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 both 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 asked to engage with many different kinds of primary sources (including political tracts, posters, films, letters, cartoons, and oral histories). They will also be introduced to 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, either militarily or morally? We will also consider the role that World War II plays in contemporary political discourse in the United States.

A blackboard site has been created for this course. On the site, you will find the syllabus, the course readings, assignments as they are handed out, copies of any PowerPoint presentations from the class, and links to interesting web sites on the United States in World War II.

Besides our regular class meetings, there will be three required film screenings outside of class, either on Sunday late afternoons/early evenings or Monday nights (we will vote on the best time for film viewing as a class).

COURSE READINGS:
The following books are available at the Oberlin bookstore and are on reserve at Mudd.

Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch, ed., The War in American Culture
Marilyn Johnson, The Second Gold Rush
Stoler and Gustafson, ed., Major Problems in the History of World War II
E.B. Sledge, With the Old Breed
J. Samuel Walker, Prompt and Utter Destruction

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus are available on the course blackboard site under the “Course Readings” heading. I highly recommend that
you print out the online readings and bring them with you to class. Although the printing will be a slight expense, it is less than buying a course reader.

REQUIRED FILMS: As a class, we will be watching three films outside of regularly scheduled class times:

- Screening, March 1 or 2: Bataan (1944)
- Screening, March 16 or 17: The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter
- Screening, April 19 or 20: Best Years of Our Lives (1946)

If anyone is interested in screening more WWII era films together as a group, please see me. If there is enough interest, we can arrange for a film series to take place at my house over the course of the semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grades in the History 244 will be based on class participation, three papers (a 3-page paper, a 5-page paper, and an 8-page paper), and a take-home final exam.

1) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (20%): Discussion will be a central part of this course. Students will be expected to participate regularly in class. It is crucial that you keep up with the course reading and come to class prepared to discuss the readings listed for each class session. If you are shy about speaking in class, please see me to discuss strategies to make participation easier. Attendance and class participation will count for 20% of your overall course grade.

2) PAPER #1—DUE FEBRUARY 23RD (15%): A 3-page analysis of a President Roosevelt’s Address to the Nation of February 23, 1942 (one of his fireside chats) will be due by noon on Monday, February 23rd. Electronic versions of your paper should be uploaded to the Assignment Section of the blackboard, while a hard copy should be turned in at the History Department office. Further details will be made handed out in class and made available via the course blackboard.

3) PAPER #2—DUE APRIL 9TH (20%): A 5-page paper comparing two different historical interpretations of America’s response to the Holocaust will be due on April 9th. Details will be handed out in class and made available via the course blackboard.

4) PAPER #3—DUE MAY 5TH; PROPOSAL DUE MARCH 20TH (25%): An 8-page paper that proposes the topic for a new lecture for inclusion in the course will be due on May 5th. The guidelines for this assignment will be explained in more detail in class; students are required to turn in a description of their topic by March 20th.

5) TAKE-HOME FINAL—DUE MAY 15TH (20%): A take-home final will be handed out in class on May 7th and will be due back by noon on Friday, May 15th.
COURSE POLICIES

Late Papers:
Please note that in order to be fair to everyone, all work must be turned in on time. Late papers will be downgraded 1/3 grade for the first day they are late and an additional full letter grade for each additional day. Extensions will be given only for medical reasons or family emergencies. Students must ask about extensions before the paper is due.

Oberlin Honor Code:
All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with immediately according to the letter of college policy. Plagiarism is passing the work of others off as your own work. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, to books, to the media). If you have questions about how to footnote, just ask!

General Courtesy:
Please come to class on time, and once you’re here, plan on staying for the full class session. If you must arrive late or leave early, please let me know ahead of time. Be sure to TURN OFF your cell phone before class starts.

COURSE SCHEDULE

February 3: Introduction: Before the War

PART I: THE ROAD TO WAR

February 5: The Road to War I: Europe (35 pages)

Brinkley, Washington Goes to War, Chapters 2, pp. 24-49*

Documents in Major Problems, 6-16

February 10: The Road to War II: Asia (21 pages)

Hull Note and Japanese Reply, Major Problems, 17-21

Russert, “An Unnecessary and Avoidable War,” Major Problems, 23-32

Weinberg, “A Necessary and Unavoidable War, Major Problems, 33-40

February 12: Pearl Harbor and American Entry into World War II (38 pages)

Franklin Roosevelt, “Day of Infamy” Speech, Major Problems, 22-23

Selection of press reports from December 7: The First Thirty Hours*
PART II: MOBILIZING FOR AND FIGHTING THE WAR

February 17: *Mobilizing a Government and the Military for War* (83 pages)

Geoffrey Perret, *There’s a War To Be Won*, pp. 27-46*

Brinkley, *Washington Goes to War*, Chapters 3, 5, pp. 50-82, 104-136*

February 19: *Framing and Selling the War* (51 pages)


