



On-Campus Course Syllabus

HIS 103a

American History I

Spring 2025

Class Information

Day and Time: Tuesday / Thursday 8:00 am to 9:15 am
Room Number: E209

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Kirk Spencer
Instructor Email: kspencer@criswell.edu
Instructor Phone: 469.834.5211 (Text First)
Instructor Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 11:00 to 1:00



Course Description and Prerequisites

A survey of American history from America's beginnings through the Civil War. (This course satisfies requirements for a Humanities/Fine Arts course.)

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course the student should be able to:

- A. Identify major figures and events in American history from Early America to 1877.
- B. Develop the facility of close reading by analyzing and evaluating primary texts.
- C. Practice critical thinking skills by crafting critical questions regarding the readings.
- D. Evaluate and appreciate political, military, religious and cultural developments and human achievements in Early U.S. history using Scripture (theology).
- E. Identify and evaluate lessons learned from America's past and begin to apply these to cultivate a better understanding of themselves, their faith and their social responsibility as a Christian.

Required Textbooks

Waskiewicz, Sylvie (Lead Editor), P. Scott Corbett, Jay Precht, Volker Janssen, et. al. ***U.S. History***. Houston: OpenStax, 2021

[Free Open-Source Public Domain and will be provided on Canvas.]

Link: [TEXT.USHistory-WEB.pdf](#)

Recommended Reading

A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, Volume I: To 1877, Brief Edition

11th Edition | Copyright 2023 | by Mary Beth Norton, Jane Kamensky, Carol Sheriff, David W. Blight, Howard P. Chudacoff, Fredrik Logevall, Beth Bailey

[provided to the student through Cengage. It is important that you **do not** opt out of the textbook for the course.]

Course Requirements and Assignments

- **Class Attendance, Department and Participation.**

Since class participation is vital to learning, absences should be taken only when absolutely necessary. Granting of excused absences is permitted at the discretion of the professor.

Three instances of either being tardy to class or departing before the end of class will be considered one absence. You will receive a participation grade based upon attendance and informed participation in class discussion. The participation grade will be reduced by 4 points for each unexcused absence.

The amount and quality of questions asked (or answered) and comments made during classroom discussions will also be an important consideration in determining the participation grade.

The participation grade will constitute **10%** of your course grade.

- **Textbook Reading Assignments**

The textbook will be provided for you in Canvas and you will be assigned weekly reading assignments. You will report the percentage of the reading you have done each week in a reading report. Your percentages will be averaged together to determine your reading grade.

Your reading grade will constitute **10%** of the course grade.

- **Turabian Guide Completion**

At the beginning of the semester, you will go through the Turabian Guide linked in the modules section. You will be graded based on completion of the entire guide. All activities must be completed for the grade to be applied. A quiz acknowledging completion of the guide will provide the points for this assignment.

Your Turabian Guide Completion Grade will constitute **5%** of the course grade.

- **Background Knowledge Pretest for Each Unit**

At the beginning of each unit a background knowledge pretest will be given to assess your basic knowledge of the content covered in that unit. If you follow the instructions and complete the test, you will make a perfect score of 100. The purpose is to assess the baseline knowledge for the class. This knowledge will help the professor direct the instruction and expectations for the course. For this reason, you must do your best and answer only from memory without using any other sources or aid.

Your reading grade will constitute **5%** of the course grade.

- **Exams:**

Four exams will be given during the semester. Each exam will cover the material in one four-week unit. There will be a Discovery Exam, Revolution Exam, Expansion Exam and Division Exam. Exams will cover content from the reading, lectures and class discussions. Each exam will include mostly multiple choice and matching questions.

Each exam will determine **10%** of your course grade

- **Critical Questions and Discussion:**

As you read the textbook and primary texts assigned, you should think about an area of what you are learning and craft a fascinating, thought-provoking and relevant question you would like to discuss with the class. Submit these questions on the discussion board for that particular unit (Discovery, Revolution, Expansion, Division).

