

The Making of Modern America

SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND WRITING

THUR 3:30-6:20 MHRA 3208

INSTRUCTOR: DR. SUSAN W. THOMAS EMAIL: swthoma3@uncg.edu

OFFICE HOURS: 2114 MHRA 9:30-10:30, OR BY APPT.

Required Texts Available in Campus Bookstore

- Katznelson, Ira. *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*. New York: Liveright, 2013.
- Klein, Maury. *Rainbow's End: Crash of 1929*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Love, Eric. *Race Over Empire: Racism and US Imperialism, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1917*. New York: W.W. Norton, Reprint 2011.
- Parrish, Michael. *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941*. New York: W.W. Norton 1994.
- Worster, Donald. *The Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, Reprint 2004.

Course Purpose

HIS 511 is the capstone course for history majors at UNCG. The course requires students to conduct original primary source research related to a topic of their choosing within the parameters of the chronological framework established by the readings. By the end of the semester, students will complete a 15-20 page research paper and present their findings to the class.

Course Description

This course examines the half-century plus surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, a period that arguably laid the foundation for modern America. Historians have divided these years into the Gilded Age (1877-1900), the Progressive Era (1890-1920), the Roaring Twenties, the Depression (1929-1941), and the New Deal ((1932-1941). Characterized by greed and excess, poverty and despair, reform and retrenchment, these decades saw individuals and the government grapple with the consequences of unbridled industrial growth and unsettling cultural changes. Rapid industrial growth, massive immigration, unprecedented urbanization, and disturbing racial tensions presented new problems and demanded new solutions. Consumerism and cultural shifts, as well as technological advances resulted in dramatic changes in American life. Out of this miasma emerged much of what we recognize as Modern America.

This is a reading and speaking intensive course that will require you to submit written drafts for revision, participate in peer reviews, lead discussion, and present your research. The reading load for this course is intensive, although for some texts you will only be reading selected sections. Aside from the texts, occasional supplemental readings will be provided on Blackboard.

Course Goals

At the end of this semester, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the skills of historical thinking and critical analysis in their written and oral communication
- Understand how to make a historical argument and support it with evidence
- Identify and evaluate relevant points of analysis when reading primary and secondary sources

Graded Course Components

1. Research assignments

All undergraduate students will be required to complete a series of research exercises during the course of the semester. Each assignment must be completed by the assigned due date. Detailed descriptions of these assignments will be included at the end of this syllabus. Here is a summary list of these assignments:

1. Project Description
2. Preliminary Bibliography
3. Critique of a Peer's Paper

2. Historiographical Essay

A historiographical essay is a critical overview of a variety of historical interpretations of a given topic. All undergraduate students in this class will produce a 5-7 page historiographical essay, in which they will compare the main arguments of the 6-8 secondary sources they have located for their research paper.

3. Class presentations

All students will be required to give two presentations to the class during the semester. One will be as a part of a group leading discussion on a selected reading, the other will be a presentation of your research paper.

4. Final Paper

All students will produce a research paper based on original research in primary and contextualized with secondary sources by the end of this semester. Paper topics may vary by individual interest within the chronological time frame of the course. Please remember that the quality of your writing, particularly the clarity and persuasiveness of your argument, will factor into the final grading. **No late papers will be accepted.**

All students will supply briefly annotated bibliographies with their final essays. An annotated bibliography is a list of books, articles, and documents, in which each entry is followed by a brief description of the source itself. These descriptions, or annotations, are provided to advise the reader on the accuracy and usefulness of the materials you have cited in your bibliography.

For a better sense of what it entails to create an annotated bibliography, see the Cornell University Library's web site at <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm>. This page contains a very good overview of the process. The Cornell Library's tutorial page, titled "Skill Guides: How to Find Specific Resources," is filled with other useful information. This page may be found at <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/tutorialsguides.html>.

5. Class Participation

The discussion and the exchange of ideas are very important in this seminar style class. Everyone will be expected to participate, and you should feel free to ask questions in every class. **Note:** I ask that all students bring at least 5 questions from the weekly readings. I will collect these questions at the beginning of class and they will contribute to your participation grade.

