

# HIS 3942

## **The Conquest of Mexico**

**Fall 2025** (3 credits)

Class Meetings: MWF Period 6 (12:50-1:40)

Instructor: Dr. Deardorff | [deardorff.max@ufl.edu](mailto:deardorff.max@ufl.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday (10am-12pm in Grinter 339) | Wednesday (2-4pm in Keene Flint 206)

TA: Kristen Heymer | [kheymer@ufl.edu](mailto:kheymer@ufl.edu)



*"The Conquest of Tenochtitlán,"* from the *Conquest of México* series, second half of seventeenth century, Library of Congress

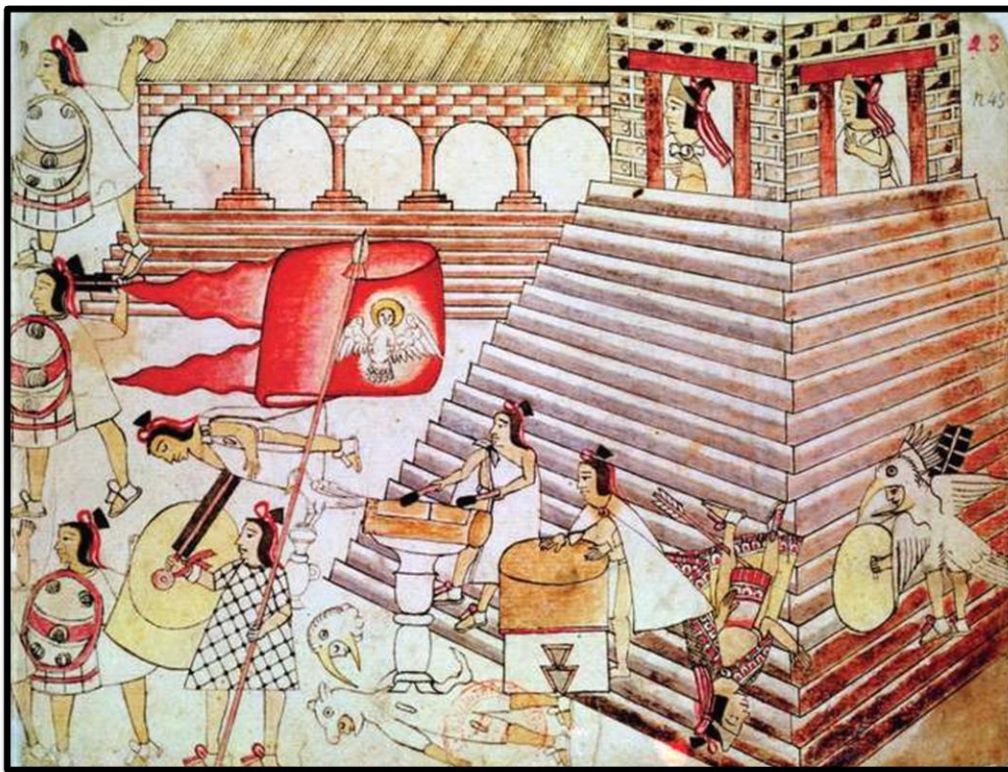
### **The History Practicum – Introduction and Objectives of the Course:**

In 1521, the great imperial city of Tenochtitlan fell to a small group of Spanish conquistadors, ending Aztec rule in Mesoamerica. For the duration of the semester, we will be exploring the history of that event, its social and cultural context, and its aftermath. As we do, we will strive to answer a number of related questions. For instance, how did so few men bring down such a great empire? Do Spaniards deserve all the credit? As students dig for the truth, they will engage with the tools of the historian.

What evidence, we will ask, exists in Spanish sources, on one hand, and native sources, on the other? Do different sources tell different stories about who was responsible for the Aztecs' defeat? And what factors – military, social, environmental, and cultural—might have played a role in the outcome?

As students become more comfortable with the traditional narrative of these events and the sources available to historians to study them, they will propose their own plan for a research project.

This course is designed to help students develop fundamental skills in critical reading, analytical thinking, historical research, evaluation of evidence, and argumentative writing, all of which are needed to succeed in the major and which will serve students well in their future endeavors, no matter what profession or occupation they pursue after graduation.



"Aztec warriors defending the temple of Tenochtitlán," Mexico, BNP Paris

### **Required Texts:**

Clendinnen, Inga. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, 2003). ISBN-13: 978-0521527316.

