The United States and the Modern World

This course offers an alternative to the second half of the U.S. history survey as taught in most colleges and universities. That standard course is organized around a textbook that uses a chronological approach, following a traditional periodization from the Gilded Age through the Progressive Era, the Twenties, the Great Depression, and the Cold War. Lectures and additional readings all follow along with the textbook. The narrative that a student receives is very much a “national” history (i.e., that of a single country in isolation), other than occasional chapters or short sections covering foreign wars and major diplomatic events. For students who have taken a rigorous high school course in U.S. history, the format and subjects will seem familiar, different only in terms of the level of difficulty.

I no longer find this approach intellectually satisfactory. It does not foster critical thinking, and it compresses long-term historical developments into brief episodes. Even the best textbooks by leading historians try to cover too much at the same time—a single chapter may address complex economic shifts, foreign policy, immigration and urban popular culture, all in twenty pages. They reduce the most important changes (like the arrival of the “Jim Crow” system of segregation in the 1890s, or the New Deal Order created in the 1930s) to a few pages. They rarely put our nation’s historical development into a global context, which is crucial to understanding the U.S.’s experience of slavery, industrial capitalism, the conquest of native peoples, or two world wars, among other major topics. No scholar writes serious history in this way, so why should we teach it to you in this fashion?

This course is not a survey in the conventional sense, which suggests the mapping of the surface of things. Rather, it will attempt to develop in students a serious grasp of historical process (how historians come to conclusions about change-over-time) and an in-depth understanding of the particular “changes-over-time” that have defined the modern United States. To meet both of these goals, it incorporates the following approaches:

First, a sharp focus on four broad thematic areas: Politics, Race and Ethnicity; Political Economy; the U.S. in the World; Culture and Society. The course is organized around these themes, each examined over a substantial period of time, first 1865-1929, then 1930 to the present;

Second, a very different kind of textbook, Carl Guarneri’s American Compared, a collection of essays by influential scholars comparing American historical developments with other countries;

Third, assignments built around primary documents and maps, which you will use to prepare for lectures;
Fourth, periodic guest lectures by professors at F&M, drawing on their own areas of expertise, to give you a deeper grasp of key topics in economic, urban, labor, cultural, and diplomatic history;

Fifth, writing assignments that emphasize analysis of a range of primary and secondary sources.

This course will be considerably more challenging than a conventional survey, but if you engage with it, you will gain a much better understanding of our enormous, exceptionally complex country in a world context.

Readings

You should purchase the following books:
- Carl Guarneri, *America Compared, Volume II* (second edition);
- Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in the United States, 1945-2000*

Besides these purchases, other readings will be made available either as a packet for you to purchase at Copyprint, or as hand-outs in class, or in Blackboard as “scanned” PDF files. “TBA” on the syllabus means “To Be Announced.”

Assignments

Your final grade will be based on 100 points, divided as follows:
1. Memoranda and Participation (20). In addition to the readings listed below in the Class Schedule, you will receive each week short assignments (documents, maps or other visuals, an exercise for you to complete or questions to prepare). These will be graded collectively both at the midterm point and at the course’s end. They will be combined with your class participation grade, based on your willingness to speak up, ask questions, and generally demonstrate interest. Any missed classes, or regular tardiness, will affect this grade significantly. **If you miss a class where the assignments are handed out, it is your responsibility to get them from me—so don’t miss class!**
2. Initial paper (15). Early in the course, you will write a short paper on Reconstruction, to acquaint you with historical method and use of sources, and ensure your grounding in this central episode.
3. Take-home midterm and final essay examinations (20 points, each). Twice during the term, you will get a choice of essays to write, using all the information received so far.

Guidelines for Written Work
All written work must be typed in 12 pt. font (Times) using 1 1/2-line spacing with 1-inch margins. All formal papers must use footnotes and include a bibliography of works referenced. The “Chicago Style” should be used always for citations. Through the Writing Center you will find a number of books and useful handouts on such topics as punctuation, grammar, formatting using the “Chicago Style,” and the writing of essays, including *Model Student Essays*, that you may find useful for this and other courses. Other than the short memos, all work must include your name and a title on a separate title page (please do not put your name anywhere else in the paper), and page numbers (upper right-hand corner). Sloppiness in spelling or grammar and evident lack of professionalism will negatively affect your grade. It is strongly recommended that you consult with the Writing Center (KEI-316; ext. 3866) when preparing your essays. Be sure to schedule a meeting with a tutor in advance, especially during midterms and finals when they are busiest.

**Assigning Grades**

The following is the letter grade system established by Franklin & Marshall College and found in the [College Catalog](#). It is the basis for grading of written work as well as the final course *composite* grade (written work, participation, level of engagement with the course material):

A range=Excellent. Work of consistently high standard, showing distinction.

B range=Good. Work showing facility in such qualities as organization, accuracy, originality, understanding, and insight.

C range=Satisfactory. Work which fulfills essential requirements in quality and quantity and meets the acceptable standard for graduation.

D range=Passing. Work which falls below the acceptable grade point average standard yet is deserving of credit in the course.

