

HISTORY 2500

**American History, Pre-Civil War**

Grande Prairie Regional College

(Section G2, Fall 1996)

Instructor: Alan Segal

Office: C410, 539-2011

Office Hours: Mondays/Wednesdays: 2 - 3pm  
Tuesdays/Wednesdays: 6 - 6:25pm  
By appointment

Course Prerequisite: None

Text:

The Enduring Vision - Boyer, Clark, Kett, et al

Assignments:

**Four Quizzes**

- Each quiz is marked on a 9-point stanine grid
- Your grades for each quiz are totaled out of 36 and divided by 4 to get a single stanine mark out of nine
- This part of the course requirement is worth 37.5% of your final mark
- Quiz 1: Prologue, Chapters 1 - 5
- Quiz 2: Chapters 6 - 10
- Quiz 3: Chapters 11 - 14
- Quiz 4: Chapters 15 & 17
- Dates of quizzes will be determined in class

### One Essay

- The due date will be negotiated
- All marking will conform to a 9-point stanine scale
- There will be a lateness penalty of 1/2 stanine per day
- This part of the course requirement is worth 37.5% of your final mark
- More details on the essay may be found on page three

### Three Journals

- One journal is due the first class of each month of the term except September
- Each journal is worth a maximum of 1 stanine
- This part of the course requirement is worth 12.5% of your final mark
- More details on the journals may be found on page 3

### Self-evaluation

- I will give you a form to fill out close to the end of the semester
- Evaluate yourself on a 3-point scale
- The evaluation is due the last class of the semester and is worth 12.5% of your final mark
- More details on the self-evaluation may be found on page 4

The total of all stanine marks available for assignments is 24. Your marks will be totaled out of 24, a percentage will be worked out, and the percentage will be reconverted to a final stanine grade according to the following table.

Stanine Grade	Percentage Equivalent
9	90 - 100
8	80 - 89
7	72 - 79
6	65 - 71
5	57 - 64
4	50 - 56
3	45 - 49
2	26 - 44
1	0 - 25

**NOTE:** No class averaging will be done.

**NOTE:** Because class discussion is a vital aspect of this course, everyone may (but not necessarily will) receive a bonus mark for the QUALITY of your class discussion, based on a combination of the frequency and quality of the participation. You will be eligible only if you display commitment to the course by reading and completing the required assignments. The bonus mark will have a range of 1-3. If you receive a bonus mark, it will added to your overall grade total prior to its conversion to a percentage.

**NOTE:** You may choose not to write an essay, but this will mean the highest mark achievable in the course is 6. You will have to sign a form indicating your choice, and you may change your mind up to the rewrite due date. Selecting this option means only the quizzes, journals, and bonus eligibility count toward your final mark.

### Essay

You may choose whatever topic that interests you, relevant to the period of American history covered in this course. Critically analyze the topic, using your own and others' ideas. Do not write a descriptive report; think about the ideas you express. Try to explain why these ideas persuade you.

The expected standard is 1500 words. Your mark will be reduced by a half-stanine for inadequate length. Your essay can, however, surpass the word limit. Type and double-space the essay unless you prefer to hand in a disk with your essay on it. All disks or hard copies must clearly stipulate your name, ID number, date of submission of the essay, and the title of the essay.

If your essay is late a half-stanine penalty per day will be in effect, including weekends. If you hand in your assignment late, have another faculty member or a regular employee of the College sign and date it. In-text referencing and a "Works Cited" section are required, and all documentation must be in the MLA style. Should either reference section be omitted, your assignment will be reduced by 1 stanine per section. If a style other than MLA is used, for each kind of referencing not in the MLA style there will be a reduction of 1/2 stanine.

### Journals

Each journal is usually one page. Anything pertaining to American history, class discussions or lectures, class interaction, or course observations and suggestions, is a suitable topic. No research is necessary or expected. The journal's purpose is informal communication with me.

