144-15 United States History since 1865

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United States History since 1865

I. Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide a broad survey of American history since 1865. In particular we will focus on four major issues: the development of corporate capitalism and various conflicts surrounding it, the rise of big government and the fate of democracy in “the age of reform” (i.e. progressivism and the New Deal), the question of race in American society and the foreign and domestic conflicts in the post World War II era of Pax Americana.

This course is also designed to promote habits of critical thinking, reading, speaking, and writing. The method for promoting these habits is the reading of historical documents and historical arguments, followed by thinking, speaking, and writing about the issues they raise. Since the assigned texts are central to the course it is particularly important that students keep up with the reading. It will be difficult to do well in this course without careful and timely reading.

The course also serves to acquaint students with “history” as a field if inquiry. History is centrally concerned with change over time. Historians describe and, as fully as possible, explain how things change over time. A major concern of historians, therefore, is cause and effect. Historians prefer multicausal, rather than monocausal explanations because we believe things are generally more complex than they might superficially appear. (A major benefit of historical study is a greater appreciation of complexity and ambiguity.) This particular historian prefers historical descriptions and explanations that emphasize active agents rather than impersonal forces because I believe men and women play a significant role in making their own history.

Historical inquiry is dependent upon good questions about change over time and logical arguments about cause and effect. History is something very different than “the past” (a chaotic jumble of everything that has ever happened). History is an interpretation of selected aspects of the past. To guide our way through the maze of details and events in the past, we need good questions that clarify what it is we want to know and that, therefore, help us select what is important to our inquiry. These questions inevitably are shaped by our own concerns and values, fears and ambitions. To answer our questions (questions that generally do not have single, simple or obvious answers), we construct arguments that marshal as much evidence and logic as possible to develop convincing explanations of change over time. Everything in this course, from lectures and readings to tests and papers, will involve questions and arguments concerning change over time.

Historical arguments, like the questions they address, are infused with moral and political judgments, values and implications. History is, therefore, closely linked to the capacity of humans to act as moral and political agents. Historians attempt to clarify where we have been, suggest where we are going, alert us to choices we have made in the past, and inform the choices...
we will make in the future. In this sense every thinking person is something of an historian. We may think about the future but we cannot know anything for certain about it. We can only know about the past and more fully we understand the past better are chances of seizing the opportunities the future may hold. This is what history helps us do. Thus history is not something dead and gone, something merely in the past; history is with us as both a resource and a burden.

This is why history is at the heart of a liberal arts education. As the great observer of American democracy Alexis de Tocqueville said, a liberal arts education is an apprenticeship in liberty; it helps us to learn how to be free. We are not born free but we become free in the course of making collective decisions about our future and acting on those decisions. This is what it means to be a citizen. In a democracy, a liberal arts education must play a major role in creating citizens. This is why Thomas Jefferson ranked his role in the founding of the University of Virginia among his three greatest accomplishments. As Jefferson’s generation understood, the overriding challenge and burden of our great experiment in democracy would be to make citizens of us all. So this course encourages you to look seriously at our history and to consider carefully a series of arguments about it and ultimately to take responsibility for making your own informed judgments about that history.

II. Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this course will be the result of the following:

A. Class attendance and participation; attendance is required and repeated absences will lower your grade; participation is also required, which includes keeping up with the reading, as well as asking and answering questions in class.

B. Short homework assignments.

C. 2 Midterm Examinations. These examinations will be take-home exams and will be essay in nature.

D. Booknote (Instructions are attached)

E. Final Examination. (This examination will be take-home exam and will be essay in nature)

***Late assignments will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor.

***Your grade will be based on the number of points you have accumulated and divided by the total number of points possible. (All grades will be posted on Blackboard)

The grading scale for the class is as follows:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-94%</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>70-71%</td>
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Please note the following policy from the Xavier University Catalog which is taken very seriously by the History Department and this instructor:

“The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.”

“All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.”

Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an “F” in the course, and expulsion from the University.”

III. Texts

1. Tindall & Shi, America: A Narrative History, vol. 2
2. Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition

IV. Course Outline and Reading Assignments

America: A Narrative History, written by George Brown Tindall and David Shi is our basic text and is a fine introduction to American history.

As a survey of U.S. history, this course covers a great deal of ground. As a means of providing a focus for this course, I will use the first several classes to raise a series of questions about the possibilities and character of American democracy and its relationship to both Reconstruction and the rise of corporate capitalism.

Through Richard Hofstadter’s The American Political Tradition, a classic work about the men who built the American political tradition, from its earliest period until the New Deal of the 1930s, we will examine the relationship between power and ideas in our national experience. This book will form the basis of many of our classroom discussions relating to the character of American democracy and its relationship to the economic system known as capitalism.

C. Vann Woodward’s The Strange Career of Jim Crow has been described as a “landmark in the history of American race relations. This study is one of the basic books in America on this subject since its first edition was published in 1955.

