

HIST 127

American History to 1865



General Description

Course Objectives

Greetings and welcome to the course.

In past years, distance courses such as this one have been taken by people holding doctorates and high school degrees, stay-at-home parents, farmers, teachers, social workers, and prison inmates.

Members of the group have come from Illinois, Wyoming, Alaska, and Hawaii, as well as from North Carolina. Ultimately, then, you are part of a mixed student body.

Given the different life experiences that you and other course members have, the challenge for those of us at Independent Studies is to create an offering that speaks to every person in the group. How can the course be intelligently organized so that it does not become a meaningless exercise? Why take this course or study history in a general sense?

Of course, there are plenty of practical reasons that led many of you to HIST 127. Some of you are completing degree requirements for your professional careers, some are trying to improve your grades in order to enter UNC on a full-time basis, or you are finishing a Carolina degree you previously started. Others of you are taking this course purely out of interest.

But on a more philosophical basis, why study history? There are many answers to this question. Certainly in elementary and secondary schools American history courses are intended to make all of us better citizens, to "socialize" us as it were. That is why there is a history component in the battery of tests the federal government administers to immigrants who seek to become US citizens. If you live here, the reasoning goes, you should know a little about the place.

This list of “whys” can go on and on—teaching critical thinking skills, fostering broader thinking about people and issues, and so on. All of these are fine answers, but to me, history is best taught when it becomes personal. That is, if somewhere in the course, students are not made aware that these often forgotten events have had a very real and significant impact on their lives, then one of the fundamental lessons of history has been lost.

Fortunately, this is a US history course, so seeing these vital, personal connections is not quite as difficult as, say, in a study of ancient or Far Eastern histories (although the same sort of principles apply even with these subjects). We will cover the American Revolution and the Civil War, for instance, conflicts that directly shaped the course of our nation: its politics, society, and economy.

My hope is that, as you become more aware of these immediate connections, you can start making connections with incidents that may seem less important to you. The Early National period, the “Age of Jackson,” and the conquest of Mexico all shaped the nation, the experiences of those who came before you, and ultimately, your own life.

Throughout the course, you will be asked to comment on some of these great historical issues. At times, as a means of further personalizing these issues, you will be asked to put yourself in the place of various actors in a given period.

This process might make you a better citizen, and, if successful, it will certainly give you more of a sense of connection with the country in which you live.

Course Materials

The course is divided into fourteen lessons. Most of the lessons require you to read roughly a chapter of the text. As a complement to this reading you often will be asked to digest an accompanying historical article or monograph (book).

As you complete these assignments, pay attention to the large themes you encounter—chapter headings and subheadings are a good place to start. Understanding each of the “Important Terms” listed for each lesson will also help. Normally, it is best to work from the general to the specific in mastering these themes.

You will find that all this information does, in fact, fit together into greater whole. By studying in this manner, you will also be well prepared for your final exam.

Required Reading The bulk of your reading assignments will come from the following two books:

Divine, Breen, Frederickson, and Williams, *America Past and Present*, Volume I, 7th edition (2005).

Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, Volume I, 5th edition (2005).

As supplements to this reading, you will also be assigned three excellent books that provide a more personal look at many important historical issues. One is a best-selling account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Another is a collection of interviews with former slaves. The final one deals with a small North Carolina community struggling with local disturbances created by the Civil War.

Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (1996)

Berlin and Favreau, eds., *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation* (1998)

Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (1981)

All of these books may be purchased from the Higher Grounds bookstore at the Friday Center, using the book order form located after this section of the manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds>.

Written Assignments

During the course, you will normally be required to complete two essays for each of the fourteen lessons. These responses are normally two to three pages long. In some cases you will be asked to complete a single, four-page essay.

As you write, keep the following points in mind.

General Description

- You need to place each of your responses in proper essay form. That is, you must have an introduction containing a thesis statement (which summarizes the main points of the essay), a body that follows the outline stated in the introduction, and, finally, a summarizing conclusion. You may want to consult a basic English textbook to find more information about the construction of a good essay.
- The general argument(s) in each essay should be your own and thus should reflect your thoughts and words. You should, however, support these fundamental ideas with course materials. For instance, you might choose to argue that the Civil War resulted from a series of poor presidential decisions (your idea). You might then refer to specific actions taken by the Taylor, Pierce, and Buchanan administrations (support from course materials).
- When supporting your arguments with factual detail, try to explain these materials in your own words. If you do occasionally paraphrase or quote from your readings, be sure to use quotation marks and properly cite your sources.

Grading	Lesson Essays60 percent of final grade
	Final Exam40 percent of final grade

Final Exam The results of your final examination will comprise 40 percent of your final grade. Keep in mind, however, that you **must pass this exam to successfully complete the course.**

The exam will have three parts. You will be required to answer two long essays and then complete a section of short identifications that will be drawn from the lists of Important Terms in each lesson. In this last section, you will have to fully identify and then state the significance of each term.

Good luck to you.