American History to 1877
Major Problems of Interpretation

The up-to-date, official syllabus for this course is maintained online at
http://www.oberlin.edu/history/GJK/H103F08/.

This course provides an introduction to the study of American history from the eve of European colonization through the close of Reconstruction. We focus on key topics which hold special interest for scholars and which figure centrally in debates over the meaning of the American experience today. We pay particular attention to how historians do history and construct interpretations from various kinds of evidence. We also consider why historians sometimes disagree about how to read and evaluate the existing sources. Historical interpretation is "contested terrain." Yet it is not simply a matter of opinion where all points of view are equally valid. Historical interpretation involves creative investigation, careful documentation, critical thinking, and logical analysis. Over the course of the semester, students will be expected to develop and to explain their own interpretations regarding a host of major issues in the study of American history to 1877.

Format: Most weeks there will be lectures on Mondays and Fridays and discussions on Wednesdays. The discussions will focus on the assigned readings, which should be done on time. In preparation for class discussions, students will be required to post responses to study questions on Blackboard by 9 am the day of the discussion. The web address for Blackboard is http://oncampus.oberlin.edu, and it can be reached by clicking on the "Blackboard" buttons below. Note also that attendance at discussion sessions is required and that student participation is expected.

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on the basis of two 3-4 page papers (25% each), one 5-6 page paper (35%), and class participation, including contributions to Blackboard (15%). The instructor reserves the right to exercise some discretion in assigning final grades.

Honor Code: All student work is governed by the Oberlin College Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Code applies to a particular assignment, you should raise that question with the professor in advance of the due date.

Purchases: The following books are available at the Oberlin Bookstore and should be purchased.

- Alan Taylor, American Colonies
- Charles C. Mann, 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus
- Jennifer L. Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery
- Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution
- Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

### Schedule of classes and assignments:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Sept. 3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Fri., Sept. 5</td>
<td>North America to 1490</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 8</td>
<td>Emergence of the Atlantic World</td>
<td>• Mann, <em>1491</em>, 3-27, 62-133, 243-279, 312-326 [purchase]</td>
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<td>Fri., Sept. 12</td>
<td>Colonizing Virginia</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 15</td>
<td>Colonizing New England</td>
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<td>• Martin H. Quitt, &quot;Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding.&quot; <em>William and Mary Quarterly</em> 3rd. Ser., 52 (April 1995): 227-258 [in JSTOR, accessible from a campus computer]</td>
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<td>• Kathleen Brown, &quot;In Search of Pocahontas,&quot; in Ian K. Steele and Nancy L. Rhoden, eds., <em>The Human Tradition in Colonial America</em>, 71-95 [under &quot;Course Documents&quot; in Blackboard]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri., Sept. 19</td>
<td>Colonies in Crisis: War, Rebellion, and Racism</td>
<td>First paper due</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 22</td>
<td>Rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade</td>
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Wed., Sept. 24

Discussion: Role of Slavery in Colonial Development

- Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 1-11, 50-106, 144-201 [purchase]
- Taylor, *American Colonies*, 138-57, 222-244 [purchase]

Guest participant: Prof. Jennifer Morgan (OC ’86)

Fri., Sept. 26

Constructing the First British Empire

Mon., Sept. 29

Great Awakening and Global War

Wed., Oct. 1

Discussion: Benjamin Franklin's America and Empire

- Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.* (1751) [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth" (1758) [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Benjamin Franklin, *The Interest of Great Britain Considered, with Regard to Her Colonies...* (1760) [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]

Fri., Oct. 3

Imperial Reform and Colonial Resistance

Mon., Oct. 6

From Resistance to Revolution

Wed., Oct. 8

Discussion: The Patriots' Logic

- Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, v-xii, 22-159 [purchase]
- *Declaration of Independence* [on WWW]

Fri., Oct. 10

How Radical Was the American Revolution?
Mon., Oct. 13  
Challenges of Nation-Building

Wed., Oct. 15  
Discussion: Debate over the Federal Constitution 

- James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (1787) [on WWW]
- Melancton Smith, *Speech* at New York State Ratifying Convention, June 21-22, 1788 [on WWW]

Fri., Oct. 17  
Political Crisis of the 1790s

Fall Break

Mon., Oct. 27  
Contours of National Growth, 1790-1850

Wed., Oct. 29  
Dynamics of Political Democratization

Fri., Oct. 31  
Second Great Awakening and Social Reform
Second paper due

Mon., Nov. 3  
Launching the American Industrial Revolution

Wed., Nov. 5  
Discussion: Culture of Opportunity in the Early Republic

- Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 1-193 [purchase]

Fri., Nov. 7  
Radical Impulses: Abolitionism and Feminism

Fri., Nov. 7 - Sat. Nov. 8  
Students in History 103 are encouraged to attend "Race and Resistance, 1858 and 2008" (click for schedule)

Mon., Nov. 10  
The "Old South" in Black and White

Wed., Nov. 12  
Discussion: Interpreting the Slave Experience

- Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1-128 [purchase]

Fri., Nov. 14  
Manifest Destiny and War with Mexico
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<tr>
<td>Mon., Nov. 17</td>
<td>Political Crisis of the 1850s</td>
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<td>Wed., Nov. 19</td>
<td>Discussion: Comparing the North and the South</td>
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<td>• Edward Pessen, &quot;How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?&quot; <em>American Historical Review</em> 85 (Dec. 1980): 1119-49. [in JSTOR, accessible from a campus computer]</td>
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<td>• James Huston, <em>Calculating the Value of the Union</em>, 24-41 [under “Course Documents” in Blackboard]</td>
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<td>Fri., Nov. 21</td>
<td>Imagining Antebellum America (at Allen Memorial Art Museum, led by Colette Crossman)</td>
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<td>Mon., Nov. 24</td>
<td>A House Dividing</td>
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<td>Wed., Nov. 26</td>
<td>No class</td>
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<td>Fri., Nov. 28</td>
<td>No class</td>
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<td>Mon., Dec. 1</td>
<td>Secession and Civil War</td>
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<td>Wed., Dec. 3</td>
<td>Discussion: An Irrepressible Conflict?</td>
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<td>• Eric Foner, <em>Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War</em>, 34-53 [under “Course Documents” in Blackboard]</td>
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<td>• Gary J. Kornblith, &quot;Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise,&quot; <em>Journal of American History</em> 90 (June 2003): 76-105 [in the History Cooperative, accessible from a campus computer]</td>
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<td>• Edward Ayers, <em>What Caused the Civil War?</em>, 131-144 [under “Course Documents” in Blackboard]</td>
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<td>Fri., Dec. 5</td>
<td>Emancipation and Northern Victory</td>
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Mon., Dec. 8

Reconstruction

Wed., Dec. 10

Discussion: The Civil War as a Moral Problem

- Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (1865) [on WWW]
- James M. McPherson, Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution, 3-22 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Harry S. Stout, Upon the Altar of the Nation, 457-461 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]

Fri., Dec. 12

Retreat from Reconstruction

Tue., Dec. 16

Final project (third paper) due by 11 a.m.