

New Bedford Clemente Course, 2009-10: U.S. History

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This is an introductory survey course on American history focusing on one of its major themes: **freedom**. Throughout the term, we will investigate the meaning of freedom from the American Revolution to the present using a variety of sources and perspectives. Since history is foremost an integration of stories, we will devote our attention to the experiences and voices of a diverse group of Americans—Founding Fathers, runaway slaves, revolutionaries, Presidents, and activists. In the process, we will see that “freedom”—as well as other political concepts such as “rights,” “equality,” and “democracy”—have always meant different things to different people.

American history is best understood as a dynamic **tension between great promises, and great failures**. I chose my profession (to teach and study American history) while sitting in a classroom much like this one, when I was a student like you. And what I found so fascinating about America, were its contradictions, its immense promise, its idealism, and its often-horrifying practices. We are a nation founded on incredible ideals, which we often don't meet, and in fact, often deny to other people. In recent decades, we increasingly use these ideals as platitudes, without realizing the extent to which they often involve a difficult and complicated call to justice, to reparation, to self-responsibility, to conflict – even to sacrifice.

Books:

Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States

Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845)

Jonathan Earle, John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry: A Brief History With Documents (2008)

Marshall Frady, Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Life

We will also read a number of primary sources to be handed out in class. They are marked with a ‘*’ on the syllabus. Primary sources are documents or artifacts from the past. When researching and writing history, historians use these primary

sources as evidence to determine not only what happened in the past, but also why and how. Please bring these readings with you to class.

In addition to writing a portfolio paper for this class, you will be asked to write smaller papers. The smaller papers will help you build your portfolio paper, which will be written jointly with the philosophy course.

Public speaking:

As in the other classes, I will ask each one of you to participate in some kind of public presentation in class. I've scheduled 2 different kinds of presentations (listed below). I would like you to **choose one**. I will pass around a sign-up sheet early in the semester. You will work with your teammates, and with Kathleen and myself, on your preparation.

1. **John Brown on trial:** if you choose to participate in this public speaking assignment, you and your teammates will argue before a jury of your professors that Brown's use of violence to end slavery was necessary and justified.
2. **Reading and analysis of a primary source:** if you choose to participate in this public speaking assignment, you will make a presentation to the class using two of the primary sources listed on the syllabus. The sources should be drawn from the same topic. Your presentation should do the following: tell us about the author and historical context, summarize the document, and make an argument either about what you think it means, or what you think we can learn from it.

Writing assignments:

There will be 3 writing assignments in this class: 2 two-page papers, and the joint US History-Philosophy portfolio paper on Martin Luther King, Jr. All three papers will need to be written for you to be considered for the college credits.

The two shorter papers will be on Frederick Douglass and slavery, and on Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. I will give you a specific question for each paper.

Deadlines for your portfolio paper:

On Monday May 17th (philosophy portfolio night) you will bring to class an introductory paragraph, and an outline of your paper.

On Monday May 24th, you will bring a completed first draft of your paper to the US History portfolio session.

On Monday May 27th, you will bring your final draft of your portfolio paper to the last US History class.

Thursday 2/11: Freedom, 'Un-freedom' and the creation of America

Read for today:

- Howard Zinn, "Columbus, the Indians and Human Progress," A People's History of the United States (pp.1-22)
- Ronald Takaki, "The 'Giddy Multitude': the Hidden Origins of Slavery," A Different Mirror (pp.51-76)

Thursday 2/25: Slavery

Read for today:

- Douglass, introduction (pp.1-8); chapter 1 (pp.39-43), chapters 5-7 (pp.57-63), chapters 10-11 (pp.71-104)
- Declaration of Independence (1776)
 - Letters, Abigail Adams and John Adams (1776), pp.76-79.
 - Slave Petitions for Gradual Emancipation (1777), pp.90-91.

Thursday 3/4: John Brown, Abolitionism and the Coming of the Civil War
Public speaking workshop with Kathleen?

