

United States History II: Westward Expansion to Sept. 11, 2001

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Purpose of the Course :

The purpose of this course is to enable each of us to become more critical and engaged citizens of our nation, and the world. Each member of this class will assume the duty of analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing historical evidence to gain an understanding of our collective past.

To properly understand America's current place in the world today, it is necessary to understand its varied and complex past. The U.S. is constantly redefining itself based on past events and current trends both domestically and internationally. While these past events cannot be changed they are re-interpreted by historians (and all other citizens) as the U.S. redefines its place in the world. This is why it is important to have a firm grasp on the major events and trends of the past 140 years.

Beliefs that will Guide our Study of U.S. History:

Please notice that I have referred to OUR study of U.S. History, because I am a member of the community of learners in this classroom. As the teacher, I see it as my role to facilitate and foster investigation, analysis and learning, not to serve as a human encyclopedia. This year I look forward to sharing my knowledge and passion for U.S. History, while learning more in the process.

Below are some of my core beliefs about the discipline of history, which will guide my choices in how I teach this course:

1. Studying the past has relevance in understanding the world we have inherited.
2. There is no one "accepted" account of past events, and historians (that includes you!) must continually analyze and evaluate multiple forms of historical evidence to piece together an understanding of "what really happened."
3. There are no historical accounts that exist free of bias. This being said, the existence of bias does not remove the value of a piece of evidence, it just falls on us as historians to analyze what role bias is playing in accounts of the past.

4. The skills we use to understand the past enable us to more effectively analyze and evaluate what is going on in the present.

Essential Questions:

Below are several questions which will form the back bone of our study of U.S. History:

1. To what extent can history be studied and written about objectively?
2. How does change occur?
3. How can we know what "really" happened in the past?
4. Who writes history?
5. What qualifies as historical evidence?
6. How is history relevant to me? Who cares? Why does it matter?

Course Objectives:

Besides learning about the modern era of U.S. history, a major goal for this course is to introduce you to the necessary skills for success in the International Baccalaureate program during your junior and senior years. You will be able to:

1. Use historical data to support an argument or position
2. Explain how a cause and effect relationship is different from a sequence or correlation of events.
3. Distinguish between long-term and short-term cause and effect relationships.
4. Show connections, casual and otherwise, between particular historical events and ideas and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.
5. Interpret the past within its historical context rather than in terms of present-day norms and values.
6. Distinguish historical fact from opinion.
7. Research and write a major historical investigation.
8. Demonstrate having acquired the preparation necessary for the International Baccalaureate program.

Technology Policy:

As colleges (and the work world) rapidly expand the reliance on technology for communication it is vital for high school students to learn how best to utilize technology in an educational setting. As such, the majority of resources for my class rely on the use of internet technologies. Students will learn how to use Google Documents as a method of keeping class notes and organizing their learning resources, use an online version of the textbook, create and maintain a blog for homework assignments, and of course, e-mail.

With this technology come new expectations for the submission of assignments. Students are given an ample timeframe in which to submit the homework, therefore excuses such as “my printer is broken” or “the internet wasn’t working at my house last night” are not acceptable. Students have access to the internet and printers at school prior to the start of the day, lunchtime, study halls, and after school.

Assignment due dates are given a day and a time. Usually these assignments are shared with me via the student’s blog or a Google Document. These usually are to be shared with me by 8:20 a.m. or 12:25 p.m., which means students must plan ahead, especially if they don’t have my class until the end of the day.

Also, if students are absent from school for the full day or are dismissed early and miss my class, the expectations for keeping up with the homework or in-class assignments have changed. Students (and parents) have 24/7 access to all assignments, notes, readings, due dates, and now, even the textbook. While the school’s absence policy on makeup work still applies (3 days plus the number of days absent), I encourage students to keep up with the class to the best of their ability because of these new technologies.

If parents or students have concerns about the lack of internet access at home, please discuss this with me as there are alternatives.

ASSESSMENT/Student grades will be based on the following:

1. Written Assignments/Homework (25%)
2. Tests (40%)
3. Quizzes (25%)
4. In-Class Work/Participation (15%)

1. 4th Quarter, The Internal Assessment will account for this 15%.

Supplies:

1. 1-inch three-ring binder: this is required as your “working notebook” while at school. Make sure you keep blank loose-leaf notebook paper in the back of it for notes.
2. Highlighters are useful tools to mark significant passages when analyzing written primary documents in class.

3. Flash disk / thumb drive: at least 64mb. While not required, a thumb drive is extremely useful for storing and transporting computer data for the research papers and other class assignments.

Classroom Culture:

Above all, our classroom culture will be built around the principle of mutual respect. Hey, they call it the golden rule for a reason. I cannot overstate the importance of informing every interaction we have with each other in this classroom with respect. Let me tell you what that means to me:

1. We listen to each other. Participation in class discussion relies just as heavily upon active listening as it does sharing.
2. We respect differences in opinion, and explore these differences through productive debate.
3. This classroom will be a place in which each individual feels comfortable to express themselves.
4. There will be zero tolerance for any actions that endanger this classroom culture. Harassing, belittling or disrespectful behavior of any kind is completely unacceptable and will be dealt with immediately.

I see your time as valuable, and will strive to make this class the best use of it I can, but in the end, how much you will get out of this course is your personal choice.

Extra Help:

Please know that I am here as a resource to help you learn and succeed in this class. Please feel free to ask questions and seek extra help if needed. I am available during lunch, and if you need to meet before or after school, please let me know, and I will make time.