

Rhode Island College
Department of History
History 201
United States History from the Colonial Period to 1877
Professor Karl Benziger
Spring 2010

Office hours: Tues. 11:00 – 11:45 A.M., Th. 12:30 – 1:15 P.M., or by appointment.

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British colonization of North America set the stage for a chain of events that ultimately led to the establishment of the United States and a political system based on rational legal law as opposed to monarchy. By 1877 the United States was fast becoming a major industrial and political power able to compete with the great European powers such as Great Britain and France on the World Stage. Grand narratives as found in textbooks and politicized accounts of America's early years portray this chain of events as seemingly preordained and always leading to greater progress and triumphs. Leading many Americans to ask the question, who wouldn't want to be like us? But what of those left out of the narrative? For example, slavery flourished in the United States and as we shall examine was a principal cause of what historians Bruce Levine and Eric Foner claim was the most significant generator of the Civil War that gripped the country 1861 – 1865. According to one planter in 1853, "for what purpose does the master hold the servant? Is it not by his labor he, the master, may accumulate wealth?" This certainly stands in sharp contrast to a 1782 immigrant's interpretation of labor in America when he stated, "We are the most perfect society now in the world...each person works for himself..."

This course surveys United States history from its origins in the colonial period through the ending of Reconstruction in 1877. Different from other surveys of this period that you may have taken we will set this story in the context of the Atlantic World and the Global System as it existed during this period. Utilizing Eric Foner's *Give Me Liberty* as a basis for conversation, the course is linked thematically to the many varied interpretations of freedom espoused by the actors in our story that include slaves, women, indigenous peoples, and workers, among others. This period of American history was marked by upheavals that included events such as Shay's Rebellion, the Nat Turner Revolt, and the Civil War that reveal deep divisions both within and outside the polity. Are the echoes of these many arguments still relevant to us today? Rather than a single narrative we will examine the many contested narratives that informed this tumultuous period that set the ideals laid out in documents such as the Constitution against the realities of slavery, class, and gender. At the same time we will examine the many variables by which Americans built upon the First Industrial Revolution to create a dynamic economic system unrivaled by the end of the nineteenth century.

Our class time will be split between brief lectures, student discussion, group work and presentations. You will be required to write one six to seven page critical book review that addresses a critical problem from the period under study, participate in at least two presentations that will include an outline with critical questions, and finally, a four to five page primary source essay. I will provide you with detailed instructions for the writing and presentation assignments. We will have a mid-term and a final exam. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date assigned.

Student participation in class is essential. Attendance is required. If you miss class, you must speak with me as soon as possible in order to determine what the proper course should be in regard to making up the work. Academic honesty is a hallmark of the Department of History and I urge you to carefully read our departmental policy in this regard. Finally, if you have any questions about the assignments or the class in general, do not hesitate to contact me.

Grading

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|---------------------------|-----|
| Class participation: | 10% |
| Critical Book Review | 15% |
| Primary source essay: | 15% |
| Presentation and outline: | 10% |
| Mid term: | 20% |
| Final: | 30% |

Required Readings

Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History, Vol.1.*

Victoria Bissell Brown and Timothy J. Shannon, *Going to the Source, Vol. 1: to 1877.*

Choose one out of three:

David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing.*

Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War.*

James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam.*

Class Schedule

1/26 Introduction

1/28 The Global Context of Colonization in the Americas

Read: Foner pp. 1-35. **Choose Books.**

2/2 English Settlement

Read: Foner pp. 36-54; Brown and Shannon pp. 1-27.

