HIST 1025: America since the Civil War

MWF 9:00-9:50 am
Eaton Humanities 190

Alexander P. Langer, Instructor
alexander.langer@colorado.edu
Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00, Hellems 351

Overview

This is an introductory course in American history, beginning with the end of the Civil War and finishing around the turn of the 21st century. This class will primarily examine the political and diplomatic history of the U.S., as that is my personal specialty. Never fear, for my goal is to bring in American music, entertainment, and culture wherever I can.

In this class, we will ask one deceptively simple question: has America lived up to the promise it made in July of 1776? Has this nation, “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” as Abraham Lincoln said, lived up to that promise?

Americans tend to fall into two camps when it comes to this question. Either they believe that the story of America is the story of a nation striving towards those goals, failing occasionally but always moving forward, or they believe that the promises made in the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address are merely nice words that have little to do with the actual history and lives of Americans. What camp do you fall into?

History is not merely the study of the past, the memorization and recitation of dates and names. It is the study of how our actions affect lives, about how policy is made, and how the lessons of the past animate our current arguments.

Many of the issues we face today, we have faced before. We will examine how Americans of different eras confronted the same problems with different answers. Every example of these problems gives us insight into how to approach the future. The study of history is a tool to use in everyday life. Learn to use it well, and it will help you for the rest of your life!

Books and Other Readings

This course has two required books.

The first is the course textbook, *The Story of American Freedom*, by Eric Foner. It is available in the University Bookstore, on Amazon, and in local bookstores for $19.95. (I recommend Boulder Bookstore. It is a fabulous local bookstore on Pearl Street).

The second required book is *Our Dumb Century* by The Onion. It is also available in the University Bookstore and on Amazon.

In addition, students will read one or two primary sources per week. Reading primary sources entails more than simply reading. It entails comprehension, summation, and questioning. Students will be expected to come to class having read, understood, and summarized the readings. To make sure of this, you will be completing summaries of the primary sources online before the class when they are due, for participation credit.
All readings outside of the two course books will either be uploaded to Canvas or are easily accessible online. (If you cannot find Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address online, for instance, it is written in marble on his memorial).

**Course Requirements**

**Assignments:** Students will be required to complete two tests. Each test will cover approximately one half of the course and will not be cumulative. The tests will be a mix of several IDs, provided in advance, and a short essay that circles back to the main question of the course.

Students will also be required to write three essays of varying length throughout the semester. The first essay will be capped at 250 words and be a test of your ability to write a provable thesis and examine short primary sources.

The second will be taken from *Our Dumb Century*; you will draw a year from the 20th Century out of a hat early in the semester and will write a 4 to 5-page paper wherein you find a legitimate newspaper article for every satirical article from that year of the book and compare the real news to the satirical.

The final essay will be a six-page research paper of your own choosing. Throughout the semester you will have opportunities to meet with me about a topic that you find fascinating, do outside research, and prepare to make a historical argument. This assignment is as close to what we as historians do as we can get in an introduction class, and should be the most fun, as you have absolute freedom to write about something you love learning about.

**Participation:** Being in class is the best way to learn. Every study ever conducted in higher education shows that students who show up every week do better than those that don’t, students who take notes do better than those that don’t, and students who physically write notes do better than those taking notes on a laptop. That is why I take attendance. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, with the exception of long absences, which we can discuss if you feel comfortable doing so.

Each of you has three free absences--one week where you do not need to show up. After that, each absence negatively affects your participation grade in increasing increments.

Your participation grade will come from a variety of sources. You will need to do small assignments through Canvas on the primary sources and *Onion* articles. Twice through the semester, you will give a two-minute presentation on a person, thing, or event relevant to the class meeting for that day. Sign-ups will be held on the first Friday of the semester.

**Primary Source Summaries**

You will be asked to write a four-sentence summary of each primary source, to be uploaded by midnight the night before the class to which they are assigned. These four-sentence summaries are designed to teach you how to pick up the main point of each of the sources. A detailed description of how to write these summaries is show below. For the first several weeks of class, until the first paper is turned in, the summary is all that is required. After that, you will add a short reaction to the text, where you will share your thoughts, questions, objections to, etc.
These summaries should be written in this way:

Sentence 1: Identify the author and the main idea, argument, or thesis. For example: “Mr. Langer explained in his syllabus that these assignments should summarize the text in a four-sentence model.”

Sentence 2: In this sentence, explain how the author supports their major claim. For example: “Mr. Langer argues that reducing a summary to this model narrows your focus to allow for a better reading of the key points.”

Sentence 3: In this sentence, state the author’s reason for writing this piece, using an “in order to” phrase to be explicit. For example: “Mr. Langer came up with this system in order to improve critical reading and analysis skills in his students.”

