

HIST 128

American History Since 1865

General Description

Course Overview and Objectives

In the past few years this course has been taken by people holding doctorates and high school degrees, by stay-at-home parents, farmers, teachers, social workers, and prison inmates. Members of the group have come from all over the nation, representing states such as Illinois, Wyoming, Alaska, and Hawaii, as well as North Carolina. Ultimately, then, you are now part of a mixed student body.

Given the different life experiences that you and your fellow students have, the challenge for those of us at Self-paced Courses is to create a course that speaks to every person in the group. How can the course be intelligently organized so that it does not become a meaningless exercise for some of you? For that matter, why take this or any other US history course?

Of course, there are plenty of practical reasons that led many of you specifically to this course. Some of you are completing degree requirements for your professional careers; some are trying to better your grades in order to eventually enter UNC on a full-time basis; some are finishing a Carolina degree you previously started; others are taking this course purely out of interest.

But on a more philosophical basis, why study US history? There are many answers to this question. Certainly in elementary and secondary schools American history courses are intended to make all of us better citizens, to “socialize” us, as it were. For similar reasons, there is a history component to the battery of tests the federal government administers to immigrants who seek to become US citizens. If you live here, the reasoning goes, you should know a little about the place. This list of “why’s” can go on and on—teaching critical thinking skills, fostering “broader” thinking about people and

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issues, etc. All of these are fine answers, but to me, history is best taught when it becomes “personal.” That is, if somewhere in the course, students are made aware that these often forgotten events have had a very real and significant impact on their lives, then one of the fundamental lessons of history has been learned.

Fortunately, this is a course in recent US history, so seeing these vital, personal connections is not quite as difficult for most of us as, say, in a study of Colonial Americans or of the ancients (although the same sort of principles apply). This course will cover the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, for instance, conflicts that probably either directly involved you or certainly impacted friends or family. You will learn about immigration reform in the 1920s and 1960s, which drastically affected the racial and ethnic composition of the nation. Again, somewhere in your family tree, these policies probably made themselves felt.

We hope that, as you become more aware of these immediate connections, you can start making connections with incidents that may seem less important to you. Populism, Progressivism, the New Deal, nativism, Prohibition, and the Cold War all shaped the nation, the experiences of those who came before you, and, ultimately, your own life.

Throughout the course, you will be asked to comment on some of these great historical issues. Many times, as a means of further personalizing these issues, you will be asked to put yourself in the place of various actors in a given period.

This process might make you a better citizen, and, if successful, will certainly give you more of a sense of connection with the country in which you live.

Study Tips

The course is divided into sixteen lessons. Most often, you will be required to read a chapter of the text and some complementary document sets that are comprised of original source material. These sets of documents will help you to make your own decisions about historical events without relying on a historian to act as an interpreter. The assigned

readings will at times be supplemented with a short lecture from your course audiotape or with a historical monograph.

As you complete the work for the lessons, pay attention to the large themes you encounter—chapter headings and sub-headings in your texts are a good place to start. Understanding each of the “important terms” listed in this course manual will also help. Normally, it is best to work from the general to the specific in mastering these themes. Once you understand what the New Deal was, for instance, then you might study a bit about the “first” and “second” New Deals, then about the NRA, the “court packing” scheme, and so on.

You will find that all this information does, in fact, fit together into a greater whole. By studying in this manner, you will also be well prepared for your final exam.

Texts and Materials

The following texts and materials are required for the course:

- *The Enduring Vision, Volume II*, 6th edition (2008) by Paul Boyer, et al.
- *Enduring Voices, Volume II*, 4th edition (2000) by James Lorence.

The bulk of your reading assignments will come from these two books.

- *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1978) by Studs Terkel.

This is an excellent history of the Great Depression based on interviews with those who experienced it.

- CD—The course CD contains a series of short lectures by scholars associated with the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of History. Each piece is a supplement to one of your course lessons. The work is meant to humanize the course experience by allowing you to hear the voices of some of the people who are engaged in researching and writing history. The CD contains a variety of speakers, from long-

established professors to those working on their doctoral degrees.

Use the book order form in this course manual to order your texts and materials.

Written Assignments

Each of the sixteen lessons will have a written assignment that will require you to write one or two essays. These written pieces should reflect your ability to analyze the course materials and to derive your own opinions about them. As you complete these essays, please keep the following points in mind:

1. You need to place each of your responses in proper essay form. That is, you must have an introduction containing a thesis statement (summarizing the main points of the essay), a body that follows the outline stated in the introduction, and, finally, a summarizing conclusion. You may want to consult a basic English textbook in order to find more information about the construction of a good essay.
2. The general argument(s) in each essay should be your own and thus should reflect your thoughts and words. You should, however, support these fundamental ideas with course materials. For instance, perhaps you might choose to argue that the initiation of the Cold War was the result of poor decision making on the part of US policy-makers (your idea). You might then refer to specific actions taken by the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations (support from course materials).
3. When supporting your arguments with factual detail, try to explain these materials in your own words. If you do occasionally paraphrase or quote from your readings and tape, be sure to use quotation marks and cite your source.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, each of your essays should be two to three typewritten or word-processed pages (thus slightly longer if you must complete your assignments by hand).

Grading and Final Exam

Two-thirds of your final grade will be determined by averaging the grades from your sixteen individual assignments.

The results of your final examination count for the remaining one-third, but keep in mind that *you must pass this exam in order to receive credit for the course.*

Your final exam will have three parts. You will be required to answer two long essays and then complete a section of short identifications that will be drawn from your list of important terms in each course lesson. In this last section, you will have to fully identify and then state the significance of each term.

One of the two long essays will be given to you when you receive a copy of the final exam; it will cover one of the major themes of the course. The other essay will be derived from a question that I want you to contemplate throughout your studies and one that speaks to my desire to make US history something personal for you. Thus, I will give you the question (and fully 35 percent of your final exam) now:

After having studied the period of US history since the Civil War, what seven national episodes, events, or developments have you come to feel most impacted you and the world in which you live? In answering this question, be sure to explain *why* you made the selections you did and be sure that you *fully identify* these historical issues by using factual materials from the course. Also be sure to cover comprehensively the time period from 1865 to the present. Do not, for example, make seven selections from the 1980s and 1990s. You must cover the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well. (I am afraid that I will also have to limit your options here to those episodes, events, or developments covered in the course materials.)

Good luck to you in the course.