

Honors 201B
American History, Institutions, and Values Since 1900

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and by appointment

What is this class about?

This class covers United States history from 1900 to the present. While I certainly don't expect all of you to leave this course wanting to be historians, I do hope you will be able to use what you have learned in this class to be an informed citizen. Being an informed citizen means you will have a greater understanding of how history has played an important role in creating the nation we live in today.

Themes:

There is a lot of history to cover since 1900. In order to keep our discussion focused over this semester we will concentrate on three main themes. To start thinking about these themes consider these questions:

1). When we say Americans whom are we talking about?

The United States has always been a multicultural nation, but how have such diverse groups (Native Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans to name a few) lived together? Why have certain groups been able to maintain power over others? How have different groups worked to improve their situation or protect their positions

2). How has social reform occurred in the United States? In 2003 the United States is a very different nation than it was 100 years ago. What kind of progress have different groups of Americans made since 1900 (i.e. women, blacks, the poor)? Are there issues that Americans discussed or debated in the 1930s, 1950s, or the 1960s that we are still grappling with today?

3). What role has America played in the world? Today the United States considers itself among the most powerful nations in the world. Have we always been this powerful? What have Americans' attitudes been toward other nations? What has been the goal of our foreign policy? How has our involvement abroad affected Americans lives at home?



Skills:

In addition to helping you increase your knowledge about historical events and debates since 1900, this course will also improve your critical thinking skills.

- 1). **Interpreting:** Throughout the semester you will be provided with evidence from the textbook, lectures, and other readings. It will be your job to take these “facts” and interpret them. One of the best ways to hone your interpreting skills will be through work with primary sources (a speech, a letter, a newspaper article). Here, you will have the “first crack” at evidence and be able develop your own historical interpretation.
- 2). **Writing:** You will also work toward presenting a coherent and persuasive written argument. Putting your thoughts on paper may help you clarify and organize your ideas. You will have to think: how can I select the best evidence to support my interpretation? (For more on this see handout on essay writing. It will be on Blackboard in the first week or two of class). Furthermore, I am always delighted to read drafts of essays, thesis statements, or intro paragraph before an essay is due
- 3). **Challenging Assumptions:** We all have preconceived notions about the past. By considering a variety of viewpoints and taking some time to understand them, we can begin to evaluate our own assumptions. You may discover, in the process, that you can learn something from those who have a different way of looking at history. This semester you will encounter historians who disagree with one another. Ask yourself this question: How can these historians use the same evidence to come up with different interpretations of what happened?

Readings

Addams, Jane. Twenty Years At Hull-House
Brinkley, Alan. The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People. Vol. 2. Fourth Edition.
McElvaine, Robert. Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man
Moody, Anne. Coming of Age in Mississippi
O’Brien, Tim. The Things They Carried
Schrecker, Ellen. The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History With Documents

A few other short readings – mostly primary documents – will be handed out in class or placed on reserve at Pollack library.

Course Format

This course will be a combination of lectures and discussions. I place a high value on student participation and class discussion. Discussion can only be successful if members of the class

have done the assigned reading. The reading that is assigned for a given day should be read **before** you come to class.

Writing Assignments

There will be four different types of writing assignments to help you practice these skills. First, each student will complete one primary source project of **two pages** in length. Second, you will write short reactions to the books and films (see below). Third, each of you will conduct an oral history interview of at least one hour in duration with someone who can speak with you at length about a particular era in United States history. After you conduct the interview, you will write a **5-7-page paper** in which you examine the interviewee's experiences in connection to the information about your topic from other course materials (readings, lectures, films). Finally, there will be an in-class mid-term and final exam (short answer and essay).

Reaction Papers

On **three** occasions during the term, you will write short reactions to the books (I will pass around a sign up sheet on the second day of class) Five times we will be reading more in-depth discussions or personal accounts of an historical era. You must write a reaction to **three** of the books. You may choose to write four reaction papers (one extra) and I will drop the lowest grade. Book reactions help prompt your thinking for discussion classes.

What should you write? Write your personal reaction to each book or set of readings. You must say, however, more than what you liked or didn't like. Address an issue or question from one of the readings that you find interesting, puzzling, inspiring, or disturbing. You might consider one of these questions: What connections do you see between the information presented in the readings to the themes we've been discussing in this course? How do these books or articles relate to issues Americans are struggling with today? You might connect a theme in one book with our discussions and other readings.

Your response should be **500 words**. These will not be graded in terms of a correct answer, rather they will be evaluated for your attempts to think about the historical information presented in these readings. These are informal responses in that you may write them in a more conversational/creative style (in the form of a memo, editorial, letter). They are still formal essays in the sense that they should, like all history essays, have a strong thesis statement, present an argument, and be supported by precise evidence. I will grade reviews with a plus = outstanding; check plus = very good; check = good; check minus = adequate; minus = come talk with me.

