

American History, 1877 to the Present



Above: Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway* (1995), Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington DC. A fifty-two channel CRT video screen sculpture/installation with lighted neon tubes indicating the borders of the “Lower 48” states (plus Alaska and Hawaii, on a side wall of the gallery), this flickering, glowing, and mesmerizing monster artwork seems a fitting monument to our contemporary, 300-plus-million inhabitant, YouTube and Netflix streaming America. The US of A has indeed been on a “superhighway,” and we are certainly moving fast. But where are we going? And where did we come from? How did we get here, and what does it all mean?

For more information about this art work, visit the website of the Smithsonian American Art Museum: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/electronic-superhighway-continental-us-alaska-hawaii-71478>

Best contact: email tfarnold@bsu.edu at any time with any questions or concerns.

Office hours will be announced early in the semester. If these times don’t work for your schedule, alternate times are available by appointment. Significant time during scheduled in-person class meetings will be available to go over and clarify general questions about readings, assignment instructions, evaluation criteria and policies, etc.

Course description:

This course surveys the American historical experience since 1876. Students will examine key events, ideas, personalities and movements from the Centennial to the twenty-first century.

This course is available for Dual Credit as BSU HIST 202.

Course goals:

To explore, with as much sophistication as possible, the American experience from 1877 through the present.

To practice thinking, writing, and speaking with clarity, force, and conviction.

Canvas:

The course Canvas site is the essential organizing hub for this class, including announcements and other instructions. Weekly “Art and America” online threaded discussions will be hosted on the class Canvas site, and most (if not all) of the course discussion readings will be found on that site as well. For all these reasons, students should regularly and routinely check the course Canvas site, at least every scheduled class day.

Class policies:

Attendance will be taken for all in-person sessions according to the policies explained in the student handbook. Please promptly contact the instructor with any questions regarding the application of those policies.

Students are free to use a laptop, tablet, or phone for class purposes at any time. Some discussion readings and other materials will be online or distributed as a pdf document. Students may read or view these on a device, or print them out as hard copies, as they see fit. In any case, students are expected to be able to refer to any text or image under discussion.

Students are expected to read all discussion readings carefully and thoughtfully by the indicated dates in the course calendar of readings and threaded discussion dates (see below). Students are encouraged to take notes on all readings, and during any class sessions, as they see fit. Students are not expected to have mastered any reading or other material before the class session in which that text or image is discussed. However, if students find that they do not understand the basic ideas and examples in a text or image, even after in-class conversation, then they have a responsibility to further work on that material – with their fellow students as well as with the instructor – to be able to contribute to the online threaded discussion (and respond to any written essay question).

A generous time allowance will be provided for all online threaded discussions and for all essays (“papers”). If you need extra time, please ask. Reasonable accommodations will be provided should circumstances warrant. In the case of missing threaded discussion posts, a grade of 0% may be entered if a required discussion post is not made up within seven days, and no accommodation or extension has been granted. In the case of missed essay assignments, a grade of 0% may be entered if no essay is received by the final due date, and no extension has been granted. Any 0% grade may be replaced upon submission of work, with an appropriate grade penalty for lateness, and after discussion with the instructor to determine acceptance and any appropriate penalty.

Grades will be posted to PowerSchool following a reasonable time for evaluation. Discussion grades will normally be posted within a few days of the last class session or final online discussion thread pertaining to a given topic or week. Essays will normally be evaluated and the grades posted within a week of submission. Students will be informed in circumstances of delay. Students should regularly and routinely check their grades on PowerSchool, share those grades with parents or guardians, and promptly contact the instructor with any questions or concerns.

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please review the student handbook for a full discussion of the relevant policies.

There may be provision for extra credit or additional or replacement assignments. Such opportunities, if any, will be announced during the semester.

If circumstances warrant, alternate assignments, extended due dates, and other exceptions to stated policies can be arranged on a case-by-case basis after consultation with the instructor. All reasonable accommodation will be made.

Any student with a disability will be accorded appropriate accommodation, as arranged in advance.

As the semester develops, course topics and readings may be amended as the instructor sees fit. Therefore, be alert to all announcements and any revisions to the below calendar of readings and threaded discussions.

This syllabus may be amended by the instructor at any time. In such cases, students will always receive timely prior notification of any changes.

Required statement regarding unexcused absences:

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator [Ms. Drumm] in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four (4) or more unexcused absences will lead to academic and residential consequences beyond the scope of this class [as] determined by the Office of Academic Affairs (i.e., residential groundings, parent/principal conference, and/or detention).

Required syllabi statements:

1. Ball State University diversity and inclusion statement:

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>.

2. Indiana Academy History Department content statement:

As with many history classes, the lectures, readings, and discussions [in this course] will include a range of topics that may be triggering, emotionally distressing, and difficult for some students. Engaging with topics such as slavery and human suffering is essential to this discipline. History seeks to understand the experiences and thought processes of former generations, whether for good or ill. Sometimes the language and word choices used by people in the past may be insensitive or politically incorrect today. Nevertheless, the goal of history is to understand the past within its own context and time. If a reading, image shown in class, or discussion is truly troubling to anyone, please do not hesitate to talk to your instructor. In such circumstances, an alternative reading [or other course material] can be assigned.

Evaluation overview:

16 weekly discussion grades @ 25 points each	400
4 written essays @ 100 points each	400
total	800 points + any extra credit

Grading scale:

Percentage	Grade
.940-1000	A
.900-939	A-
.870-899	B+
.830-869	B
.800-829	B-
.770-799	C+

.730-769	C
.700-729	C-
Below 700	D*

Discussions:

Students will receive a discussion grade for each week of the semester, from Week 1 through Week 16. Evaluation will principally be based on contributions to the in-class spoken conversation, particularly during scheduled seminar-style discussion sessions (typically on Wednesday and Friday). Weekly discussion grades will also reflect written contributions to the online “Art and America” discussions hosted on the course Canvas site.

