

History 244: The United States in World War II
T/TH 3:00-4:20
Fall 2015

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Office Hours:
Mondays, 1:30 pm-3:00 pm
Tuesdays, 10:00 am-12:00 pm
Wednesdays, 1:30 pm-3:00 pm

In the United States, World War II is often called “The Good War,” with those who fought it considered “the greatest generation.” One of the most important events in twentieth-century American history, the war had a profound effect on America’s government, its culture, its economy, and its position in the world. In this course, we will explore how the war changed the United States, and what this transformational event demonstrates about enduring structures of American politics, ideology, and culture. Over the course of the semester, students will be asked to engage with a range of primary sources (including political tracts, posters, films, letters, cartoons, and oral histories), as well as some of the major historical debates about the war: Did the United States do all it could to help European Jews escape the Holocaust? Why were Japanese-Americans interned? Was the American decision to use atomic bombs in Japan justified? The class will pay particular attention to how the war affected Americans of many different identities and backgrounds with a focus on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and age. In addition to our regular class meetings, there will be three film screenings outside of class.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Robert Abzug, ed., America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945: A Brief Documentary History (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999)

Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community (University of North Carolina Press, 1996)

Richard Overy, Why the Allies Won (W.W. Norton, 1995)

E.B. Sledge, With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa (Oxford University Press, 1990)

James Sparrow, Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Yoshiko Uchida, Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family (University of Washington Press, 1982)

J. Samuel Walker, Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (University of North Carolina Press, 1997)

Books are available at the Oberlin bookstore and are on reserve at Mudd. Abiding Courage and Prompt and Utter Destruction are also available in e-book form through the library. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus are available on the course blackboard site under the “Course Readings” heading.



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REQUIRED FILMS: As a class, we will be screening the following three required films outside of regularly scheduled class times:

Bataan (1943)
The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter (1971)
Best Years of Our Lives (1946)

Screening times TBA. The films are also on reserve at the library for those who cannot make the arranged screening time.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grades for History 244 will be based on two individual papers, a group final project, a take-home final exam, and class participation:

Paper #1: Primary Source Analysis (3 pages):	15%
Paper #2: Atomic Bomb Memo (4 pages)	20%
Group Exhibit Project:	25%
Take-Home Final Exam:	25%
Attendance/Participation/Postings:	15%

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (15%): Your active involvement with the class is extremely important. Attendance, reading, and participation are critical to your learning and your success in History 244. Regular class attendance is expected. More than three unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your final grade. It is also vital that you keep up with the reading. This course has an average of approximately 150-200 pages of reading a week (and occasionally more). You should come to every class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that day on the syllabus. I will always ask about the readings during class. If you have trouble speaking in class, please come see me during my office hours so we can develop strategies to help you become a more active participant in class discussion.

Five sessions during the semester are designated specifically as “Discussion Sessions” (Sept. 10, Oct. 8, Oct. 29, Nov. 12 and Nov. 24). These five classes will be devoted primarily to talking about the readings or films. For some of the sessions, the class may be split in half with each group attending for 40 minutes; for others, we will spend part of the time in small-group conversations.

Blackboard postings: There is a question/prompt on the syllabus for each of the five discussion sessions. You are required to write and post responses to the blackboard site for your choice of four of the five discussion sessions. Your response should address the discussion question posed in the syllabus and must be posted by 9:00 am on the day of the discussion in order to receive credit. Postings will be factored into your participation grade.

PAPER #1—DUE THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24 (15%): For this 3-page paper you will do a close reading of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Fireside Chat of February 3, 1942.

PAPER #2—DUE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15 (20%): For this assignment, you will take on a persona of your choice and write a memo of approximately four pages advising Harry Truman on whether and how he should use the atomic bomb based on that perspective.

GROUP EXHIBIT PROJECT—DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10 (25%): Working in groups of four, you will curate an online exhibit on some topic related to the history of the US in World War II. You will work on this project throughout the semester. Each group will be required to create an online exhibit that features a minimum of *eight* different objects. Preparation for the assignment will include a session at the library to learn about the exhibit program, Omeka, as well as a visit to the Allen Art Museum to learn more about curating an exhibit. Groups will present their exhibits to the class during our last class meeting. Each group will be required to meet with me and with library Omeka specialists at least once outside of class time during the second half of the semester. Full details are available on the blackboard site, but here are some of the preliminary deadlines associated with the project:

September 13: Statement of your research interests due; these will be used to assign groups.

October 6: Omeka Training Session; bring info about 1 item that might be in your exhibit

November 8: Metadata Entries Due (4 per person in your group)

November 15: Exhibit Collections and Preliminary Draft Exhibit Text Due

TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM—DUE BY 9:00 PM ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19 (25%):

There will be a take-home final exam that will be handed out at the last class session and is due back at the end of the time of our regularly scheduled exam, 9:00 pm on Dec. 19th. The exam will ask you to bring together course readings and lectures to respond to a question in an essay of 6-8 pages.

