

The University of Western Ontario
Department of History
History 2311G
The United States: 1865 to the Present
Winter 2024
Prof. Jeffery Vacante
jvacant2@uwo.ca

This is a **draft** syllabus. Please see the course site on OWL for a final version.

Course Description

This course surveys the history of the United States from Reconstruction to the present day. Topics include the political history of the United States; the growth of American capitalism and mass culture; changing meanings of race, gender, and difference; and the United States' place in the world.

Antirequisite(s): History 2301E; History 2302F/G.

Course Syllabus

On January 6, 2021, an angry mob descended on the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. For many people watching the events of that day, the storming of the Capitol represented a shocking attempt to interrupt the counting of the electoral votes and to subvert the democratic will of the people. For others, however, the events of that day represented a legitimate expression of dissent and was perfectly in line with what they believed to be America's revolutionary culture. Historians will be analyzing the meaning of the events of that day for years to come. For the moment, these events appear to be part of a larger erosion of trust in American institutions that has been taking place since the 1960s. Over the past six decades, many Americans have grown suspicious of the powers of the state as well as of the members of the elite that they believe to be in charge of that state. Whether it manifested in the form of protests against the Vietnam War, the rejection of Keynesian economic policy, the loss of faith in the intelligence community in the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003, or the disillusion with the financial system following the financial crisis of 2008, Americans have lately been in an anti-establishment mood and appear to be losing faith in their institutions and their elected leaders. The elections of Barack Obama and Donald Trump expressed, in their own ways, some of these frustrations through the electoral process. The events of January 6 suggest perhaps that these frustrations may be finding expression outside the traditional bounds of the electoral process and civil discourse.

This course will turn to the past in an effort to understand the larger issues and trends that have brought the country to the place it now finds itself. It will consider the promise of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow. It will consider the triumph of capitalism during the Gilded Age as well as the manner in which this ideology of capitalism would triumph over the ideals of the revolutionary generation. It will then look at the Populist and Progressive revolt against the version of capitalism that took hold in post-Reconstruction America, as well as the revival of the idea that the state has a role to play in a democratic society to ensure the common

good. It will then look at how the world wars during the first half of the twentieth century would alter the public's expectations of the government's role in peoples' lives, enlarge the powers of the state, and in time produce a backlash in the form of the liberal dissent of the sixties as well as the conservative revolt since the seventies.

If you are prepared to read some interesting material on the history of the United States, are willing to distill some of what you're reading into two short essays, and are eager to move beyond the course readings to produce one good research essay, then this course should be a rewarding experience.

In this course students will—in addition to learning the modern history of the United States—sharpen their ability to read and think critically, develop their analytical skills, learn to organize and present their thoughts in the form of academic essays, and practice the art of expressing their ideas in tutorials in such a manner that demonstrates their respect for the opinions of others as well as their own critical engagement with the course readings and the world around them.

Methods of Evaluation

First short essay (due Feb. 5)	20%
Research essay (due Mar. 11)	40%
Second short essay (due Apr. 1)	20%
Tutorial Participation	20%

In addition to keeping up with the weekly readings and engaging meaningfully with these readings, students will prepare three essays over the course of the semester. Students will prepare **two short analytical essays**, each of which will be **four pages in length**. The first short essay is due **February 5** and the second is due **April 1**. At least one week before each essay's due date, students will receive the question that is to serve as the basis for their essay. They are to answer that question in essay format. All the material that students will need to write these two short analytical essays will be found in the course readings and slides. No outside research will be expected for these two essays. In addition, students will prepare a **research essay**, which is to be **eight pages in length** and on a topic of their choice. For this essay students will draw on sources beyond the course readings, including primary sources. This research essay is **due March 11**.

All three essays are to be typed, well-written, provide sound analysis, draw upon the appropriate sources, follow proper scholarly conventions (including Chicago Style Footnotes, as well as a bibliography) and include a cover page. You will upload the essays to the course web page on owl, where they will also be subject to turnitin review. Essays submitted after the due dates will be subject to a late penalty of five percent the first day and one percent for every day thereafter (including weekends).

Please note: All work submitted in this course must be your own. You may not make use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT for any assignments in this course.

Students will also be assessed on their **participation** during weekly **tutorials**. During these tutorials, students will discuss the assigned readings and will be encouraged to grapple with the larger themes of the course. The textbook readings will serve as the background material that will, it is hoped, provide the necessary base from which to launch into an intense discussion of each week's major themes. Students will be assessed on their attendance throughout the year as well as on the basis of their familiarity with the readings and their ability to discuss the broader themes of the course. It should be noted that the quality of one's remarks are very often more valuable than the quantity of one's interventions in a discussion. A student's ability to consider and respect the ideas and opinions of others will also be recognized. **Please note: tutorials begin the week of January 15.**

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Course Materials

A copy of Eric Foner, Kathleen DuVal, and Lisa McGirr's *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, 7th edition, Vol. 2 (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022) has been ordered and is available in the campus bookstore. There are additional readings assigned each week, as well, which will be made available online either through owl or the library. These readings are intended to supplement the textbook and to offer greater depth for some themes. They are also intended to serve as source material for the two short essays assigned this term.

Course Schedule and Readings

Jan. 8: Introduction

Jan. 15: The Civil War and Reconstruction

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 15
- David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 255-299.

Jan. 22: The Gilded Age

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 16
- Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), 1-51.
- Sven Beckert, "Democracy and its Discontents: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York," *Past and Present*, 174 (Feb. 2002), 116-157.

Jan. 29: The Age of Reform

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 17-18
- Morton G. White, "The Revolt Against Formalism in American Social Thought of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 8, no. 2 (April 1947), 131-152.

Feb. 5: The Jazz Age

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 19-20.

- Calvin Coolidge, “Government and Business,” *Foundations of the Republic: Speeches and Addresses* (New York 1926): 317-332.

Feb. 12: The New Deal

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 21
- Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 3-14, 265-271.
- Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), ix, 129-143, 267-297.

Feb. 19: Reading Week

Feb. 26: The Cold War

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 22-23.
- Henry R. Luce, “The American Century,” *Life Magazine* (Feb. 17, 1941): 61-65.
- George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566-82
- Dwight Eisenhower, “Farewell Address,” January 17, 1961.

Mar. 4: The Affluent Society

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 24.
- J. K. Galbraith, “The Unseemly Economics of Opulence,” *Harper’s* (January 1952): 58-63.
- William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, (1956), 3-24, 36-66, 143-52.
- David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), 3-25

Mar. 11: The Sixties

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 25.
- *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Students for a Democratic Society, 1964).
- Mario Savio, “Bodies Upon the Gears,” speech delivered at Sproul Hall, December 2, 1964.

Mar. 18: Liberalism and its Discontents

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 26-27.
- Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11-39, 103-106, 199-206, 237-262.

Mar. 25: The Conservative Revolt

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 28.
- Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s* (Nov. 1964), 77-86.
- Sam Adler-Bell, “The Other Radical Youth,” *The New Republic* (December 2021), 38-45.
- Matthew Walther, “Rise of the Barstool Conservatives,” *The Week* (February 1, 2021).
- Sam Tanenhaus, “Jan. 6 Wasn’t an Insurrection. It Was Vigilantism. And More is Coming,” *Washington Post* (December 10, 2021).
- David Brooks, “What Happened to American Conservatism?” *The Atlantic* (January/February 2022), 94-103.

April. 1-8: Conclusion

Additional Statements

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.

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