

Course Syllabus
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AVIATION ADVENTURE
American Studies Course No. 01:050:281 (A1)
Summer, 2007 (June Session)

Prof. Michael K. Heaney
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Fridays, June 1, 8, 15, & 22; 8:30 am to 5:00 pm; Ruth Adams 001 (Douglass)
Office Hours Thursdays or Fridays, by Prior Arrangement

Overview

“Aeronautics was neither an industry nor a science. It was a miracle.”
Igor Sikorsky

“Takeoffs were not like ship departures. They were riveting, unpredictable, dangerous. * * * People have always departed, by land or sea, but to leave by air is still new, it is still a cause for wonder. * * * ...[A]t the time I’m describing, to leave in an airplane is as magical as taking off in a spaceship. It’s a resurrection.”
From *I Was Amelia Earhart*, by Jane Mendelsohn

**“Up we go into the wild blue yonder/Climbing high into the sun;
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder/At ‘em boys, give ‘er the gun!
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under/Off with one helluva roar;
We live in fame or go down in flames/O nothing can stop the Army Air Corps!”**
W.W.II version of Official U.S. Air Force song, by Robert Crawford

Today, aviation (including space travel) occupies much the same cultural niche occupied for centuries by human maritime endeavors. For almost a century, flying has been at the center of human inventiveness and technological advance, profoundly altering and dominating the conduct of war, changing the way we travel and do business, opening entirely new frontiers of exploration and discovery, and firing human imagination and our yearning for the Romantic.

In many senses, aviation’s story is also the story of America in the 20th Century. Americans were the first to achieve powered flight and, after falling behind Europe in aviation development during W.W.I and the “inter-war” years, the U.S. emerged as the pre-eminent sky power during and following W.W.II, in virtually every category. (It is a pre-eminence the U.S. has maintained ever since, with a couple of intriguing exceptions.)

America pioneered commercial aviation and the opening up of trade and passenger routes to almost every part of the globe; American aviation legends were the first men and women to make solo, non-stop crossings of vast oceans and continents, to land at the North and South Poles, to “break the sound barrier”, and to set foot on the moon; America continues to lead in military, commercial and personal aircraft development and sales; and America remains one of the few countries in the world where flying and even aircraft ownership are within reach of working class men and women, and where governmental regulation of flying and of airfields continues to be resisted by a strong core of independence-minded fliers. American aviation has also been a (not uncharacteristic) story of early dominance by white men - initially white “gentlemen” - gradually challenged by spirited women and “pilots of color”.

This course will take a look at several of the main strands of this story - and a few of the less well-known ones - and attempt to answer a fundamental question: what particular national “stamp” has the United States placed on the world of flight during the last 100

years? (How different, in other words, might aviation be today had its first century of explosive growth not been dominated by America, but by, for example, the Soviet Union, China or Japan, or Europe?) As part of this investigation, we will take field trips to a large international commercial airport, a military air base, and a small, privately-owned airfield, and talk to some of the people who work at each; read from various texts about what the aviation experience has meant to a variety of (primarily American) participants and observers; screen a few aviation-related movies or movie clips; and perhaps even listen to some “flying music.”

We will go out and touch airplanes...and see whether, and in what ways, they touch us.

Given the events of “9/11” and the subsequent "war" on terror, we will also spend some time discussing the relationship between violence (war, terror, etc.) and aviation, and address the question of whether 9/11 really “changed everything” - or was merely the latest version of “business as usual”.

Work Assignments & Exam/Course Expectations

The two primary texts for the course, **which we will discuss in class**, are:
Flight of Passage; A Memoir, by Rinker Buck (Hyperion Books, New York, 1997); and
Like Sex with Gods; An Unorthodox History of Flying, by Bayla Singer (Texas A&M Press, College Station, TX, 2003)

Both should be available at Douglass Coop.

This is a highly condensed course. Anyone missing a Friday class or the term project due date will receive a failing grade; exception will be made only, in my sole discretion, for medical or family emergency, supported by such documentation as I may require.

Our **transport** will depart on each of the field trip Fridays (6/8, 6/15, and 22) between **8:45 and 9:30 am sharp** (see below), from the parking area immediately outside Ruth Adams Hall. A “Pre-Flight Checklist” for field trips, and liability waiver, will be distributed during our first class, and must be read, signed and returned to me.

Our return time at the end of each trip will vary, depending on factors beyond my control (traffic, time taken for on-site presentations by others, etc.), but we may have time following each trip for some additional classroom work before the end of the day. Each class will end not later than 5:00 pm sharp.

You will be expected to turn in two kinds of written material, as follows:

1. "Logbook". From time to time during our classes/field trips, I will give you a short, unannounced writing assignment, related to a topic on that day’s agenda, which you will complete at that time on a spare sheet of paper. Depending on time factors, you will be invited to read a selection out loud, and we may then briefly discuss your writing. Your sheet will be turned in for me to review, but your entries will not be graded. (Bring something to write with & on during all 3 trips.)

2. Term Project. On the third class day (6/15), you will hand in a completed term project. A one-paragraph description of your project is due by Class 2 (that's next week, 6/8); or you may email me your proposed topic any time before Class 2. I will reply by email with comments/suggestions.