COURSE POLICIES

Late and Incomplete Policy: Assignments must be submitted on time to receive full credit. If an assignment is due at the beginning of class, it must be turned in at the start of class to count as on time. An assignment that is handed in late will be marked down 3 points for every 24 hours it is late. Requests for extensions must take place before the assignment is due. I will gladly grant extensions in cases of illness or family emergencies, but not because you have another paper due on the same day. You must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

Classroom Conduct: Please come to class on time, and once you're here, plan on staying for the full class session. I consider it disrespectful to me and rude to the rest of the class when a student walks out once class has started and walks back in a few minutes later. You are welcome to take notes on a laptop during class, but please do not distract other students by doing email, facebook, etc.

Oberlin Honor Code: All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code, which means that it must be your own. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with immediately according to the letter of college policy. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, books, the media, etc.). If you have questions about citations, academic honesty, or the acceptability of collaborations, please see me. You should include the honor code on all the written work you hand in for this class. The Honor Code reads: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment."

Educational Access: I am committed to designing a course in which all students can learn and to creating inclusive learning environments. If any aspects of the instruction or design of the course result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation, please let me know. If you receive any specific accommodations, please provide documentation from Disability Service in Peters G-27/G-28.

Extra Help: My door is open if you need help or just want to discuss the reading or other topics of interest to you. Drop in to my office hours anytime or email to schedule a specific appointment. I am happy to provide feedback on drafts if get draft writings (partial or full) to me at least **four days** before the paper is due so that I have time to give you feedback.

COURSE SCHEDULE

September 1: Introduction

PART I: THE ROAD TO WAR

September 3: Background to War

Secondary: Richard Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapter 1, pp. 1-24

September 8: The U.S. Response in the 30s

Primary: Neutrality Acts, 1935-1939*
Franklin Roosevelt's "Quarantine Speech" (1937) and
Lend-Lease Proposals (1940)*
A Catalog of Political Cartoons by Dr. Seuss* (*browse
cartoons from between Jan-Nov 1941*)



September 10: The Great Debate over the Lend/Lease Policy (Discussion Session #1)

For this class session, we will stage a debate (in two consecutive 40-minute sessions) between students representing the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies and those representing the America First Committee. Although I have divided the readings for the two groups, I highly recommend you do all the readings.

Readings for students assigned to the "America First" group:

"Defend America First: A Compilation of Five Anti-War Addresses Delivered on Behalf of the America First Committee"*

Laura McEnaney, "He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, no. 1: 47-57*

Readings for students assigned to the "Committee to Defend America":

Franklin Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, December 29, 1940*

Senator James Byrne, Address on January 17, 1941*

Senator Tom Connally, Address on February 17, 1941*

Adlai Stevenson, response in debate with America First representative, Oct. 19, 1941*

Blackboard Post: How would you answer critics that your position is unpatriotic? Why is your position best for the future of the United States?

Sunday, September 13: Post a statement outlining what topics you might like to work on for the group project to the blackboard site by 10:00 pm

September 15: Pearl Harbor and American Entry into World War II

Primary: Sec. of State Cordell Hull's proposal to Japan and Japanese response, Nov. 26, 1941*
Selection of press reports from December 7: The First Thirty Hours*
President Roosevelt's Declaration of War, December 8, 1941*

Secondary: Stephen Ambrose, "Just Dumb Luck: U.S. Entry Into World War II"*

PART II: MOBILIZING FOR AND FIGHTING THE WAR

September 17: Mobilizing a Nation for War

Secondary: David Brinkley, Washington Goes to War (Ballantine, 1988), Chapt. 5, pp. 104-136*
James Sparrow, Warfare State, Chapter 1, pp. 19-47
Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapter 6, pp. 180-207

September 22: Framing and Selling the War

Primary: Browse U.S. WWII propaganda posters at the Northwestern University Library WWII Poster Collection, <https://images.northwestern.edu/catalog> *

Secondary: Robert Westbrook, “I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl that Married Henry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in WWII,” American Quarterly (December 1990): 587-614*
James Sparrow, Warfare State, Chapters 2 and 4, pp. 48-77, 119-159

September 24: Fighting the War, 1941-1942 (First Paper Due in Class)

Primary: Franklin Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, February 3, 1942*

Secondary: Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapter 2, pp. 25-62 (Chapter 8, pp. 245-281 optional)
John Dower, “Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures: World War II in Asia,” in The War in American Culture, 169-201*

September 29: Fighting the War, 1942-1943

Primary: A Mother Questions and General Arnold’s Staff defends strategic bombing, 1943*

Secondary: Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapters 4 and 7, pp. 101-133, 208-244
Michael Sherry, “Strategic Bombing as Technological Fanaticism, excerpted in Major Problems in the History of World War II, 149-155*

October 1: Fighting the War, 1944-1945

Primary: D-Day oral histories*

Secondary: Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chpt. 5, 134-179

October 6: Library Visit—Introduction to Omeka



October 8: The Experience of Combat (Discussion Session #2)

Primary: E.B Sledge, With the Old Breed (entire)
Bataan (1944)—Screening time and place TBD

Blackboard Post: In what ways does Sledge’s description of the combat experience resonate with or differ from the way you have thought about WWII? What might Sledge have thought of *Bataan*?

