

Issues in American Culture and History

GENA 2122 | Term I (Fall), 2020-2021 | Tuesdays 10:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. | Via Zoom (COVID-19)

Instructors

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Office location: Fung King Hey Building 314 / Zoom

Office hours: 10:30-12:15 M/W/F (Kelly), 3-5 Th (Robbie), or by appointment (both). For Kelly's office hours, please email ahead so she knows to expect you. No email necessary for Robbie's.

This course offers a survey of important topics and themes in the history of the United States. In the first four weeks, instructors will guide students through a brisk, chronological overview of the country's development over time. In each of the latter nine weeks, we will work together to explore a particular theme significant to American history, culture, and society. The course will cover material from all eras of American history (including from before the founding of the United States), but will emphasize content from the 20th and 21st centuries. Students will learn to think about the U.S. and its history from political, economic, social, and cultural perspectives. They will leave the course with a fuller understanding of the country's past and present.

Students should note that the scope of this course is ambitious and the length of the term limited. This means that we will move through material quite quickly, with many topics appearing in one lecture and not necessarily reappearing as we advance through the course. Although you will each have the chance to explore a topic of your choice through the final project, we also encourage you to email us at any time if you have any questions about the course or want to learn more about a particular topic. This term, we will also have the chance to engage with each other in optional enrichment sessions that will cover additional content not included in the course proper. We will share more information about these sessions several weeks into the term, after soliciting information from you about your interests.

Course Outline

Week 1	8 Sept.	Course introduction + Chronology I: Colonial era (15th c.-1776) (RS + KT)
Week 2	15 Sept.	Chronology II: Founding through Civil War (1776-1865) (KT)
Week 3	22 Sept.	Chronology III: Reconstruction through World War II (1865-1945) (RS)
Week 4	29 Sept.	Chronology IV: Post-World War II era (1945-present) (RS)
Week 5	6 Oct.	Democracy (KT)
Week 6	13 Oct.	Inequality (KT)
Week 7	20 Oct.	Race I: African Americans (RS)
Week 8	27 Oct.	Immigration (RS)

Week 9	3 Nov.	Race II: Asian Americans (KT)
Week 10	10 Nov.	Citizenship (KT)
Week 11	17 Nov.	Gender (RS)
Week 12	24 Nov.	Sexuality (KT)
Week 13	1 Dec.	America Abroad (RS)
	8 Dec.	Student presentations*

* Student presentations will take place during a special session on Tuesday, 8 December, between the end of term and the start of exams.

Online Teaching

Given the uncertainty arising from the coronavirus pandemic, we have designed this course to take place entirely online in the event that we are unable to physically return to campus this term. This has involved altering the instructional mode in order to suit the realities of online learning, emphasize its advantages, and minimize its pitfalls. Specifically, we have tried to structure class time in order to expand opportunities for students to engage in active learning. For your information and reference, here is the general framework that we intend to follow.

During Weeks 2-4 (Chronology), we will meet synchronously for the duration of the assigned time slot (Tuesdays 10:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.) and follow this schedule:

10:30-10:40: Warm-up
 10:40-11:15: First half of lecture
 11:15-11:20: Break
 11:20-11:40: Primary source activity
 11:40-12:15: Second half of lecture

During Weeks 5-13 (Themes), students will watch a pre-recorded lecture (45-60 minutes) before class. Afterward, students will submit comments and questions about the lecture via a short Google Form that is due **by 8 p.m. on the Monday** preceding our weekly class meeting. We will then meet synchronously for a shorter period of one hour (Tuesdays 10:30-11:30 a.m.) for a discussion of the material, following this schedule:

10:30-10:45: Instructors' review of lecture and response to student questions
 10:45-11:00: Student-led primary source presentation
 11:00-11:15: Instructor-led primary source discussion
 11:15-11:30: Current events connection

These frameworks are subject to our adjustment and we welcome your feedback on them. We will upload lectures and other materials for the thematic classes to Blackboard by the Thursday

of the preceding week (so, for instance, the “Inequality” lecture and materials will be available by Thursday, 8 October, for the lesson on Tuesday, 13 October).

Assessment Scheme

Attendance and participation	15%
Four response papers	20%
Take-home midterm exam	25%
Final project	40%

Attendance and participation: We will take attendance at every class meeting. Students who are chronically absent, chronically tardy, and/or obviously disengaged during class without a legitimate excuse will see their attendance and participation grade suffer. This grade also includes 1) completion of assigned short readings and 2) a brief presentation that each student, working with a partner, will need to make on a primary source at some point during the thematic section of the course. We will circulate more detailed instructions and a sign-up sheet for these presentations near the end of the chronological unit.

