

History 2301E
The United States: Colonial Period to Present
Summer 2024

Distance Studies, Online, Asynchronous

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

Course Description

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 look at Puritan New England and the manner in which early efforts to achieve one form of purity produced dissent and moral questioning. It will then look at the tension at the heart of colonial societies that had come to place the idea of freedom at the heart of their political and cultural identities only to depend on slavery for their economic and cultural survival. It will consider the ideals of a revolutionary generation that argued over what a new government might look like but that also shared a belief that Americans would work together for the common good, or for what they called public virtue. It will consider the challenge to the ideals of this generation by the Transcendentalists, thinkers who tended to privilege the needs and desires of the individual above those of the community. It will consider the triumph of capitalism following the Civil War, and 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 government 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.

As an online, distance studies, summer class, this course will be necessarily compressed. It will, to be sure, cover the outline of American history, but its focus will be on the larger themes stitching this history together. This is also an asynchronous course, with no formal class time. This should free students up to spend more time on the readings and to engage even more meaningfully with the material. Students may approach the course material at their own pace. However, it is advisable to keep up with the readings in order to avoid finding oneself with an avalanche of material to cover right before essays are due. I will, of course, be available to provide additional guidance as well as to respond to any and all questions that might arise during the semester.

If you are prepared to read some really 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 broad outline of the history of the United States, sharpen their ability to read and think critically, develop their analytical skills, and learn to organize and present their thoughts in the form of formal essays.

Antirequisite(s):

At main campus: History 2302F/G, History 2311F/G, History 2312F/G, History 2710F/G. At Brescia, Huron, King's campus: 2302F/G, 2710F/G.

Methods of Evaluation

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 essays**, each of which will be **five pages in length**. The first essay is due **May 27** and the second is due **July 15**. 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 essays will be found in the course readings and slides. No outside research will be expected for these two essays. In addition, students will also prepare a **research essay**, which is to be **ten 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 July 2**.

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).

A note on academic integrity: It is expected that students produce work that is written using their own words and that relies on research that they have conducted themselves. Submitting work that is not your own is considered dishonest. It is thus not permitted to copy other peoples' work, to copy from published or unpublished texts, or to present artificially generated text (i.e. ChatGPT or other AI content generators) as your own. Nor would it be permitted to submit an essay or a response to an exam question using ChatGPT or any other AI content generator even if you acknowledge that you have done so with proper source attribution.

First short essay (due May 27)	25%
Research essay (due July 2)	50%
Second short essay (due July 15)	25%

Course Materials

Every Monday (or Tuesday should the Monday fall on a holiday) a slide presentation will be posted on the course site on owl. These slides are designed to highlight the main points we should be focusing on each week, and should help guide you as you navigate the weekly topic and readings. Your reading each week should start with the assigned chapters in **Eric Foner, Kathleen DuVal, and Lisa McGirr's *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, 7th edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022)**. In the spirit of the online nature of this course, I have ordered an e-book version of this text, which can be secured through the bookstore at Western. 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

May 6 & 8 Introduction/New England

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 1-2
- Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 97-121.
- Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 117-181, 222-251.

May 13 Slavery and Freedom

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 3-4
- Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 250-270.
- Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and*

Power in Colonial Virginia (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1996), 137-186.

May 21 The Revolution and the Early Republic

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 5-8
- Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 46-90.

May 27 The Age of Jackson

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 9-10
- Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience,” (1849)
- Robert A. Gross, “Quiet War with the State: Henry David Thoreau and Civil Disobedience,” *Yale Review* 93, no. 4 (July 2005), 1-17.

June 3 The Civil War and Reconstruction

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 11-15
- David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 255-299.

June 10 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.

June 17 The Age of Reform

- Foner, *Give me Liberty!* Ch. 17-19
- 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.

June 24 Depression and War

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 20-22
- 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.

July 2 Liberalism and its Discontents

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 23-25
- *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.
- 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.

July 8 & 15 The Conservative Revolt

- Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* Ch. 26-28
- 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.

July 22 Conclusion**Additional Statements**

Use of generative AI tools: 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.

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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