“The past itself is not a narrative. In its entirety, it is as chaotic, uncoordinated, and complex as life. History is about making sense of that mess, finding or creating patterns and meanings and stories from the maelstrom.”
— John H. Arnold, History: A Very Short Introduction

“History is always written because history is always made. Historiography is always revised because history is constantly remade.”
–Bert James Loewenweng, American History in American Thought

Interpretations of events, ideas, forces, and persons in history change all the time. Historiography is the study of those differing interpretations by professional historians and their development over time. In this class you will be exposed to various schools of thought on major themes in American history through the Civil War. You must read a large amount of material in order to begin to master the literature on our selected topics. You will read the equivalent of roughly a book and a half each week, a normal load for history graduate students. I strongly urge you to take notes on your readings and familiarize yourself with the notes. As a matter of course, you will be exposed to “facts” and “content knowledge” in this course, but we are more interested in historical interpretations and how and why historical interpretations have changed over time.

When doing history, it helps to keep in mind that there are many different ways of determining how history happens. One of the key things to remember is that historians can disagree very much over why almost any event happened. You will not agree with all interpretations that you encounter in this course. However, you must know the major differing interpretations in order to understand historians and to become one yourself.

**Grading:** I expect that you will attend every class meeting, complete all readings, and participate in discussions. Your grade will be reduced for non-participation or absences.

You will complete **seven (7) analysis papers** throughout the semester. Each paper of 5 or so pages will take that week’s readings and search for a crucial fact, process, question, idea, or approach to history that has caused historians to disagree about that topic or that seems to dominate historical approaches to that topic. Analyze that particular item: why is it so critical to debate and research on this topic? Should it be the main focus of historians, or are there
other facts, processes, questions, ideas, or approaches that could open up new understandings? Perhaps one of the week’s readings makes such a case? In addition, you should briefly tell me about each of the authors of the readings for each week that you write about. You choose the seven topics/weeks to complete your papers – they are due the day we discuss that particular topic, though **everyone must complete a paper on the American Revolution topic on October 1 and you must complete at least one analysis paper before October 1.**

At one meeting you will **lead the discussion** of that week’s readings. Prepare a one-page, single-spaced outline of key ideas and questions you will use to guide the discussion to turn in at the end of that class. Also prepare to tell me and the class about each author for that week's reading: who are they, where do/did they teach, what are they known for, etc.?

**Grading summary:**
- 7 Analysis Papers 10% each or 70% of your overall grade
- Class Discussion Participation 20%
- Discussion Leadership 10%
  - 100%

**Required Books** (listed in the order that we will read them):
- Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (2007)
- Peter Charles Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellesiles, Ellis, and Goodwin* (2008)
**SCHEDULE:**
Nearly all the journal articles listed in the schedule are available on the J-STOR, Project MUSE, or other databases through the UNCG Library webpages or via the general internet. Others will be made available as a pdf on the Canvas site for this course.

**Aug. 20: Introduction**

**Aug. 27: Transformations in approaches to early American History**
*Note: DO NOT write an analysis paper for this first introductory week – be ready to discuss the readings. Dr. O’Brien will be the discussion leader this week.*

Articles:
Nancy Isenberg, "'Make 'Em Laugh': Why History Cannot be reduced to Song and Dance," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Volume 37, Number 2, Summer 2017, pp. 295-303. Project MUSE

**Sept. 3: Colonial North America: broadly conceived**

Article:

**Sept. 10: Early North American Colonization and Enslavement**

Articles:

Sept. 17: American Indians/Ethnohistory

Sept. 24: Environmental History
Articles:

*Oct. 1: Historiography of the American Revolution
*All students must write an analysis paper for this topic/week.
Book: Gwenda Morgan, The Debate on the American Revolution (Palgrave, 2008)
Article:

Oct. 8: Gender & Sex in Early America
Articles:


October 15: No class! (Fall Break at UNCG)

Oct. 22: Historical Memory and Myth-Making in Early America


Articles:
Robert E. Cray, Jr., “Major John André and the Three Captors: Class Dynamics and Revolutionary Memory Wars in the Early Republic, 1780-1831,” Journal of the Early Republic 17 (Fall 1997) 371-397. JSTOR


http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/ulrich/

Oct. 29: Jacksonian America & Market Revolutions


Articles:

Nov. 5: Slavery in the United States: New Understandings


Article:

Nov. 12: The West


Article:

Nov. 19: Causes of the Civil War

Book:  Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (2007)

Articles:


November 26: No class! (Thanksgiving)

Dec. 3: The Perils of American History and Historians

Book:  Peter Charles Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellesiles, Ellis, and Goodwin*

Articles:

Other Mis-Behaviors by Historians: Jon Wiener, “Feminism and Harrassment: Elizabeth Fox-Genovese Goes to Court,” *Historians in Trouble*, 13-30. *Provided via pdf on Canvas*