Schwartz, Stuart & Tatiana Seijas, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Fall of the Mexica Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bedford, 2018) ISBN-13: 978-1319-094850

Townsend, Camilla. *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (UNM, 2006) ISBN 978-0826334053

------. *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (Oxford, 2021) ISBN-13: 978-0197577660

Rampolla, Mary. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018) ISBN-13: 9781319113025 [any edition of **Rampolla** 7<sup>th</sup> edition or later is acceptable]



*A 'cacique' from Tepetlaoztoc complains to 'encomendero' Miguel Díaz de Aux in the late 1520s about the latter's brutal treatment of the local community; Kingsborough Codex, fol. 11b*

### **Course Goals:**

- Students will develop a familiarity with pre-Hispanic Mexico, early modern Spain, and the character of the first interactions between their peoples
- Students will learn to read primary texts and secondary sources in a critical fashion, with an eye to understanding how and why those texts were produced
- Students will practice the basics of historical research and writing, in order to be able to:
  - **evaluate primary and secondary sources**
  - **devise research questions**
  - **conduct library-based and online research**
  - **produce analytical writing**
  - **identify and avoid plagiarism**
  - **deliver oral presentations based on research**
  - **provide informed critical feedback in a collegial manner**
- Students will better understand the range of careers available to students of history

### **Assignments & Grading:**

Exercises (x10):	40%	[400 points]
Research Project & Presentation:	40%	[400 points]
Group Work	5%	[50 points]
Participation:	15%	[150 points]

### **Grading:**

Letter Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Numerical Value (% rank)	+93.3	90 93.3	86.7 89.9	83.4 86.6	80 83.3	76.7 79.9	73.4 76.7	70 73.3	66.7 69.9	63.4 66.6	60 63.3	-60
GPA Equivalent	4.0	3.67	3.33	3.0	2.67	2.33	2.0	1.67	1.33	1.0	0.67	0

More information on grades and grading policies is here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

### **Participation (15%):**

Overall, your **class participation grade** will derive from the following:

- Regular preparation for class, including bringing the required readings
- Serious prior engagement with the assigned course readings
- A sustained effort at contributing to class discussions through visible attention, helpful questions, and worthwhile insights into the issues being discussed

You can use the **self-assessment questionnaire** below to understand how you are doing as a class participant. Please consider it from time to time as we go through the course and feel free to share your evaluation with your TA (this is not necessary, but always welcome):

- Are you prepared for section discussions? Have you read the assigned texts carefully and thoroughly? Do you come to class with issues to raise in discussion?
- Do you participate regularly? Energetically? Do you participate actively in group activities?
- Do you listen to your fellow classmates and respond to them? Do you ask them questions?
- Do your interventions spark our discussion? Raise significant questions? Challenge our understanding of the readings and major themes? Offer insightful and unexpected reactions to discussions?
- How does your participation compare to that of other students? Are you a class leader or a follower? Do you try to take responsibility for what happens in class?

Use the guidelines below to determine **what grade you would give yourself for participation**:

- **A participation grade falls in the "A" range if** the student not only participates regularly but also consistently and actively encourages the flow and substance of discussion. You are not only well-prepared, but you also have thoughts about the texts that go beyond a basic understanding of the work. You also take responsibility for creating and maintaining a stimulating discussion each week. You are eager to share your ideas with others, and active in your listening and reactions to other students' comments. Your ideas are critical and stimulate our discussion. When there is a silence or lull in the conversation, you work hard to move discussion in a new direction. You are aware of your role in encouraging other students and you work hard to make classroom

discussions an interactive conversation not just a forum for announcing viewpoints. You help to create a welcoming atmosphere for people's ideas, and you listen actively.

- **A participation grade falls in the "B" range if** the student is involved and motivated in more than the required way: you are always present, well prepared, contribute quite regularly by sharing your insights. Your contributions show that you are familiar with the material. You share your ideas with others and show interest in the contributions of other students. You listen to what others say and occasionally try to respond to their ideas. You help to create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone's ideas.

- **A participation grade falls in the "C" range if** the student meets the basic requirements of the course: you are present, are usually prepared, and participate once in a while, but not regularly. Your contributions relate to the texts and offer some insightful ideas, but they rarely facilitate a discussion. You are an attentive listener.

### **Attendance policy and expectations**

Students will normally attend three classes each week. Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive for lecture or discussion section promptly. Unexcused absences will be penalized in the following manner:

Two absences: no penalty (to cover illness or personal days)

Each subsequent absence: Attendance and Participation **grade lowered** by one-third

Poor attendance (40% or more of the semester) is grounds for failing the course.

