US History Syllabus:
Regular, Honors, and Advanced Placement

Overview

This course will cover United States history from its pre-colonial period beginning in c. 1492 to the present. It covers all major aspects of American history during that period including: political, diplomatic, intellectual, cultural, economic and social. In addition, the course deals extensively with learning how to read, understand, analyze and interpret a wide variety of both primary and secondary texts together with the maps, graphs and pictorial materials associated with them. The course also aims to help students to put the knowledge and understanding they are gaining into practice through sharpening their oral and written communication skills. This will be achieved in two ways: First, through regular class discussions and occasional assigned oral presentations or debates. Second, through the regular writing of focused essays that require both knowledge and analytical and interpretive skills. Though challenging, this course is extremely important in understanding the United States of America as it exists in the world today. Students will be rewarded in a myriad of ways for the effort they put into it. Finally, if the past is any guide to the present – and I believe that you will learn that it is – this course will be one of the most enjoyable and beneficial that you will ever take in your high school career.

Course Requirements

This US History course is taught at a high college preparatory level for Regular and Honors students and at a college level for AP students. In particular, a great deal of reading will be required both from the main texts and from other secondary, and especially, primary sources. All students – Regular, Honors and AP - must keep up with their readings! Lectures will be aimed at covering the most important subject matter and increasing understanding. They will not simply go over the reading material in the text. Instead, they will augment it and go beyond it. Good note-taking is essential! Each student should have a notebook or large section in a larger notebook solely for U.S. history. Each day’s class activities should be documented in this notebook. The classes will also include regular oral participation and group work.

Grading

Trimester Grades will consist of: 50% on Tests, Essays, etc. + 50% on Homework and Classwork. Class participation can improve one’s grade but it cannot hurt it. The Yearly Grade will consist of: Three Trimester Grades of 25 % each (= 75%) + Midterm Exam of 12.5% + Final Exam of 12.5% = 100 % total.
Course Outline

This course will follow a chronological scheme of study that is in line with its main texts. The course outline below follows a basic outline form.

Themes

Throughout the course we will emphasize five major themes which are of continual importance and special relevance in U.S. history from the founding to the present:

1. America the Beautiful: its Geographical Position
2. The Role of Religious Faith
3. Self-Government and The Rule of Law
4. The Free Market Economy
5. Leadership and the Art of Compromise

These themes will be continually emphasized in lectures and discussions and will provide a framework for the entire course. Regular essays will also center on various aspects of these themes.

CLASSROOM NORMS: What Works for Me

- RESPECT—Respect others, their property, and their right to learn. Students are expected to treat other classmates and the teacher with respect and courtesy.

- RESPONSIBILITY—Come to class every day with the required materials. Be prepared and ready to participate. If you are absent from class, you are responsible for your make-up work. I will not hunt you down.

- BELL-TO-BELL—Be seated and on task when the bell rings and wait for me to dismiss you (not the bell) at the end of the period.

- ASSIGNMENTS—Assignments are due at the beginning of class.

- LEAVING THE ROOM—Visit the restroom, water fountain, etc., on your own time. If you must leave the room, first ask permission.

- CELL PHONES—See above information regarding “respect.” Unless I direct you to use them, they need to be put away.
Course Outline

First Semester

Unit I.: The Exploration and Colonization of the Americas

A. Introduction: First Week
1. Welcome Back: policies, procedures, syllabus and books and resources for the course.
2. Go over present day map of US and discuss the relevant geographical and other significant features.
3. Discuss timeline of US history.
4. Make a timeline of US history for our Classroom
5. Discuss principles of historiography based on John Lukacs’ book A Student’s Guide to the Study of History

B. The First American Peoples (to c. 1500)
1. The First Peoples: When They Came, Where they Came from and Where they went; Were they “Native Americans?” What’s the Best Term to Use?
2. The Cultures of the First American Indian Peoples
3. The American Indian Peoples at the Time of Columbus: Geographical Locations; Similarities and Differences

C. The Beginnings of the Colonial Era (c. 1500-1700)
1. The World of Columbus: The Renaissance, Reconquista and Sea Exploration
2. The First Discoveries and the Beginnings of Colonization: Reasons for Going and Reasons for Staying
3. The Making of New Spain: Cortez, Spanish Technological Superiority and the Factor of Disease
4. The Role of Catholicism in the Empires of Spain and Portugal: the Pope, the Spanish as the Vanguard of the True Faith, and the Hierarchical Structure of Society in New Spain
5. The Reformation and Challenges to the Spanish Empire: the Dutch and the British
6. French Explorations and Outposts in the North
7. The War of the Spanish Armada and its Significance on the Settlement of North America