Four response papers: Each week of the thematic section (so, beginning in Week 5), all students will read several short primary sources related to the topic of that week’s lesson before class. Over the course of the term, each student will need to submit four brief (250-word) responses to one or more of the sources for that week. These response papers are intended to give you a chance to personally reflect on the sources before we discuss them as a class. Questions you might seek to answer in your response include, among others, the following:

- What do I see in the source? What’s happening in it? Why might it be significant? What might it tell us about the past?
- How does what I see in the source fit into my prior understanding of American history? How does it *not* fit? Does the source change my understanding of a particular period and/or topic in American history?
- What kind of source is this? Where did it come from? Who made it? *Does that change how I read it?*
- What questions do I still have about the source and/or topic? What does it not tell me?

You don’t need to answer all or even most of these questions; they are just some examples to get you started. Each student may decide during which four weeks of the thematic section that they would like to submit a response paper. We do, however, recommend submitting at least one before midterm so that we can give you feedback before you submit the others. All response papers must be submitted via Blackboard by the start of Tuesday’s lesson (10:30 a.m.) in order to count for that week.

Take-home midterm exam: We will distribute a take-home exam consisting of several essay questions at the end of class on **Tuesday, 20 October**. Students will have until the start of class the next week (**Tuesday, 27 October at 10:30 a.m.**) to return their completed exam via Blackboard. This exam is open-book and is intended to assess your ability to think historically and critically about the content of the first half of the course.

Final project: At the end of the course, each student will be required to submit a final project exploring a topic in American history of their choice. This project can take many forms: a traditional research paper (7-8 pages); a podcast or short documentary; a primary source collage or zine; an interactive website; a visual art piece and statement; and so on. Students may work individually or in groups of up to three, although students who work in groups will need to be able to demonstrate their personal contribution to the project. All students will give a brief presentation of their work to the class during our last meeting on **Tuesday, 8 December**, and students must submit their projects via Blackboard by **11:59 p.m. on Friday, 11 December**. We will distribute further details about the final project after the midterm.

Class Policies

Attendance: As much as we enjoy having you in class, we understand that life happens and that occasionally you cannot be present. If you are to be absent with a legitimate excuse* (sickness, family emergency, essential appointment, etc.), please email both instructors as soon as possible, ideally at least 24 hours before the class you expect to miss. The same applies if you expect to be late with a legitimate reason. Unexcused absences and lateness will drag down your participation grade. If you do miss all or part of a class, you are responsible for emailing us or a classmate to ask for materials and a quick class summary to catch yourself up.

We understand that the COVID-19 public health crisis may cause extraordinary difficulties in addition to those listed above. If this is the case, please email both instructors as soon as possible; we will facilitate a discussion to work through these difficulties on a case-by-case basis.

Late submission: Late submission of assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Electronics: This course will be taught online over Zoom. We ask that you remain engaged while attending class and respect your instructors and peers by 1) refraining from using electronics that are unrelated to the Zoom sessions during class time and 2) refraining from checking your email, checking social media, online shopping, etc. while in class. We are happy to make accommodations for students with documented needs; just reach out to us.

Zoom: To alleviate legitimate concerns about privacy, we will not be recording the discussion components of this class. Instead, we will record only lectures given by instructors. We respectfully urge all students to likewise refrain from recording or screenshotting class discussions in order to maintain a comfortable environment for all. Regarding cameras, we ask students to turn their cameras on during discussions in order to facilitate more authentic class engagement. Please get in touch with us if this will pose a challenge to you.

Academic honesty: The University places very high importance on honesty in academic work and follows a policy of zero tolerance toward academic dishonesty. You may review its policies [here](#). Students will be required to submit midterm exams and final projects to VeriGuide. We will report plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to the relevant bodies as necessary.

Respect: Everyone deserves a chance to learn in an environment where they feel safe and respected. We do not tolerate disrespect of any kind in our classroom. Lively conversations and robust disagreements about the course content, however, are warmly encouraged.

Feedback for evaluation: Students will be asked to complete course evaluations for GENA 2122 at the end of the term. Comments and suggestions about the course content, teaching methods, and learning tasks are most welcome at any time during the term.