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 assigned readings. To facilitate this exercise, you will be organized into small groups for the semester, though your discussion grades will be earned individually. Your discussion grade, moreover, will be determined by your small group peers as well as myself at the end of the semester. We will begin each discussion period in these small groups, but reconvene as a class mid-way through the hour. During discussion periods,
will circulate around the room, assisting with questions and noting your talking points. This is worth 20% of your final grade for the class.

**Synthesis Papers**

Two synthesis papers are assigned (6 pages each, double-spaced). Your goal in these assignments is to creatively synthesize our weekly article readings with our first two monographs (Section One readings with Anderson’s *Creatures of Empire*, and Section Two readings with Nissenbaum’s *The Battle for Christmas*). You should make the readings speak to one another in insightful and thought-provoking ways. In what ways, for example, can we think of certain authors as in dialogue with others? How does one historian’s work complicate or enrich another’s? Are their arguments compatible or incompatible? Be creative, but back up your ideas with the texts too. Papers are due in class on the dates listed in the schedule below. No late papers are accepted. 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 in early America. 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**


Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (Vintage, 2009)


**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 and not using proper citation. If you have further questions about how this policy applies to a particular assignment, 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.

**Grade Breakdown**

A+ 97-100%; A 93-96%; A- 90-92%; B+ 87-89%; B 83-86%; B- 80-82%; C+ 77-79%; C 73-76%; C- 70-72%; D 60-69%; F 59% and below
Course Schedule

Section One
September 4 – September 6 – Introduction – Worlds Apart

September 9 – September 13 – Transplantation, 1600-1685
Alfred W. Crosby, “Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976), 289-299

September 16 – September 20 – The Transformation of Colonial Society
Randy Sparks, “The Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic Odyssey from Slavery to Freedom,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (July 2002), 555-584

September 23 – September 27 – From Colonies to Empire
Linford D. Fisher, “‘It Prov’d But Temporary, & Short Lived’: Pequot Affiliation in the First Great Awakening,” *Ethnohistory* 59:3 (Summer 2012), 465-488

September 30 – October 4 – Imperial Breakdown, 1763-1774

October 4 – Paper 1 due

Section Two
October 7 – October 11 – The War for Independence and the First Republic, 1774-1789

October 14 – October 18 – A New Republic and the Rise of Parties, 1789-1800
October 14 – Mid-Term Exam
October 21 – October 25 – No Class – Fall Recess

October 28 – November 1 – Jacksonian America

November 4 – November 8 – The Market Revolution
James A. Henretta, “Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1978), 3-32

November 11 – November 15 – Coming to Terms with Change – Social Reform

November 15 – Paper 2 due

Section Three
November 18 – November 22 – The Way West

November 25 – November 27 – Slavery and the Old South

November 29 – No Class – Thanksgiving Break

December 2 – December 6 – The Politics of Sectionalism

December 9 – December 11 – Civil War and Reconstruction
Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (Vintage, 2009)

Final Examination Period – TBD