D. The English Colonization of North America (c.1600-1775)
1. The Lost Colony and the First Permanent English Colony
3. The Settlement and Development of the Three Colonial Regions: Comparing New England, the Middle Atlantic and the South
**Discussion and Essay: Compare and Contrast the Political, Social, Religious, and Economic Aspects of the Three Colonial Regions**

5. Two Unifying Movements for American Colonists: the Great Awakening and the Enlightenment
6. Rivalries and Conflicts Between the Colonists and the Indians
7. The French and Indian War: the Turning Point for America

**Unit I Test: Multiple Choice and Essays – Comparing and Contrasting the Spanish, French, and British Colonial Systems in the Americas**

**Unit II: The ‘American Experiment’ in Republican Government: the Founding and Establishing of a New Nation (1763-1815)**

A. The American Revolution
1. The Road to Revolution: the Proclamation of 1763 to No Taxation Without Representation and Beyond
2. The Declaration of Independence: Was it “An Expression of the American Mind?”
3. The Struggle for Independence: “the Times that Try Men’s Souls”
5. The Role of Leadership: Comparing the Political and Military Leadership of the British and Americans in the Revolutionary War Era

B. The Debates, Making, and Ratification of the U.S. Constitution (1787-1791)
1. The Articles of Confederation and the Need for Stable Government
3. The Ratification Process and the Call for a Bill of Rights

C. The New Nation: Passing the Tests of Survival
1. Washington’s Leadership in the First Government: Precedents for the American Republic - A Strong Central Government and Non-Entanglement in Foreign Affairs
3. The Jeffersonian Republic: Interpreting the Constitution; Exploration and Expansion at Home; Troubled Waters Abroad; A Distinguished Citizen but a Disillusioned Politician

**Unit III: Westward Expansion, A House-Divided, and an Unfinished Reconstruction (1815-1877)**
A. National Unity, Westward Expansion and Sectionalism Resurrected
   1. The Era of Good Feelings: Nationalism, the American System and the Monroe Doctrine
   2. King Cotton and the Growth and Spread of Slavery in the South
   3. The Advent of Jacksonian Democracy: the Age of the Common Man; The Use of Presidential
      Power – The Trail of Tears and the Bank of the U.S.
   4. The Second Great Awakening, the Spirit of Reform, and the Reform Movements
   5. Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion by American “Realpolitik” and War
   6. Special Topic in American Cultural Studies: American Nationalism, Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and their Expression in the Hudson River School of Art

B. The Civil War: A House Divided Against Itself (1850-1865)
   1. The Cause(s): Sectionalism, States-Rights, and Slavery
   2. The War: Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Side; the Turning Points; The Emancipation
      Proclamation
   3. Union Victory and Lincoln’s Desire for a Compassionate Reconciliation

C. Reconstruction: Presidential, Congressional and a Job Left Unfinished
   1. Presidential Reconstruction: The State of the South; Lincoln’s Desire and Johnson’s Policies
   2. Congressional Reconstruction: the Rise of the Radical Republicans
   3. The Reality of Life in the South: the Different Groups and their Status and Reality; the Rise of
      the Ku Klux Klan and the Democratic Solid South
   4. A Job Left Unfinished: Jim Crow Established, Entrenched and Confirmed

D. Urbanization: the Rise of the Great American Cities
   1. The Growth of the American Metropolis
   2. Immigration: Old and New
   3. Life in the Big Cities

E. Life in the Gilded Age
   1. A Rising Middle Class and an Elite New Rich
   2. The Urban and Rural Poor
   3. The Age of Government Corruption: National, State and Local
   4. The Free Market Gone Wild?

