This course offers an introductory exploration of the origins and evolution of American democracy and the "republican experiment." The course focuses on major conflicts and themes from the sixteenth century to the present as they affected the pluralistic variety of ethnic, racial and religious groups that ultimately produced something we call "Americans" today.

American civic culture cherishes both liberty and equality, individual freedom and social justice. These impulses, frequently in conflict with each other, pervade political, economic, and social life in the United States. This course provides an introduction to the history of these tensions as they shaped the American polity. Since much of this history remains unknown, forgotten, or shrouded in mythology, the course provides a framework to understand and critique American democracy. Many of the revolutionary generation believed the study of history was a prerequisite to citizenship, for a civilization with little knowledge of its past has little chance of comprehending its own identity. Consequently, this course attempts to answer fundamental questions regarding the United States. Is there an American culture? How are racial, ethnic and other identities formed? How have they changed over time? What were and are the standards for citizenship? Has citizenship and freedom been equally available to all Americans? Has the meaning of "freedom" changed over time? These questions are not only "political" because they ultimately raise very personal and ethical questions about ourselves: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I lead a good and honest life? How did Americans in the past answer these questions?

The course requirements and their percentage of the final grade are: 1) a midterm exam (30%), 2) a final exam (30%), 3) participation and class discussion (25%), 4) four unannounced
quizzes on the web-based sources (15%). The lowest quiz grade will be dropped when calculating students’ final grade. The exams will be based primarily on the readings below and secondarily on lectures and class discussions. Students will receive study sheets one week before each exam which will outline questions and issues that will be included in each exam. Midterm exams and grades will be returned before 20 March 2004.

A primary responsibility of students is to complete the weekly reading before the date of the scheduled class and contribute their thoughtful, reflective opinions in class discussion. Students should allocate enough time to complete the required reading, approximately 90 pages per week. The readings can be interpreted in a variety of ways and students should formulate some initial positions and questions to offer in the class discussion. For every article or book, students should be prepared to answer all of the questions found in the "Critical Reading" section of the syllabus below. All required readings may be purchased at Barnes and Noble Bookstore in the Granada Center on Sheridan Road.

Students who are disabled or impaired should meet with the professor within the first two weeks of the semester to discuss the need for any special arrangements.

The required readings include the following:

Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845); and Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), both in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), The Classic Slave Narratives (New York: Mentor, 1987).
Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience" (1849), any edition.
William Riordan, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, introduction by Terrence McDonald (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1992), orig. 1905.
Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: Mentor, 1963).
Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell, 1963,
Students who attend class will receive lecture notes via Group Wise electronic mail at the end of every class. The notes serve as the "textbook" for class and eliminate the need to engage in frantic note-taking. Students can more carefully listen and contemplate the arguments and ideas discussed in each lecture. Students are encouraged to take some notes during class, especially if note-taking helps them to remain active and alert. Upon accessing the notes, students should transfer the notes to a disk and print a "hard" copy. To receive the notes, students must attend the class. No attendance, no notes.

CLASS MEETING DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS

6, 8, 13 Jan.: Indians, Puritans, Quakers and Cavaliers: Civilization or Invasion?


20 Jan.: The American Revolution and Creation of the Republic

22 Jan.: Discussion of Ellis, What Did the Declaration Declare?

27 Jan.: Slavery

29 Jan.: What Was Jacksonian Democracy?

Please read Andrew Jackson’s “Bank Veto” statement at:
http://www.buchanan.org/h-176.html
http://www.nv.cc.va.us/home/nvsageh/Hist121/Part3/JacksonBankVeto.htm

3 Feb.: The Rise of an Immigrant Nation

5 Feb.: Discussion of Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience"

10 Feb.: Slavery and the Rise of the American South

12 Feb.: Discussion of Douglas, Narrative and Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

17 Feb.: Abolition and Reform
19 & 24 Feb.: The Civil War

Please read the declarations of secession for South Carolina, Texas and Mississippi at:
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/csa/csapage.htm

26 Feb.: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

2 & 4 March: NO CLASS – SEMESTER BREAK

Reminder: all History Majors should see their academic advisor before registering for Fall Semester classes.

9 March: Reconstruction

Please read the 13th, 14th, 15th Amendments at:
http://memory.loc.gov/const/amend.html
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/amend1.htm

11 March: Discussion of Etulain, Frontier Experience, pp. 1-104.

15 March: Immigration and the Creation of an Urban Society

17 March: Discussion of Plunkitt of Tammany Hall

22 March: Populism

Please read the National People’s Party (or Omaha) Platform at:
http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5361/ or
http://www.nv.cc.va.s/home/nvsageh/Hist122/Part1/PopulistPlat1892.html or
http://history.smsu.edu/wrmiller/Populism/Texts/Documents/Omaha_Platform.htm

24 March: The Birth of Feminism

29 March: Consumption, Depression and the New Deal

1 April: Discussion of King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait

6 April: Civil Rights and Racial Change


13 April: The Newest Immigrants

15 April: MIDNIGHT BIKE RIDE – American History in Chicago
DISCUSSIONS AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Discussion and class participation are very important parts of your grade (25 percent). Incisive, imaginative and thoughtful comments that generate and facilitate discussion are weighed heavily in final grades. Asking questions, responding to student questions and contributing to an ongoing discussion are a necessary part of the learning experience. Failure to speak in class will only lower a student's final grade. Discussions are scheduled for 8 class periods, each worth 3 "points." Students will receive 1 point for attendance, 2 points for minimal participation, and 3 or more points for active participation. Students who raise questions that generate discussion in other classes will earn extra points.

The best ways to prepare for and contribute to class discussion are: 1) complete the reading on time, and 2) critically analyze the reading. The primary goal of critical reading is to find the author's interpretation and what evidence and influences led to that conclusion. Never assume a "passive" position when reading a text. If students ask and attempt to answer the following questions, they will more fully comprehend and understand any reading.

1. What is the thesis of the author?

2. Does the author have a particular stated or unstated point of view? How does the author construct their argument? Are the author's goals, viewpoints, or agendas revealed in the introduction or preface? Does the author provide evidence to support the argument? Is it the right evidence? In the final analysis, do you think the author proves the argument or does the author rely on preconceived views or personal ideology? Why do you think that?

3. Does the author have a moral or political posture? Is it made explicit or implicit in the way the story is told? What is the author's view of human nature? Does change come from human
agency and "free will" or broad socio-economic forces?

4. What assumptions does the author hold about society? Does the author see society as hierarchical, pluralistic, democratic or elitist? Does the author present convincing evidence to support this view?

5. How is the narrative constructed or organized? Does the author present the story from the viewpoint of a certain character or group? Why does the author begin and end at certain points? Is the story one of progress or decline? Why does the author write this way?

6. What issues and events does the author ignore? Why? Can you think of alternative interpretations or stories that might present a different interpretation? Why does the author ignore certain events or facts?

EXTRA CREDIT

Students who wish to improve their grade enjoy the option of writing a 5 to 7 page analytical essay on any of the required readings. The essay should summarize the main thesis or hypothesis of the author in one page and then critique or analyze the text in the remaining four to five pages. Students should ask questions similar to those found in the critical reading section above. Assume that I have read the text; I am interested in learning what you think and how you defend your thinking and criticism. Most importantly, the critical review is NOT a book report, so students should avoid a simple summary of a text.