

Topics in American History: American Identities and Institutions

HIST 170S

Spring 2026 Section 80 Fully Online 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/14/2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr Katherine Chilton

Email: katherine.chilton@sjsu.edu

Office: DMH 237B

Office Hours

Tuesday, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, DMH 237B

Drop-in office hours DMH 237B or Zoom

Course Information

This course is a history class for mostly non-historians that encompasses the diversity of the history of the United States for a diverse group of students. All students bring important skills and attributes to the course, and I look forward to learning together through the semester.

Course Description and Requisites

An investigation in depth of selected periods or problems. This topic focuses on historical relationships between social groups and the political, social, economic and cultural institutions they created.

Satisfies UD GE Area 4. Self, Society, and Equality in the U.S. (formerly Area S) and US 1. U.S. History

Prerequisite(s): Completion of Core General Education and upper division standing are prerequisites to all UD GE courses. Completion of, or co-registration in, 100W is strongly recommended.

Grading: Letter Graded

Sustainability Related - SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities 

Classroom Protocols

This course will consider issues in the political, social, economic, and cultural history of the United States and the effects of inequality and privilege on the development of American society and institutions. Students will conduct themselves in a civil and respectful manner. Students should avoid colloquial language, characterizations, remarks, or outright slurs that pertain to groups in the abstract or to their fellow students.

Disability Accommodations

I am committed to creating an inclusive and accessible classroom environment for students of all abilities. Students who may need academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Accessible Education Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. Knowing that ability status may shift during our time together, please let me know how I can best support your learning needs.

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be your own and plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin will be used to monitor academic honesty. If you are unfamiliar or out of practice with the kind of citations that writers use to credit their sources, you can take the plagiarism tutorial and quiz on Canvas or contact the instructor.

Use of AI

This course is designed to develop students' reading, writing, and analytical skills, as well as knowledge of United States History. Therefore, all assignments, analyses, research, and writing submitted in the course should be your own work and created without the use of generative AI, in order to develop these skills. If AI detection tools such as Turnitin suggest that work submitted in the course is AI-generated, students may be required to revise and resubmit their work.

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that

students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

Course Goals

American Institutions US1: US History

The American Institutions (AI) requirement is based on the premise that any student graduating from the CSU should have an understanding of the history and governmental institutions of the United States and the State of California. This requirement, which was put in place by the State of California, is laid out in California State University Executive Order 1061. The original mandate appears in the State Education Code Title 5, Section 40404.

Catalog description: An investigation in depth of selected periods or problems.

This topic focuses on historical relationships between social groups and the political, social, economic, and cultural institutions they created. Students will examine American politics as a struggle between various groups associated with and often organized around racial/ethnic, gender, class, regional, religious, ability, sexuality, and culturally-based identities. Interactions, including examples of both cooperation and conflict, will be highlighted in order to better understand the historical development of American political, social, economic, and cultural institutions. As a result of learning by comparison and combining the learning objectives of American Institutions U.S. History (US1) and SJSU Studies Area S, this course will promote cosmopolitan citizenship, by which we mean the understanding required to be a responsible citizen at all levels--local, state, national, and trans-national. Students completing this topic will satisfy both the American Institutions U.S. History (US1) and SJSU Studies Area S requirements.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE UD Area 4: Self, Society, and Equality in the U.S.

SJSU Studies courses -- GE UD Areas 2/5, 4, and 3 -- help students integrate knowledge between and among disciplines. SJSU Studies courses develop abilities that enable students to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in multicultural societies and to develop abilities to address complex issues and problems using analytical skills and creative techniques.

In **UD Area 4 courses**, students study the interrelationships of individuals, racial groups, and cultural groups to understand and appreciate issues of diversity, inclusion, inequalities, and justice in the United States. By exploring different perspectives and helping students articulate and discuss their own values, UD Area 4 courses prepare students to live and work responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural society.