### SELF-EVALUATION

This provision asks for your assessment of your overall contribution to the course. Explain your reasons when you hand in the evaluation. Marks are generally accepted without question if you:

1. Complete all assignments.
2. Offer accurate reasons to support your mark.

### **What is Critical Thinking?**

Critical thinking is intellectually disciplined thinking, based on skeptical, careful, and logical analysis of evidence. At their best, critical thinkers take nothing for granted and willingly reconsider what some think are universal truths or explanations. Try to postpone dis/agreement until a later stage of analysis [or at least do not allow it to guide your analysis], and think about alternative understandings, explanations, and ideas. At its best, critical thought is independent and autonomous.

Uncritical thought is conforming, dogmatic, and closed-minded. Uncritical thinkers do not strive for greater understanding or awareness beyond what they already think they know.

Critical thinking is facilitated by knowledge of a discipline or subject, skills for generating and processing ideas, and a disposition or habit of mind to use the skills consistently. Reflective teachers are knowledgeable people who think deeply and openly about what, who, and how they teach, and the circumstances in which they teach.

### **A Critical Thinker's Vocabulary**

**Argument:** Reasons given for or against something. A line of reasoning in which statements are presented to support

or refute a point.

**Assumption:** A statement accepted as true without proof or demonstration [or without immediately obvious proof or demonstration]. An unstated belief or premise, something taken for granted.

**Conclusion:** A judgment, decision, or proposition reached by reasoning.

**Evidence:** The data, facts, information, or understandings on which conclusions are based, or by which proof or reliability may be established. Standards for evidence include accuracy, relevance, and completeness.

**Inference:** The reasoning or logical thinking associated with understanding evidence and assumptions, and through which one forms conclusions.

**Premise:** A statement from which something is inferred or concluded. A statement on which an argument is based.

**Sound Argument:** An argument with good premises and reasoned inferences.

#### DISCUSSION SEQUENCE

As you consider the questions below for class discussion, keep in mind that an off-the-top judgment, or a quick expression of agreement or disagreement, is not what is expected of you. I want you to think about what other questions might help you think more comprehensively and insightfully about these questions. In addition to thinking about the questions, you should be ready to give an overview of each chapter.

1. Introduction to course
2. Prologue & Chapter 1

Why assume that geography and climate affect a society's historical and cultural development?

If you were launched backward in time and found yourself in the era and place discussed in chapter 1, what speculations would you have about the cultural ability of Native groups to deal with the Europeans? [This is not a usual or "proper" historical

approach, but it is valuable because it asks you to consider the implications of cultural responsiveness to different challenges and experiences.]

3. Chapters 2 & 3

Why did religious conflicts have social significance in 15th and 16th century Europe?

What was the historical importance of the "new slavery"? Why call it "new"? Is it reasonable to look for the roots of American racism in the new slavery?

What were the main ideas in Puritan thought in the early period of Puritan settlement in North America? What was congregationalism and antinomianism? Can we justifiably claim that contemporary American ideas about dissent derive from 17th century social and political developments?

4. Chapters 4 & 5

The period discussed in these chapters was filled with rebellions, revolutions, and general cultural upheaval. Identify these occurrences, but try to speculate about what kind of society fostered, resisted, and grappled with these developments. Think also about how the upheavals affected the relationship between colonies and the government in London?

Explain mercantilism. What social attitudes might arise in societies organized around this concept of economics? Do you think it is reasonable to assume that social values or attitudes are influenced by economic philosophy and organization?

What role[s] did women play in the emerging distinction of American colonial society? Were they recognized as contributors to society?



What do you think the authors mean when they write of a society coming of age? What criteria do they use to evaluate this, and do they differ from those you would use? Is there linear momentum between coming of age and proceeding to revolution?

How do you assess the American claims against the British government? If you were an American colonist in the 1770s, would you be a loyalist or an American nationalist? Regardless of your answer, who are you in the time period? [Sometimes we make political decisions for entirely personal reasons, but other times our choices are closely connected with our social, economic, and cultural interests].

#### 5. Chapters 6 & 7

Does it seem odd to you that a chapter heading following discussion of the War of Independence refers to nationhood? Would you not think that nationhood comes before the capacity to fight a war of independence?

What are the details and the importance of "America's First Civil War" [page 170]?

All societies embrace ideals which they constantly portray rhetorically at least to themselves and others. What were the ideals of the early years of the United States, and how closely do you think American society came to living up to them?