[Critical questions go beyond simple questions of fact (i.e., In what year did the colonists declare independence?). To answer a quality critical question, you must commit yourself to a position and defend it. “The 1619 Project concludes that the United States of America began when slaves first arrived in America in 1619. If you do not agree, please explain why. If you agree, what do you believe are the three most important historical facts that support this position?]

For each of the four discussion boards during the semester, you should find at least one question crafted by another student and post a thoughtful, well-written answer of at least 250 words. Each of you are responsible to monitor your question on the discussion board and respond to the students who answer it. At the end of the unit you should also supply your own answer to your question.

Once we have finished each unit, the professor will provide a Question and Discussion grade for that unit based upon the quality of your question and response to other’s question. Other factors used to determine the grade will be how well written your questions and answers are in terms of overall quality, clarity, creativity and insight of your discussion, as well as style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, organization etc. of your writing.

Each Question and Discussion grade will determine **10 percent** of your final grade.

- **Research**

Before the end of the second week of class, you should select an area of interest that falls within the general area of American History from its beginning to 1877 and spend time each week doing research on this topic. It is important to get an early start. Once you have your topic selected, send an email to the Professor defining what you would like to research. If you have trouble finding a topic, just consider the kinds of things you are most interested in and see if you can find a connection to U.S. History (before the end of the 19th century). It will be more interesting to you and to the class if you make the topic your own and find something that fascinates you... something that will probably not be covered in the textbook.

It is very important that you have a chance to present your research to the class. It will not be a long presentation (10-15 minutes) but will give you a chance to practice your speaking and teaching skills. After the presentation the class will have opportunity to ask questions to you and the class related to the subject. Before the presentation you should summarize what you have discovered in your research in a one or two page document that can be made available to the class.

As you research, look for a problem or question related to your topic. Also think about the different stages of critical thinking and apply them to this question or problem. If possible, include your insights gained as a result of your research in the classroom discussions and the discussion board.

A grade will be assigned for the project based upon the summary handout and the quality, clarity and relevance of your class presentation.

The Research Grade will determine **20%** of your final grade.

Grade Weight

Informed Class Participation	10%
Textbook and Primary Source Reading	10%
Turabian Guide Completion	5%
Unit Pretests	5%
Exams	30%
Questions and Discussion	20%
<u>Research Grade</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total	100%

Course/Classroom Policies and Information

You are allowed to view I-Phones and laptops during class time for notification purposes. However, it is expected that you will be consistently engaged in classroom activities while in the classroom. If you spend more than a minute or two looking at your phone or laptop without engaging in classroom activities, the professor may ask you to put away your phone or laptop and rejoin the class. If you refuse, or continue this activity at a later time in the class, you will be asked to leave the class and will be counted as absent (as you are essentially absent).

Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they (1) anticipate being able to attend every on-campus class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, or (2) participating in academically related activities as identified in online-course schedules including synchronous class sessions conducted remotely by video, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any missed information. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades. Professors apprise students of such information in course syllabi.

Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships must meet specified requirements of various departments at the college and should consult relevant sections of the *Academic Catalog*. To ensure such funds will not be forfeited, students are responsible for contacting the proper departments to ascertain any specific course participation requirements and consequences of not meeting such requirements. Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships should consult the Financial Aid office.

While Criswell College is a non-attendance taking institution, it nevertheless must demonstrate that students begin their courses in order to comply with Federal Aid regulations. Accordingly, students must participate in academically related activities during census periods. Failure to meet this requirement will result in students being administratively dropped from courses.

Academically related activity is defined as any course-related activity that may be used as evidence of attendance. Examples include:

- physical presence in a classroom during a class session with the instructor present,
- participation in a synchronous remote video class session with the instructor present,
- submission of an academic assignment, quiz, or exam,
- participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- participation in a study group or discussion board that is assigned by the instructor,
- documentation showing that the student and a faculty member corresponded about the academic subject of the course.

