

History 4320: Twentieth Century America



General Introduction

We live in a very complicated moment, one characterized by instability, political polarization, and above all, change. To understand how we arrived at this moment, we need to examine the evolution of American society in twentieth and twenty first centuries as well as the changing position of the United States on the world stage during that period. While history does not repeat itself, the past is prologue. In our class, we will meditate as a community on historical change in the United States since 1900.

BASIC INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. John Truden

Email: john.truden@sulross.edu

Office: Lawrence Hall 210

Office Hours: M (9-12) & W (1-3)

Class (Tuesdays, 6-8:45pm) via Blackboard Collaborate:

<https://us.bbcollab.com/guest/a379096f1f1842729233f55f1c457288>

Land Acknowledgement

Sul Ross State University is on the ancestral lands of the Jumanos, Lipan Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Plains Apaches, Mescalero Apaches and Chisos Apaches.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this class, students should be able to:

- Chart the evolution of American society from a series of disconnected communities into a more interconnected whole
- Meditate on the nation's continual struggle to enact the promises of the Constitution for all Americans
- Explain the construction and deconstruction of the US administrative state
- Recount the increasing power of the executive branch due to a corresponding abdication by the legislative branch
- Explain the evolution of the United States on the world stage from an isolated empire into the dominant global superpower by the end of the century

Student Learning Outcomes

The history student will demonstrate historical research skills in a logically-organized, written paper that is mechanically correct and supported by relevant documentation of historical content. Marketable Skills:

- Students will learn the importance of meeting deadlines in a successful manner.
- Students can identify the differences between primary and secondary sources, a crucial step in developing critical thinking skills.
- Students can learn to select and organize data in a relevant manner.
- Students can hone their writing skills.

The history student will demonstrate the ability to write about topics in historiography and how those topics are interpreted. Marketable Skills:

- Students can learn how ideas and interpretations change over time.
- Students can learn how to evaluate different interpretations and ideas.
- Students can learn how to use evidence to persuade various audiences.

The history student will demonstrate knowledge of American History, World History, and Non-American History. Marketable Skills:

- Students can develop a better understanding of the development of various cultures, political and economic systems, gender and race relations, and environmental change.
- Students can develop a multicultural perspective necessary for an increasing globalized world.
- Students can learn how to manage and absorb various perspectives and information.

Class Schedule

A typical class schedule will be broken up as follows:

Time	Activity	Notes
6:00-6:10	Announcements	-
6:10-7:00	Interactive Lecture	Please ask questions and interrupt me!
7:00-7:10	Break	-
7:10-8:00	Discussion	You will do the majority of the talking with your colleagues
8:00-8:10	Break	-
8:10-8:40	Thinking about History	Show us what you discovered this week
8:40-8:45	Closing Thoughts	Lessons learned from our time together

Readings

All readings will be provided by the instructor.

Spotify Playlist

[History 4320: Twentieth Century America](#)

As part of our class, I have assembled a playlist of assigned songs on Spotify. This service is free with ads, but you can also find individual songs on YouTube and other music platforms such as Apple Music. I have assembled them here for ease of use.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades

Each person earns their own grade. My job as the instructor is to assess your work along clearly articulated guidelines and expectations. I also value and reward improvement. It is therefore critical that you do all assignments, attend all class sessions, and participate in all discussions. Remember, you are a contributor, a co-learner, and a fellow investor in our collective educational experience.

Participation (30%)

The foundation of our class is participation. We are a community. While every student in this class can earn an A, I recognize none of you are taking this class in isolation. You may have other courses or collegiate-related concerns that require more attention. At the beginning of our class, you will choose which participation grade you would like to earn in this course based on the rubric below. You will then sign a contract (not legally enforceable but just to make things a little more real) with that grade. You may choose A, B, C, or D and are free to change your mind later in the semester, regardless of the contract. All of these choices are valid, with the caveat that you will obviously not receive the same academic credit for a D as an A. As with your other grades, your choice will be kept secret apart from private discussion between you and myself. Regardless of your choice, you cannot participate if you are not present for a particular class. If you are not present, you will not receive credit for that day.

I reserve the right as instructor of record to interpret your participation as it fits into the rubric. I will determine your grade by evaluating your participation through the rubric below. Every five weeks, I will issue a short report on your participation. These three reports will include a paragraph evaluating your participation and a letter grade. At the end of the semester, these will be averaged as your overall participation grade.

Your participation grade may be affected by life circumstances out of your control. If this is the case, please see my policy on reasonable accommodation and extenuating circumstances.

