

**University Studies 212C**  
**America and The Great War**  
**An Introduction to American Studies**

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MTWTh, 10:30-11:30;

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Peer mentor sections meet:

Mon, 11:10-12:00

& 12:05-12:55

Wed, 11:10-12:00

**Texts:**

The First World War, by Gerard J. DeGroot

The United States and the First World War, by Jennifer D. Keene

Packet of Selected Readings (available at Smart Copy, 1915 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Street)

**Reading Sequence and Class Activities** listed on the course schedule.

**Our Specific Goals:**

In this course we want to develop some understanding of

- 1) the break in the social and historical continuity that this war created;
- 2) the more immediate and longer term factors which precipitated the war;
- 3) what this war was really like, how it unfolded, how it proceeded, how it was experienced;
- 4) how America became involved in the war and its immediate affect on American society;
- 5) some of the larger and more long term consequences, both here and abroad;
- 6) and finally some of the more profound dynamics and issues of war itself—its attraction and horror, as well as its ironies; how war resonates both positively and negatively with the human condition, and the problematic residues it always leaves.

**Our Overarching Goal:**

To try to make sense of where we put war in our individual and collective understanding of—and responses to—our everyday world.

The tragedies that occurred on September 11, 2001—a day increasingly described as one that changed the world, have already affected us in innumerable ways. We can anticipate these changes to dramatically alter our lives in ways we cannot foresee in much the same fashion that the long complex of events inadvertently initiated on August 4, 1914, have reverberated throughout the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I have included an alertness to some of the events of the past several months in this course because there are some startling parallels, along with some significant differences,

between August 1914 and September 2001. There is often repeated a saying of the philosopher George Santyana that “those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.” Let us hope—and intend—that some of what we learn in this course might sensitize us to the more egregious errors of the past and possibly help us to avoid them in the future.

### **How are we going to achieve these goals?**

What you will see when you look at the schedule more closely is that the course is the essentially divided into four parts:

- (1) today through 1/23 centered on the European aspects of the war;
- (2) from 1/28 through 2/18 focused on the growing American involvement in the war and its more immediate aftermath;
- (3) from 2/20 through 3/4 exploring the larger social effects of the war, especially in the U.S.;
- (4) from 3/6 through 3/13 an attempt to understand at least some of the reasons for war itself

I am going to supply the backdrop by providing an interdisciplinary mix of readings, lectures, discussions, and videos—primarily historical and analytical, a few literary and aesthetic—that will introduce us to this period of history and inundate us in the deadly drama of the war. This will provide a base from which to explore at least some of the many ramifications of parts (1), (2), and (4), the first two of which will also lay the ground work for part (3).

Each of you, participating as a member of a small team, is going to have the major responsibility for part (3). The majority of your time in the mentor sections will be spent engaged in that responsibility by preparing for—and then delivering to the class at large—a presentation of about some of those larger social effects of the war. In addition to this group presentation, we will have both a midterm and a final exam. You will also have an opportunity to develop a precis of the war, to write an original piece of poetry, and, as an extra credit option, to read a piece of fiction about the war.

Once we are underway, I will supply you with a more complete description of these assignments and their point values in order to help you apportion your study time in relation to them.

But whatever these formal assignments are, the really essential and major *insights* and *lessons* of the course I hope we will engage, explore, and draw out in our work together.