History 316: Interpreting American History, Fall 2014

Covering more than four centuries, this course explores a broad swath of American history. This course is required for students who plan to seek secondary social studies licensure and is open to students seeking licensure in the middle grades social studies.

Through an in-depth examination of key episodes and large changes, you will develop and refine the analytical skills employed in the study of history. We examine several controversies, trends, events, and actors that shaped America’s past, how ordinary people, elites, and professional historians have made sense of the past, and how changing concerns and new evidence can lead us to revise the pictures we paint of the past. We will explore a variety of primary sources and methods for studying American history. You will thereby begin to build your own professional repertoire for teaching this great stuff!

My own conviction is that this nation was shaped as much by its social conflicts as by any broadly shared ideals or consensus values that we might identify. You may differ, and that is fine!

Understanding how historians reconstruct and re-interpret the past involves questions of periodization, causation, and inevitability. Doing history involves assessing the role of ideas, economic forces, individuals, and large organizations in making change. We will spend a great deal of time analyzing primary sources and addressing their use as tools for teaching.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to think historically, as demonstrated by the following:

- Identify and explain broad patterns of American history and key transformations from the colonial era through the twentieth century
- Explain and justify different schemes for “periodizing” the past, based on your evolving understanding of how dominant narratives can be challenged by new people, stories, and evidence
- Explain cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation in phenomena as diverse as the Salem witch craze and the nuclear arms race
- Demonstrate the skills of historical analysis and interpretation including:
  - distinguishing between facts and interpretations
  - challenging arguments of historical inevitability – “it happened because it was bound to happen” — i.e. the fallacy that past actors exercised no choice or agency, and that they confronted no contingent unpredictable events that changed the course of history
  - evaluating competing historical narratives in the culture, and explaining why they change over time, especially as they may be revealed in history textbooks
  - analyzing major debates among historians and comparing them to widely shared cultural beliefs
  - interpreting a broad variety of primary sources such as oral evidence, photographs, illustrations, paintings, and cartoons, diaries, speeches, journalism, films and television programs, and census data in historical context
- As a consequence of these skills students who complete this course should demonstrate the following knowledge:
  - an appreciation for how humans have interacted with the natural environment over time
  - an appreciation of how this nation’s racial, ethnic, class, geographic, and cultural diversity is grounded in large social movements and power relations and unique events
Jackson, HIS 316, Interpreting American History, F ’14, p. 2

- a sense of civic purpose in appreciation of past actors’ choices and terms of understanding and in anticipation of preparing future citizens of the U.S. and the planet!

Required Reading:

**Two books and some .pdfs or web pages available on Blackboard or the internet.**

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010. The 5th edition is acceptable as long as you come get from me a copy of the [Primary Source Investigator](#) CD that came with the 5th (this is now online, but the code password only comes with new texts). You will also need to read the new chapter 1 “Contact” that is contained in the 6th.


Supplemental primary sources, scholarly articles and websites related to doing and teaching history will be posted on Blackboard. Check the Syllabus under “Course Information” and either “Course Documents” or your Google Drive (if everyone uses that and we choose to go that faster route).

I will let you know if I make any changes as I assess the class’ development, talents, and interests. ALWAYS check the on-line syllabus for the most up-to-date class assignments and opportunities for learning, doing, and teaching history. In the online “Syllabus” under “Course Information” and “Lessons” you will find complete reading assignments, and links to documents on Blackboard, in the *After the Fact* [Primary Source Investigator](#), or the Internet.

**Recommended Reading:**


**Graded Requirements:**

**I. Participation and Attendance (10%):**

Regular and punctual attendance is required. Preparation as demonstrated by active speaking, cooperation, and respectful debate, is essential. Since you are all planning to be teachers, I need not accomodate people who think themselves too shy to speak! I allow three absences with or without an excuse. After that, without a documented excuse, I take one point off your final aggregate grade per excessive absence.

**II. Professional Development Journal (10%):**

In Blackboard’s Journal site, please define 10 areas of competency, themes, or “burning questions” that you expect will inform your teaching of American History in coming years. You can’t cover it all, so your choice of what to teach will be crucial! Your first entry is due September 4, you will write nine more short informal entries by the end of the course (100 words). These are private, unless you choose to share them, and will be read by you, me, and the Graduate Assistant alone. Credit/No Credit on these to take any pressure off.