October 13: The Atomic Bomb

Secondary: J. Samuel Walker, Prompt and Utter Destruction (entire)

October 15: Museum Visit (Paper #2 Due)

October 20-22: Fall Break

October 27: Fighting in a Segregated Army

Primary: “The Negro Soldier” (1944): *Watch this 40-minute propaganda film before class**
Oral Histories from We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans from World War II to the War In Iraq, 5-52*

October 29: The US Responds to the Holocaust (Discussion Session #3)

Primary: Abzug, America Views the Holocaust, Read all introductory sections and your choice of at least 10 documents from each of the 3 sections

Secondary: David Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945 (New York: The New Press, 1985), xiii-15*
William J. Vanden Heuvel, “The Successes of American Rescue and the Limits of the Possible,” in Major Problems in the History of World War II, 349-357*
Optional: Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapter 9, pp. 282-313

Blackboard Post: Given on an analysis of the primary documents you read, do you think Wyman or Vanden Heuvel offers a better argument about the US response to the Holocaust?

PART III: THE HOMEFRONT

November 3: Japanese Internment and Civil Liberties during WWII

Primary: Yoshiko Uchida, Desert Exile (entire)
“How to Tell Japs from the Chinese,” *Life Magazine*, December 22, 1941*
Milton Eisenhower Justifies the Evacuation (1942)*
Korematsu v. United States decision, 1942*

November 5: Wartime Work and Migrations

Secondary: Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, Abiding Courage (entire)
James Sparrow, Warfare State, Chapter 5, pp. 160-200

November 8: Group Project—Metadata Entries due by 10:00pm on Sunday, Nov. 8

November 10: Race Wars at Home

Primary: Call to March on Washington, 1941*
Carey McWilliams, "The Zoot Suit Riots," *The New Republic*, June 21, 1943, p. 18-20*

Secondary: Robin Kelley, "Congested Terrain: Resistance on Public Transportation" in Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working, pp. 55-76*
James Sparrow, Warfare State, Chapter 3, pp. 78-112

November 12: The Image and Reality of Women on the Homefront (Discussion Session #4)

Primary: Ann Sothern, "What Kind of Woman Will Your Man Come Home To?," November 1944*
"Women of WWII: Photos of Army WACS"*

Secondary: Elaine May, "Rosie the Riveter Gets Married" in The War in American Culture, 128-143*
Melissa Dabakis, "Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood," 182-204*

Film: *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (Screening time TBD)

Blackboard Post: Make an argument about the impact of the war on American women based on the readings and film for today's class.



November 15: Exhibit Collections and Preliminary Exhibit Text due

November 17: Family and Childhood in Wartime

Primary: "As the Twig is Bent," 1943 Aetna Life film on juvenile delinquency*

Secondary: William Tuttle, "Working Mothers and Latchkey Children" and "School-Age Children Fight the War" in Daddy's Gone to War, pp. 69-90, 112-133*

November 19: Love, Sex, and War

Secondary: Allan Berube, "Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay GIs in World War II" in Hidden from History, 383-394*
Marilyn Hegarty, "A Buffer of Whores?: Military and Social Ambivalence about Sexuality and Gender" in Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackis, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II, pp. 85-109*
Renee Romano, "The Unintended Consequences of War" in Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America, pp. 12-43*

PART IV: THE LEGACIES OF WAR

November 24: Demobilization and the GI Bill (Discussion Session #5)

Primary: *Best Years of Our Lives (1946)*—Screening time and place TBA

Secondary: Margot Canaday, “Building a Straight State: Sexuality and Social Citizenship under the GI Bill,” *Journal of American History* 90 (Dec. 2003): 935-957*
Laura McEnaney, “Nightmares on Elm Street: Demobilizing in Chicago, 1945-1953,” *Journal of American History* 92 (March 2006): 1265-1291*

Blackboard Post: *What were people’s fears or concerns about soldiers coming home after the war? How does Best Years of Our Lives suggest that the problems of reconversion and demobilization can be resolved? How do the solutions in the film compare to those in the readings?*

November 26: NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1: Domestic Legacies of World War II

Secondary: James Sparrow, *Warfare State*, conclusion, pp. 242-260
Gordon Wright, “Science Revolutionizes Warfare” in *Major Problems in the History of World War II*, 311-320*

December 3: The US and the Global Legacies of World War II

Primary: Henry Luce, excerpts from “The American Century,” *Life Magazine*, March 17, 1941*

Secondary: David Kennedy, “The Origins and Uses of American Hyperpower” in *Short American Century: A Postmortem* (2012), pp. 15-37*
Walter LaFeber, “Illusions of an American Century,” in *Short American Century*, pp. 158-186*

December 8: World War II in Historical Memory

Primary: Visit the Oberlin WWII Memorial (next to Finney) before class
WWII Memorial Website (linked on blackboard under “WWII Resources”)
Read the “Memorial Design” and “Inscription” fact sheets. Look at photos of the memorial on the website

Secondary: Michael Adams, “Mythmaking and the War” in *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 1-19*

December 10: Group Presentations of Online Exhibits (class may run late)

December 19: Upload Take-Home Final Exam to Blackboard by 9:00 pm