

Professor Thomas Jackson

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Option: Book a [20 Minute Office Hour Time](#)

History 316 Fall 2023: "Interpreting American History"

This course is required for students seeking secondary social studies licensure and is open to students seeking licensure in the middle grade. Always check Canvas for the authoritative and complete assignments.

Course Philosophy and Rationale:

This class is not a typical survey of American history, although our interpretive case studies follow a roughly chronological framework. Think of this as a sustained exploration of the concepts, evidence, and frames of reference that historians employ to interpret and re-interpret the past. It will give you extensive exposure to the sources through which historians know past actors. And it will provide a repertoire of concepts and resources essential to guiding your future students in actively reconstructing the past.

In other words: Understanding *historiography* and practicing *historical analysis* of original sources will benefit your future *pedagogy*. (Past actors *made* history, scholars *interpret and reconstruct* history, and we *do* history in this class, in hopes that you and your future students will *understand, interpret, and make* better history).

1. Historical Writing, Historiography, Understanding "Secondary Sources". On a variety of topics, we will examine changing and competing interpretations of the past among historians and the best non-fiction writers. If we are all revisionists, then "revision" should mean "seeing anew." This can happen: 1. When we discover new evidence. 2. When we develop new theories or apply theories from the social sciences or cultural studies. 3. When we ask new questions reflecting burning issues of the present. 4. When we focus on people left out of previous accounts.

Remember: Understanding how historians revise past accounts is called historiography.

2. Historical Analysis of Original, or "Primary" Sources. *All interpretations come from historical thinking about primary sources in light of what we think we already know about the past.* Our first inheritance are stories from our parents, siblings, churches, schools, or communities. These comprise what we call *the cultural curriculum*. When we delve deeper into the past, beyond the boundaries of living memory, every era reveals competing or contradictory stories among the **historical actors** who lived it. They are our best clues to understanding cultural or political conflicts; their language can reveal past actors' values and perceptions of others. We also learn from their "silences," what they don't say, but we know, about their world. Scholars and teachers rely upon primary sources, but we extend these understandings much further and wider, relying on published scholarship. We theorize, we contextualize, we periodize, we reconstruct coherent narratives from often chaotic and dark landscapes of evidence. *Interpreting and contextualizing primary accounts is called historical analysis.*

3. Doing and Teaching History, or Pedagogy. Reading historians' contrasting accounts, analyzing and contextualizing primary sources produced by historical actors – these support a third purpose of the course – **to help you teach your future students the fine art and rigorous science of interpreting the past, of doing history.**

4. Further Reflections. Past actors – ordinary folks and powerful elites alike – *made* history. They also lived within stories, narratives, and myths about where they fit relative to their ancestors and forbearers. We call their accumulated stories "**collective memory**." The stories *we* get from early teachers, from family, from community and church, from media and politicians, all these have productively been labeled the "**cultural curriculum**." *Historians and teachers must work with this curriculum, which is to say all of your future students will carry historical notions and narratives already into your classrooms.* Understanding past lives in their contexts is called "**taking historical perspective**." This does not mean that we endorse or look past historical injustices, rather that we strive to understand why people might have perpetrated and perpetuated them. Remember, our own poorly understood past was at one time historical actors' dimly imagined future. Further: Understand that we ask questions of the past that serve our concerns and understandings of the present.

Nations and nationalism have been history's greatest story mills. So have international movements and ideologies like communism or free market capitalism. What would "humanistic" or "internationalist" perspectives look like, if we could strip ourselves of ideology and "loyalty to race, tribe, or nation" (Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nobel Lecture," 1964)? This class focuses on the peoples and territories who became the United States, so we will attend closely to **national myths and histories, to ideas of American national identity, and to contests over just who should be included in the circle of "We the People."**

Course Content: A sampling of recurring themes (corresponding to assignments and case studies):

How can *archaeology and ecology* change our understanding of European settlement and Indian displacement in the 16th and 17th centuries?