What problems of explanation capture your enthusiasm and are likely to spark similar excitement in students? After Sept 4, each week for at least 8 of the remaining 11 weeks, I want you to add informal observations of about **100 words** that answer: How is what you think important to teach being enriched, broadened, narrowed, or changed by what you are learning and doing in this class? At the end of the course, we will have a better sense of
the “learning outcomes” you will carry forward. **Then, after the last class, go back and rework your “burning questions” and refine your competency areas.** Repeat: To get full credit, I want to see at least 8 substantial entries after your first formulation, plus the final re-formulation, for a total of 10 SHORT journal entries. **Evaluation:** Credit/No Credit, That’s 10 points or 5 points for this 10%.

**Why do this?** James Loewen wisely observes that no teacher, let alone student, can “learn” in any meaningful depth all the material served up by most textbooks. So his advice to teachers is golden: pick 20-25 (I’m only asking for 10) subject areas across the spectrum of US history that you feel most passionate about learning and teaching. *Then teach from your strengths and let others teach from theirs.* You will figure out ways of adapting your teaching to core history standards many school systems are adopting for history. **Examples** (my own): the 20th century black freedom movement; the language of the American equal rights tradition in moments of “revolutionary” change; poverty and social provision; women’s expanding roles in the public sphere since 1868; the struggle to maintain community in periods of dramatic economic or ecological change; presidential rhetoric and biography as a window into changing political culture.

**III. Primary Source Analyses: “Text, Subtext, Context” (30%) – You Choose the Weeks and the Sources!** But you have to write 4 three page essays and you have to turn them in on the Thursday before class in the week that we discuss the issues. **Twice before Fall Break and twice thereafter.** Write 2 (4 total) short (3 pp.) essays on days of your choosing. **Analyze at least two contrasting primary sources** that shed light on the events or social processes we discuss that week. These papers are due at the beginning of Thursday class (you may or may not have the benefit of in-class discussion). Draw from the assigned readings, and take the option of **discovering a source that is even more revealing**, based upon the research leads available in the two books, or based on one of many subject guides available in print or on the web. **Evaluation Rubric:**

1. **Focus:** You clearly state a problem of interpretation, and you mine well your primary sources for evidence. You select sources that speak richly to the issue or problem you pose. (That is, 2. **Selection:** You accurately summarize, paraphrase, or quote relevant information or language from the sources.

3. **Critical thinking (1) Subtext:** You incorporate subtexts (important omissions, meanings that are less explicit or hidden to who produced the source) into your explanation.

4. **Critical thinking (2) Contextualization:** Your reader’s appreciation of the meaning and significance of a source are informed by your description of the larger contexts that help us make sense of it.

**IV. Historiographical Analyses: Changing Times, Changing Interpretations, and Evidence (30%) – Two (2) 4-5 pp. papers due Oct 10 and Nov 25.**

These papers examine in greater depth the ways in which historians have interpreted and re-interpreted the past. Using *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and *After the Fact* as points of departure, or my own suggestions, please examine the historians’ ideas and evidence and whose ideas they revised. (Follow the footnotes, or look up the historians they name using the library’s powerful search engines).

I expect you to consult (and footnote) at least 2 extra scholarly sources—books, book chapters, or journal articles—representing at least two points of view. You need not read an entire book (indeed you should not) in order to understand the contribution a scholar made, the important discoveries of evidence she unearthed, or the most productive line of questioning he opened. Use book reviews as well as our two main texts. But *show me* that you have followed scholars’ original research, not someone’s second-hand version. Teach me something Loewen, Davidson, and Lytle did not thoroughly address, in other words.
Late papers will lose a full grade for every day late. This is an absolutely essential core skill you must acquire if you are to be an effective history teacher. As Loewen amply demonstrates, textbooks cannot be relied upon to give you the freshest material for effective pedagogy. **Hint: the OAH Magazine of History is perhaps the most accessible and important scholarly journal for history teachers.** But don’t neglect websites with scholarly articles and links, such as BackStory With the American History Guys, or PBS Video’s “American Experience.” The National Archives, Presidential Libraries, research institutes like the Miller Center for Public Affairs, the Library of Congress, Universities and State Archives, all have growing on-line collections that I could only dream of seeing when I was an undergraduate. (Whether this is good or bad for you depends in part on your information literacy).

**Evaluation Rubric:**

1. **What problem** in American history have your authors interpreted or re-interpreted? What are the main analytical elements (i.e. the concept of “the frontier,” the “nadir” of African American history, the “decision” to drop the Atomic Bomb, the “inevitability” of the civil war)?
2. Do you **paraphrase and quote thoroughly and accurately** the main points in at least one older and one newer interpretation?
3. Do you explore **why the new interpretation emerged when it did**, that is, can you explain the re-interpretation in light of new evidence, new social concerns, the new visibility of neglected groups or questions?
4. Can you suggest a more fruitful line of research, or sketch what a fuller explanation might look like?