GE UD Area 4 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an GE UD Area 4 course, students should be able to:

1. describe how identities are shaped by cultural and societal influences within contexts of equality and inequality. Examples include, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, age, generation, regional origin, national identity, language, and intersectionalities;
2. analyze historical, economic, political, or social processes that shape diversity, equality, and structured inequalities in the U.S. and reflect on one's own identities and positions within these structures;
3. evaluate social actions which have or have not led to greater equality and social justice in the U.S.; and
4. engage in constructive interactions about social issues in the U.S. within the framework of equality and inequalities.

Writing Practice: Students will write a minimum of 3000 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

US1 Learning Outcomes

To fulfill the requirements for U.S. History, students should be able to explain and evaluate the principal events, developments, and ideas covering a minimum time span of approximately one hundred years in all the territories now in the United States (including external regions and powers as appropriate).

As students explore the historical development of the United States, they should be able to evaluate and synthesize different positions, support analysis with relevant evidence, and create evidence-based interpretations of:

- A. major subtopics in United States history, such as Native Americans and their interactions with the U.S. government; slavery and its legacies; the foundational ideals of the American Republic; colonization and territorial expansion; economic development; political reform and reaction; immigration to the United States and the experiences of immigrants; foreign relations; wars and conflicts; and movements including religious, labor, civil rights, feminist, and environmental; and
- B. multiple perspectives related to, for example, diverse cultures, communities, and environments; age, gender, and sexuality; the history and experience of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; the experiences of people with disabilities; and patterns of race and class relations.

Course Materials

A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America

Author: Ronald Takaki

Publisher: Back Bay Books

Edition: Revised edition (2023)

ISBN: 978-0316499071

Availability: Campus Bookstore; Online Booksellers; Library Ebook (limited access)

[Library Ebook Access \(https://csu-sjsu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CALS_SJO/tu4ck5/alma991013829516902919\)](https://csu-sjsu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CALS_SJO/tu4ck5/alma991013829516902919)

American Women's History: A Very Short Introduction

Author: Susan Ware

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Year: 2015

ISBN: 9780199328338

Availability: SJSU Library Ebook

[Library Ebook Link \(https://csu-sjsu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CALS_SJO/6cuvr6/cdi_oup_veryshortintroductions_10_10_93_actrade_9780199328338_003_0001\)](https://csu-sjsu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CALS_SJO/6cuvr6/cdi_oup_veryshortintroductions_10_10_93_actrade_9780199328338_003_0001)

Course Requirements and Assignments

Module Activities (10 points):

Short analyses of historical documents. Primary sources will include written documents, pictures, photographs, and data.

Module Video Journal (15 points):

In many modules you will view an episode of a related documentary on the experience of diverse groups in U.S. History and write a journal response detailing the main issues raised in the film and your analysis and interpretation of the events. You will post this on the Video Journal board by the end of the Module.

Unit Discussion Forum (50 points):

As this is a "virtual" class, participation in course discussions are heavily weighted in your grade to ensure you get the most out of this format. Discussion postings will be graded according to the rubric on the course canvas site. For each unit discussion, students should make one substantive post based on course reading and resources by Thursday at 11:59pm and two follow up posts by the end of the unit at 11:59pm.

Midterm reflection (100 points):

The midterm reflective essay will ask students to consider course materials up to Module 7. In a short (2-3 page) essay students will reflect on what they have learned about the formation of coalitions and conflicts between different ethnic groups in the early United States, and how this confirms or challenges their understanding and relationship to the past.

Final Reflective Project (200 points):

The final project will ask students to reflect on their own learning experience in the course to propose a new historical documentary series that will examine the history of a contemporary social issue. The series will seek to educate the public on the possibilities opened up in the United States for different people by World War II and the long Civil Rights Movement and how the limitations of these changes are revealed in social issues we face today.

Extra Credit (10 points)

Students may get extra credit for viewing related movies (list of films on Canvas). For films viewed at home, you should upload a receipt, still, or selfie as proof to the Extra Credit assignment on Canvas.

✓ Grading Information

Assignments

This course is based on low-stakes assessment principles. Completing weekly module activities in a timely manner will help to build your skills and comprehension and ensure your success in the course. In an online course, setting a regular work schedule and keeping up with assignments is extremely important.

Grading policy

If you are unable to complete assignments by the due date you may submit within the Unit (typically made up of 3 modules) without explanation or penalty. If you need to submit work after the Unit has closed, you should contact the instructor.

