This course surveys major developments in historical writing about U.S. political, social, cultural, intellectual, and environmental history since the Civil War. We will read several focused monographs, but I tilted the list toward titles I judged to be synthetic, interpretive, and well written. In our field, I find the most exciting action in places where historians work with diverse sources and balance factors of culture and structure, power and agency, analysis and narrative, qualitative and quantitative evidence. But such a class can only be a sampler, not the “comprehensive” coverage of US History since the Civil War that many feel you will need to teach and function as a professional. In fact, there is no humanly possible way to master all fields of US history in this period. The best you can aspire to is to identify 10 or 12 “burning questions” in service to which your historical reading and research will aspire. (The final assignment helps you do this).

As such this course introduces you to a range of topics, themes, methods, and genres of history. We will consider the historiography of various eras and problems, but our principal focus will be on understanding and evaluating the ways in which particular historians have posed and answered questions within more limited but still significant ranges: the struggle for black freedom in Reconstruction; the re-forging of a nation around principles of capitalist progress, manhood, and racial hierarchy at home and in the world; assertions of state power in Prohibition, as progressives and evangelicals joined in a failed episode of state making; progress in civil rights and the persistence of racial inequality in housing and criminal justice.

Recurring themes that reflect the concerns of the instructor:
How could liberalism and illiberalism, inclusion and exclusion, liberty and coercion, equality and hierarchy be so consistently present in U.S. history, even as we discern marked changes over time in the power and status of various groups? 
How have debates and decisions about political economy and the balance of economic power among business, labor, consumer, and other interest groups affected the course of US development?
How have grassroots mobilization and coalition politics advanced Black equality in particular, even as new forms of control and inequality frequently replaced old.
How has popular politics, war, depression, class, gender, and racial conflict reshaped the party system, the balance of state, local, and federal power, the rights accorded citizens under the evolving Constitution, and the beneficiaries (or losers) in state-building? (That’s a big one).
How has the United States’ role in the world changed through imperial competition, World Wars, Cold War and global interventions?
How can stories of individual determination, overcoming, and loss illuminate larger changes and conflicts?

Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Discuss the major themes of United States social, political, and cultural development since 1865.
2. Analyze how historians have revised their narratives and explanations of problems in United States history since 1865.
3. Read and discuss secondary scholarly literature with multiple and clear purposes in mind, identifying main arguments, evaluating methods and evidence, assessing historiographic contributions, extracting useful insights and lively information for your teaching.
4. Define your principal areas of interest and your own "burning questions" in the field of post-1865 American history. Defining "field competencies" involves assembling notes and bibliographies that will prove useful to passing graduate comprehensive exams and to future teaching, research, or public history projects.

Main Required Readings (In Bookstore and On-line Sellers):


Foner, Eric, and Joshua Brown. *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. New York: Vintage, 2006. Widely available. (This is the shorter up to date popular version of *Reconstruction* for a wider audience of readers, which you may also purchase instead).


Guidelines for Thorough Yet Strategic Reading: You will forget the vast majority of what you read, but you must read it to remember anything! Take thoughtful analytical notes that will make sense to you later! I do this a lot in the margins and then just flag the pages in books I own. Consult book reviews and historiographical essays to help clue you into what might be important to evaluate in a work (but don’t solely rely upon these partial reviews). Choosing what to record, copy, or cite is a skill learned over years.

Definitely use my orienting questions posed in Canvas (these will vary in detail and timing depending on my schedule and whether I have read the book thoroughly before, so don’t depend on my questions exhausting yours). A strategic approach is to pose questions after reading the Introduction and Conclusion, and then try to line up references and notes that answer those questions. Research has shown that people remember facts, dates, personalities and concepts that matter to questions they deem important. What are the main concepts behind this narrative and explanation? What is the author’s basic approach to historical explanation? What is the key interpretive storyline? Are there analytical concepts that open up worlds of knowledge and interpretation? How do individuals embody or symbolize or make their mark on larger movements and trends? Is there something here I would want to put in a lecture or capture in a public exhibit? Is there a note or a quote here that might end up in something I would want to write? What do the titles really mean? Who is *Killing for Coal* in Colorado, America, the world? Who is seeking the *Rebirth of a Nation*, and how—and how many ways can “rebirth” be named and illustrated? How are *Liberty and Coercion* inextricably bound up with each other in the structure of American government and social relations? Did the *War on Crime* replace or succeed the *War on Poverty* or was the former imbricated in the latter?
Structure of our classes and conversations:

