

History 427-- History of the United States, 1916 Thru 1945

Fall 2007-- Tuesday/Thursday, 2:10-3:25, HHS 152

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Course Goals:

In terms of the subject matter, I am organizing the course around the thesis that 1916 through 1945 were the crucial years when the United States was confronted with the question of how it was going to relate to the rest of the world. It seems to have been a profoundly uncomfortable question and one that quickly combined with internal conflicts over the very nature of American society itself. I'm going to argue that the domestic and foreign stories became inextricably combined for the first time in American history and eventually put the United States in a relation to the globalized world in which it still stands. Further, I am going to follow two sub-themes of globalization where interaction across national borders profoundly influenced the American debate and even more profoundly shaped the nature of the twentieth century for the whole world. The rise of an international petroleum economy and the profound changes in scientific understanding pushed a new globalized world forward for the entire period.

In addition to the goals with the course material, I teach all my classes with two even bigger ideals in mind. First, a college education should strive to create self-learners who read, write, talk, and listen well. The life of the mind should open wide-- far beyond specific subject matter-- with any class, and curiosity is far more important than memorized facts. Second, I especially hold to a liberal arts vision of a college education where one becomes free with learning because one can question and dissent. All thoughts, all systems, are able to be challenged, and improved through that challenge, when graceful and reasonable dissent is encouraged. Thus, if this class successful, you can challenge it too-- hopefully gently in the way that encourages mutual response-- to improve it, and me, and you.

Open Source Teaching:

I'm going to be blogging this class, as well as one other I am teaching, over at www.mojoprofessor.com. I will post my lecture notes, thoughts on the class and the material, announcements, and generally anything else that will make this class more "transparent." I believe strongly that openness is a guarantor of honesty and good faith and can help create new conversations and explorations. Everyone is welcome to comment, even anonymously, even strongly disagreeing. I will only delete anything that is abusive, spammish, or somehow interferes with the creation of a useful community.

Grading:

I believe grades are necessary because my experience with systems without them shows that nobody will actually do any work without a system of evaluation! However, grades seem to me only the minimal tool necessary to make sure people actually do indeed put in the work which they are paying (alot) to do. This class then will require four 10-12 page papers, due after each of the units of study. The point of the papers will be to synthesize the information from the lectures and the books and to make it your own. The questions guiding each paper will thus be quite simple:

- 1) What is the story of America and the World in the 1916-1920 period?
- 2) What is the story of America and the World in the 1920-1929 period?
- 3) What is the story of America and the World in the 1929-1941 period?
- 4) What is the story of America and the World in the 1941-1945 period?

If anyone has new, interesting, or challenging theses in response to these questions that expand far beyond the class material, then come see me and we can even work these papers towards presenting new arguments rather than synthesizing the information from class.

With all papers, I will grade according to both content and style, but I will be interested above all in people showing they have grappled with the material. You don't want to have paid for a class and then not read the books or listened to the lectures, do you? :)

Required Books:

Sigmund Freud & William Bullitt, Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study
John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash of 29
Kevin Starr, Endangered Dreams: California in the Great Depression
James Jones, The Thin Red Line

Calendar:

Option 1: 1916-1920, The Idealist

Reading: Freud & Bullitt
7 Lectures, August 28-- September 18.
Paper Due: September 25

Option 2: 1920-1929, Ignore the Question

Reading: Galbraith
9 Lectures, September 20-October 18
Paper Due: October 25

Option 3: 1929-1941, Perils of Option 2 & Getting the Question Answered for You

Reading: Starr
7 lectures, October 23-November 13
Paper Due: November 20

Option 4: 1941-1945, In for a Penny, In for a Pound

Reading: Jones
7 lectures, November 15-December 13
Paper Due: December 20th by 4:00pm