You must attend all classes, without exceptions. Absences will only be accepted for serious medical or familiar emergencies, or for the College’s recognized religious holidays—waking up feeling “coldy” is not a serious excuse, in other words. Any other absences will directly affect your grade: more than one may lower your grade by one level (B to B-), more than two by another and so on. A pattern of missed classes, unless for valid reasons, will result in your required withdrawal from the course.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** I do *not* permit use of laptops in my classes, unless there is a good reason and you have asked me in advance of that particular class; I want you listening, thinking, taking notes, and ideally asking questions or responding to those I ask you, rather than staring at a screen. Anyone found using a laptop (or any other portable electronic device) without my permission will face a severe sanction.

**Class Schedule**

**PART ONE: FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION**
January 22
Introduction to Class
Discussion: The Civil War and the Origins of the Modern United States

January 24 (Politics)
Reconstruction and Its Consequences
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*, essays by C. Vann Woodward and Eric Foner on Reconstruction

January 29 (Politics)
The White Man’s Republic, 1877-1929

January 31 (Political Economy)
The Rise of Corporate Capitalism, 1865-1929
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*, essay by Mansel Blackford

February 5 (Political Economy)
The Conquest of a Continent
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by Roger L. Nichols and Kate Brown

February 7 (The U.S. in the World)
The New Empire, 1890-1916
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by Robin Winks and Vince Boudreau

February 11 Essay #1 Due

February 12 (The U.S. in the World)
The Great War, 1914-1919
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essay by Alan Dawley

February 14 (Culture and Society)
Cities and Immigrants
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by Walter Nugent and Witold Rybczynski

February 19 (Politics and Political Economy)
Regulars, Populists, Progressives and Conservatives, 1877-1929
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essay by Aristide Zolberg

February 21 (Politics and Society!)
Guest Lecture: Professor Louise Stevenson, Department of History
“Progressivism and Women”
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essay by Kathryn Kish Sklar [and other readings TBA]

February 26 (Culture and Society)
Guest Lecture: Professor Alison Kibler, American Studies Program
“The New Women of Commercial Leisure”

February 28 (Politics, Economy, Society, Culture!)
The Twenties: It All Comes Together
Reading: TBA

**PART TWO: FROM THE NEW DEAL ORDER TO THE “NEW WORLD ORDER”**

March 4 (Politics and Political Economy)
The Great Depression and the New Deal
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by Eric Hobsbawm and John A. Garraty

March 6 (Politics and Political Economy)
The Birth of the New Deal Order
Reading: TBA

**March 10 Midterm Essays Due**

March 13 (Politics and Political Economy)
The Rise and Fall of the 'Labor Question’
Reading: Chapter from Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*; Dana Frank, “Girl Strikers Occupy Chain Store, Win Big: The Detroit Woolworth Strike of 1937”

March 25 (The U.S. in the World)
World War II as Total War
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, and John Dower

March 27 (Guest Lecture)
Professor Maria Mitchell, Department of History
Germany and the Origins of the Cold War

**Sunday, March 30 Film Showing: VIETNAM: A TELEVISION HISTORY, 7 PM**

April 1 (The U.S. in the World)
The Experience of Defeat: Vietnam
Reading: essay by Christopher Jespersen in Guarneri, *America Compared*

**April 3**  
A Global Cold War (The U.S. in the World)  
Guest Discussion: Professors Douglas Anthony, Richard Reitan, Eric Zolov  
Reading: TBA

**April 8 (Politics and Political Economy)**  
Cold War Liberalism: The New Deal Order Matures  
Reading: TBA

**Wednesday, April 9  Film Showing: EYES ON THE PRIZE, 7 PM**

**April 10 (Politics, Race, Ethnicity)**  
Challenging the New Deal Order, From the Left  
Reading: Gosse, *Movements of the New Left* [sections to be announced]

**April 15 (Politics, Race, Ethnicity)**  
Challenging the New Deal Order, From the Left  
Reading: Gosse, *Movements of the New Left*

**April 17 (Politics, Race, Ethnicity)**  
Challenging the New Deal Order, From the Right  
Reading: Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in the United States*, Preface, 1-20, 35-121 (Documents 1-29), also consult “Chronology”

**Sunday, April 20  Film Showing: REAGAN, 7 PM**

**April 22 (Politics, Race, Ethnicity)**  
From Reagan to Bush: Conservative Triumph?  
Reading: Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in the United States*, 20-31, 122-165 (also consult Chronology)

**April 24 (Political Economy, Politics and Race)**  
America Deindustrializes  
Reading: Chapters from Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*

**April 28  Paper #2 Due**

**April 29 (Political Economy, Politics and Race)**  
Guest Lecture: Professor David Schuyler, Program in American Studies  
“From Urban to Suburban America—the Case of Lancaster”  
Reading: selections from Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980*
May 1 (The U.S. in the World)
The End of the Cold War—And After!
Reading: Guarneri, *America Compared*: essays by Niall Ferguson and Joseph Nye

May 6    Final Examination Essays Due