HISTORY 376: THE AMERICAN MIDWEST

UW-Stevens Point

Spring 2020

Professor Brett Barker, Ph.D.

W 4:00-6:30 CCC 224

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**Course Objectives:**

This course examines the history of the American Midwest from its earliest inhabitants to the present. Its aim is to help students gain a basic understanding of the major themes and developments in the region and the major intellectual questions concerning regional history in the United States. By the end of the semester students should have gained specific knowledge and skills that will prove useful in their college career.

Knowledge: a demonstrated understanding of the following:

--the indigenous history of the region before the arrival of Europeans

--the arrival of Europeans and their empires and the Midwest as part of the “Middle Ground”

--the incorporation of the region into the United States and the dispossession of native peoples

--the building of American communities across the region over the nineteenth century

--the growth of agriculture and industry

--the major political and social trends that came to define the region

--the impact on the region of urbanization, suburbanization, globalization, and deindustrialization

--what defines the Midwest as a region and whether it even is a region with a discernible history

Skills:success in this course will also require demonstration of the following:

--the ability to read and listen with critical perception

--the ability to analyze and synthesize course materials

--the ability to distinguish between knowledge, values, beliefs, and opinions

--the ability to use evidence to support assertions about the past

**Attendance**:

**You must attend class**. Much of the learning and interaction in this course will occur in the classroom each week. Since we will only meet once a week, it is critical that you attend every class meeting. As a courtesy to the instructor and other students, **please arrive on time and turn off your cell phone and computers**. **Texting or computer use in class is prohibited unless allowed by an official accommodation plan.** Repeated violation of this rule will result in a significant lowering of your class citizenship grade (see below).

**Texts** (required):

There are no readily available and useful standard texts for this course. So, all required readings will be posted on Canvas. Each week’s readings will be posted by the previous Friday at 8 AM.

**Course Calendar:**

**Unit 1: Deep and Defining Roots (The Midwest through 1783) Weeks 1-3**

Jan. 22 Introduction: What is the Midwest?

Jan. 29 The Indigenous History of the Midwest

Feb. 5 Europeans, Empire, and the “Middle Ground”

**Unit 2: Destruction and Creation (The Midwest 1783-1860) Weeks 4-7**

Feb. 12 Becoming Part of the United States

Feb. 19 The Creation of the Midwest and Its Communities

Feb. 26 Agriculture and the Fundamental Structure of the American Midwest

Mar. 4 Immigrants, Yankees, and Tuckahoes

**Mar. 18 Spring Break – No Class**

**Unit 3: At the Center of Everything (The Midwest 1861-1945) Weeks 8-12**

Mar. 11 Midwestern Politics and the Cauldron of War

Mar. 25 The Creation of a Wider Midwest

Apr. 1 Populism and Agrarian Discontent

Apr. 8 Industrialization and Midwestern Progressivism

Apr. 15 World Wars and Catastrophes

**Unit 4: Heartland or Flyover? (The Midwest Since 1945) Weeks 13-15**

Apr. 22 The Postwar Midwest: Prosperity, Suburbanization, and Deindustrialization

Apr. 29 The Midwest and the Challenges of Globalization

May 6 Today’s Midwest and an Uncertain Future

**Grading Scale:**

90-92 A- 93-100 A

80-82 B- 83-86 B 87-89 B+

70-72 C- 73-76 C 77-79 C+

60-66 D 67-69 D+ 0-59 F

**Changes to the Syllabus:**

I have tried to make this syllabus as accurate, complete, and helpful as possible. I do not anticipate changing any elements of this course, but I reserve the right to do so. Any changes will be announced in class with as much advance notice as possible.

**Grading:** Course grades will be based on the following:

**Entry Tickets (15%):** Most weeks you will be asked to write a short (250-300 word) essay summarizing the content and argument of one of the readings. Type them and bring a printed copy to class.

**Unit Essays (25% [Unit 1 5%, Units 2-3 10% each]):** At the end of Units 1-3, you will be asked to write an interpretive essay analyzing a key element or theme of that unit. These will challenge you to synthesize a great deal of course material and I encourage you to seek my help while working on these.

**History Day (5%):** As part of this class, you will assist during History Day on Thursday, March 12. There will be opportunities to be a judge or assist in some other way.

