History 377: The Transformation of Modern America, 1929-1960

Professor Michael Flamm
Elliott Hall: (740) 368-3634
Ohio Wesleyan University
mwflamm@owu.edu
Office Hours: M & W 4-5 pm, F 2-3 pm (or by appointment)
Spring 2008

Texts:

• John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*
• Richard Polenberg, *The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933-1945*
• Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers*
• Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*
• Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*
• Course reader [Brinkley, chapters 25-30]

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

Requirements:

• Class participation       10 percent
• Reading essay (750-1000 words)     15 percent
• Research paper (1500-2000 words)    30 percent
• Mid-term exam       15 percent
• Final exam        30 percent

*Class participation will include regular attendance, informed discussion, and the Eisenhower debate. Significant progress will receive appropriate recognition.*

Deadlines:

• February 1: Reading essay (required)
• March 3: Mid-term exam
• March 19: Issue précis
• April 7: Research paper (required)
• April 21: Research rewrite (optional)
• April 30: Reading essay (optional)
• May ??: Final exam

*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 14-18

Course Introduction

The Great Crash and the Great Depression
Due: Brinkley, chapter 25 (reader)
Discussion: 1) To what extent was the Great Crash the cause of the Great Depression? 2) Which scholarly interpretation of the causes of the Great Depression makes the most sense? Why?

The Social Impact of the Great Depression
Due: May, Homeward Bound, chapter 2
Discussion: 1) How were men and women, blacks and whites, children and parents, the working-class and the middle-class, affected by the Great Depression? 2) To what extent were their experiences similar and/or different? 3) What was more serious, the physical or psychological impact of the Great Depression?

Week Two: January 21-25

The Political Impact of the Great Depression
Due: Brinkley, chapter 26 (reader); begin Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
Discussion: 1) Why has history treated Hoover so poorly? 2) What was “associationalism” and how was it a precursor to the New Deal? 3) Why was the 1932 election significant?

The New Deal and the Power of Personality
Due: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, 1-16 and 39-57; continue Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
Discussion: 1) Why has history treated FDR so well? 2) To what extent are the popular images of Hoover and Roosevelt correct?

The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly
Due: Continue Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
Discussion: 1) How was the New Deal shaped by historical precedents and marked by unintended consequences? 2) Why was the AAA a success whereas the NRA was a failure?

Week Three: January 28-February 1

The New Deal and the Politics of Protest
Due: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, chapter 5; continue Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
Discussion: 1) What were some common themes voiced by the New Deal’s critics? 2) To what extent were they able to influence the New Deal?

The New Deal and American Labor
Due: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, 68-72; continue Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
Discussion: 1) Was passage of the Wagner Act due mainly to the Roosevelt administration or labor activism? 2) Was the New Deal primarily a help or a hindrance to the labor movement,
particularly the CIO?

**The New Deal and American Farmers**
Due: Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*; reading essay (required)
Discussion: 1) Were farmers primarily responsible for their plight? 2) How and why was the New Deal more helpful to commercial farmers than to family farmers or southern sharecroppers? 3) What does the title of *In Dubious Battle* mean?

**The Cultural Impact of the Great Depression**
Due: Polenberg, *The Era of FDR*, 89-92 and chapter 4
Discussion: 1) How did artists respond to the Great Depression? 2) How did America respond to the artists? 3) What was “cultural democracy” and how successful were the New Deal’s efforts to promote it?

**The New Deal and the Limits of Reform**
Due: Polenberg, *The Era of FDR*, chapters 3 and 6 (except for 147-151)
Discussion: 1) What were the most important limits on the New Deal? 2) What group (women; minorities; labor) benefited the most/least from the New Deal? Why?

**The New Deal and the Achievements of Reform**
Due: Polenberg, *The Era of FDR*, 16-24, 58-64, 72-77, 83-89, and chapter 7; “The New Deal in History and Historiography” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What were the most significant short-term and long-term achievements of the New Deal? 2) Which historiographical interpretation of the New Deal is most persuasive?

**The Winds of War**
Due: Brinkley, chapter 27 (reader)
Discussion: 1) Was U.S. foreign policy isolationist in the 1920s and interventionist in the 1930s? 2) Was World War II inevitable? Why or why not?

**The Path to Pearl Harbor**
Due: “The Pearl Harbor Debate” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What did FDR know and when did he know it? 2) Was he guilty of deliberately letting the Japanese attack take place?

**The War at Home**
Due: Brinkley, chapter 28 (reader); May, *Homeward Bound*, chapter 3; Polenberg, *The Era of FDR*, 147-151 and chapter 8
Discussion: 1) What was the most significant impact of World War II at home? 2) What was the long-term impact of the war for American women and blacks?
Japanese-American Relocation
Due: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, 24-35 and 191-210; begin Sides, Ghost Soldiers
Discussion: 1) Why were Japanese-Americans relocated in the wake of Pearl Harbor? 2) Was the relocation justified? Why or why not?

Roosevelt at War (Videotape)
Due: Continue Sides, Ghost Soldiers

“Why We Fight”: Propaganda and the Public
Due: Sides, Ghost Soldiers, preface and chapters 1-3
Discussion: 1) Is propaganda an essential and inevitable part of war? 2) Does effective propaganda have to contain racial messages or images? 3) Was the Bataan “Death March” a war crime? Why or why not?

Week Seven: February 25-29

The War against Germany (I)
Due: Continue Sides, Ghost Soldiers
Discussion: 1) Could Hitler have won? 2) What was the main reason for Allied victory?

