HIS 243 The United States from 1815 to 1877

Fall 2005
Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:20-3:30, Comenius 305

Instructor: James Paxton
Office: Comenius 306
Office Hours: Wednesday 10:00-12:00, 1:30-2:30; Thursday 3:30-4:30; and by appointment
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Course Description

This course spans the decades of national expansion, economic growth, and nation building between the end of the War of 1812 and the end of the Civil War. Some historians have characterized the period as “The Era of the Common Man,” but it was also a time of sectional tension, alienation, inequality, and hardening race relations. Neither comprehensive nor chronological, this course will explore these themes by focusing on how Americans promoted, accommodated, directed, and resisted four major and interrelated “revolutions” that shaped mid-nineteenth-century American society: the market revolution, westward expansion and the rise of Jacksonian democracy, religious revivals and reform movements, and sectional politics. Americans responded to these developments in variety of ways that included intellectual radicalism and reactionary defence of the old ways, and westward migration. These developments spawned intellectual radicalism, the spread of slavery, and westward migration that exacerbated tensions between North and South. By examining the mid-nineteenth-century “revolutions” in some detail, students will be able to decide for themselves why Americans went to war with each other in 1861.

Course Objectives

Students will

- become familiar with the main events and themes in American history from the end of the War of 1812 until 1877.
- become familiar with some of the major schools of thought and historiographical debates that have shaped historians’ understanding of the United States in the Jacksonian and Antebellum periods.
- understand the ways in which historians have “constructed” the past.
- learn to critically evaluate secondary sources.
- further develop clear and effective oral and written communications skills.
Class Organization

The class will consist of one lecture and one seminar each week. Lectures provide the background and context for seminar discussions and essays. The seminars will focus on student-led discussions of the readings.

Required Texts


Required texts are available in the Moravian College bookstore. Additional readings will be placed on reserve in Reeves Library.

Attendance

Attendance is the student’s responsibility. While there is no formal penalty for missing classes, students are strongly encouraged to attend all meetings. Success in the course depends upon comprehension of the lecture material, completing assigned reading, and participation in discussions. Lateness will not be tolerated.

Please turn off or mute all electronic devices in the classroom.

Grade Distribution

Review 1  15%
Review 2  15%
Review 3  15%
Mid-Term  15%
Participation  20%
Final Exam  20%

The participation grade is based on the quality and quantity of the student’s participation. It is not an attendance grade.

Assignments

During the course students will write three critical book reviews. Papers should be three to four pages in length and typewritten with one-inch margins and. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on which the book is discussed. Because the essays form the basis
of seminar discussion, late papers will not be accepted without a doctor’s note. Computer and printing problems are not acceptable reasons for lateness.

Essay 1 due September 22.
Essay 2 due November 3.
Essay 3 due December 8.

**Academic Dishonesty**

According to the Moravian College Student Handbook, the following constitutes plagiarism: “as the use, deliberate or not, of any outside source without proper acknowledgment.” Plagiarism will result in the offender receiving zero in the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for fuller details.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with physical, learning, or medical disabilities should speak to me and contact Laurie Roth, Director of the Learning Center, to arrange the appropriate accommodations. Please make these arrangements in the first weeks of the semester.

**Class Schedule**

**Introduction**

**Week 1**

Aug. 30 – Introduction
No Reading

Sept. 1 – Preparing for Seminars and Writing Essays

**1. Economic Revolutions**

**Week 2**

Sept. 6 – Lecture – The Transportation and Market Revolutions

Sept. 8 – Seminar – The Market in Early America
How did Americans respond to the Market Revolution?

**Week 3**

Sept. 13 – Lecture – Changing Economic and Social Order
Sept. 15 – Seminar – Frontier Settlement
Is the “frontier” a useful concept in American history?

II. Expansion and the Democratic Revolution

Week 4
Sept. 20 – Lecture – The Age of Jackson, Part One

Sept. 22 – Seminar – Essay Due - Farm, Shop, Landing

Week 5
Sept. 27 – Lecture – The Age of Jackson, Part Two

Sept. 29 – Seminar – Indian Removal
Why were Native Americans removed? Was removal tantamount to ethnic cleansing?

Week 6
Oct. 4 – Lecture – The Second American Party System

Oct. 6 – Seminar – Expansion and Frontier Settlement
How would you characterize the Age of Jackson?
Week 7
Oct. 11 – Fall Recess – No Class

Oct. 13 – Mid Term Exam

III. Religion and Reform

Week 8
Oct. 18 – Lecture – The Second Great Awakening and Abolition

Oct. 20 – Seminar – The Second Great Awakening

Week 9
Oct. 25 – Lecture – Reform and the Women’s Rights Movement

Oct. 27 – Seminar – Nineteenth Century Women
Theda Perdue, “Southern Indians and the Cult of True Womanhood,” The Web of Southern Social Relations (1985),
How did gender, race, and class shape definitions of “woman” in nineteenth-century America? Of race, class, and gender, which was most important to the self-identity of women in nineteenth-century America?

IV. Sectionalism and Disunion

Week 10
Nov. 1 – Lecture – The South and Slavery

Nov. 3 – Seminar – Kingdom of Matthias Essay Due
How did Americans adapt to the Great Awakening?

Week 11
Nov. 8 – Lecture – Manifest Destiny, Mexican War, Compromise of 1850
Nov. 10 – Seminar – Slavery
Charles Joyner, “History as Ritual: Rites of Power and Resistance on the Slave
Were American slaves African, American, or something else?

**Week 12**
Nov. 15 – Lecture – Collapse of the Second Party System, 1850-1856
Nov. 17 – No Class – Instructor Away

**Week 13**
Nov. 22 – Seminar – Compromise of 1850
How would you settle the issue of slavery?

Nov. 24 **Thanksgiving – No Class**

**Week 14**
Nov. 29 – Lecture – The Rise of the Republican Party
Dec. 1 – Seminar – The Coming of the Civil War
Was the Civil War inevitable?

**Week 15**
Dec. 6 – Lecture – Secession and War
Dec. 8 – **Seminar – What They Fought For – Essay Due**
Why did Americans fight in the American Civil War?

The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus with appropriate notification.