How can *intellectual history* -- reading drafts of the Declaration of Independence -- provide a window into overt and hidden causes of the American Revolution? How do we read the ideas and intentions of non-literate people whose records are not written down or passed down? How could a Republic dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal also generate the largest slave system in world history?

How can *oral history* give insight into the experiences of formerly enslaved people who left no written records? When they gave testimonies 70 years after the fact, how much was their memory shaped by the passage of time and their relationships with their interviewers? (Here is where we really must understand context).

How can analysis of *visual culture*, especially photography and film, open up appreciation of experience otherwise not visible to the public? How did pictures galvanize audiences to support social change?

How can *social historians* interpret quantitative census **data** to interpret the peopling of America and the mythic migrations that became core stories of our culture, such as the great Okie migration? How can *quantitative content analysis* of television shows in the 1950s help us understand social pressures on women to accept domesticity?

How can *cultural analysis* of popular songs give us access to collective experiences, such as those of Mexican migrants to Texas and California in the 1920s and 1930s?

How can a *new theory* refocus attention on underappreciated regions, people, or causes? What difference does it make to think of the West as a **frontier of expanding democracy**, or alternatively as a **zone of conquest**, or as a **"middle ground" of exchange between European and indigenous peoples**?

How did *famous murder cases* (such as the Sacco-Vanzetti trials of the 1920s) become lightning rods for conflicting ideas and mass anxieties about what America should be?

How can differing *models of decision-making* help us re-interpret events like the passage of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, or the decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan? Some models focus on individual rational actors, others focus on political or organizational behavior.

Student Learning Objectives [With Appropriate Key Words]

Upon successful completion of this course, students will demonstrate **skills of historical analysis and interpretation** including:

- **Combine evidence and theory to explain broad patterns of change** – social, economic, cultural, and political – and identify **key watersheds, transformations, or ruptures** in historical time. **Key Words: change, continuity, revolution, watersheds, structures, persistence.**
- **Analyze and evaluate debates among historians who change their interpretations and questions** in light of new evidence, new questions, new social movements, new theories, and new issues of concern to everyone. Compare these versions of the past to widely shared cultural beliefs (the "cultural curriculum"). **Key Words: Historiography; cultural curriculum; ideology; evidence and interpretation.**
- **Interpret, compare, corroborate, and contextualize competing primary sources.** Extract evidence and make inferences based on contextual knowledge. Evaluate strength and weaknesses of different kinds of evidence – oral history, photographs, cartoons, diaries, speeches, journalism, films and television programs. **Key Words: Historical Analysis; inferences, contextualization, corroboration, inconsistency, "reading the silences."**
- **Identify and evaluate popular, dominant, and dissenting historical narratives within our culture** and explain why they changed over time. **Key Words: Memory and Ideology, Myth and History.**
- **Analyze and explain cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation;** distinguish and weigh the importance of different causes in any given historical explanation.

- Develop a **repertoire of teachable history**, an approach to democratic pedagogy, **and a more inclusive understanding** of past actors. **Key Words: Inclusion, democratic pedagogy.**

Required Reading and Suggestions on How to Read:

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, 6th ed. (or 5th). New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010. [Campus Bookstore or online]. **Frequently referred to as ATF.**

The Red Reader (RR throughout the course): Available only at Copy King, 611 W Gate City Blvd, Greensboro, NC 27403, just SE of campus. **Call them first, to ensure they have not run out: (336) 333-9900.** Primary sources and scholarly articles. Published “readers” are everywhere, cost a lot, and rarely fit coherent designs. This one, carefully curated by your professor, is much more affordable and pertinent. Unfortunately, it is not possible to process through Barnes and Noble bookstore. Years of experience has shown me that if all students bring paper to class, not using electronic devices to access material, your attention to each other and the professor is what it should be.

Assignments break down readings by day. Anything with “Optional” preceding is meant to satisfy curiosity or perhaps spark a topic for the midterm and final papers. Wherever possible, there will be direct links or clear bibliographic information you will use for swift library retrieval and download.