Grade Distribution

(Undergraduates)		(Graduate students)	
Research exercises	20%	Final paper (25-30 pages)	50%
Historiographical essay (5-7 pages)	10%	Historiographical essay (4-5 pages)	10%
Class presentations	20%	Class presentations	20% (10%
Final paper (18-20 pages)	30%	each)	
Class participation	20%	Class participation	20%

Schedule of Assignments

Feb 13: Proposal and Research Questions
Mar 6: Preliminary Annotated Bibliography
March 20: Historiographical Essay
Apr 10: Rough Draft
Apr 17: Peer Review
May 6: Final Draft

Schedule of Class Meetings

Jan 16) Introduction to Course

Jan 23) Gilded Age

Discussion of Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*

Additional Readings:

Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Persuasion*

Alan Trachtenburg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*

H.W. Brands, *American Colossus: The Triumph of Capitalism, 1865-1900*

Jan 30) Library

*****Feb 6) Imperialism and Foreign Policy**

Discussion of Love, Race Over Empire

Additional Sources:

Online Primary Source Collection: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook34.asp>

Perez, Louis. *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography.*

Renda, Mary. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of US Imperialism, 1915-1940.*

Traxel, David. *1898: The Birth of an American Century*

Feb 13) Progressivism and WWI

Readings on BB:

Peter Filene, "An Obituary for the Progressive Movement"

Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism"

Additional Sources:

Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*

Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*

William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*

✓ **Proposal and Questions Due**

*****Feb 20) Progressivism and WWI**

Discussion of Parrish, *Anxious Decades*

Additional Sources:

David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*

Mar 6) Immigration and Race Relations

Readings on BB:

Mae. M. Ngai, "Nationalism, Immigration Control, and the Ethnoracial Remapping of America in the 1920s"

Andrew Urban, "Asylum in the Midst of Chinese Exclusion: Pershing's Punitive Expedition and the Columbus Refugees from Mexico, 1916-1921"

William H. Siener, "Through the Back Door: Evading the Chinese Exclusion Act along the Niagara Frontier, 1900-1924"

Additional Readings:

Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1877-1917*

✓ **Preliminary Bibliography Due**

*****Feb 27: Roaring Twenties**

Discussion of Klein, *Rainbow's End*

Additional Readings:

William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*

Mar 13: Spring Break

*****Mar 20) Depression**

Discussion of Worster, *Dust Bowl*

Additional Sources:

Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of those who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*

Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression*

David Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression: Freedom From Fear, Part 1*

Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*

✓ **Historiographical Essay Due**

Mar 27: Research and Writing Day

Apr 3: Research and Writing Day

*****Apr 10: New Deal**

Discussion of Katznelson, *Fear Itself*

Additional Sources:

Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*

Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*

✓ **Rough Draft Due**

Apr 17: Presentations

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✓ **Peer Reviews Due**

Apr 24: Presentations

✓ **Final Paper Due to my office by 6:30 p.m. May 6**

Appendix #1:

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #1: PROJECT DESCRIPTION¹

Due: Monday, February 13, in class

Assignment: On a sheet of paper, please type the following:

1. List your General Topic
2. Come up with a more specific Research Question (one sentence)
3. Write one (1) paragraph describing how you will answer this question
4. Append a list of one (1) primary and one (1) secondary source appropriate to your question. Remember: all of these may well change in the next few weeks, but you need to try to sketch out a project as soon as possible.

Explanation of the Assignment:

1. General Topic:

Here I am asking for the research theme that first caught your eye. It is necessarily broad and descriptive.

2. Research Question:

Every historian begins her/his research with a question. The question helps to determine what you hope to uncover about your general topic. Your topic may be the Labor Unions, but you need to narrow it down and ask "What about Labor Unions?" In other words, what are you hoping to find out about your topic? It is important to have a research question (or perhaps one or two questions) before starting to do your research, or else you will not know what to look for. It is very common for your question(s) to change as you do research.

Keep in mind that there are several kinds of questions. The weakest questions require a description for their answer. Hence the question "What happened during the General Railroad Strike of 1877?" requires only that you find some texts about the events and report back about them. Such a question is more suited to journalism than it is to history. A second, more impressive question is one that requires analysis in answering it. This question, "What did the strike tell us about working conditions and relations between business and labor during the early Gilded Age?" clearly requires you to do more than simply file a report. It requires you to think about the meaning of your topic to particular people in particular circumstances. This is the stuff of history.

Your research question is something that you should keep in the forefront of your mind for the entire semester. Constantly ask yourself "Why am I reading [whatever source]? What am I looking for?" Your research question will guide your reading appropriately.

¹A special word of thanks to Professors Rick Barton and Jamie Anderson for their assistance with the description of these assignments.

3. Brief Description of the Project:

Explain to me how you think you will pursue the research question you have just asked. You might discuss the kinds of sources you know (or hope) are available, and suggest some preliminary conclusions to your question. I only need a short paragraph here.

4. A List of Two Sources:

Provide the bibliographic information for one primary source and one secondary source that you feel will be relevant to your topic. Should you be at a loss for sources, you might consult the bibliographies in our course materials, or you can speak with me. If you are having trouble keeping primary and secondary sources straight, please refer to the Library of Congress's reference page (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/start/prim_sources.html) for this topic.