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”—Albert Einstein

**V. Research Paper 5-6 pp. Due Dec 4**

Using the University Archives, various document collections available in the library or for purchase, edited online sources referenced in the books, or various links to approved websites, pose a question and answer it by “doing history.” Reconstruct an event or a person’s development over time, and place it in historical context. Revisit one of our many debates with fresh eyes and fresh sources. These should use endnotes according to historian’s citation styles. See Chicago Manual of Style 16e, or Turabian. Do not include footnotes or a bibliography, as all your reader needs will be in the endnotes. Start: [http://uncg.libguides.com/c.php?g=83079&p=537078](http://uncg.libguides.com/c.php?g=83079&p=537078)

Here’s some help: I will place on reserve in the Library any of the Bedford Series on History and Culture volumes pertinent to these and other issues. They are a wonderful way into may subjects. I almost had teams of three of you take up each one, but could not fit all the issues I was interested in!

**COLLABORATIVE OPTION:** You may co-author this final paper if you share a burning interest with a classmate. You’ll just have to tell the class about it at some point!

I will accept absolutely no “recycled” papers you have written for other classes. Why do I even need to mention this? It happens.

All assignments should be submitted to me in paper and in blackboard SafeAssign (Times New Roman, 11 or 12 point, endnotes, margins of 1 inch or less).

**Electronic Devices:**

Because a part of our class period will sometimes be devoted to the evaluation of web sites and online information, I encourage you to bring your laptops and tablets. I expect all phones to be turned off and put away. If we see you on Facebook or texting, appropriate action and sanctions will be administered! (The class will democratically decide on these, since you will have to deal with this as teachers yourselves).

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is a serious offense of the academic code and is treated as such by faculty. You must do your
own work and clearly cite any sources you rely upon for your information. You may view the university’s academic integrity policy for further information. Familiarize yourself with the responsibilities of the instructor and the options I have: http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integritypolicy/ SafeAssign has the great virtue of telling you you are in the danger zone of appropriating (stealing) other people’s words before you submit a paper.

**Grading Scale:**
A (93 and above), A- (90-92); B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82); C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72); D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62); F (less than 60, unacceptable work)

**SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES**

NB: Assignments for the first two weeks are complete, in terms of books and supplementary primary sources. Check Blackboard for the same level of detail for subsequent assignments.

**8/19: Introductions**

**8/21: The Problem with History Teaching, and the Joys of “Doing History”**
Loewen, *Lies*, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” xi-xix; and “Introduction: Something has Gone Terribly Wrong” 1-9 (17) (These are page counts in parentheses from my planning. I leave them in for your benefit). Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, “Prologue: The Strange Death of Silas Deane” xvii-xxi (15)

Optional: Loewen, *Lies*, chs. 12-13 and Afterword, for his explanation of why history textbooks are so overstuffed and bland. This is also the last assignment for the course.

**Discussion:** Honestly, how many of you came into this course agreeing: “History is what happened in the past”? (As if we could ever separate the past from our interpretations and selections). Is Loewen right about high school history textbooks? What is their purpose? What is the purpose of education? How do you imagine teaching history? In-class exercise on the biases of the educated.

**8/26: Beyond Heroes and Villains? The Spanish and Native Peoples**
Loewen, *Lies*, 2. "1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus" 31-69 (38)

**Documents:** Christopher Columbus, *The Diary of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America*, (1492-1493), on blackboard; Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, (1632), on blackboard; Mexican Accounts of Conquest from the Florentine Codex, (c. 1547), on blackboard; Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, (1542), on blackboard; “Two Views on Columbus Day,” (1991 and 2005) on blackboard (15 total)

Here is your first opportunity to write a primary source analysis. Try it! Obviously you can’t write about everything, but you can use the best question I pose below (or the best one suggested in our texts) and you can contextualize two or more of the assigned sources.

Analyze the mixture of admiration and condescension in Columbus’ and Diaz’s accounts of Native peoples. Is there anything in these earlier accounts that would help us predict or understand the actions of the conquistadors as revealed in the Mexicans’ Accounts in the Florentine Codex or the gruesome account of Bartolome de Las Casas? Between 1492 and 1547, Caribbean and Mexican Indian societies changed more dramatically than perhaps any other generation in human history. What can we learn from these ambiguous and conflicting primary accounts? How must we marshal other knowledge to understand them in context? Is there anything we can say with confidence that can be considered factual about both Spanish and Native cultures and societies? That is, are there common themes in these documents, borne out by corroborating evidence from very different accounts?
James Loewen and Russell Means seem to agree that the conquest of the Americas was not inevitable, that there were “suppressed historical alternatives” to conquest. How persuasive are they and what evidence might point to the importance of choice, contingency, and power? (Keep this in mind for next week too, when we read about the Pilgrims).