Strategic Reading and Writing with a Purpose: Expect to read about 50-60 pages per week. Allow quiet time for careful preparation and focused analysis. What learning you derive depends on our collective shared fund of insights, which in turn depends upon each individuals’ willingness to share, agree, and disagree. **Please make a commitment to reading, preparing, and answering weekly questions individually and together.** N.B.: The University states that a 3-credit hour course will involve 6 hours of preparation outside of class.

How to Read: Use the **guiding questions** in Canvas and at the end of textbook chapters to orient you to the main ideas and take-aways for that day. **Read conclusions first** to get the big picture and understand the outlines of the thesis! Making the most of your time reading involves **previewing, reading, highlighting, note taking**, and of course, **writing**. I have posted instructions regarding **skimming and scanning**, which are essential cultivated skills.

Good writing consists of accurate **paraphrase, summary, and selective quotation**. **Quotes should occupy no more than 20% of your writing but are essential to capturing “voices” from the past and deploying key evidence.** **In more formal writings, you aim for grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs** (each with a controlling idea); you strive for **essay coherence** (evident in good **transitions** between paragraphs).

Graded Requirements (Summary)

1. **Participation (20%). Oral participation and Attendance – Offer questions or responses during lectures, or present summary findings from group discussions at the end of each class. This includes attendance. Every missed day beyond the 3 permitted will result in a 1-point loss on this requirement. Any extenuating circumstances must be serious and within the guidelines under Attendance.**
2. **Weekly Individual Contributions to Group Discussion Boards (30%)— Approximately 300 words per week-Your Best 10 Scores Count in the Final Grade (out of 12 weeks)**
3. **Myth Busters’ Reports and Short Papers. 10%. 3 pp. Papers and 5-7 minute in-class presentation, including Question and Answer. Each of 20 students will go on separate days. Sign up soon for your day!**
4. **Mid Term Paper. 20%. 1250-1750 words, 5-6 pp. Interpret one of the problems examined so far, using primary 60% and secondary 40% sources (only 20% may come from assigned sources for that day).**
5. **Final Paper (20%). Same for second half of course.**

Graded Requirements (Detailed)

1. Participation, Preparation, Attendance (20%)

Preparation, active speaking, cooperation, and respectful debate in class are essential. I lecture and I pose questions, orchestrate small group and general class discussion. You earn credit in several ways:

- a. General class discussion (questions or observations during lecture; summary comments after group discussions). Quality counts as much as quantity.
- b. Anonymous surveys will simply ask you to award points to those in your group who most substantially made your group hum. You allocate credits to yourself and your most helpful peers on a percentage basis.
- c. Show up with all assigned reading materials and visible evidence you engaged the material through highlights or other notes.

Clarity, pertinence, evidence, and concision are the keywords here. I visit small group discussions, synthesize and counterpoise your statements, and I spur you to deeper reflection. **All of you plan to be teachers, so I am not thinking anybody will be too shy to speak!** Speak to me if you have withheld your voice in the past. Some of you who do this are the most brilliant students in any given class. Individuals benefit through their own work but perhaps even more to the collective efforts of everyone. **This includes attendance. Every missed day beyond the 3 permitted will result in a 1-point loss on this requirement.**

2. Myth Busters' Reports and Short Papers. 10%. Sign up for a day and an issue! 3 pp. papers and 5-7 minute in-class presentation, including Question and Answer. (Paper counts for 6 points; presentation for 4). **In the context of contemporary controversy, a historian corrects what they see as deceptive history or mythic history.** Students invariably want to connect past with present, and one of the most important roles the historian plays is correcting false analogies and misleading interpretations or "lessons" of the past. Each day will present an opportunity for each one of you to write a three-page paper based upon an article of chapter written by a historian, correcting or complicating historical "myths" that shape contemporary debate. (Not all suggestions lend themselves to this format, and I will indicate when you may simply report conclusions and evidence of a scholar). At the end of each assignment there will be a suggestion. Something different will have to be approved by me.

