

History of the Americas

Professor Freund
Room 512
Office: Room 408
Email: dfreund@bhsec.bard.edu

Course objective

Contrary to what its title might suggest, this class looks to do far more than convey a broad mass of facts. **Historical thinking is active.** Historians do not just state “facts,” and they do not simply recount how the world was. They organize materials into complex arguments about what happened, who made things happen, and who suffered the consequences or enjoyed the benefits of those many happenings. This class, as should any survey of American history, will convey a lot of information about who did what when, but it will aspire to a far loftier goal in assessing the many kinds of contentions historians make. This class will develop, in each student, the ability to craft compelling arguments of their own.

Readings

Historians look to pry meanings from sometimes-opaque texts. The only way to learn how to do this kind of work is practice. For this reason, this class will mostly work with primary sources (more on the difference between primary and secondary sources in a moment). As a supplement to these texts from the past, recent historical scholarship will provide a way to better understand the types of arguments historians have made.

I will provide you with copies of each week’s reading ahead of time. You should **always bring the week’s assigned texts with you to class**, as we will often refer back to readings.

Requirements and expectations

- Students are responsible for reading all texts and for coming to class ready to discuss them.
- Students may be required to attend office hours, visit the Writing Center, or attend tutoring.
- All writing done outside of class must be typed (all pages should be double spaced in a reasonably sized font like Times New Roman with margins 1 inch on top and bottom and 1.25 on left and right).
- The only way to become a better writer is to write often. At the end of each week, students will submit a short assessment of the week’s readings (1-1.5 pages). Good essays will not simply describe a source; they will make interesting arguments about how to interpret that text. Essays can either use a single source or multiple sources. These assignments will be graded on a check-minus, check, check-plus scale.

- Though it is my firm belief that lots of American social studies education has done its students—and the field of history, generally—a great disservice in reducing the past to names, dates, and assorted “facts,” there is a role for such knowledge (especially on silly exams like the Regents and the SAT II). Since gathering this information can be tedious—and sometimes painful—the class will work together to generate a timeline of relevant and important events from American history. Each week, four students will create a timeline of a short period of American history for distribution to the entire class. Details to follow.
- Students will complete regular longer essays (2-3 pages). For the most part, these assignments will require a critical assessment of a historically important issue.
 - Examples:
 - How did the difference between Spanish and English social systems effect the lives of Native Americans?
 - Was the United States at the end of the 19th century an empire?
- Students will complete one long project (details to follow).
- Finally, at the end of each term, students will take a final exam.

Grading

	Semester 1	Semester 2
Participation	25%	20%
Timeline project	10%	10%
All Short assignments	25%	15%
Longer papers	20%	15%
Research paper	---	20%
Final Exam	20%	20%