American History to 1877
Major Problems of Interpretation

[The official, up-to-date syllabus for this course is online at http://www.oberlin.edu/faculty/gkornbl/H103F09.]

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. Students with disabilities that may require accommodation should alert the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

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*
- Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender & Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia 1730-1830*
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

**Schedule of classes and assignments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Material</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon., Aug. 31</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Sept. 2</td>
<td>American History to 1490</td>
<td>Mann, <em>1491</em>, chaps. 1, 3, 4, 8, 10 [purchase]</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 7</td>
<td>Labor Day -- no class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Sept. 9</td>
<td>Discussion: European Invasion of America</td>
<td>Mann, <em>1491</em>, chaps. 1, 3, 4, 8, 10 [purchase]</td>
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Fri., Sept. 18  Colonies in Crisis: War, Rebellion, and Racism

Mon., Sept. 21  Rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade
Wed., Sept. 23  Discussion: Role of Slavery in Colonial Development
- Taylor, *American Colonies*, 138-57, 222-244 [purchase]
- Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 1-106, 166-201 [purchase]

Fri., Sept. 25  Constructing the First British Empire

Mon., Sept. 28  Yom Kippur--no class
Wed., Sept. 30  Great Awakening and Global War

Fri., Oct. 2  Imperial Crisis
- *First paper due*

Mon., Oct. 5  From Resistance to Revolution
Wed., Oct. 7  Discussion: Explaining the American Revolution
- *Declaration of Independence* [on WWW]

Fri., Oct. 9  How Radical Was the American Revolution?

Mon., Oct. 12  Challenges of Nation-Building
- James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (1787) [on WWW]
Fri., Oct. 16  Political Crisis of the 1790s

Fall Break

Mon., Oct. 26  Contours of National Growth, 1790-1860
Wed., Oct. 28  Discussion: Gender Trouble in the Early Republic

- Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble*, 186-392 [purchase]

Fri., Oct. 30  Jeffersonian Paradoxes

Mon., Nov. 2  Second Great Awakening and Social Reform
Wed., Nov. 4  Battles of Andrew Jackson: Indian Removal, Nullification, and the Bank War

Fri., Nov. 6  Launching the American Industrial Revolution

Second paper due

Mon., Nov. 9  The "Old South" in Black and White
Wed., Nov. 11  Discussion: Interpreting the Slave Experience

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

Fri., Nov. 13  Radical Impulses: Immediate Abolitionism and Feminism

Mon., Nov. 16  Manifest Destiny and War with Mexico
Wed., Nov. 18  Discussion: Comparing the North and the South

Fri., Nov. 20 Political Crisis of the 1850s

Mon., Nov. 23 A House Dividing

Wed., Nov. 26 No class

Fri., Nov. 28 No class

Mon., Nov. 30 Secession and Civil War
Wed., Dec. 2 Discussion: Explaining the Civil War

 Fri., Dec. 4 Emancipation and Northern Victory

Mon., Dec. 7 Reconstruction
Wed., Dec. 9 Discussion: The Civil War as a Moral Problem

- Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?" *American Historical Review* 85 (Dec. 1980): 1119-49. [in JSTOR, accessible from a campus computer]
- James Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union*, 24-41 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, 34-53 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Edward Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War?* 131-144 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
- Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address* (1865) [on WWW]
Fri., Dec. 11  Retreat from Reconstruction

Tue., Dec. 15  Final project (third paper) due by 11 a.m.