History 114: Introduction to Modern American History

Professor Michael Flamm
Ohio Wesleyan University
Elliott Hall: (740) 368-3634
mwflamm@owu.edu
Office Hours: M-W-F 3-4 pm (or by appointment)
Spring 2006

Texts:

• Alan Brinkley, The Unfinished Nation (Vol. II; Fourth Edition)*
• Eleanor Clift, Founding Sisters*
• John Chalberg, Rickey and Robinson*
• Ron Kovic, Born on the Fourth of July*

All texts are available at the bookstore. The * indicates the text is also on reserve in the library.

Requirements:

• Participation 10 percent
• Essay #1 15 percent
• Essay #2 15 percent
• Exam #1 15 percent
• Exam #2 15 percent
• Exam #3 30 percent

Class participation will include regular attendance and informed discussion. Significant improvement will receive appropriate recognition.

Deadlines:

• February 10 Essay #1
• February 17 Exam #1
• March 20 Essay #2
• March 29 Exam #2
• April 24 Essay #3 (optional)
• May 10 Exam #3

Late work will result in substantial penalties (one full letter grade per day). Academic misconduct will lead to severe sanctions in full accordance with university policy.
Topics and Readings (due that day):

Week One: January 16-20

Course Introduction

The Construction of the “New South”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 15 (419-427)
Discussion: 1) How “new” was the “New South”? 2) Who had the better approach to African-American advancement at the time, Du Bois or Washington? Why?

Week Two: January 23-27

The Conquest of the “Old West”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 16
Discussion: 1) Why were Native Americans unable to defend their lands? 2) Was the U.S. guilty of cultural genocide in relation to American Indians?

The American Farmer and the Populist Movement
Due: Brinkley, chapter 19 (522-533)
Discussion: 1) What was the most important legacy of the election of 1896? Why? 2) Was the Populist Party a success or a failure? Why?

Industrialization and Immigration
Due: Brinkley, chapter 17
Discussion: 1) What was the main cause of American industrialization? 2) Why did the “New Immigrants” face greater hostility than the “Old Immigrants”?

The Battle for Industrial America
Due: Brinkley, chapter 18
Discussion: What was the main reason for the failure of labor unions in this period?

Week Three: January 30-February 3

The American City and the Progressive Movement
Due: Brinkley, chapter 21
Discussion: 1) What was the main obstacle faced by the Progressives? 2) What was the most effective weapon at their disposal?

The “Progressive” Presidents: Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson
Due: Brinkley, chapter 22 (581-593)
Discussion: 1) What incident from Bell most moved you? Why? 2) How “progressive” were the “Progressive Presidents”?
American Expansionism
Due: Brinkley, chapter 20 and chapter 22 (593-601)
Discussion: 1) What was the most important cause and consequence of American expansionism? 2) Was the creation of the “American empire” a positive or negative development? Why?

Week Four: February 6-10

The Road to World War I
Due: Brinkley, chapter 22 (603-615)
Discussion: What was the main reason for U.S. entry into World War I?

The “Great War”: Over There and Over Here
Due: Finish Clift, Founding Sisters
Discussion: 1) Why was the “Great War” so devastating? 2) How was American society affected by the war?

The Struggle for Suffrage
Due: Essay #1
Discussion: 1) What were some of the causes of division and sources of tension within the women’s movement? 2) Who was the most important suffragette? Why?

Week Five: February 13-17

The “Lost Peace”: Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations
Due: Brinkley, chapter 23 (615-624)
Discussion: Was Wilson primarily responsible for the failure of the U.S. to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations?

The “Bitter Peace”: Strikes, Reds, and Nativism
Due: Prepare for exam
Discussion: 1) Was the “Bitter Peace” an inevitable outgrowth of World War I? 2) Is the U.S. on the verge of another Red Scare? Why or why not?

EXAM #1

Week Six: February 20-24

The “New Negro” and the Harlem Renaissance
Due: Brinkley, chapter 24; “The Great Black Migration” (packet)
Discussion: 1) How did World War I affect African Americans? 2) How has the Harlem Renaissance affected American culture?

The “New Era”: Women and Youth
Due: “Petting on Campus” and “Drinking on Campus” (packet)
Discussion: 1) To what extent did the image of the “New Woman” match reality? 2) Was the emergence of the “New Youth” a positive development?

The Clash of Cultures: The KKK and Fundamentalism
Due: “The Scopes Trial” (packet)
Discussion: Why were the cultural clashes of the 1920s so intense?

The Great Depression: Causes and Consequences
Due: Brinkley, chapter 25 (649-667)
Discussion: 1) What was the main cause of the Great Depression? 2) Which were worse, the physical or psychological consequences, and who suffered most?

Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Coming of the New Deal
Due: Brinkley, chapter 25 (667-672) and chapter 26
Discussion: 1) To what extent are the popular or conventional images of Hoover and Roosevelt accurate? 2) Why do they remain so powerful and prevalent?