- 2/4 Roger Williams, Religious Freedom, and other crazy ideas...**
Read: Foner pp. 54-79; Brown and Shannon pp. 28-44.
- 2/9 Political Crises in the Colonies during the 17th Century**
Read: Foner pp. 71-95; supplemental readings will be provided.
- 2/11 18th Century Colonial Society, Commerce, and Slavery**
Read: Foner pp. 95-124; Brown and Shannon pp. 45-64.
- 2/16 The Struggle for Empire**
Read: Foner pp. 124-148; Brown and Shannon pp. 65-88.
- 2/18 Taxes and the Rights of Englishmen**
Read: Foner pp. 148-162; supplemental readings will be provided.
- 2/23 Revolution!**
Read: Foner pp. 162-178; **Reading Circle *Washington's Crossing*.**
- 2/25 Revolution and the Concept of Freedom**
Read: Foner pp. 179-210; Brown and Shannon pp. 89-110.
- 3/2 Articles of Confederation to a Constitution**
Read: Foner pp. 211-220; Brown and Shannon pp. 131-151.
- 3/4 The Constitution Cont...**
Read: Foner pp. 220-240; supplemental readings will be provided as needed.
- 3/9 Midterm**
- 3/11 Politics in the New Republic**
Read: Foner pp. 241-260; Brown and Shannon pp. 111-130.
- Spring Break 3/15-3/20*
- 3/23 Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and yet another war with Britain...“you can’t have just one”**
Read: Foner pp. 260-271; supplemental readings will be provided as needed.
- 3/25 The Market Revolution**
Read: Foner pp. 272-302; supplemental readings will be provided.
- 3/30 Democracy: Who’s in, Who’s out?**
Read: Foner pp. 303-321; Brown and Shannon pp. 152-173.
- 4/1 The Age of Jackson**
Read: Foner pp. 321-336; Brown and Shannon pp. 197-220.

- 4/6 The Peculiar Institution**
Read: Foner pp. 337-366; Brown and Shannon pp. 174-196.
- 4/8 Reading Circle *Half Slave Half Free***
- 4/13 Reform and Revised Definitions of Freedom**
Read: Foner pp. 367-396; Brown and Shannon pp. 221-243.
- 4/15 Manifest Destiny**
Read: Foner pp. 397-409; Brown and Shannon pp. 244-270.
- 4/20 “To Purge this Land in Blood”**
Read: Foner pp. 409-436; supplemental readings will be provided.
- 4/22 Civil War: A New Birth of Freedom**
Read: Foner pp. 437-456; **Reading Circle *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam***
- 4/27 Civil War**
Read: Foner pp. 457-474; Brown and Shannon pp. 271-297.
All Papers are Due
- 4/29 Reconstruction**
Read: Foner pp. 475-502; Brown and Shannon pp. 298-323.
- 5/4 End of Reconstruction**
Read: Foner pp. 502-509.
- 5/6 Review for Exam**

Please remember that this schedule is an outline subject to change in order to accommodate student presentations and other special activities.

Outcomes Assessment

For all students enrolled in the following programs: History/ Secondary Ed., Social Studies, RITE and, History B.A. Your critical book review or primary source essay may become part of your student portfolio consequently the paper should demonstrate competence or mastery in the following departmental learning outcomes:

1. Understand how historians gather, interpret and analyze a wide range of primary and secondary source data/material (including literary, geographical, political and socio-economic material) and how historians construct a coherent narrative from this information (NCSS standards 1.1,1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 2.1 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1).

2. Demonstrate the skills of historical analysis and interpretation, such as compare and contrast, differentiate between historical facts and interpretation, consider multiple perspectives, analyze cause and effect relationships, compare competing historical narratives, recognize the tentative nature of historical interpretation and analyze the influence of the past (NCSS standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2).
3. Think chronologically and comprehensively, identifying temporal structures of historical narratives and comprehending the meanings of historical texts, monographs and documents, including their audiences, goals, perspectives and biases (NCSS standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2).
4. Develop research capabilities that enable them to formulate historical questions and themes, obtain and question historical data, identify the gaps in available records, place sources in context, and construct reliable historical interpretations (NCSS 1.1, 1.2, 1.4 and 2.1 RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.3).
7. Formulate and explain their own interpretations of the past by examining and communicating them with clarity and precision in a variety of oral and written assignments (NCSS standards 2.1 RIBTS 2.1).
8. Demonstrate research skills utilizing the full-range of available materials including those found in libraries, archives, museums and electronic resources (NCSS standards 1.2 and 2.1 RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.4).
9. Demonstrate the skills necessary to be an independent and lifelong learner (NCSS standards 2.1, RIBTS 1.3, 7.1, 10.2, 10.4, 11.5).