**Citizenship (20%):** Not only must you attend class, but you are also expected to participate in discussions. In evaluating your participation grade I will consider your attendance, the quantity and quality of your contributions, and your willingness to listen and interact with other students while integrating your comments into the flow of discussion. Repeated absences or habitual tardiness will significantly lower your grade. Anyone unable to attend every class in its entirety should speak with the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

**Research Paper (20%):** You will write a paper on a topic concerning the history of the Midwest. More details about this will be forthcoming.

**Final (15%):** This essay will be due the day of the final exam (Friday, May 15) at 12;15 PM. It will consist of an essay asking you to consider the entire course.

**Three Important Notes about the Course:**

1. Weekly assignments are due on the dates specified, unless you make prior arrangement with the instructor. Late work will be penalized.
2. Students who intend to be absent for a week or more during the semester must speak to Prof. Barker immediately.
3. Academic Honesty and Classroom Behavior: This course is part of the UW-Stevens Point academic community, an academic community that is bound together by the traditions and practice of scholarship. Honest intellectual work – on examinations and on written assignments—is essential to the success of this community of scholars. Using classmates’ responses to answer exam questions or disguising words written by others as your own undermines the trust and respect on which our course depends. The work in this course is challenging and will demand a good deal of each of you. I have every confidence that each of you can succeed. Doing your own work will enhance your sense of accomplishment when the semester comes to a close.

Additionally, the classroom environment is a unique opportunity for students to share ideas, opinions, and discuss course content. As each student is entitled to contribute in class, specific expectations are necessary to ensure a thriving classroom environment. Expectations include: arriving to class on time, being prepared for class, no electronic devices, unless authorized to do so, any loud shouting, excessive side conversations, arriving to class under the influence of any alcohol or drugs, profane language, and verbal or physical threats, intimidation of any kind, or any other behavior that may be disruptive to the professor or other students. If any of this behavior is exhibited, you may be asked to leave the class for the day. Any continued disruptive behavior may result in a referral to the Dean of Students Office.

##### A Brief Guide to Succeeding in this Course

# **1. Reading**: There is a lot of reading in this course, and to do well **you must start reading right away and keep up with the reading**. You must complete the week’s reading **before** Wednesday’s class The readings contains a lot of detail and you should take notes and bring them to class. I want the students to take ownership of the class and discussions. While I will be there to guide and provide insights, you will learn more through active participation than through passive listening.

**2. Class Meetings**: most classes will consist of both mini-lectures and discussion. Here’s what I intend you to get out of each: **Mini-lectures**: These will not be an attempt to restate what can be found in the readings—that’s why it’s **important for you to both read the text and attend class**. The **mini-lectures** are really interpretive narratives, or stories, meant to provide a coherent view of the week’s materials and fill in gaps in content and interpretation that the readings don’t provide. I will offer this content in a way I think makes sense, and I will challenge you to show that you understand the material. In these moments, I encourage you to interrupt me in a way that facilitates discussion and clarification.

In the end, success in this course requires that you be able to explain the American past (analysis) and you provide evidence for your explanations (content). It is critical that you are an active participant and this course will be strengthened if during lecture and discussion you make every effort to use course materials to hone your historical thinking skills.

**At the heart of every class meeting there will be discussion,** a chance for you to practice analyzing course materials and a chance for me to better comprehend what you understand and what is still unclear to you and your classmates. This course will be **much more rewarding** if you, and your classmates, come to class prepared and willing to talk.

# **3. Entry tickets**: Most weeks, you will be asked to write a short summary of one or more of the readings and turn a typed copy in at the beginning of class. These not only ensure that you are doing the readings, but they help you sharpen your ability to summarize the content and arguments of readings, a useful skill for everyone.

**4.** **Unit essays**: At the end of Units 1-3, you will be asked to write an interpretive essay analyzing a key element or theme of that unit. These will challenge you to synthesize a great deal of course material and I encourage you to seek my help while working on these.

# **5. Office Hours and Appointments**: *Every one of you should come see me in my office during the semester*. My office hours are time set aside for students, and successful students take advantage of them. Whether it’s a simple question or a serious problem in the course, you should never hesitate to stop by or make an appointment if my office hours do not fit your schedule. I will be available in person on Mondays and Wednesdays and I would be happy to Zoom, talk by phone, or e-mail at other times.