A	An A student will complete all readings, attend and participate (speak/communicate in class with comments that relate directly to that class) in all classes, make clear in their own participation that they have taken time to examine and meditate on the assigned materials, and actively listen to their colleagues in discussion
B	A B student will complete most readings, attend most classes, and participate in class regularly. They have read the materials from their contributions to the class and relevant responses to their colleagues' ideas.

C	A C student is present in class but either does not complete readings regularly or does not participate regularly. They may have read the materials, but they do not show that they have done so. Rather than building on or engaging with their colleagues, they talk past them.
D	A D student does not complete readings regularly and participates infrequently. They may have read the materials, but they do not show that they have done so. They do not engage with their colleagues' ideas and are unprepared to respond when asked about the topic at hand.
F	An F student does not participate apart from rare circumstances. They may have read the materials, but they do not show that they have done so. They rarely engage with their colleagues' ideas and are often inattentive in class.

Thinking about History (10%)

As part of our course, each week you will go out into the world and find something related to the next class and then tell us or show us what you found during class. This could be a physical item, a story, or something else. I'm happy to be flexible about what you find as long as it is clear that you have made an effort.

Quizzes (20%)

You will complete a series of weekly quizzes over the course of the semester. Each quiz will be about materials, lectures and discussions from the prior week. Each quiz will have ten questions and will be completed outside of class via Blackboard. You will have one week to complete each quiz. These quizzes are intended to be low-stakes exercises and are open book. Please complete these without consulting your colleagues or using artificial intelligence in crafting your answers.

Response Papers (30%)

Response papers are an opportunity to meditate on a particular topic or idea. You do not need to do any additional research beyond the sources assigned for each paper. Each paper should be 1.5-2 pages and follow Chicago format (double spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font, 1 inch margins, etc.). You will have three response papers over the course of the semester.

Checking In (10%)

As part of our class, you will meet with me individually twice during the semester. These meetings are worth 5% of your grade each. In each of these meetings, we will check in and talk about how you are doing in the class. These meetings are designed to help build a connection and to provide an opportunity for you to address any concerns you might have.

POLICIES

Contact

Please contact me via email or speak to me during my office hours. During the work week (Monday through Friday), I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours.

Conduct

All are welcome in my classroom. I expect you to treat your fellow classmates and any guests with empathy, kindness, and respect. Remember that we (myself, you and your peers) can make mistakes. In that circumstance, I ask for grace for both myself and your colleagues. I hope to extend that same grace to you.

Academic Integrity

Students who violate academic integrity will receive a zero on the associated assignment. Some examples of violations of academic integrity are plagiarism, failure to properly cite sources of information, or submitting papers written by someone else (including with the assistance of artificial intelligence). To be successful in this class, your work must be yours and yours alone.

Technology

Laptops and phones in this class are a privilege and not a right; if I catch you using your laptop or phone for something other than class, I will ask you to put it away.

Reasonable Accommodation and Extenuating Circumstances

In the event of illness, a death in your family, or other catastrophic personal crisis, I will be sympathetic and flexible, *provided* that you alert me as soon as possible and preferably in advance of an assignment's due date. Belated excuses will not account for poorly done or late work. You will need to support any medical excuses with the appropriate, written documentation. I will also work with you to accommodate long term extenuating circumstances, such as pregnancy and childbirth, limited transportation, childcare, limited access to the internet, limited access to permanent housing, or other issues. While I cannot solve these problems, I will work with you.

RESOURCES

Students with Disabilities

Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide

reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility services must contact:

Mary Schwartze

Ferguson Hall, Room 112

Mailing address: P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832

Phone: 432-837-8691

Email: mschwartze@sulross.edu

As a person with disabilities, I hope you will take advantage of these resources.

Counseling

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare. All SRSU students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timelycare/SRSU](https://timelycare.com/sulross). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus).

Academic Assistance

As an SRSU student, you have access to several programs designed to assist your academic performance. If you need help with writing, contact the SRSU Writing Center via Blackboard: https://shsu.blackboard.com/ultra/organizations/_195798_1/cl/outline or via Robin Alvarez (Writing Center Coordinator) at rka19ro@sulross.edu. You also have access to the Lobo Den Tutoring Center at Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library. Anthony Quintana is Coordinator of Tutoring Services: anthony.quintana@sulross.edu.

Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers free resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837-8123).

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

Songs of the Week:

- Scott Joplin, "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899)
- Scott Joplin, "The Entertainer" (1902)

August 26 Discussion – No preparation needed. Bring yourself and be ready to talk!