Read for today:

Earle, pp.1-35, and Documents 9-12, 14 (pp.76-110; pp.122-128)

Thursday 3/11: the Civil War and Reconstruction

Public speaking: was John Brown's raid necessary and justified?

Read for today:

Zinn, chapter 9

- Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (1863)
- "A Freedman Writes His Former Master (1865)," The Civil War and Reconstruction, pp.380-381
- "Frederick Douglass Assesses the Mistakes of Reconstruction (1880)," The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection, pp.416-417

Thursday 3/18: Immigration and the Progressive Era

Read for today:

Zinn, chapters 11 and 13

- "Ideology and History: Closing the Golden Door," Thinking Through the Past (pp.141-163)

Monday 4/5: the Great Depression and the New Deal

Read for today:

Zinn, chapter 15

Eric Rauchway, "Americans in the Depression" The Great and the New Deal (please note: this isn't a

Depression
primary source)

"Peggy Terry and her mother, Mary Owsley," Hard Times: History of the Great Depression

An Oral

"Mrs. Willye Jeffries," Hard Times

Franklin Roosevelt, speech before the Commonwealth Club

(1932)

Thursday 4/8: the New Deal, then and now
2 page paper due, on Franklin Roosevelt and the
Great Depression

Read for today:

Zinn, chapter 16

Franklin Roosevelt, "Speech before the 1936 Democratic Convention"

Carl Sandburg poem, excerpt, "The People, Yes" (1936)

"Bob Stinson: the Sit-Down (1937)," Hard

Times

Franklin Roosevelt, "Second Inaugural Address" (1937)

Franklin Roosevelt, excerpt, "The Second Bill of Rights" (1944)

Thursday 4/15: Dr. King and non-violence

Read for today:

Frady, pp.1-51

- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Non-Violence" (1958)

Thursday 4/22: the civil rights movement: from Montgomery to Birmingham
Jen's visit, to talk about MLK's rhetoric

Read for today:

Frady, pp.71-118

- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" (1963)
- Anne Moody, "All I could think of....," Coming of Age in Mississippi

Monday 5/3: King's Dream, poverty and race in the North
Jen's visit, to talk about creating a thesis and outline

Read for today:

Frady, pp.118-126, 143-155, 158-206

- Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream" (1963)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" (1963)

Monday 5/10: The Cold War, Vietnam and the 60s

Read for today:

- Zinn, chapter on Vietnam

- David Farber, “Vietnam,” The Age of Great Dreams
- Tim O’Brien, “The Vietnam in Me”
- “Martin Luther King, Jr., Declares His Opposition to the War, 1967”
- “A South Vietnamese Peasant Girl Becomes a Vietcong Supporter, 1961”

Monday 5/17:

PHILOSOPHY PORTFOLIO NIGHT

Write for today:

outline

Bring to class an introductory paragraph, and an
of your portfolio paper.

Thursday 5/20:

PRESENTATION NIGHT

Monday 5/24:
portfolio paper due)

HISTORY PORTFOLIO NIGHT (1st draft of

Thursday 5/27:

Freedom and Opportunity in America today

FINAL DRAFT OF PORTFOLIO PAPER DUE

Read for today:

- Jama Lazerow, “New Bedford Riot of 1970”
- Paul Krugman, “The Great Wealth Transfer,” Rolling Stone (November 2006)
- Tamara Draut, “The Growing College Gap,” Inequality Matters
- Christopher Jencks, “Why Do So Many Jobs Pay So Badly,” Inequality Matters
- Meizhu Lui, “The Snowball and the Treadmill,” Inequality Matters

First paper assignment, US History: Frederick Douglass and slavery
2 pages, due Thursday February 24th

Based on the readings in the Frederick Douglass book, describe what slavery was like. Imagine that you told someone that you were taking an American History class, and that you were studying slavery. They ask you: 'so, what was slavery like?'

