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/H103F11.]

This course provides an introduction to the study of American history from the rise and fall of Cahokia through the Civil War and 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 https://blackboard.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 (20% each), a 5-7 page final project (40%), and class participation, including contributions to Blackboard (20%). 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.

Accommodation for students with special needs: With the assistance of the Office of Disability Services, the instructor will provide appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and special needs. Students should notify the instructor at the start of the semester if they desire such accommodation.

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

- Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*
- Timothy R. Pauketat, *Cahokia: Ancient America’s Great City on the Mississippi*
- Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America*
- Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*
- Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Schedule of classes and assignments:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Sept. 7</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri., Sept. 9</td>
<td>North America before European Invasion</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 12</td>
<td>Emergence of the Atlantic World</td>
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<td>Wed., Sept. 14</td>
<td>Discussion: The Significance of Cahokia</td>
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<td>Fri., Sept. 16</td>
<td>Colonizing Virginia</td>
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<td>Mon., Sept. 19</td>
<td>Colonizing New England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Sept. 21</td>
<td>Discussion: Early Encounters between Native Americans and English Colonizers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri., Sept. 23</td>
<td>Colonies in Crisis: King Philip's War and Bacon's Rebellion</td>
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Mon., Sept. 26  Rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Wed., Sept. 28  Discussion: Role of Slavery in Colonial Development

- Taylor, *American Colonies*, 202-244 [purchase]
- Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 1-106, 166-201 [purchase]

Fri., Sept. 30  Constructing the First British Empire

Mon., Oct. 3  Great Awakening and Global War
First paper due

Wed., Oct. 5  Discussion: Social Dynamics of Eighteenth-Century British America

- [Benjamin Franklin], *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751) [on WWW]

Fri., Oct. 7  Imperial Reform and Colonial Resistance

Mon., Oct. 10  From Resistance to Revolution

Wed., Oct. 12  Discussion: Explaining the American Revolution

- King George III, “His Majesty's most gracious speech to both Houses of Parliament, on Friday, October 27, 1775” [on WWW]
- *Declaration of Independence* (1776) [on WWW]

Fri., Oct. 14  How Radical Was the American Revolution?

Mon., Oct. 17  Challenges of Nation-Building

Wed., Oct. 19  Discussion: Debate over the Federal Constitution

- James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (1787) [on WWW, with professor's annotations]
- Melancton Smith, *Speech* at New York State Ratifying Convention, June 21-22, 1788 [on WWW]
Fri., Oct. 21  Political Crisis of the 1790s

Fall Break

Mon., Oct. 31  Contours of National Growth, 1790-1860
Wed., Nov 2  Jeffersonian America: Empire for Liberty or for Slavery?
Fri., Nov 4  Second Great Awakening and Social Reform

Mon., Nov. 7  The "Old South" in Black and White
                 Second paper due
Wed., Nov. 9  Discussion: Interpreting the Slave Experience
                 • Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1-128 [purchase]
Fri., Nov. 11  Radical Impulses: Abolitionism and Feminism

Mon., Nov. 14  Launching the American Industrial Revolution
Wed., Nov. 16  Discussion: Gender Roles in the Early Republic
                 • Carol Lasser and Stacey Robertson, *Antebellum Women*, 1-56, 84-91 (doc. #2), 95-98 (doc. #4), 102-107 (doc. #6), 117-123 (doc. #9), 127-144 (docs. #11-14), 148-154 (doc. #16), 171-175 (doc. #21) [two files under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
Fri., Nov. 18  The Battles of Andrew Jackson

Mon., Nov. 21  Manifest Destiny and War with Mexico
Wed., Nov. 23  Discussion: Comparing the North and the South
                 • 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]
Fri., Nov. 25  No class
Mon., Nov. 28  Political Crisis of the 1850s
Wed., Nov. 30  Discussion: Explaining the Civil War
  • Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, 34-53 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
  • David W. Blight, "They Knew What Time it Was: African-Americans." in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Why the Civil War Came*, 51-77 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]
  • Edward Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War?* 131-144 [under "Course Documents" in Blackboard]

Fri., Dec. 2   A House Dividing

Mon., Dec. 5   Civil War and Emancipation
Wed., Dec. 7   Discussion: The Meaning of the Civil War
  • Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address" (1863) [online]
  • Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (1865) [online]

Fri., Dec. 9   Reconstruction

Mon., Dec. 12   Retreat from Reconstruction

Sat., Dec. 17   Final project due by 11 am