

United States History

Course Syllabus

2011-2012 School Year

Grades 11 and 12

Instructor: Coart Ramey



Goals

The student will be able to . . .

1. Better explain how the current USA came to be.
2. Weigh the reliability of primary and secondary sources of history.
3. Write argumentative research papers on moral questions from US history.
4. Identify key people, events, and concepts from US History
5. Discuss the morality of actions taken by the US government from the Revolution forward.
6. Evaluate major cultural changes in the history of the US.

Overview by unit

A unit is about six weeks long. There are three units each semester. There will be cumulative quarterly exams over all material covered to that point, but there will be separate tests at the middle and end of each unit.

These units will be presented out of their historical order. The course begins with the most recent history because it is the most obviously relevant. In learning history, it is most natural first to see how things are, and then to ask why they came to be. Therefore, each succeeding unit goes back in time to explain how earlier movements produced the world that followed.

First Unit

America and the Middle East (1990 to 2010)

Soon after the long and dangerous Cold War ended in victory in 1989, America entered into conflict with the Middle Eastern nation of Iraq, formerly an ally against Shiite Iran. That limited war was never truly ended. America led worldwide sanctions against Iraq, culminating in an invasion in 2003.

In the meantime, an attack by terrorists of the Al-Qaeda network destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in 2001, leading to an American-led invasion of Afghanistan.

In the background to these troubles, the Israeli-Palestine conflict continues unabated, often putting America into the place of supporting oppressors instead of freedom fighters. Only this year mass widespread popular uprisings have toppled a number of repressive regimes and led to violence in others.

How have all these problems affected the United States as a whole? What were the lives of individual American soldiers and their families like? And how will this shape the world to come?

Second Unit

Why the Counterculture movement changed America (1960 to 1980)

As the global conflict with Communism, the Cold War, intensified with advent of intercontinental nuclear missiles and worldwide economic connections, the US entered a dramatic time of social change. The Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement were only parts of the whole.

Popular images of hippies and flower children aside, what really changed about America during the infamous 1960's? Why did the changes happen then, not sooner or later?

Third Unit

How the World Wars made America a leader (1914 to 1945)

The wars against the Central Powers and the Axis Powers stand out in the American mind as a time when good and evil were as clear as the objectives for victory. The moral questions were in fact more complicated than that. Moreover, the consequences of the World Wars led to many new challenges that a newly ascendant America had to cope with, not always successfully. In the pre-nuclear global wars, we see the end of a long period of European dominance and the beginning of short but critical time of American world leadership.

Fourth Unit

How the origins of America set it on course for the Civil War (1607 to 1830)

At the beginning of the second semester, we go back to the founding of the nation to understand the first half of US history. The Pilgrims and George Washington are familiar to most Americans, but the reality and complexity of Colonial and Early America surprises us.

From the beginning, the USA *were* essentially sovereign states with diverse backgrounds, agendas, and ideals. Much of what is good and bad throughout our history was apparent in the early days, from our instinct to moderate and innovate to our brutal treatment of Native Americans and unwelcome minorities.

The worst failure led to the single most important event in the story of the United States: the Civil War. In exploring what caused the Civil War, we can see an America that was very different from today.

Fifth Unit

How the Civil War shaped America (1830 to 1865)

Continuing the story of what was both our greatest failure and our true beginning, we look at the immediate social, political, and economic causes of the Civil War and then its aftermath. From the book *America Aflame* we will consider to what extent evangelical Christians, northern and southern, bear responsibility for the catastrophe. We will examine the realities of slavery before the war and the history of racism afterward. We will look at how the war changed the nature of American government. We will spend plenty of time on the thorny moral questions surrounding the war, including the question of what is Constitutional, when force is justified, and how should Christians get involved in the problems of society.

Sixth Unit

How outstanding individuals have shaped America for better and worse (1776 to 2001)

This final unit goes back through all of US history from the standpoint of famous people. Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, Sacagawea, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, John D Rockefeller, Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Edison, Eleanor Roosevelt, George Marshall, Joseph McCarthy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Gates, Hillary Clinton, and many more both made and revealed America along the way.

Research Papers

Students will complete four research papers, one each quarter. Topics will be individual, agreed upon by the student and teacher together. I encourage students to pick topics that they like but don't know much about. Each topic must come from the material covered in the two units that overlap the quarter in which it is due.

Each student will write their papers as a process. They will read broadly in different media, use library resources, and take systematic notes. Students must develop a personal system for research writing that they can use in post-high school education. Papers will be due in several drafts with progressive revisions.

Students will read each others' writing throughout the process. I want drafts posted online. We will settle where and how as we go, but they will provide feedback to each other during the process of each paper. Students should see each paper as a chance to master a topic and teach it to their classmates. Research papers count for about one quarter of a student's grade.

Unit Projects

For each of the six units, students will complete a small unique project. Some of these will be individual and some will be group products. Students will help choose these projects based on their interests, but must use a variety of forms and tools.

These projects must have a rhetorical thrust with both informative and persuasive elements. By this students learn the content of history better along with skills useful to business and other professions.

For example, a student's first unit project could be a display board on the Wounded Warrior project that seeks to restore badly injured military personnel physically and psychologically. For the second, the student might make a commercial trailer for a (pretend) documentary on the reality behind Haight-Asbury Streets in San Francisco. Projects count for about a quarter of a student's grade.