No late papers will be accepted. (Put yourself in a pilot’s “real world” situation. Doing this paper on time is like an Amelia Earhart flight from mainland Airport A to island atoll Airport B, a distance of 2 weeks at your cruise speed, with 2 weeks’ fuel on board. You’ve got some time-to-climb and go-around time built in, but not much; there’s no time at all for loitering over the target or trying to find the airport. There are no alternate airports,

just the yawning Pacific, and your little *Electra* of a project is going to suddenly stop flying at the end of those 2 weeks. You'd better be at or at least over Airport B when that happens!

Papers must be 4-6 pages in length (*plus* title and bibliography pages), *no shorter and no longer*, in 11-point font size (about 250 words per page), double-spaced. Time permitting, on the afternoon of Class 3 (6/15), you will give your fellow students a 2-3 minute summary presentation about your project (which will consist of something other than hurriedly reading your paper). We will discuss this further in class. (I have a fairly sizable aviation library and several videos, and can help with sources if you wish - I'd have to know what you need by next Thu.). You may choose from one of the following three project formats:

A. Interview/Oral History. Interview a person with some significant connection to American aviation (e.g., aviation writer/journalist; pilot or crew; aeronautical engineer; aircraft builder or mechanic; airport owner/manager or airline worker; government official; museum curator). Write up a narrative summary of the person's story (not a blow-by-blow, "I asked...,"/"She answered...," recitation). Develop a thesis (main idea or theme; e.g., "How Learning to Fly Changed Dotty Dare's Whole Life, in Wholly Unexpected Ways!")

B. Research Paper. Pick a topic that you are curious about. Try to think of one involving some controversy (e.g., Should we try to send humans to Mars, or be content with robotic explorers?; Should we pursue the Reagan/Bush Strategic Defense Initiative ["Star Wars" missile shield], or try something else? What should we do to address the impending saturation of our nation's commercial airport and air control networks?). Find and read suitable texts on the subject. Write a paper summarizing all sides of the debate, and then take one position in the debate, arguing persuasively for it.

C. Book/Movie Comparison. Pick an aviation topic that has been treated in both film and book, or in a movie based on a book. Examples of topics treated in both media: Lindbergh's or Earhart's epic flights; air warfare in W.W.II, Korea, or Vietnam; the Tuskegee Airmen; the Apollo 13 mission; Howard Hughes' life. Examples of books turned into movies: "[The Man Who Flew the] Memphis Belle," "The Right Stuff," "Flight of the Intruder."). Include both a *substantive* comparison (what parts of the story did each medium emphasize, or tell best?) and an *artistic* comparison (what literary or cinematic techniques were employed, and how did they affect the telling and impact of the story?), and your own all-important take (thesis) on the worth or effectiveness of the cultural artifacts you choose to examine.

TPs will be graded according to the following criteria:

1. "Technical" proficiency: spelling, grammar, punctuation, word usage, editing & proofreading, etc: 1/3 of grade.
2. Originality of topic and strength of thesis and supporting argument: 1/3. A good thesis and thesis statement are vital to a decent grade on the project.
3. Overall logic, organization, and "flow" of the paper, and general writing style: 1/3.

A **final, take-home exam** will be handed out on the afternoon of the third class (6/15), after returning from that day's field trip. It will consist of 5 essay questions from which you may choose 3 to answer. It will cover classroom lectures and discussions, the assigned readings, movies/movie clips screened in class, and field trips, and will be due on **Mon, June 25** (by email). More info will be provided about the exam in Class 3.

The term project will count as two-thirds of your final grade, and the final exam will count as one-third.

Reductions in your grade will be made for:

- i. late arrivals or early departures;
- ii. failure to maintain radio contact with tower (i.e., lack of participation in classroom or field trip discussions).

Class Schedule

(Nota Bene: All four classes start promptly at 8:30 am; attendance will be taken at the beginning *and end* of each class day.)

Class 1 - Friday, June 1 - “The Dream of Flight” - Classroom

Introductions & Overview
Detailed Schedule for Day (inc. breaks, lunch, etc.)
Administrative & “Bookkeeping” Details
Exploration of Aviation General Knowledge
Syllabus
Writing Exercise
Lectures & Class Discussion [**Inc. initial discussion of *Flight of Passage* and *Like Sex with Gods***]
Movie Clips & Class Discussion
Homework Assignment

Class 2 - Friday, June 8 - “General Aviation” - Somerset Airport (George Walker Field)

[One-Paragraph, Term Paper Project Description Due!]
8:30 am: Preliminary Classroom Discussion
9:30 am: Depart on Field Trip to Somerset Airport, Bedminster Twp., NJ. **(Either bring a bag lunch, or purchase lunch at nearby Burger King).** Mid-Afternoon: Return for Final Classroom Work
Homework Assignment

Class 3 - Friday, June 15 - “Commercial Aviation” - Newark International Airport [Term Project Due!]

8:30 am: Preliminary Classroom Discussion/Film Clip
9:00 am: Depart on Field Trip to Newark International Airport, Newark. **(Bring a bag lunch).**
Mid-Late Afternoon: Return for possible additional classroom work
Homework Assignment
Distribute Take-home Exam

Class 4 - Friday, June 22 – “Military Aviation” - [Location to be announced]

8:30 am: Preliminary Classroom Discussion
8:45 am: Depart on Field Trip. **(Bring a bag lunch).**
Mid-Late Afternoon: Return for Final Classroom Work
Course Evaluations

Mon, Jun 25 - Exams due (by email)

“So straighten up/And fly right/Don’t blow your top!”
(From popular 1940s song, adopted by U.S. military pilots)
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