8/28: Before Written Records: Archaeology, Demography, and Ecology in the “Columbian Exchange”
Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 1. Contact, 1-30 (28)


Hernando de Soto expected a Christian burial but died ignobly in Arkansas in 1541 after ransacking Indian villages. That’s the familiar story. (Contrast it with our Currier and Ives print). But our authors ask: why a century and a half later, when LaSalle made it down the Mississippi, had thousands of villages disappeared? What does this have to do with early English reports of an abundance of wildlife in the New World? How did learning about the ecological changes made by native peoples, and what happened when they disappeared, change how we understood the “Columbian exchange”? How are historians and archaeologists able to reinterpret, not just reconstruct, the past?


(This is a light reading week when you make strides toward imagining your areas of professional competency. You might also start to investigate what might grab you for the final research paper).

Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 2 Serving Time in Virginia, 31-50 (19)

**Documents:** Richard Frethorne to his parents, 20 March, 2 April, and 3 April 1623, “Conditions in the Virginia Colony” **Primary Source Investigator.**

**Documents:** John Hawkins, “An Alliance to Raid for Slaves” (1568), Willem Bosman, “Trading on the Slave Coast” (1700), Olaudah Equiano, “Kidnapped, Enslaved, and Sold Away” (c. 1756) all on blackboard

You might choose to compare Richard Frethorne’s experience in Virginia with Olaudah Equiano’s over a century later.

The romance of Pocahontas and John Smith aside, what choices, values, and power relations fueled the Atlantic commodity boom in sugar, slaves, and tobacco? How were black slaves and white servants and sailors caught up in this economic whirlwind? How were they treated by their “masters” and the environments of plantation agriculture? Why did Virginia move from principal reliance on indentured servants to reliance on racial slavery? What can we learn about the origins of American slavery and American freedom? Was racism the product of plantation slavery, or was the precondition for its rapid spread? (For deeper inquiry into this question, see “Optional” below).

Optional (this is good for added context on the slave trade):
“Why Were Africans Enslaved?” in David Northrup, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade, Second Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), pp. 1-29 on Blackboard. These are good historiographical selections from 4 historians on why Africans and not Europeans were enslaved, despite all the hazards of the former. They explore in depth the conundrum of plantation slavery and racism from different perspectives. Eric Williams argues that capitalism produced slavery and racism; others argue that Europeans enslaved Africans after they rejected lifetime slavery among themselves, that ideas or a kind of blind pragmatism led to seizing racialized Africans.

9/4: British North America -- Origin Stories
How do certain facts about the interaction of the “Pilgrim Fathers” and native peoples force a re-telling of the Thanksgiving story?

**DUE today or before: Professional Self-Definition under “Journal” in Blackboard. 10 burning questions in American history that are likely to shape your own learning and teaching.**

Also, browse the *Bedford Series in History and Culture* books on reserve for this course in Jackson Library to get an idea of what you might want to do for your research paper. See also links to substantial curated on-line document collections on the web (many are shallow, inaccurate, and incomplete, so see the professor’s approval before you proceed).

**9/9: From a City on a Hill to a Plural Society**
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 3: The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem 52-73 (21)
John Winthrop, “Reason to be Considered for Justifying the Undertakers of the Intended Plantation in New England,” 1629; and “A Modell of Christian Charity,” 1630 on blackboard
J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, “What is an American?” (1770) on blackboard

**Maybe try this one out for a historiographical paper. It is focused, multifaceted and fun.** What were the principal causes of the Salem witch craze of 1691-1692? This event was relatively rare compared to Europe, but quite revealing about developing tensions in New England colonial society and culture as it moved from Puritanism to pluralism. The larger context necessary to explaining why Salem became possessed is under continual discussion. What can understanding developing historiography and multiple historians perspectives tell us about how to understand and teach causation in history? Of the several contexts and causes historians have explored, which is most persuasive to you?

**Primary Source Analysis Option:** How is the world of J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur (and Benjamin Franklin) a new and different world from that of the Puritans? Compare John Winthrop’s attitudes toward social hierarchy and community to Crevecour’s?

