HI309: Americans in the World: United States History in Transnational Perspective

Where do the boundaries of the United States begin and end? How has the rest of the world shaped Americans’ understanding of themselves and their society? How have the lived experiences of Americans transcended nation-state boundaries and to what purpose? This survey places the history of the United States since the late nineteenth century in an international context. It uncovers the formal and informal movements of a variety of people, things, and ideas back and forth across borders. It builds upon many developments covered in other surveys of the modern United States—the plight of immigrants, the rise of cities, women’s battle for the vote, the fight for civil rights. But at the same time, this course also challenges those frameworks; it calls into question the exceptionalism of American history and analyzes how major social trends, political movements, and cultural ideas, deemed American, have connected with the struggles and experiences of others. It provides students with a nuanced history of the processes of global integration as well as the diverse ways in which Americans have engaged with those processes and exerted their power both abroad and at home.

This is not a course in official foreign relations. Our focus will not be the history of formal diplomacy and government policy, although we will encounter pieces of that story. Instead, we will concentrate on more ephemeral but no less important connections between Americans and the world beyond U.S. shores. We will explore how foreign people and cultures have been central, not peripheral, to the development of modern American society. And we will reflect on the fact that the nation itself has not been a static place or idea, but that its contours and meanings have been permeable, shifting, and deeply contested.

To place American history in transnational perspective, the readings fall into four overlapping genres: 1) accounts of Americans’ experiences abroad that have been formative; 2) doctrines Americans have composed to articulate their understanding of the relationship between themselves, their nation, and the rest of the world; 3) readings that highlight the ways in which U.S. outposts, frontiers, and cities have been not only American places but also important transnational spaces; and 4) critiques by others—visitors to the United States and observers from afar, who have offered insightful alternative views of American people, policies, and products. The lectures will provide historical context and a framework in which to situate these sources. The assignments offer you a chance to work out your own connections and deepen your analysis of American history from a new angle.
The following books are available at the Bookstore:

Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1879)
Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (1925)
Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931) [2006 abridged version]
Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (1955)

Additional sources will be available on the Blackboard website (http://blackboard.bu.edu). Readings posted on Blackboard are designated on the syllabus with **.

This course will also have two assigned films. These should be viewed outside of class time. They are available at Krasker film library on campus, and can be “rented” online at amazon.com for a small fee. Netflix, iTunes, etc. are also good bets.

Michael Curtiz, dir., *Casablanca* (1942)

Assignments:

The assignments for this course consist of three original essays—two 5-pg. essays and a final paper of 8-10 pages. Descriptions of these assignments can be found at the back of the syllabus. There will be no in-class exams for this course.

The essays will be graded according to the criteria explained at the back of the syllabus. To pass, you must complete and pass all of these essays. You will not be able to do well without attending the lectures and completing the readings; each essay assignment will require that you integrate into your analysis specific material from both the lectures and the readings. Besides the source chosen for your final paper, you may not use any outside sources for the papers.

A proposal form for the final paper will also be required; it can be found on the Blackboard website. You can begin thinking about the final paper as soon as you would like, and I am available to talk about your ideas in office hours.

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following percentages:

First Essay (25%)
Second Essay (35%)
Final Essay (40%)
ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION: Attendance at the lectures is expected. If you do not come to class, you will not be able to do well on the assignments. Participating in class discussions not only will help you learn, but it could also be a deciding factor in your final grade. If you have earned a B+ for the course but you are close to an A-, for example, and you have been an active, regular participant in class discussions, I will bump you up to the higher grade.

PLAGIARISM. Remember that plagiarism is a serious offense, and it’s your responsibility to know and understand the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. Plagiarism is subject to serious sanctions, including reprimand, suspension, and expulsion. Cases of suspected academic misconduct in this course will be referred to the Dean’s Office. For a detailed description of Boston University’s rules, consult the code of conduct at www.cs.bu.edu/students/conduct.html or pick up a copy in room CAS105.

USING OUTSIDE SOURCES: Do not use any outside sources for the exams and essays. This includes information procured from the internet or another course. Your job is not to rely on others’ interpretations or material you have become comfortable with because you have worked through it for another class. Your job is to go out on a limb and grapple with new material from this course—to challenge yourself and learn new things. The only exception to this rule is the primary source you choose for your final paper, and this choice must be approved to ensure that you are on the right track. Please see the end of the syllabus for directions on this final assignment.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1: Introduction

Tues., Jan. 17: National and Transnational Histories
Thurs., Jan. 19: Frontiers

READING: **Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)
**Bessie Louise Pierce, ed., As Others See Chicago: Impressions of Visitors, 1673-1933(1933), excerpts.