NOTE: Logging into a Canvas course alone and logging into a Synchronous Online class session without active participation or with the camera off are not considered attendance.

NOTE: A census period begins on the first day of a semester/term and runs through the end of the last day to drop courses. During the census period, attendance data is collected in order to demonstrate compliance with Federal Aid regulations. There is no census period for winter terms since there is no last day to drop courses.

Campus Closure

To ensure the health and safety of students and employees, college administrators may decide it is necessary on rare occasions to close the campus. Once this decision is announced, instructors will contact students to provide further details regarding the campus closure's impact on those courses. Students are responsible to watch for communication from their instructors and respond appropriately. (Unless otherwise specified by the instructor in this syllabus, this communication will be sent to the student's Criswell College e-mail account.)

In order to make progress toward the courses' objectives, instructors have the freedom during most campus closures to require students to participate in activities as alternatives to meeting on campus. An instructor may, for example, hold class remotely (through Zoom) at the scheduled time, provide a recording of a class or presentation for students to watch independently, or assign other activities that students are to accomplish before returning to campus. Students are responsible for accomplishing these alternative activities as well as any course requirements listed in this syllabus during the period of the campus closure. If, during the period of the campus closure, personal circumstances prohibit a student from accomplishing these alternative activities or course requirements and assignment listed in the syllabus during the campus closure, the student is responsible for communicating with the instructor as soon as possible. Instructors will not penalize students who do not have the means to accomplish the alternative activities during the period of the campus's closure and will work with students whose circumstances during the campus closure prohibited their timely completion of course requirements and assignments in the syllabus.

Grading Scale

Assigning grade definitions (i.e., above average, average, below average) is optional. Please delete the last column below if not assigning definitions. Additionally, delete these instructions when completing syllabus.

			Grade Definitions (optional)
A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour	
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour	
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour	
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour	
B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour	
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour	
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour	
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour	
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour	
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour	
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour	
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour	

Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An "I" may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar's Office. The "I" must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the close of the term or semester in which the grade was awarded, or the "I" will become an "F."

Academic Honesty

Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and
- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

Institutional Assessment

Material submitted by students in this course may be used for assessment of the college's academic programs. Since programmatic and institutional assessment is done without reference to specific students, the results of these assessments have no effect on a student's course grade or academic standing at the college. Before submitting a student's work for this type of assessment, the course instructor redacts the work to remove anything that identifies the student.

Institutional Email Policy

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students' institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of

the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

Disabilities

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

Intellectual Property Rights

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the instructor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

Research and Writing Standards

The default writing style for written assignments in Criswell College Courses is the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. However, instructors are free to require alternative writing styles in their courses. These styles include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago Manual of Style, Modern Language Association (MLA), and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) writing guides.

Resources and Supports

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at studenttechsupport@criswell.edu.

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or studentservices@criswell.edu. The Student Services Office also works with local counseling centers to ensure that every student has access to helpful mental health resources. More information is located on the college website at [Criswell College Mental Health Resources](#), and students may contact the Director of Student Services if they have any questions.

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, email the Wallace Library at library@criswell.edu. Login credentials are emailed to students near the beginning of the semester.

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence. Tutors have been recommended by the faculty to ensure that the tutor(s) are qualified to serve the student body. Every tutor brings experience and expertise in an effort to provide the proper resources for the

subject matter at hand. To consult with a tutor, students can schedule an appointment through Calendly (<https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>) or by visiting the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203. For questions, call 214.818.1373 or email at tutoringcenter@criswell.edu.