Week 2: Jim Crow America

Song of the Week:

- Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit” (1940)

September 2 Discussion: Lynching

- [Monroe and Florence Work Lynching Map](#)
- [Michael Barnes, “Life and death on the Texas-Mexico border 100 years ago” *Austin American Statesman*, September 4, 2016](#)
- [Refusing to Forget](#)
- [“A 25 year old hate crime still affects Jasper, Texas” *Texas Tribune*, June 6, 2023](#)

Week 3: The Progressive Era

Songs of the Week:

- The Osborne Brothers, “Rocky Top” (1968)
- Los Alegres De Terán, “Los Tequileros” [c. 1920s] (1972)

September 9 Discussion: The Uneven Impact of Prohibition

- [WAMC Northeast Public Radio, “The War on Alcohol’ by Lisa McGirr” \(2016\)](#)
- [George T. Díaz, “The History of Tequileros: Smugglers of Prohibition Era Tequila” *Handbook of Texas History* \(2015\)](#)
- National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, *Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws, Volume 4 – A Prohibition Survey of Texas* (1931)

Week 2 Quiz due

Week 4: War, Wealth, Rights, and Race (1917-1929)

Song of the Week:

- The Gap Band, “You Dropped a Bomb on Me” (1982)

September 16 Discussion: The Tulsa Race Massacre

- Interview with Major Frank Van Voorhis, October 25, 1937

- M.A.N. Shaw to J.B.A. Robertson, June 2, 1921
- W.A. Wallace to J.B.A. Robertson, June 3, 1921 (with reply)
- American Red Cross, Tulsa Race Riot Disaster Relief Report (1921) [Excerpts]

Response Paper 1 due

Week 3 Quiz due

Week 5: Economic and Environmental Disaster (1929-1940)

Songs of the Week:

- Bessie Smith, “Muddy Water (A Mississippi Moan)” (1927)
- Woody Guthrie, “Do Re Mi” (1940)

September 23 Discussion: Environmental Disasters

- [*Throughline*, “Aftermath” \(2020\)](#)
- [*Ken Burns, The Dust Bowl* \(2012\) – “An Environmental Catastrophe”](#)
- [*National Drought Mitigation Center, “The Dust Bowl”*](#)

Week 4 Quiz due

Week 6: World War II at Home and Abroad (1941-1945)

Songs of the Week:

- Bing Crosby & The Andrews Sisters, “Hot Time in the Town of Berlin” (1944)

September 30 Discussion: Japanese American Internment

- [*California State Library, Internment Experience*](#)
- [*ESRI Story Maps, Justice Deferred: Executive Order 9066 and the Geography of Japanese American Imprisonment during WWII*](#)
- [*KENS 5, “Crystal City’s New Museum Uncovers WWII Internment Camp History \(2024\)”*](#)
- [*George Takei, “Why I Love a County that Once Betrayed Me” \(2014\)*](#)

Week 5 Quiz due

Week 7: The United States in a Cold War World, Part 1 (1945-1968)

Song of the Week

- The Blind Boys of Alabama, “(Jesus Hits Like The) Atom Bomb” [1950]

October 7 Discussion: Nuclear Refugees: The Marshallese Diaspora in America

- [Arkansas PBS, *A New Island: The Marshallese in Arkansas* \(2024\)](#)
- [Ali Raj, “In Marshall Islands, Radiation Threatens Tradition of Handing Down Stories by Song” *Los Angeles Times* \(2019\)](#)
- [Julia Wilde, “A New Monster at NHM” Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County \(2023\)](#)
- [Susanne Rust, “How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster” *Los Angeles Times* \(2019\)](#)

Week 6 Quiz due

Week 8: The Classical Civil Rights Movement

Songs of the Week

- Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam” (1964)
- Martin Luther King Jr., “We Shall Overcome” (1965)

Tuesday, October 14: Race and Suburbia in 1950s Pennsylvania

- [The March of Time, “A City is Born – Levittown, Pennsylvania” \(1952\)](#)
- [Dynamic Films Inc., “Crisis in Levittown, PA” \(1957\)](#)

Week 7 Quiz due

Week 9: The United States in a Cold War World, Part II (1965-1990)

Songs of the Week

- Creedence Clearwater Revival, “Fortunate Son” (1969)
- Nena, “99 Red Balloons” (1984)

Tuesday, October 21 – Discussion:

- [Erroll Morris, *The Fog of War* \(2003\)](#)

Week 8 Quiz due

Week 10: The Turbulent 1960s (1962-1973)