Week 2: American Landscapes in the Late Nineteenth Century

Tues., Jan. 24: Networks and Ports of Capitalism
Thurs., Jan. 26: Working-Class Nationalisms and Internationalisms

READING: Emma Goldman, Living My Life, chs. i, iii, v-vi, viii, xi-xv, xix, xxi, xxiii xxiv, xxix, xxxi, xxxiii-xxxiv, xxxviii, xlii.
Week 3: Victorians in the World

Tues., Jan. 31: Transatlantic Middle-Class Culture and European Civilization
Thurs., Feb. 2: American Culture in Transit and on Display

READING: Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1879)

Week 4: Civilizing Missions

Tues., Feb. 7: Exotic Cultures and Imperial Outposts
Thurs., Feb. 9: Progressives’ Atlantic Crossings

READING: ** Philippine-American War documents (1898-1899)
** Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” (1899)
** Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” (1901)

Week 5: Democracy and Disillusionment

Tues., Feb. 14: World War I
Thurs., Feb. 16: Foment after the Peace

READING: Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925)

Week 6: Americanness in a New Key

Tues., Feb. 21: No class
Thurs., Feb. 23: Paris and Beyond
*First paper due at the beginning of class.*

READING: Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), 10-29, 62-189, 204-212,
215-218 and optional chapters 6 and 8.

Week 7: A World of Commitments

Tues., Feb. 28: Harlem Renaissance and the Black Diaspora
Thurs., March 1: Roads to War

READING: Watch *Casablanca*
Week 8: The Idea of the American Century

Tues., Mar. 6: World War II *Casablanca* (1942) style
First paper due, if not already submitted, by the beginning of lecture.

Thurs., Mar. 8: Founding Doctrines

**Remarks by Secretary of State, George C. Marshall at Harvard University,  
June 5, 1947  
**Franz Joseph, ed., *As Others See Us: The United States through Foreign Eyes* (1959), excerpts.

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Wars Cold and Hot

Tues., Mar. 20: Anti-Americanisms Overseas  
Thurs., Mar. 22: New Missionaries Abroad

READING: **Harry S. Truman, Truman Doctrine (1947)  
**NSC-68, National Security Council Study, no. 68, April 14, 1950  
Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (1955)

Week 10: Movements for Social Justice

Tues., Mar. 27: Civil Rights Wars at Home  
Thurs., Mar. 29: Quests for Freedom


Week 11: Hybrid People

Tues., Apr. 3: 1968  
Thurs., Apr. 5: Coming to America

Week 12: Migrant Cultures

Tues., Apr. 10: American Popular Culture Abroad
Second paper due by the beginning of class.

Thurs., Apr. 12: New Departures in “Globalization”


Week 13: World of Opportunities, World of Danger and Difference

Tues., Apr. 17: Free Trade Revolutions
Thurs., Apr. 19: America Besieged

READING: Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, chapters 1, 3, 6, 7 (only through page 117), 12 (only through page 261), 13-14, 16-18.

Week 14: Tangled Webs

Tues., Apr. 24: Global Futures
Final paper proposal due by the beginning of lecture.

Thurs., Apr. 26: TBD

READING and VIEWING:
** University of Missouri-Columbia Study Abroad Handbook (2005)
Syriana (2005)

Week 15: The Global Village

Tues., May 1: Conclusions

**Barack Obama, State of the Union (2011)

Tue., May 8: Final Paper due by noon to my box in the history department office, 3rd floor, 226 Bay State Road.
5-Page Essay Questions: For your first essay, you can choose to submit on February 23 or March 6. Your second essay is due April 10. All essays are due at the beginning of lecture on the date indicated. No personal extensions will be granted, and late papers will be docked one-third a grade for each 24 hours late.

First Essay, due February 23 (pick one):

1) To what extent and how specifically did being “American” matter to people in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? To what extent and in what specific ways were some drawn more forcefully to other kinds of allegiances?

2) Analyze the tension between many white Americans’ sense of superiority over “inferior” races and their simultaneous fears about their own civilization’s inferiority to that of Europe. How did Americans grapple with this tension and express these ideas?

Or due March 6 (pick one):

3) What difference have Americans’ experiences abroad made? How has travel and life abroad changed or not changed the way certain Americans have thought about themselves and their surroundings?

4) Have men and women thought differently about their relationship to international issues? Have they faced different constraints on their movement, or had different kinds of experiences abroad in the early twentieth century?

Second Essay, due April 10 (pick one): (Note: You must cover material for weeks 8-12):

1) How important have transnational connections been for social movements’ momentum and effectiveness? How specifically have Americans forged ties abroad and to what purpose, as they have fought for new political rights and social freedoms?