In examining these works, I plan to be contentious about the material and the issues raised. My purpose is to provoke you to think about these things yourself. You need to understand the arguments made in the works that are assigned, but you do not need to accept them. You need to be able to make your own arguments. Learning history is not simply a matter of repeating what I or any other historian says, but a matter of thinking for yourself, developing your own arguments.
and conclusions, and developing the ability to present those arguments and conclusions clearly and persuasively, backed by evidence and examples.

The rest of the course is designed to help make up your own mind about these questions with reference to a series of issues, problems and events in U.S. history. At the end of the semester I hope not so much that you have arrived at final answers to the questions raised- least of all my answers – but that you will understand more about the key issues they raised and be able to discuss them at a higher level than when the course began. I hope also to interest you enough in your own history that this will not be the last time you think, read, speak, and write about it.
Instructions For Writing a Booknote

A booknote will be completed on three type-written pages. It will be single-spaced. The note will begin with a full bibliographical citation similar to the following example:


THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF THE BOOKNOTE IS TO PROVIDE A USEFUL REFERENCE FOR YOUR FUTURE USE SO THAT YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL HAVE A DOCUMENT WHICH WILL RECALL FOR YOU WITH SOME VIVIDNESS WHAT THE BOOK WAS ABOUT.

The body of the booknote should include the following information:

1. The main subject of the book and the limits which the author places on his/her materials: Biography, economic and social history, institutional history.

2. The special nature of the book: A collection of essays, one of several volumes, a novel or any other unique characteristics.

3. A synopsis of the contents which will be a synthesis of the subject material rather than an outline of the book or a summary of the table of contents.

4. An analysis of the work which will include statements on the thesis, opinion or bias (or all three) of the author. For example: Does the author support a particular political point of view? Is he/she friendly or hostile to his subject? Does he/she take a stand which challenges the position of others who have written on the subject? Does he/she fulfill the promises he/she makes at the start of the book? Did he/she make good use of source materials? Did he/she miss any important sources? A brief biographical sketch of the author is also important. What is the background or qualification of the author to write this book? What other works has this author completed? Is he/she a journalist or an academic?

5. Importance of the book, if any. Is this book valuable or trivial to the serious student of history? Did it have any special impact when it was published? Does it continue to have value today? Is the book to be recommended over other works on the same subject?

The body of the booknote should have the distinct flavor of a book review rather than a book report. You must tailor the booknote to the book you are writing about. If there is something about the book which is not anticipated in the guidelines above, be certain to include such information. If a part of these guidelines is not relevant to the book you read, ignore it.

Your booknote should convince your instructor that you are well acquainted with the book. Again, it should be written so that its ultimate value is as a document in your own bibliographic files.
Schedule of Class Assignments

(T) January 14
Introduction (attendance and explanation of the syllabus)
Topic: The Civil War and the Meaning of Freedom
Assignment: Tindall, America: A Narrative History, ch. 18 (pgs.520-531); Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, ch. 5 (pgs.121-173)

(TH) January 16
Topic: Presidential Reconstruction
Assignment: Tindall, ch. 18 (pgs. 531-541); Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, ch. 1 (pgs.3-29)

(T) January 21
Topic: Radical Congressional Reconstruction
Assignment: Hofstadter, ch. 6 (pgs. 177-210), Worksheet (due on 1/23)

(TH) January 23
Topic: The Limits of Radical Reconstruction
Assignment: Supplemental Reading: Wurst, An Interpretive View of Reconstruction; Tindall, ch. 18 (pgs. 541-551); ch. 19 (pgs. 560-587); Klein, The War And Economic Expansion.

(T) January 28
Topic: The Second Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism
Assignment: Tindall, ch. 20 (pgs. 590-604); Kazin, Robber Barons at Work; Hofstadter, ch. 7 (pgs. 213-238), Worksheet (due on 1/30)

(TH) January 30
Topic: The Second Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism
Assignment: Tindall, ch. 22 (pgs. 650-663)

(T) February 4
Topic: Politics and the Second Industrial Revolution
Assignment: Tindall, ch. 21 (pgs. 618-647); ch. 20 (pgs. 604-615); Horstman, ‘Boss’ ruled city from atop a saloon.
Distribute essay questions for the first mid-term examination. The essay examination will be due on 2/11.

(TH) February 6
Topic: Workers on the Edge: Labor’s Search for Order
Assignment: Document (on Blackboard) Fairfield, Cincinnati’s Search for Order
Mid-term examination due on 2/11.

(T) Mid-term examination due.
February 11
Topic: Turmoil in Rural America
Assignment: Tindall, ch. 22 (pgs. 663-677); Woodward, ch. 2 (pgs. 31-65)

(TH) February 13
Topic: The Populist Movement
Assignment: Hofstadter, ch. 8 (pgs. 241-264). Worksheet (due on 2/18)