A tip on formulating Research Questions: [taken from Gregory G. Colomb et al., *Craft of Research*, p. 44]

It may help in formulating your Research Question to work through the following sequence of questions.

1. Name your topic:

"I am studying [topic]

2. Imply your question:

"because I want to find out who/how/why _____

3. State the rationale for the question and project:

"in order to understand how/why _____

Appendix #2:**RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #2: PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY****DUE: Feb 20 in class**

Assignment:

1. Prepare a preliminary bibliography for your topic. This bibliography should include 8-12 items, divided into the following categories (arrange works alphabetically within each section):

I. Primary Sources: I expect to see at least 3 listed.

II. Secondary Sources

A. Books (I expect 4-6)

B. Articles (I expect 2-4)

2. Provide a short annotation with each bibliographic entry that includes a 1-2 sentence rationale for that source (i.e., why you think it will be useful). You may place this comment immediately after the bibliographic entry.

Reminders:

A. Remember that primary sources are those written during the period you are studying; secondary sources are analyses by modern writers.

B. Books: often there will not be a book on your specific topic. Most scholars look for books to provide general or background information on the time period, region, or concept that interests them. You ought to be able to find books relatively easily by using any of the bibliographies listed on our History 511 Lib Guide created by Kathy Crowe.

C. Articles: while it is generally harder for students to find articles than books, the reward is much greater. Articles, if well selected, often pertain more directly to the topic at hand and often provide much more specific interpretations against which you can shape your own argument. To find articles, use bibliographies and footnotes in books you have located, and/or the on-line databases, such as JStor and America History and Life.

Appendix #3:

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #3: CRITIQUE OF PEER'S PAPER: Due Apr 17

Write a short (no more than 2 page) critique of your colleague's paper. Provide two (2) copies of that critique (one for your colleague, and one for me).

Components of the Critique: your critique should cover the following areas and/or questions.

1. **Thesis/Argument:** What is the argument of the paper? Is it clearly identified? Does the author maintain it throughout the paper? Does he/she successfully prove his/her point? How might the argument be strengthened?
2. **Historiography:** If appropriate, comment on how well the author situates his/her paper in the existing literature. That is, has the author examined the existing literature? How does his/her paper contribute to, modify, or reject the existing literature?
3. **Evidence:** Does the author possess sufficient evidence of sufficient quality to support his/her argument? Or does the evidence suggest something else? Does the author explain his/her evidence, or does he/she assume that you will see the importance of it? If the latter, how might he/she improve his/her discussion of the evidence?
4. **Structure:** Is the paper well organized? Could you follow the line of the argument? If not, how might the organization of the paper be improved? Remember that the ideal paper is like an assembly line, with each paragraph adding a bit more to the product until the conclusion, at which point you have a unified, coherent whole. Look for superfluous paragraphs and/or areas where expansion of the theme is necessary.
5. **Style:** Be careful and kind here. Everyone possesses an individual style. Still, you might well consider how the author's style helps and/or hinders the paper.
6. **Citations:** Does the author cite sources in a consistent way? Do the citations (either footnotes or endnotes) provide the needed support for the argument? That is, are they useful or are they peripheral to the argument?
7. **Grammar and Typos:** does the paper contain grammar errors and/or misspelled words? You only need comment on this if there is a serious problem (anyone can leave a few typos, but it's only worth commenting upon if they become so numerous as to detract from meaning).

APPENDIX #4

FINAL PAPER/DUE MAY 6

The final paper will be due by May 6 and must be submitted in person either in class or to my office by 8:30 pm on the due date. The required components for the final submission and the writing guidelines are provided below, along with formatting and style guidelines for the paper.

1. All components of the research process that led to the final paper must be included in the final submission. You will lose 10 points from your final paper grade if you do not turn these in at the end of the semester. The required assignments are:

- Project Description
- Preliminary Bibliography
- Rough Draft with Peer Review

2. Final Draft Description

1. Cover Page with the following information centered vertically and horizontally: Title of Paper, Name of Course, Instructor's Name, Your Name, The Date
2. Your 18-20 page paper
3. Annotated Bibliography

3. Formatting Guidelines

12 point Times New Roman or similar font
1 inch or less margins
Double Spacing
Page Numbers inserted in footer/bottom right
Footnotes follow Chicago Manual of Style

3. Style Guidelines

Do not use contractions
Avoid slang and jargon
Use adverbs only when the meaning would be unclear without them
Strive for simplicity and clarity/avoid using 'big words' just because they sound good
Use block quotes sparingly
Limit quoted matter to primary sources whenever possible