The New Deal (I): Achievements
Due: Continue Chalberg, Rickey and Robinson
Discussion: 1) Were the most important achievements of the New Deal concrete or symbolic, short-term or long-term? 2) Were they primarily positive or negative?

The New Deal (II): Limits
Due: “The New Deal in History and Historiography” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What were the most important limits or constraints upon the New Deal? 2) Which interpretation of the New Deal seems most plausible? Why?

The Road to World War II
Due: Brinkley, chapter 27
Discussion: 1) Did the U.S. practice appeasement during the 1930s? 2) Was FDR aware in advance of Japanese plans to attack Pearl Harbor?

The World at War
Due: Brinkley, chapter 28
Discussion: 1) Could Hitler have won? Why or why not? 2) Why were the Allies able to defeat Germany and Japan?

Week Seven: February 27-March 3

Week Eight: March 6-10

Week Nine: March 13-17 (University Holiday)

Week Ten: March 20-24

The War at Home
Due: Essay #2
Discussion: 1) How was the impact of World War II similar to and/or different from the impact of World War I? 2) Which developments had the greatest long-term significance?

The “Good War”: Security and Morality
Due: “Hiroshima” (packet)
Discussion: 1) Was the U.S. right to relocate Americans of Japanese ancestry? 2) Was the U.S. right to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

The Cold War: Causes and Controversies
Due: Brinkley, chapter 29 (751-767)
Discussion: Was the Cold War unavoidable? If not, who was primarily to blame?

Week Eleven: March 27-31

The Cold War: Containment and Confrontation
Due: Prepare for exam
Discussion: 1) Was containment a successful policy for the U.S.? 2) How and why was containment in practice (Truman) different from containment in theory (Kennan)?

EXAM #2

The Korean War: Lessons and Legacies
Due: Brinkley, chapter 29 (767-771)
Discussion: 1) Was Truman right to fire MacArthur? 2) What was the most important legacy of Korea?

Week Twelve: April 3-7

Joseph McCarthy and the Politics of Anti-Communism
Due: Brinkley, chapter 29 (771-776)
Discussion: Why was McCarthy so successful with so many (for a time)?

The Culture of Consensus
Due: Brinkley; chapter 30 (779-804); “The Rise of Suburbia” (packet)
Discussion: 1) Was the rise of suburbia inevitable? 2) What was the most important consequence (intended or otherwise) of the growth of suburbia?

The Culture of Conflict
Due: Begin Kovic, Born on the Fourth of July
Discussion: 1) Would you rather live in the 1950s or today? 2) What was the most significant source of conflict in the 1950s?

Week Thirteen: April 10-14
America Astir: Kennedy, Johnson, and the “Age of Activism”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 31 (813-824); “The Other America” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What was the most important source of activism in the 1960s? 2) What movement or individual has had the most long-term impact – for better or worse? Why?

The Transformation of the Civil Rights Movement
Due: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and “Study Questions” (packet)
Discussion: How and why did the movement evolve over time?

The Fragmentation of the Civil Rights Movement
Due: “On Revolution” and “Study Questions” (packet)
Discussion: How and why did the movement fragment over time?

Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Cold War
Due: Brinkley, chapter 30 (805-810) and chapter 31 (824-827)
Discussion: Who handled foreign affairs better, Eisenhower or Kennedy? Why?

The Origins of Vietnam
Due: Brinkley, chapter 31 (827-839) and chapter 32 (843-847)
Discussion: 1) Why was the U.S. in Vietnam? 2) Was U.S. military intervention inevitable?

No Class

The Ordeal of Vietnam
Due: Essay #3 (optional)
Discussion: 1) How was Kovic transformed by his time in Vietnam? 2) What experience of his most moved or shocked you? Why?

The Outcome of Vietnam
Due: Brinkley, chapter 32 (860-864); “A Time to Break Silence” (packet)
Discussion: 1) Were Nixon and Kissinger able to achieve “Peace with Honor” in Vietnam? 2) Why was King opposed to the war?

Watergate and the Politics of Scandal
Due: Brinkley, chapter 32 (864-875)
Discussion: 1) What is the most plausible explanation for Watergate? 2) What was the most important legacy of Watergate?

Week Fourteen: April 17-21

Week Fifteen: April 24-28

Week Sixteen: May 1-3
America Adrift: Ford, Carter, and the “Age of Limits”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 33 (879-884)
Discussion: 1) Why were many Americans in the 1970s convinced that they now lived in an “age of limits”? 2) What was the most important consequence of this development?

America Ascendant: The “Reagan Revolution”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 33 (884-906)
Discussion: 1) Was the “Reagan Revolution” of the 1980s a positive or negative development? 2) Why was Reagan so successful a politician?

For changes and updates, please consult the ERes course page. The discussion questions serve as a general guide to reading assignments and class participation.