moments in American History
Spring 2025**

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Contact information and office hours can be found on CANVAS Modules
Lecture M-W 12-1

Weekly recitation sections are 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 attends to 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%

AI policy

This course is designed for a human being (you) to think deeply about historical subjects, sources, and interpretations, many of which are not part of mainstream history courses. You are encouraged to be brave and diligent and to do your own thinking. Doing the reading and attending class will enable you to outperform A.I. If you get stuck or confused, your best option is to reach out to one of your instructors for a conversation about the material.

We prohibit the use of A.I. for several reasons: first, we want you to do your own work; second, we want you to make use of us as the instructors teaching the course. If you do choose to consult A.I. despite our prohibition, you should be aware of the risk of penalty for failing to adhere to assignment guidelines. Use of sources other than the assigned readings and lecture materials is not allowed. Use of Google, A.I., or other outside sources can result in receiving no credit for your Journal B response, your mid-term, or your final examination, and additional disciplinary measures by the university.

For more details on our reasons for prohibiting A.I. and the risks you take by violating our course policy, please see the CANVAS module “A.I. policy.”

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 10 posts accordingly**
- **All elements of the course must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course**

Information about student resources

Weingarten Center <https://weingartencenter.universitylife.upenn.edu>

A great resource for academic support and disability services

Wellness at Penn <https://wellness.upenn.edu>

This resource combines Student Health and Counseling, with appointments available on demand, and Public Health and Wellbeing.

LGBTQ Center <https://lgbtcenter.universitylife.upenn.edu>

Penn Women's Center <https://pwc.universitylife.upenn.edu>

Makuu, Black Cultural Center <https://makuu.universitylife.upenn.edu>

La Casa Latina <https://lacasa.universitylife.upenn.edu>

Natives at Penn <https://pennclubs.com/club/natives-at-penn>

Office of the Chaplain <https://chaplain.upenn.edu>

Academic Freedom Statement

The policies of the University of Pennsylvania protect academic freedom, as defined in the [AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles](#). This statement has been endorsed by over 250 scholarly and educational organizations in the United States, and its principles are written into faculty handbooks nationwide, including [Penn's](#). The principles of academic freedom were established to protect the integrity of research and teaching from interference by donors, trustees, politicians, and others who might seek to make universities serve private and political interests. They are founded on the idea that a university's purpose is to generate new knowledge that can serve the common good in a democratic society, and that generating new knowledge requires free and open inquiry. To safeguard the university's public mission, academic freedom entails the following rights for all faculty members—whether tenure-track or non-tenure track, and including graduate research and teaching assistants—and for students:

- The right of faculty members to full freedom in research, teaching, extramural speech (public speech on issues of general concern) and intramural speech (speech about the university itself, including criticism of it).
- The right of students to freedom in learning, which includes freedom of association and expression and freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

Academic freedom is only as strong as the institutions, procedures, and professional norms that faculty members established over the last century to protect it: institutions of faculty governance such as Faculty Senates and unions; the institution of tenure; and due process procedures that protect both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty against unjust discipline or dismissal. For further information about academic freedom, see the [AAUP-Penn website](#).

Schedule of Lectures and Weekly Reading Assignments

Jan. 15 Course Introduction:

Jan 22 Martin Luther King Junior Day observation; NO CLASS

UNIT 1: Dispossessing Indigenous Inhabitants

Jan. 24: Dispossession: War, Disease, and Slavery

Readings: William Wood, *New England's Prospect*, 80-85, 102-103
 William Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, excerpt
 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. 27: Servitude, Slavery, and Households: The Mobilizing of Labor in Early America

Jan. 29: Slavery: Birth, Property, and Race

Readings: Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, "The Political Economy of the Slave Ship"
 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. 3: Imperial Wars: The Seven Years War

Feb. 5: The American Revolution: The First Successful Colonial War Against Empire

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. 10: Constitutionalism

Feb. 12: Expansion

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. 17: Philadelphia: Social Reform and Anti-Black and Anti-Catholic Violence

Feb. 19: Sectional borderlands

Readings: 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 24: The Civil War: Causes, Course and Shifting Purposes

February 26: The Civil War: The Question of Emancipation

Readings: Eric Foner, "Our Lincoln," *The Nation*, (January 26, 2009)

Paul Quigley, "Dreams: Southern Nationalism before Southern Nationhood" in *Shifting Grounds*

Amy Murrell Taylor *Embattled Freedom* excerpt

Ira Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning"

Samuel S. Cox condemns emancipation, *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix (1862)

Midterm exam posted on Canvas March 12

UNIT 7: Reconstruction: Land and Citizenship

March 3: Reconstruction in the South

March 5: The West, Indigenous Peoples, and the Dawes Act

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
 Congressional Record speech of Senator William M. Stewart (Nevada), 1873
 Dawes Act (1887)

SPRING BREAK March 8-16

UNIT 8: The Gilded Age

March 17: Capital, Labor, and Social Conflict

March 19: Constructing Free Laborers: Race and Immigration

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

UNIT 9: Overseas Empire and Progressive Reform

March 24: Race, Imperialism, and Reform, 1880-1920

March 26: Progressive Era Reform

Readings: Paul Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880-1910," *The Journal of American History*, 88 (March 2002): 1315-1353
 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

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

March 31: The New Deal

April 2: Radical Movements in the 1930s

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 Terkel, *Hard Times*, excerpts by Frank Czerwonka, Louis Banks, and Diane Morgan

UNIT 11: World War II and Post-War America

April 7: Race, Sex and Family in World War II and the Post-War U.S.

April 9: The Cold War Homemaking

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 14: Reckoning with Poverty and Racism

April 16: Reckoning with Empire

Readings: Annelise Orleck, Introduction, and Daniel Cobb, “The War on Poverty in Mississippi and Alabama,” in *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race Against Profit*, chapter 2
 Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America*, 432-445
 Moynihan Report (excerpt), from Rainwater and Yancey, *the Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*

UNIT 13: Neoliberalism in the 1990s

April 21: Neoliberalism and its Challengers

April 23: From Colorblindness to “Race Realism”

Readings: Lily Geismer, “Agents of Change,” *Journal of American History*
 Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer, *Both Hands Tied*, pp 1-20 and chapter 4
 Quinn Slobodian, *Crack-Up Capitalism*, 1-6, 99-109
 Jane Berger, *A New Working Class*, “Introduction” and chapter 10
 “Contract With America” (1994)

UNIT 14 Legacies of the past and reckonings in the present

April 28:

April 30

NO RECITATION SECTIONS THIS WEEK**Final Exam during Final Exams Period, May 5-13, Exam date TBD**