Guidelines: The point will be to distill the main terms of the argument, give the most pertinent examples, and field a couple questions, all within 5-7 minutes total. You will need to practice; you should not read from a laptop or your own PowerPoint slides; at most you should use note cards; you should connect with your listeners rather than rely upon PowerPoints, though those are allowed as supportive and illustrative. **Rubric available soon on Canvas.**

Addendum: Several of these options come from two books that the class will read very selectively. *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James Loewen; and *Myth America*, eds. Zelizer and Kruse both challenge reigning misconceptions about the past: "American Exceptionalism," "The Myth of the Vanishing Indian," and the like. The first one will be James Loewen, "The Truth about the First Thanksgiving," ch. 3 in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

3. Weekly Written Discussion Board Posts (30%). 300 words total. Informal writing, "reactions," or "think pieces" on assignments. There will be one discussion board per week, covering Tuesday's and Thursday's content (Assignments and Readings and Questions with links to Weekly Discussions occur each day as ungraded assignments). **Either write as a Leader on ONE day (300 words) or a Responder on TWO separate days (150 words) (Whether you are a Leader for one day or Responder for 2 days, still the contributions will amount to 300 words at minimum. Since there are 4 members in each group, expect to write as a leader every other week. Organize yourselves in advance!** The groups will determine who will be the Leader for each day. Leaders must write before the class, responders may write before or after class. But know that simply repeating something concluded in class will not satisfy, and that late submissions will have one point deducted. At any rate by midnight of Thursday, get this done for full or partial credit. If you write after class, bring the discussion forward by adding something not covered in lecture.

Every four weeks or so, I will re-scramble the four-person sub-groups in the class, and each cluster of students will sit in such a way that you can all face each other (two rows, on one side of the room usually works). Each class will reserve at least 15 minutes for the groups to discuss and debate questions. Decide **who will be the leader for each of four days**.

The purpose: These posts inform, supplement, and reinforce the best points of oral discussion. If done well in cooperation, you will end the semester with a substantial body of reflections, arguments, and evidence, that will aid you going forward when you teach.

Criteria for Evaluation and Feedback: Make sure what you write is substantial, and not a comment on a small piece of the puzzle. Everyone will write about an interpretation that they favor, and why, in terms of concepts that make sense to them and the evidence that supports interpretation. At their best, group members will expand upon, give other supportive examples, challenge an interpretation with other evidence.

The topics? Note how historians changed their interpretations of the past. Or evaluate, contrast, contextualize the "voices" of past actors. Generic examples: What was the most interesting piece of evidence or line of new inquiry a scholar employed to cast the past in a new light? Why did F.J. Turner's own student come to the opposite conclusion about frontier democracy, was one right, or did each have a piece of the truth? Or again, "contrast the perspectives of past actors on the same events."

Be selective, not exhaustive, but be substantial! [NB: I will let you know if you are being too granular and missing aspects of the big picture, OR if you seem to be just generalizing without reference to the actual topics, people, and events].

4. Mid-term Paper *Interpreting a Problem Encountered in the First Half*. Due October 13, a day without class, after Fall Break. 1250-1750 words, 5-6 pp. 20%

A formal paper, with properly formatted endnotes, not footnotes, and no bibliography. Based on 20% assigned readings, 80% suggested or discovered extra sources. The extra resources can be sources either referenced in class or in the optional readings for assignments. Information literacy skills are necessary for topics I do not have a wealth of material on. **You should favor primary sources, but different topics lend themselves to different combinations of sources.** These should not be the result of Google searches or thirdhand educational sites, like some UK high school. You want scholarship or original primary sources. The class will see many mini-tutorials on source discovery. I am very happy to brainstorm with you in advance! Actually, it is one of the most fun parts of my job. I will post some suggestions. *Under no circumstances, will I accept papers tangentially related to the issues of any given day. This is intended to completely remove the temptation of recycling work previously done or use of AI.* (Times New Roman or equivalent Font, 11 or 12 pt. no more than 1" margins, block quotes at single spacing).