Discussions will always be based on the weekly readings and other sources either posted to the course Canvas site or distributed in class. Weekly readings will be posted or distributed at the end of the previous week. In most cases, this means students will have several days to read and prepare – from Friday or Saturday of one week to the Wednesday and Friday of the following week. Sometimes, fresh, additional shorter-length source materials will be distributed during seminar sessions themselves.

Further, more specific information on expectations for discussion preparation and participation, as well as evaluation, will be shared in the first days of the semester. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding discussion materials, topics, or student evaluation.

Essays:

Students are required to write four essays, one for each of the four parts of the class (see course calendar below). There will be new prompts each week (on Friday), so students have more than one option (and due date) for writing each essay. These essays are not research papers – the questions will always pertain to the discussion readings and other source materials.

Unless otherwise indicated, essays are due in one week, on the following Friday. The exact due date time is always 5:00 pm on the given day. Completed essays may be turned in during class time, or may be placed in Dr. Arnold’s faculty mailbox by 5:00 pm on the due date. Students must always provide a hard copy, if at all possible (contact Dr. Arnold if an exception is warranted).

Further instructions and evaluation criteria will be provided with each specific essay option assignment. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding these essays, including student evaluation.

Textbook and readings:

Students need only acquire one book from the bookroom: James A. Henretta, et. al., *America* (3rd ed.). Students will never be expected to bring this textbook to any in-person class session. Background reading selections from this textbook for a given week will be indicated on the outline provided for each lecture class.

Discussion readings and other materials will be provided by the instructor, in most cases as a pdf document posted to the course Canvas site, or as a link to an online text or image.

Students need to be alert to the calendar below, as well as to all class announcements and syllabus changes, to be sure they are reading and preparing to discuss the correct reading for a given day’s class (and that day’s associated online discussion, if any). The basic “homework” of this class is reading and carefully considering the assigned texts (and images, in the case of the Monday “Art and America” discussions).

Course calendar of readings and online discussion:

Given discussion materials and dates may change over the course of the semester. Be alert to all announcements.

Part 1, Weeks 1-4: Industrial America, from farms and towns to factories and cities (1877 to 1917)

	<u>Class-time activity</u>	<u>Canvas online discussion thread</u>
Week 1		
Mon Jan 2	No class	
Wed Jan 4	Introduction	Week 1 Art and America
Fri Jan 6	Lecture	
Week 2		
Mon Jan 9	Lecture	Week 2 Art and America
Wed Jan 11	Conversation on the readings	
Fri Jan 13	Conversation on the readings	
Week 3		
Mon Jan 16	MLK Day, no class	
Wed Jan 18	Lecture	Week 3 Art and America
Fri Jan 20	Conversation on the readings	
Week 4		
Mon Jan 23	Lecture	Week 4 Art and America
Wed Jan 25	Conversation on the readings	
Fri Jan 27	Conversation on the readings	

Part 2, Weeks 5-8: America and the World, from the Spanish-American War to the Great Depression (1896-1941)

Week 5		
Mon Jan 30	Lecture	Week 5 Art and America
Wed Feb 1	Conversation on the readings	
Fri Feb 3	Conversation on the readings	
Week 6		
Mon Feb 6	No class, extended weekend	
Wed Feb 8	Lecture	Week 6 Art and America
Fri Feb 10	Conversation on the readings	
Week 7		
Mon Feb 13	Lecture	Week 7 Art and America
Wed Feb 15	Conversation on the readings	
Fri Feb 17	Conversation on the readings	
Week 8		
Mon Feb 20	Lecture	Week 8 Art and America
Wed Feb 22	Conversation on the readings	
Fri Feb 24	Conversation on the readings	

Part 3, Weeks 9-12: Wartime America (1929-1949)

Week 9

Mon Feb 27 Lecture
Wed Mar 1 Conversation on the readings
Fri Mar 3 Conversation on the readings

Week 9 Art and America

Spring Break

Week 10

Mon Mar 13 Lecture
Wed Mar 15 Conversation on the readings
Fri Mar 17 Conversation on the readings

Week 10 Art and America

Week 11

Mon Mar 20 Lecture
Wed Mar 22 Conversation on the readings
Fri Mar 24 Conversation on the readings

Week 11 Art and America

Week 12

Mon Mar 27 Lecture
Wed Mar 29 Conversation on the readings
Fri Mar 31 Conversation on the readings

Week 12 Art and America

Part 4, Weeks 13-17: Post-War America (1945-present)

Week 13

Mon Apr 3 Lecture
Wed Apr 5 Conversation on the readings
Fri Apr 7 Conversation on the readings

Week 13 Art and America

Week 14

Mon Apr 10 No class, extended weekend
Wed Apr 12 Conversation on the readings
Fri Apr 14 Conversation on the readings

Week 14 Art and America

Week 15

Mon Apr 17 Lecture
Wed Apr 19 Conversation on the readings
Fri Apr 21 Conversation on the readings

Week 15 Art and America

Week 16

Mon Apr 24 Lecture
Wed Apr 26 Conversation on the readings
Fri Apr 28 Conversation on the readings

Week 16 Art and America

Week 17

Mon May 1 Lecture
Wed May 3 Conversation on the readings
Fri May 5 Conversation on the readings

Week 17 Art and America

There is no final exam (though some students may be working on their final essay option during exam week).