Using Douglass' descriptions of his own life, answer this question. Be sure to use specific examples (and a few quotes) from the book itself.

The paper should have an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. In the introduction, summarize your argument. In your body paragraphs, demonstrate that argument, using specific quotes and examples. Then, in the conclusion, sum up your argument again.

John Brown on trial: you and your teammates will argue before a jury. **This debate will take place in class on Thursday March 11th.**

Prompt: John Brown's use of violence to end slavery was necessary and justified.

Team 1 will argue in the affirmative, agreeing with the prompt.

Team 2 will argue in the negative, disagreeing with the prompt.

Both sides will work to prove your case to the jury.

Details:

1. Each team will make an opening argument, supplying good reasons for the jury to agree with their case. Every member of the team must speak during the opening argument, either to make a claim or provide data to support a claim.

-- Team Conferences!

2. Both teams will then have the opportunity to ask questions and debate points with each other.

-- Team Conferences!

3. Each team will then provide a closing statement. Again, every member of the team should be prepared to speak during the closing. The closing should summarize your strongest arguments, point out weaknesses in the arguments of their opposition, striving to show the jury that you have most persuasively proven your case.

4. The jury will ask both sides questions throughout the debate.

Advice: Both teams should work collectively to construct their arguments and accumulate their evidence, based on their reading, knowledge, and life experience. Teams that "divide and conquer" tend to lose to teams that collaborate and create effectively persuasive arguments.

Second paper assignment, US history: Franklin Roosevelt, the Great Depression and the New Deal
This is a 2-page paper, and will be due on Thursday April 8th.

Drawing upon our two weeks of readings on the Great Depression and President Franklin Roosevelt, please write a paper on the following:

What was the Great Depression like for Americans? What views did Franklin Roosevelt have on the role government should play in helping them?

You will find the Peggy Terry, Willye Jeffries and Bob Stinson readings very useful for answering the **first part** – they are primary sources, from the time period. The Rauchway and Zinn readings are secondary sources, and may also be helpful.

For the **second part** of the question, you will need to use the speeches by Franklin Roosevelt.

The paper should have an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. In the introduction, summarize your argument. In your body paragraphs, demonstrate that argument, using specific quotes and examples. Then, in the conclusion, sum up your argument again.

Final Paper Topic
American History and Philosophy
Professors Gardner and Santow

For your final paper, we want you to be *interdisciplinary*—that is, we want you to bring together what you have learned this semester in American History and Moral Philosophy. In Moral Philosophy, you have been reading about the human moral world. We have asked why we should be good people and what it is to live a good life. We have also asked whether we should strive to have a good character or to do good acts or both. In American History, you have been reading about individuals and groups of people who have wrestled with these dilemmas in order to understand and change American society from the Revolution to the Civil Rights Movement.

One reading that allows us to combine these philosophical and historical elements is Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963). For your paper, we would like you to do the following:

1. Describe the historical context in which King wrote the Letter. What conditions was he trying to change? What did he argue, and why did he argue it? This will require that you discuss not only the civil rights movement, but also the broader history of race in America.
2. Choose TWO philosophers you have studied this term and apply their writings to an analysis of Dr. King’s letter. In other words, what would Socrates, Mill, Kant or Aristotle have to say to Dr. King? This is not just a question of agreement or disagreement with Dr. King’s civil disobedience, it is a question of the arguments and the philosophical framework that lie behind the agreement or disagreement.

We expect that you will quote directly from Dr. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” **and** from the writings of the philosophers you choose, as well as any relevant texts from earlier in the US History class (Frederick Douglass or John Brown, for example). But we also expect you to allow your own voice to shine through. Please use specific examples from the chosen texts to illustrate your main points.

Please bring an Introduction to the paper, and an outline, to the Philosophy Portfolio session on Monday May 17th.

Please bring a draft of the paper to the US History Portfolio session on Monday May 24th.

Your final paper, 4-6 pages in length, is due on Thursday May 27th.