Course Outline/Calendar

Weekly Session

Assignment

UNIT 1

DISCOVERY of the Americas

Week 1 (January 21-23)

Introduction and Syllabus
Beginning of America

Study Chapter 1

The Americas, Europe, and Africa
Before 1492

Complete Background Knowledge Pretest

Week 2 (January 28-30)

Native Americans
MesoAmerican Civilizations

Study Chapter 2

Early Globalization: The Atlantic World,
1492–1650

Email Research Topic to Professor

Turabian Guide Completion

Week 3 (February 4-6)

First Colonies in America
French, Spanish, English & Natives

Study Chapter 3

Creating New Social Orders: Colonial Societies,
1500–1700

Submit Critical Discussion Questions & Answers

Week 4 (February 11-13)

Review Day
Discovery of America Unit

Study Chapter 4

Rule Britannia! The English Empire,
1660–1763

Take Reading Quiz to Submit Reading Percentage

Study for Exam over Discovery of America Unit

Take Exam over Discovery Unit

UNIT 2

REVOLUTION to The United States

Week 5 (February 18- 20)

American Reactions
Declaration of Independence

Study Chapter 5

Imperial Reforms and Colonial Protests,
1763-1774

Each Week Work on Research Topic

Complete Background Knowledge Pretest

Week 6 (February 25-27)

Revolutionary War

Study Chapter 6

America's War for Independence,
1775-1783

Week 7 (March 4 - 6)

Study Chapter 7

Building the Constitution
Forms of Government

Creating Republican Governments,
1776–1790

Submit Critical Discussion Questions & Answers

Week 8 (March 11-13)

Review Day

Revolution to the United States Unit 1790–1820

Study Chapter 8

Growing Pains: The New Republic,

1790–1820

Take Reading Quiz to Submit Reading Percentage

Study for Exam over

Revolution to the United States Unit

TAKE EXAM over Revolution to the United States Unit

SPRING BREAK (March 17-24)

UNIT 3

EXPANSION to the West

Week 9 (March 25-27)

Industrial Revolution

Study Chapter 9

Industrial Transformation in the North,
1800–1850

Each Week Work on Research Topic

Complete Background Knowledge Pretest

Week 10 (April 1-3)

Basic Jacksonian Problems

Study Chapter 10

Jacksonian Democracy,
1820–1840

Week 11 (April 8-10)

Manifest Destiny

Westward Expansion

Study Chapter 11

A Nation on the Move: Westward Expansion,
1800–1860

Submit Critical Discussion Questions & Answers

Week 12 (April 15-17)

Review Day

Expansion to the West

Study Chapter 12

Cotton is King: The Antebellum South,
1800–1860

Take Reading Quiz to Submit Reading Percentage

Study for Exam over Expansion to the West

TAKE EXAM over Expansion to the West Unit

UNIT 4

DIVISION of the Union

Week 13 (April 22-24)

Reasons for the Civil War

Study Chapter 13

Antebellum Idealism and Reform Impulses,
1820–1860

Each Week Work on Research Topic

Complete Background Knowledge Pretest

Week 14 (April 29 – May 1)
Beginning of the Civil War

Study Chapter 14
Troubled Times: the Tumultuous
1850s

Week 15 (May 6-8)
End of the Civil War

Study Chapter 15
The Civil War,
1860–1865
Submit Critical Discussion Questions & Answers

Week 16 (May 13-15)
Review Day for
Division of the Union

Study Chapter 16
The Era of Reconstruction,
1865–1877
Take Reading Quiz to Submit Reading Percentage
Study for Exam over Expansion to the West

TAKE EXAM over Division of the Union

Bibliography

Benjamin, Jules R. *A Student's Guide to History*. 13th ed. Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.

Fritzer, Penelope Joan, and Ernest Andrew Brewer. *Social Studies Content for Elementary and Middle School Teachers*. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2010.

Kidd, Thomas. *American History, Volume 1: 1492-1877*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019.

Schweikart, Larry, and Michael Allen. *A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to America's Age of Entitlement*. United States: Sentinel, 2004.

Trueman, Carl R. *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Wineburg, Sam. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.