The War Against Germany (II)
Due: Continue Sides, Ghost Soldiers
Discussion: 1) To what extent do World War II films accurately reflect reality? 2) Is it possible (or desirable) for war films to depict combat conditions?

The Grand Alliance
Due: Finish Sides, Ghost Soldiers
Discussion: 1) What were the main tensions within the Grand Alliance? 2) How would these tensions lay the groundwork for the Cold War?

Week Eight: March 3-7

Mid-Term Exam

The War against Japan
Discussion: 1) Why was combat so brutal in the Pacific? 2) Why was the U.S. ultimately able to defeat Japan? 3) What specific incident or event from Ghost Soldiers most moved or troubled you? Why?

The Atomic Age: Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Due: “Was It Necessary to Drop the Atomic Bomb?” (reader)
Discussion: 1) What was the main reason the US chose to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima? 2) Was the decision justified? Why or why not?

Week Nine: March 10-14 (University Holiday)
Week Ten: March 17-21

The U.S. and the Holocaust
Due: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, 219-224; “Speech of Elie Wiesel” (packet)
Discussion: 1) To what extent should the U.S. share responsibility for the Holocaust? 2) What are the “lessons” of the Holocaust for today?

The Legacies of the “Good War”
Due: Issue précis: Polenberg, The Era of FDR, 226-227; “War, Remembrance, and Reward” and “Raising a Flag for Generation W.W.II” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What were the most important legacies of World War II? 2) Why has the war assumed such a large role in contemporary popular culture? 3) Is it a positive development? Why or why not?

The Cold War: Causes and Controversies
Due: Brinkley, chapter 29 (reader); “Was the U.S. Responsible for the Cold War?” (reader)
Discussion: 1) Was the Cold War inevitable? 2) If not, who was to blame?

Week Eleven: March 24-28

The Cold War: Containment and Confrontation
Due: Begin Fried, Nightmare in Red
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)?

Truman and the Korean War
Due: “The Korean War” (reader); continue Fried, Nightmare in Red
Discussion: 1) Was Truman right to fire MacArthur? 2) What was the most important legacy of the Korean War?

No Class

Week Twelve: March 31-April 4

The Anti-Communist Impulse
Due: Fried, Nightmare in Red, chapters 1-4
Discussion: 1) Was the Red Scare an inevitable outgrowth of World War II and the Cold War? 2) If not, what was the main cause of the Red Scare?

Joseph McCarthy and the “Great Fear”
Due: Fried, Nightmare in Red, chapters 5-7 and epilogue
Discussion: 1) Why was McCarthy so successful with so many? 2) To what extent should he receive credit or blame for the “Great Fear” of the 1950s? 3) What was the greatest legacy of the “Great Fear”?
Truman and the “Fair Deal”
Due: Brinkley, chapter 30 (reader)
Discussion: 1) Was the “Fair Deal” a continuation or extension of the New Deal? 2) Was it a failure or a success? Why?

The Culture of Consensus
Due: Research paper (required); “Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes” (packet)
Discussion: 1) What forces promoted a culture of consensus? 2) What was the most important legacy of the culture of consensus?

The Culture of Conflict
Due: “Howl” and “America” (packet)
Discussion: 1) How were the seeds of revolt nurtured during the 1950s? 2) What was the most important legacy of the culture of conflict?

The Emergence of the Civil Rights Movement (I)
Due: Begin May, Homeward Bound, introduction and chapters 1, 4-9; Brown Decision (reader)
Discussion: 1) What was the main reason for the emergence of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s? 2) In what ways was the Brown decision limited?

The Emergence of the Civil Rights Movement (II)
Due: “Rosa Parks” and “E.D. Nixon” (packet)
Discussion: 1) Who was most responsible for the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott? 2) Were Eisenhower’s actions during the Little Rock Crisis commendable?

Eisenhower and the Cold War
Due: “Revisiting Cold War Coups” (packet)
Discussion: Was Eisenhower’s foreign policy a success or a failure? Why?

The Eisenhower Era (I)
Due: Continue May, Homeward Bound
Discussion: Did the Eisenhower administration damage American prestige and national security in the Middle East (Egypt and Iran) and Southeast Asia (Taiwan and Vietnam)?

The Eisenhower Era (II)
Due: Research rewrite (optional)
Discussion: Did the Eisenhower administration damage American prestige and national security in Eastern Europe (Hungary and the Soviet Union) and Latin America (Guatemala and Cuba)?

The Eisenhower Era (III)
Due: Continue May, Homeward Bound
Discussion: Did the Eisenhower administration fail to protect or promote the civil rights of black Americans (Brown Decision; Montgomery Bus Boycott; Little Rock Crisis)?

**Eisenhower and “Modern Republicanism”**
Due: Continue May, Homeward Bound; “Farewell Address” (reader)
Discussion: 1) Was the Eisenhower era a success or a failure? 2) What was the main threat posed by the “military-industrial complex” according to Eisenhower?

Week Sixteen: April 28-30

**Gender, Family, and the Rise of Suburbia**
Due: May, Homeward Bound, introduction and chapters 1, 4-9
Discussion: 1) Was the rise of suburbia inevitable and/or desirable? 2) How and why was “sexual containment” promoted during the Cold War? 3) Would you rather live in the 1950s or today? Why?

**America Transformed**
Due: “The Proud Decade” (packet); reading essay (optional)
Discussion: 1) How was America transformed between 1929 and 1960? 2) What was the most significant change – political, international, economic, social, or cultural?

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