OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION
A comprehensive survey of American history from the end of Reconstruction to the present.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO DO AND LEARN IN THIS CLASS (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES)

- You will learn how to approach history as a way of reasoning about the past, just as professional historians do. By the end of the semester, you will understand that history is about critical thinking and interpretation, not about memorizing facts.

- You will develop core skills that scholars use to support historical reasoning. You will gather and analyze evidence from primary and secondary sources, make connections between sources, assess change over time, compare multiple perspectives, identify causes and turning points, construct sound arguments, etc. See p. 5-6 for more information on historical reasoning.

- You will apply these historical reasoning skills to three long-running debates in American society in order to develop an appreciation for how a historical perspective can shed light on today’s concerns. We can’t understand where we are, if we don’t know how we got here.

Rote memorization without understanding is not learning. It has no value in this class.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

- Debates: 15% (3 at 5% each)
  Sept. 28, Oct. 31, Dec. 12
- Paper 1: 20%
  Thursday, September 28
- Paper 2: 20%
  Tuesday, October 31
- Paper 3: 25%
  Tuesday, December 12
- Homework/Quizzes: 20%
  1-2 per week on D2L

Course materials: All readings will be posted on D2L. That means that everything is free! Yay! The (possibly) bad news is that you must have frequent computer access to be successful in this course. Your phone will not be enough. If you do not have access to a computer at home, you should be prepared to spend at least two hours a week at a computer lab, more when papers are due. The main textbook will be *The American Yawp* at [http://www.americanyawp.com](http://www.americanyawp.com). There will be short daily readings from other sources. I will update these based on student questions and interests, so be sure to check D2L regularly.

Reading: This class requires a great deal of reading and writing. Students who have completed ENG 131 and ENG 132 are more likely to be successful in this course. Students who have trouble with reading, especially students who are currently enrolled in IRW 099, may find the course difficult. That doesn’t mean that you are doomed to fail, but you may need to work with a tutor or clear your schedule for SI.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

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<tr>
<th>Week 1 to Week 5</th>
<th>Aug. 29 to Sept. 28</th>
<th>Should the government regulate the economy?</th>
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<td>What happened when there was little regulation? When and why was regulation introduced?</td>
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<td>What was the result? Why do some politicians want to get rid of regulation again?</td>
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<td>September 28: Debate #1 and Paper #1</td>
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<th>Week 6 to Week 10</th>
<th>Oct. 3 to Oct. 31</th>
<th>What role should the US play in the world?</th>
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<td>How did the US become a global power? What goals have driven US foreign policy? Has the US acted primarily in its own self-interest or to help others? Can it do both?</td>
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<td>October 31: Debate #2 and Paper #2</td>
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<th>Week 10 to Week 15</th>
<th>Nov. 2 to Dec. 12</th>
<th>Why do Americans argue so much about race, gender, and sexuality?</th>
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<td>How can historians help us understand the origins of contemporary cultural conflicts? Why is racism and sexism such a persistent problem in a nation dedicated to freedom? How have ideas about cultural norms been reinforced—and challenged—through the 20th century?</td>
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<td>December 12: Debate #3 and Paper #3 (also submitted to LiveText)</td>
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STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INTERNAL COURSE POLICIES

Consultations: I take my responsibilities as an instructor seriously. You are warmly invited to come to my office hours to discuss readings, lectures or anything else that you have concerns or questions about. You may also make an appointment, if my hours are not convenient.

Coursework: You should think of this course like joining a health club. As your personal trainer, it is my responsibility to show you how to do everything that is required of you. I give you my word that I will not deviate from the syllabus, except in case of an emergency. On the other hand, it is your responsibility to do the exercises and eat right—that is, to come to class, keep up with the reading, and prepare properly for assignments. The grade you earn is determined by the quality of your effort, not necessarily by the amount of time you spend.

Professionalism: Students are expected to be on time and to behave in a professional manner. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Professionalism also means keeping lines of communication open. I promise to give you timely feedback on your work, so that you know if you are on track. I also promise to let you know if something happens that prevents me from doing so. By the same token, I would ask that you keep me informed of any matters might affect your performance in the course.

Attendance: Although attendance is not formally required in this class, poor attendance will make it difficult to perform well. There will be no make-ups on in-class activities, and assignments build on skills developed in the classroom.

Make-ups: No make-up exams will be given unless you make prior arrangements to miss the regularly scheduled exam. Please note that personal travel is not a valid reason to miss an debate. If Sasha Obama missed her father’s farewell address to take an exam, the rest of us can organize our travel arrangements. If you miss an exam due to an emergency on the day of an exam, you will not be allowed to take a make-up until you provide written documentation to justify your absence.

Technology: You should know that research shows that students who take notes by hand get higher grades than those who use a laptop—and not just because of the distractions offered by the internet. The ability to type quickly on a laptop means that students don’t have to think much about what they are typing. They simply transcribe everything the professor says. Students who take notes by hand, however, are much more likely to retain the material. If you want to study from typed notes, I recommend that you take notes by hand and type them up after class. This technique is the single most powerful study technique that you will find. You may not use a laptop on lecture days, but please feel free to use them on workshop days.