Monday, February 23: FIRST PAPER DUE BY NOON

February 24: *The War in Europe* (33 pages, plus Sledge reading)

Documents in *Major Problems*, 73-82, 84-94, 111-115, 118-121

Richard Overy, “The Naval and Air Campaigns as Critical to Allied Victory” in *Major Problems*, 98-105

Start reading Sledge, *With the Old Breed*

February 26: *The War in the Pacific* (36 pages, plus continue Sledge)

John Dower, “Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures: World War II in Asia” in *War in American Culture*, 169-201

Documents in *Major Problems*, 174-178

Continue reading Sledge, *With the Old Breed*

March 1 or 2: Screening of *Bataan* (Specific Time and Place TBA)

March 3: *The Experience of Combat--Class Discussion* (329 pages)

E.B Sledge, *With the Old Breed* (entire)

March 5: *Fighting in a Segregated Army* (61 pages)

*Letters from African American Soldiers* 

Oral Histories from *We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans from World War II to the War In Iraq*, 5-52

March 10: *The Atomic Bomb* (110 pages)

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

**PART III: THE HOMEFRONT**

March 12: *Laboring and Producing for War* (82 pages)


Browse posters in the National Museum for American History site, "*Produce for Victory,* Posters from the Homefront" (http://americanhistory.si.edu/victory/)

March 15 or 16: Screening of “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter” (Specific Time and Place TBA)

March 17: *The Image and Reality of Women on the Homefront* (40 pages)

Elaine Tyler May, “Rosie the Riveter Gets Married” in *War in American Culture*, 128-143


“What Kind of Woman Will Your Man Come Home To?” in *Major Problems*, 256-258

March 19: *Family Life During Wartime* (87 pages)

Perry Duis, “No Time for Privacy: World War II and Chicago’s Families” in *War in American Culture*, 17-45


March 20: *Final Paper Proposal due by Noon—Upload to Assignment Section of Blackboard*

**SPRING BREAK (Continue reading Johnson, The Second Gold Rush)**
March 31: Discussion—Urbanization, Migration and Regional Development—(98 pages)

  Marilynn Johnson, The Second Gold Rush, entire

April 2: Race Relations in a Time of War

  “A Call to March on Washington, 1941” in Major Problems, 213-215

  Charles Wesley, “The Negro Has Always Wanted the Four Freedoms” from What the Negro Wants*


  Edward Escobar, “Zoot-Suiters and Cops: Chicano Youth and the Los Angeles Police Department during World War II” in War in American Culture, 284-309

April 7: Japanese Internment (45 pages)

  Alice Yang Murray, "The Internment of Japanese Americans," in What did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?, 3-26*

  Oral histories of Mary Tsukamoto and Yuri Tateishi in John Tateishi, ed., And Justice for All 3-15, 23-26*

  Mikiso Hane Remembers his Internment,” Major Problems, 227-230

  Milton Eisenhower Justifies the Evacuation (1942)*

  Korematsu v. United States decision, 1942*

April 9: Second Paper Due

  In Class: Screening of “America and the Holocaust”

April 14: Coming Out and Going Out: Sexuality during WWII (48 pages)

  Renee Romano, “The Unexpected Consequences of War” in Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America, 12-43*

  Allan Berube, “Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay GIs in World War II” in Hidden from History, 383-394*

  Leisa Meyer, “Creating GI Jane,” in Major Problems, 275-280

  Article on “Victory Girls and Venereal Disease,” Major Problems, 251
April 16: Popular Culture During the War

Lary May, “Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War II Films” in War in American Culture, 71-102

William Tuttle, “Children’s Entertainment” in Daddy’s Gone to War, 148-160*

Optional: Lewis Erenberg, “Swing Goes to War: Glenn Miller and the Popular Music of World War II” in War in American Culture, 144-165

PART IV: THE LEGACIES OF WAR

April 19 or 20: Screening of Best Years of Our Lives (Specifics TBA)

April 21: Demobilization and the GI Bill: Constructing Postwar Prosperity (48 pages)


April 23: World War II and the Shape of Postwar Europe and Asia (65 pages)

John Dower, Embracing Defeat, 73-84, 525-546

Documents in Major Problems, 366-378

Frederick Marks, “The Ignorance and Naiveté of Roosevelt’s Wartime Diplomacy,” in Major Problems, 370-387


April 28: The War’s Impact on American Politics and Culture (35 pages)

Reed Ueda, “The Changing Path to Citizenship” in War in American Culture, 202-216

Alan Brinkley, “World War II and American Liberalism” in War in American Culture, 313-330
April 30: *Remembering and Forgetting World War II* (10-11 pages)


[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*

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May 5: THIRD PAPER DUE

*In Class: Screening of Saving Private Ryan or Flags of Our Fathers*

May 7: Conclusions: *World War II in American Consciousness*

May 15: Take-Home Final Exam Due

*Take-Home Final Exam is due by noon in the History Department Office.*