2) How do the perspectives of non-Americans enrich or complicate the study of American history? What, if anything, is gained by viewing the United States from the outside in?

3) Since the late nineteenth century, disagreements between radicals and liberals in the United States have often hinged on differing views of Americans’ role in the world. Assess the degree to which this statement is accurate.

4) What was Henry Luce arguing in “The American Century,” and why did Max Lerner disagree with it in the New Republic? What would the creators of Casablanca and the authors Graham Greene and Ariel Dorfman have thought about this debate between Luce and Lerner?
The Final Essay Assignment is an 8-10 page paper on a problem and primary source of your choice, set in the context of American history as you have come to understand it in the readings, lectures, and discussions of this course.

The type of primary source can be anything—a novel, film, manifesto, piece of artwork, even an amusement park ride. But it should illuminate in some way Americans’ relationships to the broader world during the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries, and it should be something you have not written about for another course. For example, you might choose a story about Americans abroad or the writings of someone whose life defies clear national affiliations. You could focus on the work of an outsider, critiquing American politics or culture, or the commentary of an observant visitor to the United States. You might pick a political speech, grappling with questions about the place of the United States in the world, or you could analyze an object of popular culture that captures how Americans have imagined places and people beyond U.S. borders.

Whatever you choose, you must be able to relate it to some of the themes of the course and make an argument about its significance to the study of modern American history. To make sure you are on the right track, complete the final paper proposal and have it approved by April 24th at the latest. Please come see me if you would like help selecting a source or advice about the feasibility of your argument.

The result should not be a research paper, but a thoughtful, analytical essay. Do not simply summarize the source or relate what others have said about it. You should read it with your own eyes, using the historical tools and references from the course—not through the eyes of other scholars or internet reporters.

Your goal in this paper is twofold:

First, you should provide a close analysis of your source. Pick the source apart. Analyze its overt and implied messages, and determine how it communicates those messages. Read it with and against the grain. What does the author want you to believe? Are there any tensions or alternative interpretations that work against the source’s stated purposes? The result should be a richly textured essay that demonstrates how you have thought in depth about the different facets of your source.

Second, you must place your source in a meaningful historical context. How does it enrich our understanding or shift our framework for thinking about American history? How does it relate to other things you have seen and read this semester? If your source had been assigned, what would we have talked about in lecture that week? How does it challenge, complicate, or extend what you already know from other lectures, readings, and discussions?

The paper is due on Tuesday, May 8 by noon to my box in the History Department office on the third floor of 226 Bay State Road. Good luck, and have fun!
Grading and Expectations for the Essays:

All essays for this course should draw specifically on both the assigned readings and relevant lecture material. Your goal is not simply to summarize and regurgitate the ideas of others, but rather to craft an original and contentious argument that responds to the essay questions you choose. You should support your argument with detailed evidence and analysis that is sustained throughout the entire essay in a clear and cogent manner. Your argument should be a historical one; your job is to make claims about what Americans thought at the time under consideration, NOT what you think about certain beliefs or policies. Try to imagine and uncover how Americans viewed themselves and their world in the past, and consider the historical conditions that led them to think in particular ways at particular moments in time.

Note: You should not use any outside sources for the essay and each paper should incorporate at least three course readings.

Essays will be evaluated according to the following criteria:
- **An “A” range essay** is both ambitious and successful. It presents a perceptive and independent argument backed up by well-chosen evidence, a creative and compelling use of sources, and sensitivity to historical context. It demonstrates that the writer has grappled seriously with the issues of the course, has done a close, critical reading of the texts, and has synthesized the readings and lectures.
- **A “B” range essay** is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. It may demonstrate many of the aspects of A-level work, but falls short in organization and clarity, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the depth of source analysis. It demonstrates a command of course material and an understanding of historical context and contains flashes of insight, but lacks consistency or depth in the argument.
- **A “C” range essay** has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument, or seems to lack a central argument entirely. Oftentimes, C-range papers offer little more than a summary of information covered in the course, or they might prove insensitive to historical context, contain factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or insufficient evidence.
- **A “D” essay**, in addition to displaying the shortcomings of a C-range paper, also fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment. A D essay suggests seriously insufficient command of the course material.
- **An “F” essay** falls short in the manner of a “D” essay. It is also often significantly shorter than the assigned length, does not demonstrate even a glint of potentially original thought, and suggests a lack of effort or no competence in the material at hand.

All essays should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins and a reasonable font. For a detailed description of the proper format for historical essays and other things to keep in mind, students should consult the **BU History Department Writing Guide** at the following website: http://www.bu.edu/history/writing_guide.html