Other: On the first day of class, we will discuss any other policies that we might want as a group. These could include things like classroom civility (late arrivals, texting, etc.) or assignment procedures (paper vs. electronic submissions).

OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity (SFA Policy 4.1)
Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to: using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam; falsifying or inventing of any information, including citations, on an assignment; and/or; helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism.
Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one’s own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to: submitting an assignment as one’s own work when it is at least partly the work of another person; submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source; and/or, incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

Penalties may include, but are not limited to reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, re-submission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

**Disability Policy (SFA Policy 6.1)**
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic-accommodation-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf

**Withheld Grades (SFA Policy 5.5)**
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**The SFA Way (SFA Policy 10.4)**
Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program. Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed. For information on the Student Code of Conduct, called The SFA Way, go to: http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student-conduct-code.pdf

**Core Curriculum Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes**
HIS 134 is part of the university’s Core Curriculum and as such strives towards both the general goals of the core and the specific objectives for classes designated for inclusion in the American History Foundational Component Area as defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Courses in this Foundational Component Area focus on the consideration of past events and ideas relative to the United States. Courses in this area, such as HIS 134, include instruction in the interaction among individuals, communities, states, the nation, and the world, considering how these interactions have contributed to the development of the United States and its global role. In addition to learning the above, students in HIS 134 will demonstrate the more general ability to:

- Think critically, which includes the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information about this period of history.
• Communicate effectively by developing and expressing ideas through written and visual communication.
• Gain intercultural competence, a knowledge of civic responsibility, and an awareness of how humans in the past have engaged effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
• Understand the role that personal responsibility has played throughout history and gain the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to making ethical decisions.

**History Department Program Learning Outcomes**
This is a general education core curriculum course and no specific program learning outcomes for this major are addressed in this course.

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**THE FIVE C’S OF HISTORICAL REASONING**

What is historical reasoning? What do historians do when they reason about the past? We will use five main concepts to help you develop your historical reasoning skills.

1. **Change and Continuity**: Historians debate what has changed over time and what has remained the same. Change can be a dramatic pivot or a slow shift.

2. **Causation**: Historians debate the causes of historical events. Actually it would be more accurate to say that we often fight about causality, sometimes passionately. Few events have only one cause (monocausal), so we argue with one another about which cause should be considered the most important.

3. **Context**: Historians insist that the past must be understood on its own terms. Any historical event, person, idea must be placed in the context of its historical era to be interpreted. The historian’s goal is to discover how people in the past understood their own lives, which is often very different from how we might react to their situation.

4. **Contingency and Connections**: Historians are aware that events happen for a variety of reasons, which are often interconnected. Change one factor, and the event might not have happened at all. This idea helps us to remember that historical events are not inevitable.

5. **Complexity**: Historical reasoning is not about memorizing dates and names. It is about making sense of the messiness of the past, in all its complexity. That means recognizing that different historical groups experienced events in different ways.
**Students of history should understand...**

**History**: History is an interpretative account of the past supported by evidence that survives. History is not simply an account of "what happened"; the past cannot be known except through a disciplined process of problem solving.

**The Past**: The object of historical study is the past. Recognizing the "pastness of the past" directs historians to understand people of the past by contextualizing their actions: what they were trying to accomplish, the nature of their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, the culturally and historically situated assumptions that guided thought and action.

**Historical Evidence**: Historians use primary and secondary sources to make sense of the past. History students should know that primary and secondary sources come in diverse forms, represent diverse perspectives, and have distinct strengths and limitations as evidence about the past.

**Complex Causality**: Historians are intensely interested in the how and why of historical events. Historical accounts are multiple and layered, avoiding monocausal explanations and reductionist thinking.

**Significance**: Significance is the indefinite standard by which historians determine what questions are worth asking; what parts of the past are worth teaching, learning, and remembering; and which pieces of the extant past properly belong in a meaningful, coherent account.

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**Essential Competencies**

**Students of history should be able to...**

**Evaluate Historical Accounts**: Recognize historical explanations in their most common forms: narrative, exposition, causal model, and analogy. Identify an author's interpretation and critically scrutinize the evidence and analysis used to support it, and critically evaluate, compare, and synthesize historical accounts.

**Interpret Primary Sources**: Distinguish primary from secondary sources; assess the credibility of sources and make judgments about their usefulness and limitations as evidence about the past; consider how the historical context in which information was originally created, accessed, and distributed affects its message; and address questions of genre, content, audience, perspective, and purpose to generate subtexts that illuminate the intentions of the author.

**Apply chronological reasoning**: Take account of the role of time, sequencing, and periodization in historical narratives. Contextualize: Place an event, actor, or primary source within the context of its time in order to interpret its meaning and significance.

**Construct a historical argument using primary sources**: Construct acceptable historical accounts that interpret the past using primary sources as evidence for knowledge claims in ways that demonstrate understanding of historical concepts, especially the nature of historical evidence, interpretation, and perspective.