

U.S. HISTORY TO 1865

HIST 1301

University of Texas at Dallas

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My office: JO 5.412
Office Hours: By appointment

Fall 2025
Aug 25 - Dec 16
Our Classroom: JO 3.516

Course Description

This course covers the main themes of U.S. History through 1865. The first objective of this course is to provide you with an overview of American history through the Civil War. We will study the main political, economic, social, and cultural developments during this period so that you will have a basic understanding of the chronology of U.S. history. Another objective is to enhance your ability to evaluate historical information. An adequate overview of any historical period requires a balance of factual knowledge and critical analysis. Memorization of facts is useless without an understanding how they fit into a bigger picture. In addition to the examination of U.S. History, this course is also designed to improve your skills as a college student and modern professional, making you more educated, employable, and interesting. All required course materials are open-access and entirely free.

Note: This will be an intentional, low-technology learning experience. Unless you have specific accommodations, nearly all required work will be completed by hand, in class.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will evaluate key questions in early American history.
2. Students will create an original historical argument based on primary sources.
3. Students will develop skills as a writer and editor.

Grading

		<u>Grading Scale</u>	
<u>Assignments</u>		100-93	A
Weekly quizzes	15%	92- 90A-	
Weekly essays	50%	89-88	B+
Primary source analyses	10%	87-83	B
Final exam	25%	82-80	B-
* This class also includes two optional opportunities for extra credit		79-78	C+
		77-70	C
		69-	F

Readings

I am currently finalizing the second edition of [*The American Yawp*](#), a free US history textbook. You will read the current draft of this second edition. All readings will be made available to you for free through eLearning.

Technology

This course requires use of eLearning. Please review the technical requirements on the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage. All electronic communication must take place through official UT Dallas email. Please note that individual assignment grades posted to eLearning will be accurate. Grade totals, however, are computer generated estimates and may be inaccurate. Check the weighting listed above in this syllabus if you would like to calculate your own grade estimate.

AccessAbility Services

I am happy to make accommodations for students with documented disabilities. However, written notification from the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is required (see <http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess>).

Academic Honesty

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Academic dishonesty includes, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, collaboration/collusion, and any use of AI. Consequences for academic dishonesty will include an automatic failing grade for the class as well as additional discipline to be administered by the university. Additional information related to academic dishonesty and tips on how to avoid dishonesty may be found here: <https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/integrity/>. Don't be a cheater.

Other university policies and procedures relevant to this course can be found at:
<http://provost.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies/>

Course Structure

Every Monday, we will all gather in-person from 4:00-6:45pm in JO 3.516. I understand that you may miss a class or two, but to earn credit for the week, you must attend in person. Each class session will include a 90-minute lecture and then an individual writing activity which must be completed by hand. This class is designed to help you practice the skill of synthesizing and applying information quickly and without the aid of technology. While technology is changing fast, these skills remain essential for both professional and personal success.

Description of Assignments

Quizzes = 15%

You will complete brief online quizzes. The purpose of these quizzes is to ensure that you have a basic understanding of events covered in class. You may take each quiz up to 10 times before midnight on the Wednesday after our class session, but I strongly recommend you take each at least once before class.

Weekly Essays = 50%

Each lecture will begin with big, interpretive questions. During the lecture, you should take notes to gather details that would help you answer those questions. Immediately following the lecture, you will be asked to handwrite a short essay that answers one of the questions. Only your 10 highest scores will be counted, so you may either skip three weeks of this assignment, or I will drop your three lowest scores.

Primary Source Analyses = 20%

Each week, you will also complete a short primary source analysis in-class. Only your 10 highest scores will be counted, so you may either skip three weeks of this assignment, or I will drop your three lowest scores. However, completing this every week will give you an advantage in writing your final essay.

Final Exam = 25%

During final exam week, you will use the primary source analyses that you have completed to write an in-class essay.

Final exam dates are typically generated during the second week of classes. In your "UTD Student Center," click on the "Manage My Classes" tile. In the "View My Classes" for the term, select "Exam Schedule" under your class listings.

OPTIONAL: Extra credit, Digital history worksheet (5%)

Students can earn extra points by reading one chapter of the freely available *American Revolutions in the Digital Age* and completing a worksheet. See the second to last page of the syllabus for more information.

OPTIONAL: Extra credit, Choose your own assignment (5%)

Students can select an additional assignment based on their personal interests. See the last page of the syllabus for more information.

*** Descriptions and timelines may change at Professor Wright's discretion ***

Course Schedule

WEEK	DISCUSSION	CHAPTER(S) TO READ
WEEK 1	Aug 25	COURSE INTRODUCTION
WEEK 2	Sept 1	LABOR DAY - NO CLASS
WEEK 3	Sept 8	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 1
WEEK 4	Sept 15	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 2
WEEK 5	Sept 22	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 3
WEEK 6	Sept 29	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 4
WEEK 7	Oct 6	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 5
WEEK 8	Oct 13	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 6
WEEK 9	Oct 20	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 7
WEEK 10	Oct 27	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 8
WEEK 11	Nov 3	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 9
WEEK 12	Nov 10	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 10
WEEK 13	Nov 17	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 11
WEEK 14	Nov 24	FALL BREAK
WEEK 15	Dec 1	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 12
WEEK 16	Dec 8	AMERICAN YAWP CHAPTER 13

DECEMBER 11-16 **FINAL EXAM**

* Your final Exam **MUST** be completed in-person. You must be on campus through December 16.

