Course Description:

How does a society as complex, diverse and divided as the modern United States come to be? How does a nation whose founding principles include that “all men are created equal” have such a troubled past when it comes to granting equal rights to many of its citizens? How does something as seemingly distant as the Industrial Revolution or the Progressive Era affect the politics and culture of our country now? In US History and Geography we will be grappling with these and many other questions that will help us to understand the reasons why the US developed in the way that it has, and the roots of uniquely American problems and accomplishments, with a focus on people’s history from the 1877-present.

Coursework:

You will find that what you get out of our class will be directly proportional to what you put into it. You will be required to work hard in order to do well, but your efforts will pay off significantly, not only in the form of your grades, but in your understanding of and insight about the history and politics of our society. Critical thinking and thoughtful questioning are particularly valuable when it comes to these topics, so these skills will be developed along with analytical, writing and discussion skills.

In this class we will be using all kinds of activities to “do” history, from group work to creative writing to simulations and reading primary sources. Most days there will be assigned readings and homework that I expect you to complete before class so that we can spend our time together delving into the material (and so that you don’t have to lug those heavy books to class every day). Homework will be assigned by unit (usually 10 points per assignment) so you will know what is coming and units will end with a project, test or other activity (usually worth 50 points). At the end of the semester there will be a cumulative final exam and a common assessment that will be worth 5% of your grade as required by the district. Make sure to save all work that you do for this class at least until the semester; it will be useful for studying for the final, and if I make a grading mistake it is much easier to rectify if I have the original assignment.

Expectations:

You should always come to class on time with a pencil and your notebook or binder. Even more importantly, I expect you to come prepared to listen attentively to me and to your classmates, to think deeply about the issues we tackle and to contribute in a way that is both thoughtful and constructive. Of course, we all have really bad days, so on those days I expect you at the very least to be respectful, kind, and cooperative. On that note, cell phones must either be off and put away in order to be fully present.

Please express your thoughts and questions openly in class, and in a way that is respectful (raise your hand when we are talking in a group, do not interrupt or insult others, etc.). To make this possible, I expect all phones to be stored on silent or off. You should not make yourself available to anyone outside of class except at break time. Of course, any emergency contacts can be made through the Main Office at 994-2025. This becomes especially important as we deal with many difficult, and sometimes disturbing events in US history that continue to affect us all in modern society.

I do expect you to sign up for text updates for Google Classroom* so you can receive regular notifications about our class. Please communicate with me if you are having trouble with any aspect of my
class. In person is always best, but Google Classroom and email are okay, too. I am more than happy to find a time to meet with you outside of class to help you with work or answer any questions you have. If you have my cell phone number because of Mock Trial, Forum or QSA, in the interest of fairness (and my sanity) please do not text to ask class-related questions.

Materials:

- *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn
- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander
- *American Vision* textbook
- 3-hole punched paper OR notebook

Late Work:

I expect you to turn in your assignments on time, so **late work will be placed at the bottom of the grading pile and I do not guarantee that late work will be counted for credit until the next marking period.** If an assignment is turned in the day after it is due it is eligible for up to 75% of the original credit, from two days until the end of the unit it will be eligible for up to 50%. I will not accept late work past the day of the unit test or project. If you need an extension on a project, assignment or paper make sure to communicate with me at least a day before it is due. Each interim you may retake a single quiz if you scored below 60% on your first try. Also, if you score below 62% on a unit test, you may do corrections for up to half points, due one week after tests are returned; see specific instructions available on Google Classroom.

Help, I missed a day! What do I do?

If you have to miss a day of class, it is your (important!) responsibility to get any make up class work from your classmates, Google Classroom & the extra handouts bin. You will have two days for every excused absence to make up homework assigned during your absence. Please make sure to write “excused absent” & the reason on the top of any late homework so that you do not receive late credit.

Retakes & Extra Credit:

I consider test retakes on a case by case basis with an explanation of what happened on the original assignment. I am happy to consider rewrites of papers within a week of when they are returned if attached to the original. Occasionally I will offer extra points for a write up of a relevant event or lecture. I also allow one movie write-up per quarter worth up to 15 extra credit points if it meets my requirements. Please check out the extra credit page on my website (at the top of this syllabus) if you are interested in this option. Also, if you hear about an opportunity that is related to our coursework please tell me!

Grading Policy:

My grade system is a standard US letter scale and is pretty straightforward: your grade is based on your total points received divided by the number of possible points assigned. This means no weighting; every point is worth the same amount. As required by the district, the common assessment at the end of each semester is worth approximately 5% of your grade in terms of points and will be given during the final exam time along with my portion of the test, which is also cumulative.

Academic Dishonesty:

I expect each of you to do work that is both high quality and that is your own. Cheating, plagiarism (using words written by someone else without giving them credit), or other forms of dishonesty undermine the important work we are doing together. This includes copying homework. Even though Wikipedia is written by a lot of people, you still have to cite it; the same goes for all web pages. If there is some question as to
whether a source is valid or whether you need to cite what you are using, please ask! In these cases it is always better to be safe than sorry. Any work you turn in that is not your own will receive an E (with opportunities for re-dos in special situations).

Sappy (but True!) Final Word:

Now that I’ve gotten most of the business out of the way, I want to mention that I’m really looking forward to getting to know you and do history with you. This class is particularly dear to me because it is the class that got me interested in history when I was a student at Community, and which I student taught here. Learning about history has helped me to understand why this crazy world is the way it is, and has developed my world view in important ways; I hope this class will give you some of the tools to do the same. However, I love teaching not just because I get to teach history, but because I get to teach and learn from students. If you work hard you will do well here, and with your input our year will be worthwhile and fun.