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Spring 2012
MHRA 2208
TR 3:30-4:45

HIS 394-01 Hard Times in Home Places: Working-Class and Middle-Class Americans' Quest for Security, 1911-2011 (WI, SI), GEC: HSS,



This course explores vivid examples of local social history as lived by ordinary people through a sampling of our best nonfiction writing and a few excellent films. We will focus upon the very topical issue of how families and communities who were confronted with adversity sought stability and security, relying upon each other, and increasingly, looking to government for support and solutions to crises in the market or the environment. Tough economic times, epic racial confrontations, and environmental disasters tend to lay bare the tangled power relations in which ordinary Americans find themselves. Under adversity, people show what they are made of and capable of. We can thereby take the pulse of their agency and responsibility. Events like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911, the 1930s Dust Bowl, or Hurricane Katrina also challenged America's political institutions and culture. They tested the nation's capacity to respond to collective challenges through collective voluntary and government action. Other local stories serve as intense microcosms to see how groups seek solidarity in new and frightening places. A black doctor defends his home in a white Detroit neighborhood against a mob attack in 1924, and is put on trial for murder. Refugees from Guatemala's civil war rebuild their communities in Morganton, North Carolina in the 1990s, enduring long hours and harsh

working conditions in the poultry factories where they work. Through individual research projects and reports, class members will also educate each other about the larger historical contexts in which people struggled for survival and security over the last century.

The current economic crisis and glacially slow recovery from the worst slump since the Great Depression inevitably will frame our discussion of how Americans have increasingly looked to government to solve problems, or in some cases, stop causing problems. We will continually discuss ideals of national community and purpose in relation to class and other forms of inequality. Many of the working-class actors we will read about for example are either economic migrants or immigrants. Their status as working-class newcomers often pitted them against native born working-class or middle-class people. At other times, middle-class people have identified with working-class people and sought common cause.

In addition to our discussion of six books and several films, each student will share with the class a presentation based upon individual research into aspects of the larger contexts in which the particular events examined in the books played out. As we read about the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, for example a student may want to lecture upon women's trade unionism, or Progressive Era efforts to secure workplace protections for workers. Our discussion of the Maya in Morganton, North Carolina may spur a student to lecture upon working conditions in meatpacking industries generally, or perhaps examine the evolving policy distinctions in government between political refugees and economic migrants in the 1980s and 1990s. As we dive into these discussions, I will provide many suggestions for presentations. I'd like each student to sign up for a different topic until all are covered.

These smaller research projects and presentations may or may not lead to your final paper, which should engage a community or group of people faced with economic or environmental challenges. I will supply a list of researchable topics, and you will report briefly at the end of the semester on research progress. I will give quick feedback on a draft that will then be rewritten by the day of the final exam, Tuesday, May 1.

Student Learning Outcomes.

By the end of this course you should be able to:

1. Identify the main historical issues and analytical problems embedded in historical narratives.
2. Place particular communities, individuals, or famous events in the larger historical contexts – social, political, economic, international – that help explain people's actions and outlooks, paying particular attention to their cultural assumptions about the role of government in promoting security.
3. Orally report upon historical trends that are necessary to explaining particular historical actions.

4. Research, write, and report on the experiences of American working and middle-class people in a particular context in such a way that explains their actions and changing expectations of each other and government.

Required texts:

Occasional articles on blackboard to help frame discussion.

Von Drehle, Dave. *Triangle : The Fire That Changed America*. 1st ed. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003.

Boyle, Kevin. *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*. 1st ed. New York: H.Holt, 2004.

Egan, Timothy. *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*. 1st Mariner Books ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Fink, Leon. *The Maya of Morganton : Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Eggers, Dave. *Zeitoun*. San Francisco: Mcsweeney's Books, 2009.

Reding, Nick. *Methland : The Death and Life of an American Small Town*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Requirements:

Participation and Preparation 30%

Come to each class having done the reading and the written assignments, and ready to engage in respectful but possibly contentious discussion. You will be evaluated on the quality and pertinence of your remarks, not just on quantity. I allow 4 absences for whatever reason before deducting points, so don't miss class for light reasons.

Written Assignments on Blackboard 30%

In advance of each week I will ask for reflection pieces on the reading or specific small research assignments, such as comparing an account in one of our narratives with a contemporary news report. By Thursday of each week you should have an assignment for the following week: check your email and "Announcements" in Blackboard.

Presentation 15%

Practice these in advance. These should be thoroughly researched and informed by facts and theoretical perspectives that shed light on the large social and ecological changes that we are considering during the class you sign up for.

Interim and Final Research Paper 25%

In 12 pages, lay out a problem requiring explanation and share the fruits of your empirical research into problems raised by the class. A list of possible topics and questions will be up on blackboard soon, but don't limit your interest to what I can come up with!

Course policy on sustainability: UNCG recently began a sustainability initiative. Campus-wide policies are being adopted that require students, staff and faculty to act in ecologically conscious ways while at UNCG. UNCG's web site says: "Sustainability is an approach to discovering and implementing a balance of economic and social equity with ecological awareness in order to minimize damage to the environment caused by human activity." While in class and performing assignments, students must strive to act in ecologically conscious ways. This means that you need to: recycle plastic bottles or bring filtered or tap water in reusable bottles; turn off lights and projectors when you are the last to leave a room, or when you see an empty room; recycle office paper, newspapers, and cardboard; if possible, turn papers in to me on two-sided paper. Of course there is no grade and no points here, just the grade the biosphere gives us at the end of the third millennium!

Here are a few links to sustainability information at UNCG, including a recycling guide.

<http://sustain.uncg.edu/> <http://www.uncg.edu/student.groups/uncgreen/index.htm>

<http://www.uncg.edu/rcy/index.htm>

UNCG's Academic Integrity Policy <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/>

Violations of this policy include, but are not limited to 1) Cheating 2) Plagiarism: (see link below). Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy will be handled in accordance with UNCG procedures. An Educational Resolution Program option is available to undergraduate students with no other Academic Integrity violations.

Penalties can range anywhere from having to redo the assignment, to receiving an F on the assignment or even the course, to expulsion from the University (in cases of repeated violations).

Plagiarism Defined. Memorize the library's definition and then take the research tour!

<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/tutorial/integrate/plagdef.asp>

Grading Scale: A+: 98-100; A: 93-97; 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: 59 and lower.

Schedule of Meetings

1/10: Introductions

1/12-1/26: The Immigrant Working Class, The Progressive Middle Class, and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Von Drehle, Dave. *Triangle : The Fire That Changed America*. 1st ed. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003.

1/31-2/14: The Great Black Migration, Working Class Detroit, and the Sweet Case

Boyle, Kevin. *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*. 1st ed. New York: H.Holt, 2004.

2/16-3/1: Dreams to Dust: the Great Plains in the 1930s

Egan, Timothy. *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Spring Break

3/13-3/22: New New Immigrants in the Nuevo New South

Fink, Leon. *The Maya of Morganton : Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

3/27-4/5: The National Insecurity State: Hurricane Katrina and the War on Terror

Eggers, Dave. *Zeitoun*. San Francisco: Mcsweeney's Books, 2009.

4/10-4/19: Gutting Small Town America in the 2000s: Iowa and the Meth Epidemic

Reding, Nick. *Methland : The Death and Life of an American Small Town*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.