The midterm paper and the final paper will ask you to consider evidence and ideas from one of the days in much greater depth, involving extra reading. The writing may reflect some of the shared readings, but most of the paper (80% or more) should draw insights from primary and secondary sources not assigned to the whole class. You may select whatever day in advance, and you may change topics as we go forward.

5. Final Paper -- Due December 7, 3:30 PM (exam time). Submit on Canvas, 1250-1750 words, 5-6 pp. 20% Same as mid-term. Suggestions will be posted on Canvas.

Your final paper, due the day of the final exam after classes, will put into practice some of the interpretation skills you have refined in this class. You will report briefly on your preliminary findings on the last day.

Grading Scale:

A (93.3 and above), A- (90-93.2); B+ (87-90), 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).

Canvas and One Drive: Canvas is the learning system where you will find all assignments and rubrics and links to sources. They will also have clear links to some One Drive folders with optional readings and some sign-up sheets and

study aids. Always check Canvas for the *authoritative and complete* assignments. You will have plenty of advance warning if any change is merited.

Technology Requirements and Support: I don't prohibit useful devices in class, but I ask you to make them truly useful for the class. Most readings will be paper. If I see people using technology to absent themselves psychically from the class, I will pull you aside for a chat after class.

Writing Assignments: All assignments must be submitted on Canvas using either .rtf, .docx, or .pdf format, so I can more easily comment in text, either in Canvas or by downloading and uploading again. Your weekly posts do not require full citations other than page references, but use full citations in endnote style when writing the 2 formal papers. Learn these rules. See Rampolla's *Student Guide*, chs. 6-7, which will remain at the top of Canvas syllabus page. Papers should be double spaced unless otherwise indicated, 1" or .75" margins and no more either 11 or 12 pt. font, Times New Roman or equivalent. (Block quotes, used sparingly, should be single spaced). This yields an average of 250-300 words per page.

Feedback and assessment: I use voice dictation software to comment directly on student papers, in addition to any comments or rubrics that you find on Canvas. This software makes mistakes I sometimes do not catch. Forgive me in advance and don't hesitate to ask me if something I write/dictate is confusing. Formal papers submitted as .pdf or .doc or .rtf files *must* be named as I need to download, comment, and upload these: Last Name_HIS391_Date_Subject (like "Slave Narratives"). Don't just title them "History Paper."

University Virtual Accounts: tjackson@uncg.edu is my University email. That is the best way to get in touch with me. Accounts: You must use your UNCG email account and have an active account to gain access to Canvas and the Library databases. Please do not ask for permission through @gmail.com or other account. Email: Please address questions to me via email regarding assignments, appointments, mishaps. Subject line: "HIS 316 question." If you don't hear back from me in 24 hours (weekends excepted), please try me again. If you must hear sooner, use Subject Line: "URGENT His 316 problem."

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious offense of the academic code and is treated as such by faculty. Familiarize yourself with the responsibilities of the instructor and the options I have with respect to Academic Integrity: <http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integritypolicy/> Turnitin is a software program attached to Canvas to clue you and your professor into possible plagiarism.

AI writing code of conduct: reproduction of any machine generated text using artificial intelligence is also plagiarism. AI engines like ChatGPT might in fact put a few textbook publishers out of business, but they simply will not help you develop and assess your own interpretations of history. They will not help you discover historical sources and synthesize them into meaningful interpretations. They apparently scoop every possible idea and explanation out of the metaverse's intellectual soup, and serve up a literal mishmash, readily identifiable as such. Canvas has ways of detecting AI-generated plagiarism. *More importantly, if you do not learn to think more creatively than a machine, you might just be replaced by one in a future job that you settled for, because no one asked you to think for yourself.*

Attendance: Regular, punctual attendance is required. More than three absences for any reason will lower your participation grade by one point per missed day. Accommodations: Prolonged illness or personal and family emergencies and setbacks – let me know very generally you are in this camp and I'll work with you. Don't ask for exceptions for conflicting work schedules or early vacation plans. Sports team players have their own process. Appropriate accommodations should be registered with SOAR. (See Canvas for particulars about Accessibility and Accommodations). If you experience an extenuating circumstance, let me know as early as possible, and at my discretion some or all point deductions might be waved. I respect the University's policy on religious holidays and will work with anyone absent on that account.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES
ALWAYS CHECK CANVAS FOR READINGS, LINKS, AND QUESTIONS
(A MS word .docx version of this syllabus *With* Assignments can be downloaded from Canvas)