Songs of the Week

- Buffalo Springfield, “For What It’s Worth” (1966)
- Marvin Gaye, “What’s Going On” (1971)
- Charlie Daniels, “Uneasy Rider” (1973)

Tuesday, October 28 – Discussion: The Dawn of American Conservatism

- Merle Haggard, “Okie from Muskogee” (1969)
- [CBS Boston, “WBZ Archives: 1974 Boston Busing Protests” \(2018\)](#)
- [Code Switch, “The Original ‘Welfare Queen’” \(2019\)](#)
- [Retro Report, *Prop 13: Mad as Hell* \(2016\)](#)
- [PBS, *The MacNeil/Leher Report*, Episode 6040 “Politics in the Pulpit” \(1980\)](#)

Response Paper 2 due

Week 9 Quiz due

Week 11: Civil Rights Movements

Songs of the Week

- James Brown, “Say it Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968)
- Los Alvarados, “Yo Soy Chicano” (1970)
- Loretta Lynn, “The Pill” (1975)

Tuesday, November 4 – Discussion: El Movimiento en Texas

- [Texas Public Radio, “Raza Unida Party members reflect on Chicano activism on its 50th anniversary” *Fronteras* \(2022\)](#)
- [UT-Austin, “Justice for Farah”](#)
- [KERA, *Farrah!* \(1973\)](#)
- [KXAS-TV, “Brown Berets” September 6, 1978](#)
- [KXAS-TV, “Brown Berets” November 4, 1978](#)

Week 10 Quiz due

Week 12: A Crisis of Confidence (1974-1981)

Songs of the Week:

- Billy Joel, “Allentown” (1982)
- John Cougar Mellencamp, “Pink Houses” (1983)
- Bruce Springsteen, “Born in the USA” (1984)

Tuesday, November 11: The Growth of American Extremism

- [“The Modern White Power Movement” *Throughline*, December 3, 2020](#)
- [American Experience, *Oklahoma City* \(2017\) - "Timothy McVeigh at Waco"](#)
- [Shelly Brisbin, “Home invasion: how one man experienced the 1997 Republic of Texas standoff” *Texas Standard* \(2022\)](#)
- [KXAS-TV, "Reax Republic" April 27, 1997](#)
- [KXAS-TV, "Recruits" May 1, 1997](#)
- [Etta Hume, "Embassy of the Republic of Texas" May 6, 1997, Etta Hume Cartoon Archive, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections](#)
- [KXAS-TV, "McLaren" May 13, 1997](#)

Week 11 Quiz due

Week 13: The Reagan Era (1981-1992)

Songs of the Week:

- Tupac, “Changes” (1997)
- J Cole, “Neighbors” (2016)

Tuesday, November 18: Hip Hop and the War on Drugs

- [Slow Burn, Season 3, Episode 2: Cops on My Tail](#)
- [University of Houston, *Brothers in Rhyme: Fat Pat, Big Hawk, and the Screwed Up Click* \(2018\)](#)
- “Wood” in Lance Scott Walker, editor, *Houston Rap Tapes: An Oral History of Bayou City Hip-Hop, 2nd Edition* (University of Texas Press, 2018): 243-248

Week 12 Quiz due

Week 14: Brave New World (1992-2001)

Songs of the Week:

- Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (1991)
- Selena, “Bidi Bidi Bom Bom” (1994)

Tuesday, November 25: The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising

- [Kamilah Kashanie, “Remembering Latasha Harlins, whose death helped set off unrest in Los Angeles” *Story Corps* \(2022\)](#)

- [BBC World Service, “Rodney King and the Los Angeles Riots” *Witness History* \(2012\)](#)
- [Center for Asian American Media, *K-Town ‘92*](#)

Response Paper 3 due

Week 13 Quiz due

Week 15: The War on Terror (2001-2021)

Songs of the Week:

- Darryl Worley, “Have You Forgotten?” (2003)
- John Mayer, “Waiting on the World to Change” (2006)

December 2 Discussion: Arab Americans and Muslim Americans after 9/11

- [PBS News Hour, “American Muslims remember how 9/11 changed America as they knew it” \(2021\)](#)
- Mujan Seif, “My Life as a Brown Person” in Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011): 213-220
- [Aymann Ismail, “The Most Cathartic TV I’ve Seen in Ages Came from a Show I Absolutely Did Not Want to Watch” *Slate* \(2025\)](#)

Week 14/15 Joint Quiz due on December 9

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO AMEND THESE POLICIES AND THE SCHEDULE AT MY DISCRETION AND WILL GIVE ADEQUATE NOTICE OF ANY CHANGE