University of North Texas

Department of History

HIST 4642.01: War and American Society, 1608 to the Modern Era

Fall 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 to 10:50 a.m.

**Instructor: Dr. Alex Mendoza**

**Office: WH 260**

**Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., or by appointment**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

HIST 4642 is a lecture-based course that focuses on the various ways in which the United States has dealt with war and the changes that have taken place in American society as a result of war. The course considers the following wars: the colonial wars of the 17th and 18th centuries, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War. As the course title implies, a major emphasis is placed on American society during these conflicts, addressing war and the American homefront.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

* Explain how the American experience of war has changed over time
* Describe how war impacts and shapes the social attitudes and values of American society
* Identify and analyze wartime political, social, and economic trends in America during wartime
* Analyze the philosophical and moral issues raised by the American experience with war

**TEXTS:**

* **Reading Assignments are available on Canvas**
* **Paul L. Atwood, *War and Empire: The American Way of Life* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), optional**

**GRADING:**

The grade breakdown is as follows:

* **Exams (3) 60% (20% each)**
* **Quizzes (3) 10%**
* **Discussions (3) 10%**
* **Hollywood and American Wars Project 10%**
* **Attendance/Class Participation 10%**

Generally speaking, a grade of 90.00% corresponds to a borderline A- and 89.99% to a B+; 80% is the line between a B- and a C+ and so on. **Grades will not be curved in this course.** No individual extra credit will be accepted to substitute for poor test grades.

## EXAMS:

Three exams will be given during the semester (including a final exam). Exams will be comprised of matching, identification questions, and an essay component. Each test will focus on lectures and assigned readings. The final exam is NOT comprehensive/cumulative.

**QUIZZES:**

Throughout the semester students will be asked to submit answers to approximately 4-6 quizzes (films/videos are included as well). The dates for these assignments will be unannounced. Whether the format for each quiz is in-class or take-home, students are responsible for submitting their work on the scheduled due-dates. The average of the top 3 quizzes will be used to comprise 15% percent of the overall grade. These are *attendance*-based quizzes and thus not eligible for standard makeup protocols like the scheduled exams or other assessments.

**DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS:**

There are three graded discussion assignments during the semester (10% of total average). Several primary (firsthand) documents have been uploaded by the instructor in the appropriate discussion forum (Discussion Forum #1, #2, & #3) for the course. Students will be required to write a posting of approximately 250-words per assignment which should cover the questions posed. The topics and due dates for each Discussion assignment are **Sept. 04, Oct. 02, and Nov. 11.**

**MEDIA PROJECT:**

Films have arguably been the dominant cultural expression of the twentieth century. The power of films, and to a lesser extent other forms of popular culture, to express and influence popular attitudes dealing with American wars is self-evident. Since at least the 1910s, films have had the power to reach vast audiences, audiences who never experienced a war or visited a military museum or historical shrine in the United States as a tourist. That films have profoundly influenced perceptions of how wars are fought among Americans is beyond question. But to determine the extent films revise, distort, or alter or excessively praise the American military is the goal of this course project. Students must choose, acquire, and view (on their own time, of course) **ONE** of the assigned movies (or an alternate of their choice) in a forthcoming list and write a comprehensive **3-4 page** analytical review of the experience, **worth** **10% of the overall grade**. The project is due on **November 20,** in class. **A more detailed preparation guide will be forthcoming.**

**ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:**

A portion of your grade will be based on a subjective class participation component. Since participation in class is expected, I will keep track of who shares in Q&A, discussions, etc., and who says next to nothing. Obviously, since you must attend class to contribute, there will be an emphasis on attendance for the class participation component. The professor will check attendance daily and use this to correlate this portion of the overall grade. Students who arrive late or leave early may have infractions count as absences.

**Please do not email the professor if you are absent**. Attendance/Participation accounts for 10% of your average.

**MAKEUP EXAM POLICY:**

Exams and quizzes may **NOT** be taken early. Students must arrange work schedules and travel plans in order to take the tests & quizzes on the scheduled dates. There are no reviews for the makeup exams, which are of an different format than the original test.

**CLASS DEPORTMENT:**

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result, minimally, in a request to leave class. In essence, I will treat you with courtesy and respect and I expect the same consideration.

**USE OF CANVAS:**

The instructor will use the University of North Texas’ Canvas’ platform to distribute information throughout the semester. Lecture outlines, exam reviews, and announcements will all be found on the course Canvas page. Students must learn the process of accessing course information and quiz materials on specific dates. HIST 4642 is a face-to-face class and Canvas is not intended to serve as a substitute for information provided in the classroom.

**STUDENT ABSENCE DUE TO RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE:**

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester.

**STUDENT ABSENCE FOR UNIVERSITY SPONSORED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES:**

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

**DISABILITIES ACCOMODATION:**

The University of North Texas complies with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The University of North Texas provides academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, as defined under the law. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides a reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, please see the instructor and/or contact the Office of Disability Accommodation at (940) 565-4323 during the first week of class.

