

HISTORY 2111A -- THE UNITED STATES TO 1877

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Fall Semester 2009
M, W, F, 10:00 a.m.

This course will focus on some of the most important events, issues, and personalities from the early exploration and settlement of North America through the Civil War and Reconstruction. The time span we are investigating is enormous--almost three hundred years!--so instead of trying to do the impossible and "cover the ground" in just sixteen weeks we shall concentrate on four key periods: (1) the early colonial settlement of North America (the 1600s), (2) the American Revolution and its aftermath (1763-1815), (3) the dramatic expansion of the new American Republic (1800-1848), and (4) the rise of sectional conflicts between North and South that led to the Civil War and Reconstruction (1846-1877). As we look together at each period, we shall try to relate the central issues of the past to our concerns of the present.

There will be two principal written sources of information for this course. The brief text by James Henretta and David Brodie, America: A Concise History, Volume 1: To 1877, *Fourth edition*, provides a lively narrative overview of the period. Provocative essays on how historians have reconstructed controversial events in the past are presented in James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection, Volume 1, *Fifth edition*.

In addition to those two principal sources for the course, important personal perspectives on key individuals are found in:

Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop

Edmund S. Morgan, The Meaning of Independence: John Adams, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson

Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

Stephen B. Oates, Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths

Evaluation in the course will be based on four examinations, given in the fifth, tenth, thirteenth, and seventeenth weeks of the semester. The examinations will be based both on the class lectures & discussions and on the required readings. This is an intensive course and class attendance is expected.

I welcome your lively participation in the class, as well as any suggestions you may have about topics of special interest. I shall be happy to meet with any students who have questions about the work or who would like to pursue any of the topics discussed in the class further.

If you are confused or are having difficulty with the course, please talk with me after class, e-mail me, or come to see me at my office as soon as possible so that we can help you to do your best and get the most you can out of the class.

Note that under Georgia Tech's procedures, graduating seniors will now take the regular final exam in this course at the same time as the rest of the students.

NOTE WELL: Class roll will be taken after the first week. More than six (6) unexcused class absences during the semester (the equivalent of a full 2 weeks of the course) may be grounds for lowering the student's final course grade by one full grade level (10 points).

Throughout the course, all students will be expected to follow the Georgia Tech Honor Code.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT:

I. Patterns of Colonial Settlement in the 1600s

Beginning with some preliminary background information on the origins of the American Indians and on the Spanish conquest and settlement of Mexico, we shall proceed to look closely at four different types of English settlement patterns, represented by (1) Virginia and Chesapeake colonies; (2) Massachusetts and the New England colonies; and (3) Pennsylvania and the Middle colonies, and (4) South Carolina and the Lower South colonies. What kinds of backgrounds did immigrant men and women come from? What led them to make the difficult journey to a new and uncertain world? What were the distinctive challenges and opportunities of the new land? To what extent were European social and cultural patterns transplanted to the New World and to what extent did the New World environment--America's "first frontier"- transform earlier styles of life and behavior.

II. The American Revolution and its Aftermath, 1763-1815

Between 1763, when the French relinquished their North American holdings, and 1789, when a new government under the Constitution of the United States went into effect, Americans came into increasing conflict with England, declared their independence from her, fought a war for that independence, and began to set up a government unique in its time--"the First New Nation," as one sociologist later called it. What were the causes of tension between the American colonies and England? Why did those tensions lead to revolution? What were the underlying ideals of that revolution, and how were they expressed in documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution? In what ways did the American Revolution differ from other revolutionary movements throughout the world? How did the War of 1812, sometimes described as "the Second American War for Independence," represent the end of the Revolutionary generation?

III. *Expansion and Growth of the New Republic, 1800-1848*

During the five decades before 1850, the young American Republic tripled its geographic size, increased its population nearly five times, began to be impacted by the Industrial Revolution, and moved toward much fuller popular participation in politics. Also during this period, the institution of African-American slavery was dramatically expanded and transformed, and both pro- and anti-slavery arguments began to be put forward as part of larger efforts at social reform. What helps account for this almost explosive growth and dynamism of the young American Republic during this period? How did such growth affect individuals, both positively and negatively? In what ways did the dramatic growth of the first half of the nineteenth century contribute to the development of sectional tensions that eventually would come close to tearing the United States apart during the Civil War?

IV. *Sectional Conflict, Civil War, and Reconstruction, 1846-1877*

The conclusion of the course will focus on the growing sectional tensions between North and South that followed the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846, the subsequent Civil War which brought brother into conflict with brother and left over 600,000 dead (more than in all other American wars together until Vietnam), and the complex and controversial attempt to reconstruct the Union after the Civil War. How can we account for the breakdown of the American political system that led to the devastating conflict of the Civil War? Can the influence of a handful of fanatical Northern abolitionists or of an equally extreme handful of Southern "fire eaters" account for this war, or were there deeper reasons that made such a conflict almost inevitable given the circumstances? How did the war itself develop, and what were its major "turning points"? Why was Reconstruction after the war so difficult? What was the larger significance of the Civil War and its corollary, the abolition of slavery, in United States and world history?

READING ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAM SCHEDULE:

NOTE: Students are expected, as a minimum, to start reading the assignments by the dates indicated below and to finish reading those assignments before the next class session. Students hoping to earn an "A" in the class should try to finish their reading in advance of the schedule below in order to allow sufficient time for proper review before the exams.

- August 17--begin After the Fact, prologue
- 19--begin After the Fact, chapter 6
- 21--begin America, chapter 1
- 24--begin After the Fact, chapter 1
- 26--begin America, chapter 2
- 28--begin The Puritan Dilemma, chapters 1-5
- 31--begin The Puritan Dilemma, chapters 6-10

September 2--begin The Puritan Dilemma, chapters 11-13
 4--begin After the Fact, chapter 2

NO CLASS -- Monday, September 7 -- Labor Day Holiday

September 9--begin America, chapter 3
 11--begin America, chapter 4
 14--review for Exam #1

EXAM #1 -- Wednesday, September 16

September 16/18--begin America, chapter 5
 21--begin America, chapter 6
 23--begin After the Fact, chapter 3
 25--begin Meaning of Independence, chapter 1
 28--begin Meaning of Independence, chapters 2 and 3
 September 30/October 7--begin America, chapter 7

NO CLASS -- Monday, October 5 -- School Holiday

October 9/12--begin America, chapter 8
 14--begin After the Fact, chapter 4
 16--review for Exam #2

EXAM #2 --Monday, October 19

October 19--begin America, chapter 9
 21--begin America, chapter 10
 23--begin After the Fact, chapter 5
 26-28--begin Douglass (entire)
 30--begin America, chapter 12
 November 2--After the Fact, chapter 8
 November 5/7--begin America, chapter 11
 9--review for Exam #3

EXAM #3 -- Wednesday, November 11

November 11/13--begin America, chapter 13
 16--begin After the Fact, chapter 7
 18--begin America, chapter 14
 20--begin Lincoln, part 1
 23--begin Lincoln, parts 2-3
 25--begin Lincoln, parts 4-5

NO CLASS -- Friday, November 27 -- Happy Thanksgiving holiday!

November 30/December 2--begin America, chapter 15
December 4--review for Final Exam

FINAL EXAM -- Tuesday, December 8, 11:30 a.m.

A FINAL CARTOON PERSPECTIVE:

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