Sentence 4: In the last sentence, describe the author’s intended audience, or, if there does not seem to be an intended audience, the relationship the author takes with you, the audience member.

**Onion Summaries**

For every decade of Onion articles, you will take one article, whether it is a headline article or a smaller one and compare it to what we talked about in class. In a 500-word paper, turned in online, you should:

1. Quickly summarize the satirical article.

2. Situate it within the class (what does it relate to).

3. Explain how it changed or reinforced your understanding of that event. (Did the article seem to be satirizing an aspect of the era that we didn't talk about? Should we have talked about it more in class?)

4. Argue for or against satire being appropriate/helpful for understanding the event.

These will be worth ten points each, adding up to half your participation grade.

**Grading Breakdown:**

- Midterm: 15%
- Final: 15%
- Paper 1: 10%
- Paper 2: 15%
Paper 3: 25%

Participation: 20%

Course Schedule

Monday, 14 January
The Gettysburg Address and the Rebirth of American Freedom
Readings: Foner, Introduction.

Wednesday, 16 January
The Wars over Reconstruction
Readings: Foner, Chapter 5; Frederick Douglass’ Reconstruction Letter.

Friday, 18 January
Radical Reconstruction

Monday, 21 January
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY—NO CLASS

Wednesday, 23 January
Readings: Chief Joseph’s writings.

Friday, 25 January
How the West Was Lost

Monday, 28 January
Jim Crow
Readings: Foner, Chapter 6; Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Compromise Speech of 1895; DuBois critique of Washington.

Wednesday, 30 January
Industrialization
Readings: Andrew Carnegie: “Gospel of Wealth.”

Friday, 1 February
Industrialization’s Discontents
Readings: Foner, Chapter 7; Debs, “What Can We Do for Working People?”

Monday, 4 February
The Progressive Movement

Wednesday, 6 February
America’s Imperial Moment

Friday, 8 February
Over There: The Origins of the Great War

Monday, 11 February
Over Here: America and the Great War
Readings: Foner, Chapter 8.
Wednesday, 13 February  
1919

Friday, 15 February
Immigration, Citizenship, and a “Return to Normalcy.”

Monday, 18 February
NO CLASS-INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN

Wednesday, 20 February
The Blues and the Roaring Twenties
Readings: A Series of Blues Standards

Friday, 22 February
The Great Depression
Readings: “The Adventures of Superman.”

Monday, 25 February
1933
Readings: Umberto Ecco’s “Ur-Fascism.”

Wednesday, 27 February
The New Deal
Readings: Foner, Chapter 9; The Economic Bill of Rights.

Friday, 1 March
“A Date which will Live in Infamy”: Pearl Harbor and the Second World War.
Readings: Oral History of World War II

Monday, 4 March
Double Victory
Readings: George Takai’s Recollections of Internment

Wednesday, 6 March
Tw Bombs over Japan
Readings: Was the Bomb Really Necessary?

Friday, 8 March
MIDTERM

Monday, 11 March
The Cold War
Readings: Foner, Chapter 11, Mr. X: “The Long Telegram.”; Lippman: “Critique of Containment

Wednesday, 13 March
McCarthyism and the Domestic Cold War
Readings: “Bert the Turtle.”

Friday, 15 March
Rock n’ Roll and Youth Culture

Monday, 18 March
The Modern Civil Rights Movement
Readings: Foner, Chapter 12; “The Southern Manifesto” (1956); Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Wednesday, 20 March
A Great Society: Triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement
Readings: LBJ’s Speech on the Voting Rights Act.

Friday, 22 March
The (Second)-Longest War: Vietnam

Monday, 1 April
1968

Wednesday, 3 April
Détent and the End of the Vietnam War.

Friday, 5 April
The Nixon Years and Watergate
Readings: “Nixon Was Far Worse.”

Monday, 8 April
Malaise: The Crises of the 1970s

Wednesday, 10 April
The Power Movements and Conservative Backlash

Friday, 12 April
A New Conservatism: Reaganism

Monday, 15 April
Rollback and Iran-Contra
Readings: Selections from Walsh Report on Iran-Contra.

Wednesday, 17 April
The End of the Cold War and the New World Order

Friday, 19 April
Neoliberalism—the wars on drugs, crime, and welfare.

Monday, 22 April
The 90s & Globalization.
Readings:

Wednesday, 24 April
9/11 and the War on Terror
Readings: “We Were the Only Plane in the Sky.”

Friday, 26 April
Iraq
Readings: “Lie by Lie.”

Monday, 29 April
The Election of 2008 and the Obama Years

Readings: SNL Trilogy of Palin Sketches.

Wednesday, 2 May
Rising Polarization and Review