8/15: Introductions

8/17: The “Cultural Curriculum” and the Educational Calling

Hochschild, Adam. “History Bright and Dark | Adam Hochschild.” *New York Review of Books*, May 2, 2023. Magazine [website](#). Download [1 page](#) and [double page](#) compressed. TJ’s [Hulu 17:15](#).

Hannah-Jones, Nikole. “[America Wasn’t a Democracy](#), Until Black Americans Made It One.” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2019, sec. Magazine.

Serwer, Adam. “[The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts](#).” *The Atlantic*, December 23, 2019.

Questions: Write 200 words. I want to see how you write. What are the fundamental “origin stories” that are contending in the public sphere and now attempting to shape public school curricula? Can you teach the facts of U.S. history apart from any interpretation, or is the very selection of a fact an interpretive action?

Optional: The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum is available for free download [here](#). The 9-12 grade curriculum in US History I downloaded [here](#). (Page 22 on Jamestown is revealing). President Trump’s Advisory 1776 Commission - Final Report is [here](#). The 1619 Project is available through the initial New York Times Magazine downloaded [here](#) and through the expanded ebook available [here](#). Any paper you write might profitably spend a page contrasting the two approaches to sharpen your interpretive questions.

8/22: Demography and Ecology in the “Columbian Exchange”

8/24: Surviving Colonial Jamestown: Tobacco, Disease, Conflict and Mortality

8/29: New England – Conflict and Transformation – Interpreting Causation in the Salem Witch Craze

8/31: Independence -- Ideas and Actions in the American Revolution

9/5: Westward Expansion – Jacksonian Democracy? Jacksonian Aristocracy? Jacksonian Dispossession?

9/7: “Middle Ground” to “Zone of Conquest” – Cherokee Acculturation and Cherokee Removal

9/12: Recovering Enslavement and Emancipation from Below, Through Oral History

9/14: Anti-Slavery and Sectional Crisis--John Brown, Sanity, and Revolutionary Violence in Context

9/19: Lincoln, Reconstruction, and Black Political Agency

9/21: 19th Century Class Formation and Its Legacies—Andrew Carnegie and Henry George

9/26: The Immigrant City and the Middle-Class Conscience--Jacob Riis and His Audiences

9/28: Between Victorian and Progressive: Jacob Riis’ Immigrant Nativism—Immigrants and the Nativist Gaze

10/3: Progressive Symbolism and the Political Process--Upton Sinclair, TR, and Congress Take on the Meat Trusts

10/5: Upton Sinclair: Socialism and Reform in Meat Packing

10/10: Fall Break

10/12: Mid-term paper is due. No class.

10/17: Sacco and Vanzetti: Americanization and Nativism in the "Tribal Twenties"

10/19: Corridos & Tragedias De La Frontera: Mexican American Migration and Popular Culture in the 1920s and 1930s

10/24: The Dust Bowl and the Great California Migrations

10/26: Dorothea Lange and John Steinbeck: Artists and Documentarians

10/31: Presidential Authority and Military Bureaucracy: The Atomic Bomb Debate

11/2: Did Father Know Best? Women and Popular Culture: TV, Magazines, The Power of the Media

11/7: The Greensboro Sit Ins: Change and Continuity -- Why Greensboro? Why 1960?

11/9: Black Revolution and the March on Washington Coalition

11/14: Vietnam and American Memory in Film and Oral History

11/16: Incident at Son My: The Load of Responsibility

11/21: Final Paper Commitment

11/23: Thanksgiving break

11/28: Last day—Student Reports on Findings, or What the Rest of Us Don't Know Yet!

12/7: 3:00 PM, Final Paper is due on Canvas (this is the end of the final exam period)