

HIST 2003: American Civics through History

How have people from across the spectrum of political power shaped American civic traditions?

Course Description

Fulfills GE Historical Studies + Ohio's American Civic Literacy Requirement (SB1)

This course traces the history of American democratic civic traditions through the debates and decisions that shaped U.S. political institutions, from the colonial era to the present. Students engage closely with foundational texts and primary sources, exploring how the meaning of freedom, citizenship, and government power has been contested and redefined across U.S. history, and how American democracy has evolved alongside the nation's capitalist economic system.

This innovative course in all online and many in-person formats features content and talks developed by a dozen of OSU's top award-winning historians of American history.

Format and Structure

- **3 credit hours, available in fully online and asynchronous options, as well as other modalities** (all course materials, assignments, information located on Carmen site)
- Semester comprised of thirteen units, each built around engagement with primary documents
- Videos lectures from OSU historians across a range of specialties
- Weekly assignments will typically consist of primary document readings, secondary source readings, Hypothes.is annotations, and Document Analysis Responses

Major Course Themes

- **Central Theme:** Birth of American Freedom, Meanings of Freedom
- Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities; Democracy; Capitalism and Economic Liberty; Systems of Profit and Labor; Party Politics and Realignment

Key Primary Documents and Secondary Source Readings

- **Declaration of Independence (1776)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **U.S. Constitution (1787)**, read in full, *In Norton course-pack
- **Selected Federalist Papers (No. 10, 39, 51, 68, 78, 84)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **Emancipation Proclamation (1863)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **Gettysburg Address (1863)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **Adam Smith, selections from The Wealth of Nations (1776)**, *In Norton course-pack
- **Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom**, *In Norton course-pack
- Primary sources and *American Yawp* chapters (free open-access textbook), *Hyperlinked on course site

Assignment and Grading Breakdown

- **Participation (5%):** Hypothes.is digital annotations for primary sources outside of Norton
- **Quizzes (25%):** Syllabus quiz, a pre-midterm practice quiz, Norton reading quizzes and InQuizitive document review assessments
- **Document Analysis Responses (25%):** Five short analytical essays (700-1,200 words) on selected primary sources; lowest score dropped
- **Midterm Exam (20%):** Closed-book, online-proctored via Honorlock; short answer and multiple choice
- **Final Exam (25%):** Cumulative, closed-book, online-proctored via Honorlock; short answer, multiple choice, and long essay question

A passing score on the final exam is required to pass the course

Course Units at a Glance

- **Unit 1: Colonial America, Dr. Christopher McKnight Nichols**
How did colonization create the paradox of liberty and slavery from the very start?
- **Unit 2: Revolutionary Stirrings, Dr. Margaret Newell**
What ideas turned colonial grievances into a Declaration of Independence?
- **Unit 3: A New Republic Emerges, Dr. Jason Opal**
How did the founding documents of American governance try to balance power, representation, and liberty?
- **Unit 4: The Early Years, Dr. Margaret Newell**
Whose political rights expanded- and whose were denied- in the new republic?
- **Unit 5: The Expansion Years, Dr. Maria Hammack**
In what ways did westward expansion and the market revolution enlarge the nation's commercial power, and at whose expense?
- **Unit 6: A House Divided: Civil War & Emancipation, Dr. Randolph Roth**
How did the Civil War and emancipation redefine what “freedom” meant in America?
- **Unit 7: Reconstruction: Capital, Labor, and Rights in the Gilded Age, Dr. Bartow Elmore**
Where did Reconstruction succeed and default on its promise of equal citizenship?
- **Unit 8: Freedom in the Progressive Era, Dr. Christopher McKnight Nichols**
How did ideas of progressive reform shape U.S. governance at home and abroad?
- **Unit 9: To Make the World Safe for Democracy, Dr. R. Joseph Parrott**
How did WWI serve as grounds for simultaneously expanding and restricting civil liberties?
- **Unit 10: New Deal Freedoms, A World at War, Dr. Clayton Howard**
Where did the New Deal redefine the role and responsibilities of the federal government?
- **Unit 11: Wartime America and Freedom Struggles, Dr. David Steigerwald**
To what extent did America’s entry into WWII push open and constrict the boundaries of citizenship?
- **Unit 12: The Cold War, Civil Rights, Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries**
How did the Black Freedom Struggle change conceptions of freedom and reshape democracy during the Cold War?
- **Unit 13: Countervailing Voices, Backlash & Unfinished Business, Dr. Daniel Rivers** - How did the New Left and New Right influence ideas of liberty in the modern era?