**9/11: Republicanism and Independence**
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 4. Declaring Independence, 75-96 (20)
This is an interim draft, fairly similar to what you read, except: examine grievance #25, the last one, deleted from the final draft. “He has waged cruel war against human nature itself.”

**Documents:** “Dunmore's Proclamation, 7 Dec 1775,” in PSI (Primary Source Investigator).
North Carolina Regulators, “Shew Yourselves to be Freemen” (1769) on Blackboard
“Declaration of Sentiments, 1848” Seneca Falls Women’s Convention, PSI.

**Another primary source analysis option, and on they go. Check blackboard for new or better sources.**

How did the Founding Fathers reconcile liberty and slaveholding? Why do you think Jefferson’s attempt to do so was omitted from the Declaration? What kind of rights consciousness do you discern in the North Carolina Regulators’ call to “throw the bums out” of the colonial legislature? HINT: This is a HUGE theme in American political culture. Guess why! Finally: How do women seventy two years later pick up the themes and promises? Why then?

**9/16: A Slaveowner’s Republic? 19th Century Racism in Economics, Politics, Social Life**

**Full Assignment on Blackboard. More primary source options will be posted.**
How was racism also a Northern phenomenon? How does Loewen present the origins of racism and slavery in British North America? How was expansionism a slave-holder’s project? How did expansion fuel the sectional divisions leading to Civil War?

Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 6. Jackson's Frontier-and Turner's, 124-146 (22)
Full Assignment on Blackboard.

9/23: “Middle Ground”—Interculturation and Syncretism in Euro-American and Amerindian Societies
Loewen, Lies, 4. Red Eyes, 93-134 (40)
Full Assignment on Blackboard.

9/25: Anti-Slavery and Sectional Crisis
Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 7. The Madness of John Brown, 148-169 (21)
Full Assignment on Blackboard.

9/30: Recovering Slavery and Emancipation from Below
Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 8. The View from the Bottom Rail, 171-199 (28)
Full Assignment on Blackboard.

10/2: 19th Century Class Formation and Its Legacies
Documents: Andrew Carnegie and Henry George, Full Assignment on Blackboard.

10/7: The Immigrant City and the Middle Class Conscience
Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 9. The Mirror with a Memory, 203-228 (25)
Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives, excerpts. Full Assignment on Blackboard.

10/9: Progressive Symbolism and the Political Process
Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact, 10. USDA Government Inspected, 229-253 (34).
Neill-Reynolds Report, 4 Jun 1906, PSI
Skim and select from Thomas Wilson’s defense of the meat packers in House Committee on Agriculture, Hearings, June 1906 (Government Printing Office) on blackboard. Full Assignment on Blackboard.

FALL BREAK – At this mid-point, I expect to have graded two primary source papers, one historiographical paper, and 4 Professional Journal entries. Remember, it is your responsibility to hand the two kinds of papers in during the classes when they are relevant.

10/16: Using the Archives – Workshop in the University Archives with Archivist Kathelene Smith

10/21: Radicals and Reactionaries in the Progressive Era
10/23: Americanization and Nativism  
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 11. Sacco and Vanzetti, 256-280 (24). A bit hard to follow with all the characters. A cast of characters will be posted for your edification and convenience. **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 12. Dust Bowl Odyssey, 284-308 (24). **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

10/30: The Great Depression and the “New Deal Order”  
Promises and expectations of relief from government. **Readings and Assignment on Blackboard**

11/4: The Atomic Bomb: Ending WWII and Commencing the Cold War  
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 13. The Decision to Drop the Bomb, 310-334 (24). President Harry Truman’s Diary, and related documents. **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

11/6: A Century of Military Intervention  
Loewen, *Lies*, 10 “Down the Memory Hole: The Disappearance of the Recent Past,” 259-279. (20) **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

11/11: Women and Popular Culture  
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 14. From Rosie to Lucy, 339-363 (24). Documents from the women’s movement. **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

11/13: Civil Rights to Human Rights  
Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 15. Sitting In, 366-394 (28)  
Was 1963 a revolutionary moment in race relations? Why do textbooks regularly fail to address what everyone at the time regarded was a “Negro Revolution”? **Full Assignment on Blackboard.**

11/18: Vietnam and American Memory  

11/20: Limits to Growth? Modern Economies and the Biosphere  
**Full Assignment on Blackboard. This will be the last primary source analysis option, so plan ahead.**

11/25: The Teacher’s Vocation and Responsibility  

**Thursday December 4: Research Paper Due – Paper copy in my office and submission via SafeAssign.**