**Excused Absences:** Students unable to attend *for extended periods of time* because of personal or family medical issues should provide notification via email justifying their absence (medical documentation is required in the case of extended absences). Students who have other conflicts that will prevent them from being able to complete an assignment on time or who will incur absences due to UF-sanctioned activities (such as participation in UF teams, etc.) must notify the professor in advance.<sup>1</sup>

### **Laptop/tablet policy**

**Laptops and tablets** are **permitted** in class **solely** for the purpose of **accessing digitalized readings**. Note-taking must be done the old-fashioned way, with paper and a writing instrument. Social science research has repeatedly shown that students who write their notes (rather than type them) demonstrate better understanding of material and better recall. Internet websurfing, texting, checking of email, or other tasks unrelated to readings for discussion or other classroom activities is not permitted. Any student found engaging in these activities during class may be asked to leave the classroom. A second violation will result in disciplinary sanction.

**Group Assignments:** In the early weeks of the semester, you will be assigned to a group (Tenochca, Tlatelolca, Tlaxcalteca, Maya, Caxtilteca, Conquistadors, Friars).

1. **Digital History Report:** Student groups will investigate and report on digital history websites linked to pre-Hispanic Mexico and the conquests of the sixteenth century. On my website, ***Iberia Plus Ultra*** (<https://www.iberiaplusultra.org/digitalhistorylinks>), there are dozens of

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<sup>1</sup> Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in the course are consistent with university policies. See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/> for more information regarding the University Attendance Policies.

options to choose from. Student reports should give a summary of the selected website's content, communicate who is responsible for creating and maintaining the website, highlight some of the website's best features, and tell how the website might relate to the content of the class. Reports should be roughly five (5) minutes in length. Digital History Reports will be given starting on the third week of the semester.

**Late Work & Makeups:** Late work will be accepted up to three week days following the assigned due date. It will be assessed a penalty of 10%/day, which begins to accrue one minute after the submission deadline. After three weekdays, late work will not be accepted. [Justified absences will extend the submission period and override some or all late penalties.] Makeups are allowed at the discretion of the instructor.

### **Class-related Communication**

The professor will send out class announcements via Canvas. You will be held responsible for all amendments to reading or writing assignments posted there. "I don't check Canvas" will not be considered a valid excuse for failure to complete an assignment or follow instructions. In addition, the professor and TA will also use the message feature in Canvas to communicate with you individually in regards to assignments. You are expected to check your Canvas Inbox at least once every 24 hours during the Monday-to-Friday workweek.

## **1. Introduction to the Course and Discipline**

Fri 8/22

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Fri	Course Introduction, overview, and class expectations	Read the Syllabus

## **2. The Historical Profession / The Deep History of Mesoamerica**

Mon 8/25, Wed 8/27, Fri 8/29

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Introduction to the Historical Profession	<b>Methodology:</b> <b>Rampolla</b> , "Introduction: Why Study History?" (pp. 1-7) <b>Wineburg</b> , "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts" <b>Exercise 1 (Historical Thinking) due</b>
Weds	Skills and Responsibilities of the Trade - Academic Honesty, Taking Notes, etc.	<b>Methodology:</b> <b>Rampolla</b> , "Identifying historical sources" (8-12); "Evaluating secondary sources" (18-21); "Reading Actively in History" (p. 26-30); <b>Secondary Readings:</b> <b>Townsend</b> , <i>Fifth Sun</i> , 1-32
Fri	Who were the Aztecs?  <b><u>Student Working Groups Assigned This Week</u></b>	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> <b>Townsend</b> , <i>Fifth Sun</i> , 33-84

### **3. The Background – Who were the Aztecs? The Spaniards?**

Mon 9/1 [~~Labor Day~~], Wed 9/3, Fri 9/5

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Weds	Who were the Spaniards?	<b>Methodology:</b> Rampolla, "Writing about reading" (31-32); Using secondary sources (42-45) <b>Secondary Readings:</b> Cline, Altman, & Pescador, "Spain in the Era of Expansion," 27-52 <b>Exercise 2 (Evaluating Secondary Sources) due</b>
Fri	Spaniards, from Caribbean to the Yucatán	<b>Secondary Readings:</b> Townsend, <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> , intro & chap. 1 (1-29)  *** EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY AT LIBRARY EAST 12:00-12:30 ***

### **4. Encounters, Omens, Reactions**

Mon 9/8, Wed 9/10, Fri 9/12

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Confrontations on the Coastline IN-CLASS DISCUSSION – A Conquistador's Account	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Townsend, <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> , chaps. 2-3 (30-84)
Weds	Cultural Encounters PRIMARY SOURCE DISCUSSION	<b>Methodology:</b> Rampolla, "Analyzing primary sources (13-17) <b>Primary Sources:</b> <i>Victors and Vanquished</i> , TBD
Fri	Cultural Encounters PRIMARY SOURCE DISCUSSION	<b>Primary Sources:</b> <i>Victors and Vanquished</i> , TBD <b>Exercise 3 (Single Source Analysis #1) due</b>