Why did the United States have to restructure its government in the 1780s? Might this restructuring have been what the textbook's authors had in mind when they wrote this chapter on forging nationhood? If you were writing this book and wanted to have a section on nationhood, would you concentrate at all, or as much as is done here, on changing the form of government? What other aspects of American life at this time would you look at?

Of what historical importance is Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists?

What four laws comprised the Alien and Sedition Acts? Why were they passed, and what do you think was their effect on national security and civil liberties? How should we approach evaluating national security and civil liberties?

6. Chapters 8 & 9

Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall had a strong impact on American policy and governance. Explain the relationship between these men and for what reasons they were battling each other.

Did the War of 1812 have any impact on the conceptualization or practice of American foreign policy? What internal conflicts in the United States were created or aggravated by the war?

Explain the Monroe Doctrine

This era in American history is characterized by, among other things, acquisition of territory. What issues implicit in these gains divided Americans? What do the divisions suggest about American political and social relations [those among people]?

We have not covered the period in American history in which the significance of the Missouri Compromise becomes more clear. However, if you were wondering aloud one day shortly after the compromise was reached, about the future of American society because of the agreement, what hints might you detect in the arrangement? [Remember that I do not see this kind of exercise as a valid approach to historical analysis, but it might assist you to see the broader context of American history before the civil war].

Do you see parallels between the politics of American policy toward Indians and the politics of slavery? Prepare to discuss differences or similarities.

In what ways was American society transformed? As junior historians, what data would you look for to evaluate what "transformation" means, and whether one



occurred?

Explain the substance and the implications of the debate over *specie*.

6. Chapters 10 & 11

The title of chapter 10 intimates there is a relationship of some kind linking politics, religion, and reform in American society in the early 19th century. Are you persuaded such a relationship exists, and if so, prepare an explanation of it. If you think the relationship is slight at best, explain the shortcomings of the authors' argument.

Andrew Jackson is considered one of the most important Presidents the United States has ever had. Why?

What economic practices and policies led to the depression that began in 1837? Why did banking policy instigate so much controversy?

Given the harshness of life in some parts of the United States in the mid-19th century, what do you think the authors are saying when they write people's leisure? Why connect culture to it? What do "leisure" and "culture" refer to? And why "join" together leisure and life? What developments in American society convinces the authors that writing of leisure is justified?

7. Chapter 12

What is meant by "Old South?" Why was slavery as a social institution thought crucial to this concept of the south? Occasionally we think of slavery as one-dimensional and monolithic. Yet there were different aspects and features of southern slavery. What are these different aspects and features?

8. Chapters 13 & 14

In this part of your reading, the exercise of power by the state, and immigration into

the US, highlight how power was conceived by many Americans, and as well how it was enforced. Prepare a summary of the concept[s] of American power prevalent in the mid-century, and prepare to discuss how immigration advanced, enhanced, diminished, etc., the exercise of state power at this time. Power is not confined to state policies and enforcement, but also has social manifestations - that is, little expressions of it every day. After you have thought about immigration and power, prepare a list of expressions of power in daily American existence, and consider what they might tell us about American society in the two decades before the civil war.

Why did some southerners gradually see secession from the union as the only way to assure their existence? What was this existence they wanted to assure? Was it the lifestyle associated with the "Old South?" Were southerners solidly favourable to secession? What was the Compromise of 1850 and why did it fail to satisfy the south's most earnest defenders? Why should the Dred Scott decision of the supreme court be seen as important by many historians?

Party politics have been a powerful element in American political life since the early 19th century. Today, for example, running for a minor civic position means identifying oneself as a member of some political party. What explains, then, the collapse of the Second Party System, and what emerged afterward to replace it?

## 9. Chapter 15

How would you assess the implications of the statistics on page 480? That is, what questions can you think to ask about them? Remember that asking questions hints at thoughts about the larger tapestry of American society. The numbers on the page are straightforwardly presented. The questions you raise about them say a lot about your conjectures about this epoch in American history.

Radical Republicans viewed the civil war as a second American Revolution. What did they mean by this, and do you agree with them?