

History 277 – Syllabus Draft

Trials of the Twentieth Century

History 277

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OVERVIEW

Uses controversial legal cases to explore key topics and controversies in twentieth-century American history, as well as how media spotlight facilitates, obstructs, and shapes such debates. The course focuses on issues of race, class, science, Cold War politics and foreign policy; trials discussed will include Sacco & Vanzetti, the Scopes Trial, the Oppenheimer hearing, Watergate, Rodney King and O. J. Simpson. The course uses a variety of primary and secondary sources, such as trial transcripts, news coverage, memoirs, film, and literature.

READING

Assignments will be drawn from the following books, as well as from supplemental reading on e-reserve. (The books will be on reserve at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library.)

- Robert Ferguson, *The Trial in American Life*
- Gilbert Geis and Leigh Bienen, *Crimes of the Century*
- Heinar Kiphardt, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*
- Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods*

In addition, there will be some reading (and good material for research papers) on Douglas Linder's website on Famous Trials: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/ftrials.htm>

GRADING

Attendance & Participation: 15%

Quizzes: 15%

First Paper: 20%

Final Paper: 30%

Exam: 20%

I will provide more information about each of these as the semester progresses, including formal assignment sheets for the papers. In brief, however, the *quizzes* are short, factual tests of reading and lecture comprehension. The *first paper* is 5-7 pages; it will be based on course materials and a small amount of outside research. The *final paper* will be a short research paper; a draft and a conference will be required. The final version should be no longer than 5 pages. The *exam* will be largely based around short answer and other factual questions. The *attendance and participation* grade measures

both consistent attendance and active engagement in class discussions. All work must be turned in to pass the course.

CALENDAR OF READINGS AND MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

This is an overview of the assignments and reading for the course; it is likely to change slightly. (** indicates that the reading is on e-reserve.)

Week 1 (Sept 7-11)

Class topics: Introduction, Haymarket

Reading: MONDAY— Introduction

WEDNESDAY – Ferguson, *Trial in American Life* 1-28, 191-232.

Week 2 (Sept 14 - 18)

Class topics: Sacco & Vanzetti

Reading: MONDAY – Linder: “The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: An Account”; Petition of Vanzetti to Governor Fuller”; “Report of the Lowell Committee”; Vanzetti’s letter to Sacco’s son. E-Reserve: **Vanzetti’s Last Statement; ** Mary Anne Trasciatti, “The American Campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti”; ** Katherine Ann Porter, “The Never Ending Wrong.”

WEDNESDAY – Ferguson, *Trial in American Life*, 29-74.

Week 3 (Sept 21 – Sept 25)

Class topics: Leopold & Loeb

Reading: TUESDAY – Geis & Bienen, *Crimes of the Century*, p. 13-45; **Paula Fass, “Making and Remaking an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in American Culture”; **John Breslow Martin, “Murder on His Conscience,” parts 1,4; ** “Leopold & Loeb Decision”; ** “Crime and Publicity: Leopold, Loeb, and Chicago.”

WEDNESDAY – Movie: *Rope*

Quiz #1 will be Wed. September 23rd

Week 4 (Sept 28 – Sept 21)

Class topics: The Scopes Trial

Reading: MONDAY – No Class (Yom Kippur)

WEDNESDAY – Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 3-169.

Quiz #1 will be on Tuesday, September 18th.

Week 5 (Oct 5 – Oct 9)

Class topics: Scopes, Scottsboro

Reading: MONDAY – Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 170-266; ** H.L. Mencken, *The Impossible Mencken* (selected columns).

WEDNESDAY -- Geis & Bienen, *Crimes of the Century*, 49-84; ** Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa, *The Man From Scottsboro*, 33-50.

Week 6 (Oct 12 – Oct 16)

Class topics: Alger Hiss

Reading: MONDAY – Fall Break.

WEDNESDAY – Geis & Bienen, *Crimes of the Century*, 127-164; Linder: “Nixon: Answer to Tricia,” “Pumpkin Papers,” “Incriminating Venona Cable”; **Hiss, *Recollections of a Life*, 149-160; **Haynes, “Alger Hiss: Case Closed”

Week 7 (Oct 19 – Oct 23)

Class topics: Rosenbergs, Oppenheimer

Reading: MONDAY – Douglas Linder, “A Trial Account,” **Garber & Walkowitz, *Secret Agents* (selected chapters); ** Popular Press Coverage of the Rosenberg case; Ferguson, *The Trial in American Life*, 233-266.

Quiz #2 will be on Monday, October 19th.

WEDNESDAY – **Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, ix-x, 498-550; ** “Was the Oppenheimer Decision So Terrible?”

Week 8 (Oct 26 – Oct 30)

Class topics: Oppenheimer, Emmett Till, Brown v. Board of Education

Reading: MONDAY -- ** *New York Times* coverage; Kiphardt, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*.

WEDNESDAY – “”**Hugh Stephen Whitaker, “A Case Study in Southern Justice”; **American Experience, Case Overview; **Mary Dudziak, “*Brown* as a Cold War Case.”

The first paper will be due Friday, October 30th at 4 p.m.

Week 9 (Nov 2 – Nov 6)

Class topics: Mississippi Burning, My Lai

Reading: MONDAY – **Douglas, Linder, “Bending Toward Justice: John Doar and the Mississippi Burning Trial”; Additional reading TBA Movie?

WEDNESDAY – **Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4*, p. 44-75.

Quiz #3 will be on Wednesday, Nov. 4th

Week 10 (Nov 9 – Nov 13)

Class topics: Charles Manson, Patty Hearst

Reading: MONDAY – Douglas Linder, “The Trial of Charles Manson” & “The Beatles’ Influence,” **Vincent Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter* (excerpts); **Popular Press Articles about the Manson case.

WEDNESDAY – Douglas Linder, “Patty Hearst Trial,”; **Nancy Isenberg, “Not Anyone’s Daughter.”

Week 11 (Nov 16 – Nov 20)

Class topics: Roe v. Wade, Watergate

Reading: MONDAY – **Leslie Regan, *When Abortion Was a Crime* (excerpts); **Popular press reaction to the Roe v. Wade decision; ** Jack Balkin, “Roe v. Wade: An Engine of Controversy.”

WEDNESDAY – TBA

Quiz #4 will be on Wednesday, Nov. 18th

Week 12 (Nov 23 – Nov 24)

Class topics: Final Paper Drafts

Reading: MONDAY – No class (Individual meetings, after break, will take place instead.)

Draft of final paper due on Tuesday, November 24th at 4 p.m.

Week 13 (Nov 30 – Dec 4)

Class topics: Rodney King, O.J. Simpson

Reading: MONDAY – Ferguson, *Trial in American Life* 267-304; Douglas Linder, Trial Account; **Robert Gooding-Williams, *Reading Rodney King* (selected chapters.)

WEDNESDAY – Geis & Bienen, *Crimes of the Century*, p. 170-200;

Individual paper conferences will take place this week.

Week 14 (Dec 7 – Dec 11)

Class topics: O.J. Simpson

Reading: MONDAY –**George Lipsitz, “The Greatest Story Ever Sold”; **Johnson & Roediger, “Hertz, Don’t It?”

WEDNESDAY – In-Class Exam

Final Paper due Thursday, December 17th