### **5. Hernán Cortes, Tlaxcala, Tenochtitlán (1519-1521)**

Mon 9/15, Wed 9/17, Fri 9/19

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	From Yucatán to Tenochtitlán, Cortés and Moctezuma	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Townsend, <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> , chap. 4-5 (85-125)
Weds	Tenochtitlán – Things Fall Apart	<b>Secondary Readings:</b> Clendinnen, "'Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty:' Cortés and the Conquest of Mexico," <i>Representations</i> 33 (1991): 65-100
Fri	Discussing primary sources	<b>Primary Sources:</b> <i>Victors and Vanquished</i> , chap. 5, doc (108-137); chap. 6, docs. 18-20 (138-148) <b>Exercise 4 (Single Source Analysis #2)</b>

## **6. Consolidation of Conquest**

Mon 9/22, Wed 9/24, Fri 9/26

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	The Siege and Fall of Tenochtitlán	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Townsend, <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> , chaps. 6-7 (126-171)
Weds	Doña María's Epilogue [DISCUSSION on <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> ]	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Townsend, <i>Malintzin's Choices</i> , chaps. 8-9 (172-214)
Fri	Writing Workshop	<b>Methodology:</b> Rampolla, Chapter 4 ["Following Conventions of Writing in History"] (50-76) <b>Exercise 5 (Outlining an Argument) due</b>

## **7. Historiography – Thinking Critically about the Conquest**

Mon 9/29, Wed 10/1, Fri 10/3

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Questioning Narratives	TBD
Weds	Servants to Spaniards or Forgotten Allies? Historical Investigators Employ Visual Sources	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Yannakakis, "Allies or Servants? The Journey of Indian Conquistadors in the Lienzo of Analco" <i>Ethnohistory</i> 58:04 (2011): 653-682
Fri	<i>Indios conquistadores?</i>	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Restall & Asselbergs, chap. 1 in <i>Invading Guatemala</i> , 1-20 <b>Exercise 6 (Historiographical Interventions) due</b>

## **8. Thinking about the Final Project**

Mon 10/6, Wed 10/8, Fri 10/10

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	<b>RESEARCH TOPIC WORKSHOP</b>	<b>Methodology:</b> Rampolla, Writing a Research Paper (77-98); The Project Statement
Weds	<b>LIBRARY ACTIVITY</b>	<b>Secondary Readings:</b> Townsend, <i>Fifth Sun</i> , 209-231 <b>Exercise 7 (Exploring the Library Catalog), due following the meeting with UF's librarian</b>
Fri	War, Conquest, and Political Change	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Clendinnen, <i>Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570</i> , chaps. 1-4

## **9. The Spiritual Conquest**

Mon 10/13, Wed 10/15, Fri 10/17 [~~Homecoming~~]

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Grounds for Conflict	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Clendinnen, <i>Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570</i> , chaps. 5-8 <b>Exercise 8 (Evaluating Secondary Sources) due</b>
Weds	The Old Gods and the New - DISCUSSION	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Clendinnen, <i>Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570</i> , chaps. 9-12

## **10. Law and Society**

Mon 10/20, Wed 10/22, Fri 10/24

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Building a New Society out of the Old	<b>Primary Source:</b> Zorita, "The Brief and Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain," in <i>Life and Labor in Ancient Mexico</i> , 180-185, 200-218 <b>Methodology:</b> Rampolla, Plagiarism (99-105), Quoting and Documenting Sources 111-118 <b>Exercise 9 (Quoting and Citing Sources)</b>
Weds	Violence and the Debate about the Legal Justification of Conquest	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Carrasco, "The Exaggerations of Human Sacrifice," and "Human Sacrifice/ Debt Payments From the Aztec Point of View" (439-447 & 458-465) Sepúlveda, excerpt from Valladolid debate, on natural slavery (unnumbered)
Fri	Law, Land, and the Home	<b>Primary Sources:</b> Docs 5.1-5.3 in <i>Mesoamerican Voices</i> (96-102), 5.6 (106-113) <b>Secondary Reading:</b> Kellogg, " <a href="#">Legal Documents as a Source for Ethnohistory</a> " (2007) Cline, " <a href="#">The Testaments of Culhuacan</a> ," (2007) <b>Project statement due (Friday by 11:59)</b>

[Friday's readings come from a longer list of very thoughtful reflections written by scholars: [MESOINSTITUTE. Sources and Methods for the Study of Postconquest Mesoamerican Ethnohistory](#)]