OPTIONAL: EXTRA CREDIT – Digital History Worksheet, 4 pts possible

Due by 11:59pm on Friday, November 21

THE USE OF ANY AI FOR ANY OF THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL RESULT IN AUTOMATIC COURSE FAILURE AND REPORTING TO THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

UTD's history is rooted in computing technology, and computing remains at the core of our university identity. How can digital technology change the way we understand the past, and how might a deep historical consciousness help us make meaning of our digital present? You will explore one or both of these questions by completing a brief worksheet after reading a chapter in *American Revolutions in the Digital Age*, an anthology of essays that explores the intersection of early American history and digital technology. More information will be available on eLearning.

Read any one chapter from this volume and fill out the worksheet available on eLearning. Here's a reason why you might pick any one of these chapters:

1. Digital Public History at Three Presidential Home Sites
The chapter compares how museums are using digital technology to explain the lives and presidencies of Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe. Pretty cool if you're interested in presidential history or how technology can be applied in museums.
4. Building a Relational Database to Explore Enslaved Midwives' Work in Early America
The author has created a digital database of enslaved midwives, illustrating the hidden work of these largely unknown women. This is an impressive example of how you can tell the stories of people otherwise invisible in the historical record and an interesting example of the use of relational databases.
7. Mapping Myaamia Landownership, 1795–1846 and Today
The author is working with Native American tribal leaders to chronicle the transfer of land to and from the tribe to the government. This is a story of how Native people lost their land and how digital tools might help them reclaim portions of it.
8. (Counter-)Revolutionary Discourse in the Age of Revolutions
This team of undergraduate computer science students and a literature scholar use natural language processing tools to explore what the word "revolution" meant in the nineteenth century. They consider what NLP can do and how and why and when you still need historical knowledge.
9. By Conversation with a Lady: Women's Correspondence Networks in the Founders Online Database
This chapter uses network analysis to identify the connections between elite women in the era of the American Revolution. Check it out if you're interested in women's history or what network analysis can do.
10. Identifying "A Slave": The Text Analysis Project Explores a Mystifying Letter to Thomas Jefferson
This team of computer scientists and historians developed their own text analysis software and then applied it to solve an old historical question. This involves the most serious computer science of any of the essays.
13. Media Literacy in Revolutionary America
This historian of media explains how Americans understood and responded to fake news in the era of the American Revolution. Some people claim that fake news is a problem today, but I've done my own research and those people are actually reptilians from outer space.
14. "A Busy, Bustling, Disputatious Tone": News Anxiety in the Age of Revolutions and Today
This historian of communication explains how Americans freaked out in the early nineteenth century, believing that events were happening too fast, and it was impossible to stay up to date on the chaos of the world. Sound familiar?
15. Copyright and Historical Dangers of Licensing Regimes in the Digital Age
This lawyer / historian explains the history of copyright law and how those historical understandings still shape how property rights and licensing works today. If you're interested in becoming a lawyer, or a pirate, or are otherwise curious about questions of open access versus copyright, check this out.

OPTIONAL: EXTRA CREDIT - Choose your own assignment, 4pts possible

Due by 11:59pm on Wednesday, December 11

THE USE OF AI FOR ANY OF THESE ASSIGNMENTS WILL RESULT IN AUTOMATIC COURSE FAILURE AND REPORTING TO THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

1. **For musicians:** Write and record an EP of at least three original songs based on American history through the Civil War. Upload your songs to SoundCloud, YouTube, Bandcamp or a hosting platform of your choice. Send a link along with brief 200-250-word explanations for each song that discuss how it engages with American history through the Civil War. Focus your written explanation on details from the course.
2. **For DJs:** Create a 30-song Spotify/Apple/YouTube playlist based on the material covered in chapters 1-14 of *The American Yawp*. Write 50-100-word explanations for each song, relating each to American history through the Civil War.
3. **For visual artists.** Produce at least one original work of visual art that engages this era of American history. Write a 700-900-word explanation of how your piece engages American history through the Civil War.
4. **For creative writers.** Produce a collection of poems, short story, or novel chapter that engages with American history through the Civil War. Your creative piece(s) should total at least 2,000 words. In addition to your creative writing, please also write a short 500-700 word explanation of how your work relates to this era of American history.
5. **For gamers:** Write a 1,000-1,200 word reflection on video games and American history through the Civil War. Your essay should do one of the following:
 - a. Write a review of as many video games as you can find that speak to an era of American history prior to the 1865. This review should focus on the historical content of the videogames not their playability or other gaming issues. What is revealed and what is obscured about history through this game? How does this game relate to the perspective on history offered by this course?
 - b. Pitch your own game based on this era of American history. Questions of playability and other issues can be briefly addressed, but the bulk of your proposal should explain how the game would engage with specific events, issues, and themes in American history through the Civil War.
6. **For memelords:** Create 10 memes based on the course content. Write 100-150-word explanations for each meme, explaining how they illustrate an important historical concept.
7. **For coders:** Are you inspired by the digital history essay you read? Can you think of a way you might be able to use digital technology to help answer a historical question? If so, email me your idea, and let's get you started on a cool project that applies digital tools to historical questions. Examples of tools might include GIS mapping, topic modeling, database creation, VR/AR creation, and more.