Unit IV: Challenge and Reform: Populism, Progressivism, and an Imperial America
(1865-1920)
A. The Beginnings of Agrarian and Labor Movements: Organization and Action
   1. The Labor Movement: Organizing and Striking
   2. The Labor Movement: Successes and Failures
   3. The Agrarian Movement: Farmers Organize
   4. The Populist Movement: Successes and Failures and Sowing the Seeds for Future

B. The Progressive Movement
1. Who Were the Progressives and What Kind Of Progress Did they Want?
2. Reforms in Local Governments: the States and Cities
3. The Progressive Constitutional Amendments
4. The Progressive Presidents:
a. Theodore Roosevelt: the Progressive Leader and a Square Deal
b. William H. Taft: Carrying on the TR Legacy (But Enough?)
c. Woodrow Wilson: Wilsonian Democracy

C. Imperial America: Progress at Home and Imperialism Abroad
1. American Attitudes About Imperialism and Reasons for and Against It
2. Pacific Involvement: Trade Routes, Missions, and “The White Man’s Burden”
3. “Open Doors” in China and Involvement in Asia
4. Latin America: “Speak Softly and Carry A Big Stick”
a. TR: America the Policeman of Latin America
b. Taft: Dollar Diplomacy
c. Wilson: A Moral Foreign Policy

1. The Causes WWI
2. Neutrality and the Traditional American Policy of Non-entanglement
3. Entering the War: the Reasons
4. America at Home – Life in America During WWI
5. Peace, Peacemaking, and the Failure to Ratify a Treaty

Unit V: The US From War to War: Prosperity, Depression, and World War II

A. The Roaring Twenties
1. After the War: Unrest and the Red-Scare
2. Return to Normalcy: From Harding to Coolidge to Hoover
3. A Cultural Revolution: Fashion, Art, Literature, the Harlem Renaissance, and a Lost Generation
4. A Divided America: Capitalists, Labor, Farmers, Gangsters, and Segregation

B. The Great Depression: Hoover and FDR
1. The Causes of the Great Depression
2. The Hardships of the Great Depression and Hoover’s Response
3. FDR and the New Deal(s): Relief, Recovery, and Reform
4. The Reality of Life in the Depression under FDR; His Critics Right and Left
5. Packing the Court and its Effects
6. The Lasting Role of the Federal Government in American Life
C. American Foreign Policy Between the Wars: the Search for Peace
1. Isolationist or Traditional Non-Entanglement?
2. Peace Conferences and the Outlawing of War
3. Latin America: Being a Good Neighbor
4. The Rise of Dictators and the Clouds of Coming War
5. Breaking Neutrality to Enter the War: from Lend-lease to Pearl Harbor and Beyond

D. World War II: The End of Non-Entanglement – the US Becomes a Global Power
1. The Allies and their Strategy: the US, Britain, and the USSR
2. America at Home in the War
3. The Turning Points
4. Peace in Europe and the Pacific
5. A New World

Unit VI: A Cold War Abroad and Happy Days at Home (1945-1960)

A. The Truman Years
1. The Truman Years:: the Cold War – The Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, Berlin Airlift, NATO, and the Korean War
2. The Truman Years: From Inflation to Prosperity; A Fair Deal, Desegregation by Executive Order; The McCarthy Red Scare

B. The Eisenhower Years
1. The Eisenhower Years: Ending the Korean War; Roll-back in Word but Containment in Deed: the Arms Race; Sputnik; the Military-Industrial Complex
2. The Eisenhower Years: Happy Days at Home: the Economic Boom and the Baby Boom; the Beginnings of a Counter-Culture

Unit VII: Turmoil at Home and Abroad (1960-1980)

A. JFK and LBJ
1. JFK and The Cold War: Weakness and Strength – the Arms Race; the Bay of Pigs; the Summit; the Cuban Missile Crisis; the Beginnings of the Vietnam War
2. JFK and the Domestic Front: Camelot, the Economy, Civil Rights, and Assassination
3. LBJ at Home: Capitalizing on the Aura of a Fallen President – Civil Rights Legislation and the Great Society
4. LBJ and the Vietnam War: Escalation, Stagnation, and the Despair of a President
5. Special Topic: the Civil Rights Movement in American History

B. The Nixon Years: from Strength to Disgrace
1. America at Home: a Divided Nation and Stagflation
2. The Cold War: Vietnam – Peace With Honor?; The Opening with China and Détente with the USSR
3. Watergate and the Crisis of Constitutional Government; Resignation
4. Special Topic: The Vietnam War

C. The Carter Years: Economic Malaise and Disappointment Abroad
   1. Ford: Pardon and Quiet Leadership; Stagflation, Détente
   2. Carter at Home: Stagflation Continues amid a National Identity Crisis
   3. Carter Abroad: Camp David; Arms Control; the End of Détente; Crisis in Iran

➢ What do you SEE in the framing of history provided by this syllabus?

➢ What do you THINK are instances of visible and hidden white normative thought in this syllabus?

➢ What do you WONDER about the experiences of students of color in this class?

➢ How you would you ACT to decolonize this syllabus?