**NOTE TAKING:**

You are expected to take notes during lectures, discussions, and, if applicable, videos. Lecture outlines and exam study guides will assist you in this process. However, it is not enough simply to copy the lecture outline—you must take notes in order to do well on exams. If you miss a class, check with your fellow students to see if someone will lend you their notes. The professor does not provide lecture notes.

**USE OF EMAIL:**

Feel free to e-mail me in regard to anything related to the class, the topic, or professional requests. Please do not e-mail me in regard to specific grades and extra credit. I will not respond to anything I deem inappropriate or unprofessional. I also retain the right to forward all such e-mails to university officials. Please use my university email address listed on page 1 of this syllabus.

**WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:**

1. Read the syllabus. This class is easy to understand if you follow instructions and pay attention.
2. Keep up with readings and announcements.
3. Please try not to be late to class. If there is a reason why you must be late, try to be quiet as you come in.
4. Take all exams on the scheduled dates.

**WHAT TO EXPECT FROM ME:**

1. My lectures will be well-prepared and organized.
2. I will see that your papers and exams are graded as promptly and accurately as possible.
3. I will remain accessible throughout the semester and hold office hours regularly.

**NOTE:**

* Please DO NOT bring a tape recorder to class unless you can provide some documentation for a disability.
* This syllabus is subject to change at the professor’s discretion. All changes will be provided verbally in class.

**POLICY STATEMENT:**

**Please keep in mind that there are no individual assignments or extra credit opportunities to substitute for poor grades or non-attendance.**

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings (subject to change)**

**Week One: Introduction**

Aug. 19 01 Introduction: American Wars and their Meanings

Aug. 21 02 Homefronts

**Week Two: The Colonies and their Conflicts**

Aug. 26 03 The Amerindian Wars

Aug. 28 04 The Causes of Revolutionary Conflict

 **Quiz 1: Natives and Colonists**

 **Readings: Jill Lepore, “The Curse of Metamora” (Canvas)**

**Week Three: The American Revolution**

Sep. 02 05 The American Revolution

Sep. 04 06 Forging Swords: The United States and its Challenges in the Early National Period

 **Discussion 1: The Boston Massacre**

 **Readings: Middlekauff, “Outside the Campaigns,” pgs., 544-578 (Canvas)**

**Week Four: The 19th Century**

Sep. 09 07 The Mexican War and American Mobilization

Sep. 11 08 The Causes of the Civil War

 **Readings: Howe, “Revolutions of 1848” (Blackboard)**

**Week Five: Test Week**

Sep. 16 Summary/Review

Sep. 18 **Exam I**

**Week Six: Civil War**

Sep. 23 09 Politics and Dissent

Sep. 25 10 The Guerrilla War

 **Readings: McPherson, “The Homefront” (Canvas)**

**Week Seven: The Legacies and New Beginnings**

Sep. 30 11 Slavery and Emancipation

Oct. 02 12 The Civil War in Film

 **Discussion 2: The Civil War**

 **Readings: Levine, *Confederate Emancipation* (Canvas)**

**Week Eight: The Modern Era**

Oct 07 13 Manifest Destiny Redux and America as a World Power

Oct. 09 14 U.S. Entry into World War I

 **Readings: Reckner, “Great White Fleet” (Canvas)**

**Week Nine: The Great War**

Oct. 14 15 Discontent and the Growth of the Government Apparatus

Oct. 16 Summary/Review

 **Readings: Kennedy “Over Here”**

**Week Ten: World War II**

**Oct. 21 Exam II**

Oct. 23 16 World War II and the “Arsenal of Democracy”

 **Readings: Kennedy, “Freedom From Fear” (Canvas)**

**Week Eleven: World War II**

Oct. 28 17 Mobilization of the Homefront

Oct. 30 18 Propaganda on the Homefront

 **Readings: Kennedy, “Freedom From Fear” (Canvas)**

**Week Twelve:**

Nov. 04 19 The Cauldron of Conflict during the “Good War”

Nov. 06 20 The Cold War at Home

Nov. 07 Last Day to Drop with a “W”

 **Readings: Kennedy, “Freedom From Fear” (Canvas)**

**Week Thirteen: Limited Wars and other Conflicts**

Nov. 11 **Discussion 3: The Cold War**

Nov. 13 **Quiz: Integration of the Armed Forces**

**Week Fourteen: Modern Wars and their Problems**

Nov. 18 21 The Vietnam Phenomenon and Anti-War Dissent

Nov. 20 22 Americans and the Gulf War

 **Hollywood and American Wars Project Due**

**Week Fifteen: Thanksgiving Week**

 **No Classes Scheduled November 24-28, UNT**

**Week Sixteen: Summary**

Dec. 02 Summary Day

Dec. 04 Makeup Day/Review Day

Dec. 05 UNT Reading Day—No Classes Scheduled

**FINAL EXAMINATION**

**Tuesday December 09**

**10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**