Students will demonstrate their mastery of course learning objectives through the following assessment activities:

Assignments	Points	%	Course Learning Objectives Assessed
Module Primary Source Assignments	150	18	Meets objectives US1 A-B; S-1, S-2
Module Video Journals	150	18	Meets objectives US1 A-B; S-1, S-2, S-3
Unit Discussion Forum	250	29	Meets objectives US1 A-B; S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4.
Midterm reflective essay	100	12	Meets objectives US1 A-B; S-1, S-2

Final reflective project	200	23	Meets objectives US1 A-B; S-3, S-4
Total	850	100	

Writing Requirement

Students will meet the Area S writing requirement by completing the midterm reflective essay (1000 words), the final reflective project (2000 words), ten video journal assignments (approx. 2000 words) and five discussion forum assignments (approx. 1000 words). All writing will be graded by a rubric to provide feedback and evaluation.

Breakdown

Grade	Range	Notes
A+	97-100%	824.5 - 850 points
A	93-6%	790.5 - 824.5 points
A-	90-2%	765 - 790.5 points
B+	87-9%	739.5 - 765 points
B	83-6%	705.5 - 739.5 points
B-	80-2%	680 - 705.5 points
C+	77-9%	654.5 - 680 points
C	73-6%	620.5 - 654.5 points
C-	70-2%	595 - 654.5 points
D+	67-9%	569.5 - 595 points
D	63-6%	535.5 - 569.5 points
D-	60-2%	510 - 535.5 points A student with a semester average below 60% will fail the course.

Criteria

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

When	Topic	Notes
UNIT ONE FOUNDATIONS January 22	Module 1: Introduction—Identities and Institutions	Introductory Activities
January 26	Module 2: Social and Economic Institutions in Colonial America	READ: Takaki, Chapter 2, Ware, Chapter 1 p 5-16 Module 2 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 2
February 2	Module 3: The American Revolution and Political Institutions in Early America	READ: Takaki, Chapter 3, Ware, Chapter 2 p24-30 Module 2 Document Activity DISCUSSION FORUM 1
UNIT TWO MULTIPLE FRONTIERS February 9	Module 4: Industrial America	READ: Takaki Chapter 4 and 6, Ware Chapter 2 p30-49 Module 4 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 4
February 16	Module 5: Settling the West	READ: Takaki, Chapters 7-8 Module 5 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 5

When	Topic	Notes
February 23	Module 6: Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction	READ: Takaki, Chapter 5 Module 6 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 6 DISCUSSION FORUM 2
UNIT THREE TRANSITIONS AND MIGRATIONS March 2	Module 7: Reorganizing Identities in the West	READ: Takaki, Chapter 9 Module 7 Document Activity
March 9	Module 8: Immigration and Progressivism	Reading: Takaki, Chapter 10-11 Module 8 Document Activity
March 16	Module 9: Jazz Age and Great Migration	Takaki, Chapter 13, Ware, Chapter 3 Module 9 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 9 DISCUSSION FORUM 3
	Midterm Reflection	
UNIT FOUR TRANSFORMATIONS March 23	Module 10: Up from Mexico	Takaki, Chapter 12 Module 10 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 10
April 6	Module 11: The Great Depression	READ: American Yawp, The Great Depression (online textbook), Ware, Chapter 4 p84-95 Module 11 Document Activity
April 13	Module 12: World War II and Wartime Identities	READ: Takaki Chapter 14, Ware p95-99 Module 12 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 12 DISCUSSION FORUM 4

When	Topic	Notes
UNIT FIVE RIGHTS AND REVOLUTIONS April 20	Module 13: The Long Civil Rights Movement	READ: Takaki, Chapter 15 Module 13 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 13
April 27	Module 14: Latino Americans and Immigration Reform	Reading: Takaki, Chapter 16 Module 14 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 14
May 4	Module 15: Inspiring Revolution: Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation	READ: Ware, Chapter 4 p 99-118, Stein, Chapter 3 Module 15 Document Activity VIDEO JOURNAL 15 DISCUSSION FORUM 5
May 17	FINAL REFLECTIVE PROJECT	