### **11. Native Sources, Native History, Native Officials**

Mon 10/27, Wed 10/29, Fri 10/31

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	The Web, AI, & Online Sources	<b>Websites:</b> <a href="https://florentinecodex.getty.edu/">https://florentinecodex.getty.edu/</a> <a href="https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/">https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/</a> <a href="https://www.aztec-history.com/">https://www.aztec-history.com/</a> <b>Exercise 10 (Evaluating Online Sources)</b>
Weds	Indigenous Intellectuals and the Appropriation of History	<b>Secondary Reading:</b> Townsend, <i>Fifth Sun</i> , 181-204 <b>Primary Source:</b> 6.10 "Excerpts from Chimalpahin's <i>Diario</i> , 1604-1614" in <i>Mesoamerican Voices</i>
Fri	TBA	<b>TBA</b>

### **12. Student Presentations**

Mon 11/3, Wed 11/5, Fri 11/7

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor sometime this week</b>
Weds	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor sometime this week</b>
Fri	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor sometime this week</b>

### **13. Student Presentations**

Mon 11/17, Wed 11/19, Fri 11/21

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor sometime this week</b>
Weds	Citation Showcase & Student Presentations	<b>Methodology:</b> <u>Rampolla</u> , Quoting and Documenting Sources (106-152)
Fri	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor sometime this week</b>

### **14. Thanksgiving Week - No Classes**

Mon 11/24, Wed 11/26 [Thanksgiving]—Fri 11/28

## **15. Student Presentations**

Mon 12/1, Wed 12/3

Date	Lecture or Discussion	Reading & Assignments
Mon	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor before submitting prospectus</b>
Weds	Student Presentations	<b>Schedule mandatory office hours meeting with professor before submitting prospectus</b>

**END OF TERM RESEARCH PROJECT:** It will include a research Prospectus, timeline; & annotated bibliography. Presentation will form part of the grade for the final project.

[RESEARCH PROJECT DUE MONDAY DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup> BY 12:00 PM (Noon)]

**AI Policy:** In certain limited instances (to be clarified by professor in class), students will be allowed to use LLM's (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc.) to complete assignments. Whenever students use LLM's to complete assignments, they are required to cite and detail their use (in order to avoid plagiarism penalties). However, all uses of LLM's not expressly authorized by the professor's policies are prohibited and will be subject to punitive assessment.

### **Plagiarism policy**

Please familiarize yourself with the University's academic honor code. Unintentional plagiarism results in an "E" for the paper. Intentional plagiarism results in an "E" for the course, or worse. All plagiarism charges will be reported to the University administration.

### **Grading Criteria:**

If you believe an error has been made in grading your work, please bring it to the instructor's attention, and he will review the situation. Once it has been verified that no error has been made, *GRADES ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE*.

A Work that goes beyond instructor's expectations: is careful, thoughtful, original, and thorough. Truly outstanding work – even for a “good” student.

A- Very good work with most of the attributes of “A” work but either deficient in some technical aspect, in thoroughness and care or not as strikingly incisive, original, or creative as “A” work. Excellent.

B+ Better than good, competent work, even for the typical student at this university. Some aspects are very strong, but not uniformly excellent.

B Good competent work, which meets all requirements the instructor could specify in advance. Reasonably thorough. Alternatively, work with some excellent aspects that are balanced by serious deficiencies.

B- Almost up to specifiable standards. Often characterized by vagueness and signs of lack of effort or insufficient engagement with the material. Sometimes the result of correctable misunderstanding. Talk to instructor.

- C+ Below the specifiable standards for good work. Talk to instructor.
- C Minimally passing work, showing serious misunderstanding or lack of effort or engagement. Talk to instructor
- C- or below: Talk to instructor immediately.

### **The Writing Studio**

The UF Writing Studio  
2215 Turlington Hall  
Office phone (352) 846-1138

<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

The Writing Studio also offers online tutoring hours, which vary from term to term. Please check the website to see available time slots, and then choose from either daytime, evening, or online tutoring.

**The University of Florida Honor Pledge:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states *We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.* On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the UF Conduct Code website (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) for more information. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

### **Students Requiring Accommodation**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

### **Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: [1] The email they receive from GatorEvals; [2] Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or [3] The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### **Counseling and Wellness Center**

Students facing difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help should call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352-392-1575); <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>).

**Stay Informed! History Department Social Media Accounts:** The Department of History is working to inform students about events and funding opportunities. You can learn about these opportunities by following @UFHistory on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Facebook](#).

### Materials and Supplies Fee

N/A