Grading

While learning is what's most important in this class, I do have to evaluate what you do and in some cases assign a grade.

Throughout the semester there will be many opportunities for you to get feedback on your responses in class and on your writing. On every piece of writing you turn in there will be comments on both the ideas you present and how well you convey what you're trying to say. These evaluations will give you concrete suggestions on how you might improve as well as tell you what you've accomplished already.

Since there will be assignments that must be graded, here's an idea of the criteria I will use:

A: Excellent – Make creative contributions to discussions, writes insightful, coherent, original papers.

B: Strong – Participates instructively in discussion, writes authoritative, clear, but conventional pieces.

C: Adequate – Participates superficially in discussions, writes competent pieces of limited scope or insight.

Distribution:

Primary Source Project (due 2/11):	10%
Midterm Exam (3/2)	20%
Oral History Project (due 5/17):	30%
Final Exam (5/28):	20%
Reaction Papers and participation:	20%

A:	90-100%
B:	80-89%
C:	70-79%
D:	60-69%
F:	-59%

Course Policies:

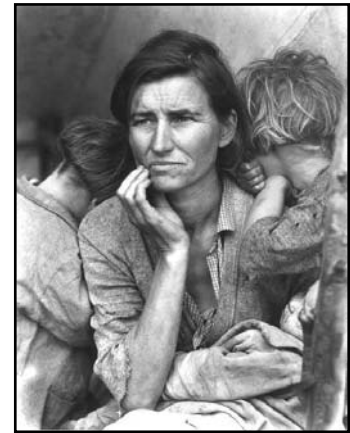
** Please be courteous to your classmates and the professor by turning off cell phones and pagers during class. **

Late Papers: Papers are due at the beginning of the class period. For every day that a paper is late, it will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade (so a paper that would have received a B had it been on time will be a B- if it is one day late, a C+ if it is two days late, etc.). There will be no exceptions to this policy, except with my consent prior to the due date of the paper. The syllabus

February 16: **President's Day – No Class**

February 18: **Oral History Workshop**
Read: Keep reading Addams

February 23: **Discussion: Twenty Years at Hull-**
House; Pages TBA



Moving Into the Modern Era, 1917-1941

How did World War I affect some Americans? What impact did it have on America's role in the world? What was new about the New Deal? Which America

February 25: **World War I and the Domestic Aftermath**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 23

March 1: **American Culture in the 1920s**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 24

March 3: **The Great Depression and the American People**
Read: Brinkley, Chapt. 25

March 8: **New Deal: Limits and Legacies**
Read: Brinkley, Chapt. 26

March 10: **Discussion: Down and Out in**
the Great Depression

Consensus and Conflict, 1941-1968

What affect did the war have on the lives of many Americans? Why did so many Americans feel that they were not sharing equally in the nation's prosperity? How did the Cold War dictate America's foreign policy after World War II and also influence events at home?

March 15: **World War II: Isolation, Intervention, and Victory**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 28

March 17: **Japanese American Internment**
Film: “A Family Gathering”



Questions to think about while you watch this movie:
1). What was life like for this Japanese-American family before the war?
2). How did the war change their standing in the community?
3). Why were they the only group of U.S. immigrants placed into relocation camps?

March 22: **The War at Home: New Opportunities**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 28

March 24: **MID-TERM EXAM**

April 5: **Film: Atomic Cafe**

April 7: **Cold War: Anxiety and Fear at Home and Abroad**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 29 and Shrecker, TBA

April 12: **Discussion: Schrecker, The Age of McCarthyism**

April 14: **Paradox of the 1950s: Uniformity and Diversity; Conformity and Rebellion**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 30; begin reading Moody

April 19: **Blacks Struggle for Equality: 1954-1963**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 30; continue reading Moody

April 21: **Discussion: Ann Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi**

April 26: **The Great Society, Civil Rights and the War on Poverty**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 31 (pages 914-927)

April 28: **The Vietnam War: How and Why We Got Involved**
Film: “America Takes Charge”
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 31 (pages 927-943)

May 3: **1968: Coming Apart at Home and Abroad**

Read: Brinkley, Chapter 32

May 5: **Discussion:** **These Things They Carried**

Moving Toward the Present, 1968-2003

What role has conservatism played since 1970? What has guided U.S. foreign policy since Vietnam? What affect has diversity had on America since 1970?

May 10: **The Modern Women's Movement**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 32 (cont.)

May 12: **Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Discontent of the 1970s**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 32 (cont.)

May 17: **The Reagan Revolution**
Read: Brinkley, Chapter 33 and pages 1002-1007
**** Oral History Papers Due****

May 19: **Where are We Now?**

May 28: **Final Exam – 9:30-11:20am**