Description
In this survey course we will examine various facets of American history from the pre-Columbian era to the post-Civil War period of Reconstruction. Unlike prior history classes you may have experienced, this course will not center on the rote memorization of random facts (i.e. people, dates, events) and their regurgitation in assignments. Instead, we will be focusing on the dominant social, intellectual, political, and economic trends and changes in early America, how these phenomena developed over time, and how they shaped the human experience. By assessing history through the lenses of continuity and transformation, you will come to understand the American past as something immensely effectual rather than stagnant and irrelevant. Secondly, and in that vein, you will come to understand that history is not simply what happened before the present, but is a constantly evolving creation by human beings. That is to say, history is also something analyzed, interpreted, and debated among professional historians, and society more generally, as fresh evidence is continually uncovered and historical subjects are approached from new angles and interpretive frameworks.

By the end of this course, you should also have sharpened your communication skills. This will be accomplished by writing in a clear, concise, and cogent prose and by discussing class material during discussion periods.

Method of Instruction
This course demands your active participation via in-class discussions. Lectures, assigned readings, audio-visual material, and primary source analyses will also comprise the framework with which you will advance your knowledge of the American past and the ways it is understood today. As a side note, if you need to miss class for any reason, be certain to contact a classmate for quality notes. It would behoove you to get contact information from someone early on in the semester.

Class Requirements
Attendance/Participation
Mondays and Wednesdays will be lecture periods, all of which you are expected to attend and prepare for by reviewing your notes from preceding lectures. You are encouraged to ask questions and/or offer comments during the lectures.

Fridays will be designated discussion periods giving you the opportunity to dissect that week’s Taking Sides reading. To facilitate this exercise, you will be organized into small groups for the semester, though your discussion grades will be earned individually. We will begin each discussion period in these small groups, but reconvene as a class mid-way through the hour. During discussion periods, I will circulate around the room, assisting with questions and noting your talking points. This is worth 20% of your final grade for the class.
Response Papers

Two papers are assigned (5-6 pages each, double-spaced), each covering one of the course monographs. For each paper you will respond to a question designed to examine your careful reading of the book. These two questions are listed in the course schedule below. You are encouraged in the papers to cite specific examples from the text that support your ideas, but please do so sparingly and selectively (I am far more interested in your interpretation of the reading). Papers are due in class on the dates listed in the schedule below. Paper 1 is worth 15% of your course grade, and Paper 2 is worth 25%.

Examinations

Two in-class examinations are assigned. These will require you to synthesize class material, thereby demonstrating your grasp of the broad themes and trends at various points in American history. Missed exams cannot be made up under any circumstances. If you have verifiable documentation of your absence during an exam, you will be given the opportunity to complete instead a comparable assignment or an entirely different, make-up version of the exam. The mid-term is worth 15% of your course grade, and the final is worth 25%.

Required Texts

Anderson, Virginia DeJohn, Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America (Oxford University Press, 2004)


Academic Dishonesty

Please do your own work. Cheating on any written assignment will not be tolerated by either myself or the college. This includes plagiarism (using someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as your own.) You will not, for example, copy another student’s work, anything off the internet, or anything from a book while claiming it as your own without using proper citation. If you have further questions about this matter, please consult either myself or the Oberlin College Honor Code.

Miscellaneous

The use of electronic devices during class periods is strictly prohibited. This includes cell phones, computers, ipads, etc. Violating this policy will result in the lowering of one letter grade for the course per instance. If extenuating circumstances require that you use a computer in class, you must discuss this with me during the first week of class.

Course Schedule

September 5 – September 7 – Introduction – Worlds Apart

September 10 – September 14 – Transplantation, 1600-1685
   TS – Issue 3: “Was Disease the Key Factor in the Depopulation of Native Americans in the Americas?” Question: Briefly, what is the “virgin soil theory”? According to Calloway’s
and Jones’ respective essays, how did “virgin soil” diseases effect American Indian populations?

**September 17 – September 21 – The Transformation of Colonial Society**
*TS – Issue 4: “Was the Salem Witchcraft Hysteria Caused by a Fear of Women?”* Question: According to Karlsen and Carlson, what fueled the events at Salem? What types of evidence do they use to support their respective arguments?

**September 24 – September 28 – From Colonies to Empire**
*TS – Issue 5: “Was there a Great Awakening in Mid-Eighteenth Century America?”* Question: Where do Kidd and Butler agree and disagree regarding the origins, effects and leaders of the “Great Awakening”?

**September 26 – No Class – Yom Kippur**

**October 1 – October 5 – Imperial Breakdown, 1763-1774**
*October 1 – Paper 1 due. Paper 1 Question: According to Anderson, in what ways did domesticated animals both facilitate and complicate the imperial ambitions of Euro-American colonists? Secondly, how could these creatures both disrupt and stabilize American Indian societies?*

*TS – Issue 6: “Was the American Revolution Largely a Product of Market-Driven Consumer Forces?”* Question: In Breen’s interpretation of the American Revolution, what united American colonists against Great Britain? In contrast, what does Degler mean by “reluctant revolutionaries”?

**October 8 – October 12 – The War for Independence and the First Republic, 1774-1789**
*TS – Issue 7: “Were the Founding Fathers Democratic Reformers?”* Question: According to Roche’s and Zinn’s respective essays, what were the primary goals of the Constitution’s framers? How can their two interpretations be synthesized or reconciled?

**October 15 – October 19 – A New Republic and the Rise of Parties, 1789-1800**
*October 19 – Mid-Term Exam*

**October 22 – October 26 – No Class – Fall Recess**

**October 29 – November 2 – Jacksonian America**
*TS – Issue 9: “Did Andrew Jackson’s Removal Policy Benefit Native Americans?”* Question: Briefly, what was the Indian Removal Act of 1830? Regarding the act and its implementation, where do Remini and Cave agree and disagree?

**November 5 – November 9 – The Market Revolution**
*TS – Issue 10: “Did the Industrial Revolution Provide More Economic Opportunities for Women in the 1830s?”* Question: Do Cott and Lerner see continuity or transformation in the economic status of women during this period? What forces encouraged this continuity/transformation?

**November 12 – November 16 – Coming to Terms with Change – Social Reform**
TS – Issue 11: “Was Antebellum Temperance Reform Motivated Primarily by Religious Moralism?” Question: According to Lender/Martin and Rumbarger, what major factors fueled temperance reform in antebellum America, who were its principal leaders, and what goals did they hope to attain in their movements?

November 19 – November 21 – The Way West
November 19 – Paper 2 due. Paper 2 Question: According to Nissenbaum, what factions fought in the battles for Christmas in early America, and what were their reasons for doing so? How did the holiday itself change over time as a result of these contestations?

TS – Issue 12: “Was the Mexican War an Exercise in American Imperialism?” Question: How do Nugent and Graebner each portray President Polk’s role in the Mexican War? To them, why is his role important to understanding American foreign policy during this period?

November 23 – No Class – Thanksgiving

November 26 – November 30 – Slavery and the Old South

December 3 – December 7 – The Politics of Sectionalism
TS – Issue 14: “Was Slavery the Key Issue in the Sectional Conflict Leading to the Civil War?” Question: How did economics and race contribute to the secession of the lower South before the Civil War, according to Dew and Egnal? How can their respective arguments be synthesized or reconciled?

December 10 – December 14 – Civil War and Reconstruction
TS – Issue 16: “Was Abraham Lincoln America’s Greatest President?” Question: Discuss Paludan and Bradford’s respective treatments of Lincoln the “Great Emancipator”? How does each interpret Lincoln’s use of executive power?

Final Examination Period – TBD