
History of
Chicago

HIST 255
Professor Elizabeth
Todd-Breland

Fall 2025



History of Chicago

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course traces Chicago's history from the city's early development into a post-industrial metropolis. In this course students will analyze historical texts, films, literature, visual art, and media related to Chicago's history. The course pays particular attention to historical transformations in Chicago related to the following themes:

- Industrialization & deindustrialization
- Migration
- Constructions of race, class, gender & sexuality
- Community
- Politics, reform & societal change

In addition to the assigned readings and lectures, you will have the opportunity to explore Chicago through projects and experiential learning trips to historical and cultural institutions and neighborhoods around the city. The content, structure, and assignments in this course encourage students to develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills, and consider varying perspectives and viewpoints on major events and transformations in Chicago's history.

LEARNING GOALS

This class counts for general education course credit for Understanding the Past and Understanding U.S. Society. Through this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the implication and meaning of technological innovation and scientific discovery for the development of human society.
2. Critically analyze the cultural, economic, geographical, and political processes that influenced historical events.
3. Recognize, describe, and critically explain the nature of past historical events and their consequences for present U.S. society.
4. Examine the relationship between individuals and past events, their interactions, and the repercussions of these interactions.
5. Understand and explain the significance and influence of the past and its connection to current political, scientific, and cultural forces.
6. Analyze aspects of U.S. society.
7. Analyze the communicative, political, social, economic, or cultural systems in the U.S.
8. Explore the diverse communities (racial, ethnic, class, gender, religious, and sexual) that define cultural and political life in the United States.
9. Critically examine the tensions among various groups within U.S. society.
10. Study events, ideas, or movements that have influenced U.S. society.

Integration with Hull-House Materials

(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)

TOPIC 1: PROGRESSIVE ERA REFORM

Three days of class will be dedicated to providing students with background on the Progressive Era, a visit to the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, and a discussion of experiences on the final day.

READINGS & OTHER MATERIALS

- "Could Jane Addams be Considered a Lesbian?"
- "Radical Craft: Arts Education at Hull-House, 1889-1935"
- "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements" (Jane Addams, 1892)
- "I Discover Hull-House" and "Growing Up" from *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (Hilda Satt Polacheck, 1991)

TOPIC 2: THE WORLD'S FAIR, PULLMAN & URBAN PLANNING

Three days of class will be given to teaching the World's Fair & Pullman (day one), urban planning (day two), and a discussion of the events in relation to primary sources to be read for the week.

READINGS

- "I Discover Hull-House" from *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (Hilda Satt Polacheck, 1991)

CLASS PROJECTS

Students will complete three projects over the course of the semester that could integrate Hull-House sources, along with others from the class, into cohesive applications of their learning objectives. These include a reading reflection, a primary source essay, and an experiential learning activity.

READING REFLECTION

Reflections are to be 1-2 pages in length and provide answers to 3 discussion prompts.

1. Select a quote from the assigned secondary source materials and explain either how the quote demonstrates the major argument of the source or how the quote is related to specific things mentioned in this week's lectures.
2. Analyze at least one of the assigned primary sources in-depth in relation to the assigned secondary source materials and/or lectures.

3. Relate this week's assigned course materials to either something discussed earlier this semester or to a personal experience from your life.

PRIMARY SOURCE ESSAY:

An analysis (3 pages) of a set of primary source documents assigned for the class.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITY

This 2-page response is based on a set of prompts that will require you to reflect on your experiences and interactions with the exhibits at the institutions.

Sample Assignment

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING REFLECTION

1. On the first floor, look at the model of Hull-House. Read and learn about the various reformers and residents connected to the institution, and programming that took place at Hull-House. Make sure to visit the second floor of the house and the Dining Hall building too! Choose 1 artifact or display from the museum that demonstrates what you found most interesting about the buildings, reformers, neighbors, and/or types of programming offered at Hull-House. Write the caption for the artifact/display as it appears in the museum. Describe the artifact/display. Explain what interested you about this artifact or display. What does this place mean to you / what is it “for” / what parts of it are you less or more familiar with?
2. Was the Near West Side a segregated community ethno-racially or economically in the 1890s? Make an argument (using the Assertion-Reasoning-Evidence format) that answers this question using specific evidence from the Hull-House Maps and Papers display on the first floor.
3. Go to Jane Addams’ bedroom. Relate 1 artifact or display in her bedroom to ideas from the assigned secondary sources and/or lectures from the course (be specific).
4. Scavenger Hunt time! Where did you see Hilda Satt Polacheck in the museum? Hint: There are 2 different places. You need to visit both buildings. One is a large image, and the other is something that she wrote. Make connections between Satt Polacheck’s reflections on Hull-House from your assigned primary sources and the Radical Craft exhibit at the museum. Make sure to include specific references to the assigned primary source(s) AND particular artifacts or displays at the museum.
5. What role do you think the Hull-House Museum serves for the broader community today? What is the significance of the location of the museum? What message(s) do you think a visitor is supposed to take away from the exhibits and museum? Are these the message(s) that you took away? Why or why not?

JANE ADDAMS
HULL-HOUSE
MUSEUM

800 South Halsted Street
Chicago, IL 60607

hullhousemuseum.uic.edu
[@hullhousemuseum](https://twitter.com/hullhousemuseum)