The core of this course are the hours we spend in dialogue. Conversations should move among three overlapping levels. Graduate students should be building a base of knowledge and notes that will serve you in comprehensive exams and in your careers as scholars, teachers, or public historians. So obviously you should be thinking on several levels simultaneously as your professional identity takes shape.

I will steer conversation to each if the class doesn’t fully explore these dimensions:

1) Historical change, explanation, and content knowledge. How has this work added to your knowledge of this period and the fundamental questions of American history? How does it shed light on major issues and developments in the political, social, and cultural history of the United States? How would you explain the book’s main insights to an undergraduate more interested in history than historiography? How do these insights shed light on current issues and choices?

2) Historiography. Can this work help you understand how professional historical writing and argumentation has changed over time, in response to new evidence, new questions, and new frames of reference? What intervention into the ongoing conversations among scholarly historians does it make? How does it periodize or characterize an era, illuminate a neglected arena of public life, or make connections between disparate phenomena that haven’t been customarily related? Because a number of these works are synthetic and intended to cross over professional and “trade publication” status, the author might not prominently state their contribution. But you can usually find it in footnotes, related articles, or book reviews. Use all of these. ASK me for the best historiographical reviews.

3) Genre, Method and Models for Doing History and Becoming a Historian. Are there basic concepts, research strategies, ways of relating different historical changes as revealed in the book’s sources and structure, which are particularly useful or interesting to you as you go forward with your sense of what it is possible to do in the discipline? Are there implications for broader publics of non-specialists, citizens, activists, policy people, literary nonfiction lovers and writers?

Logistics:
Each class will have one “historiographer” and “co-facilitator” who will help the rest of us situate this work in the “ongoing conversations” and periodic “revisions” of basic narratives and ways of explaining change. Sometimes a work will straddle fields, change our basic “frames of reference” and draw connections between arenas of public and private life hitherto treated in isolation. Each historiographer will give a 10 minute report that references work that preceded (or followed) scholarship that we are reading. (I will gently cut your presentation short if it goes over 11 minutes).

What stands out in our particular book as either novel, or typical of a “school” or a trend in historical writing? Consult one or two historiographical articles as guidance, select two or at most three other scholars whose work ours complements or contests. Download and selectively read their articles or peruse their books for a sense of how other authors make arguments and present evidence (I will talk about how to quickly perform “first passes” on books you don’t have time to fully read). You should also dig into the author’s footnotes if she takes explicit issue with someone else, and consult a few book reviews to help the class understand how to place this work in an evolving field. In addition to the suggestions below, heck the canvas page for that week, for my own take on questions and refined lists of suggested writings. Use search engines or browse the professor’s huge digital archive in Google Drive entitled “Historio/Comps” (see Canvas link at top of electronic syllabus). Reviews in American History is the gold standard for reviews, but Journal of American History and H-NET also have valuable reviews, as do specialized journals such as Labor and Journal of the Guilded Age and Progressive Era.
Guidelines for Thinking and Talking:
Just to remind you how things go well. Let’s critically appreciate a work before zeroing in its shortcomings or the things we wish it had done, but didn’t. Listen respectfully and respond to specific people and sustain the dialogue within a circle rather than addressing the professor primarily. Openly disagree without being disagreeable, or concur without parroting: add or elaborate on significant evidence or insight. Keep electronic devices, especially cellphones, stowed. Don’t use laptops in a way that pulls attention out of the room into cyberspace. Be sensitive to the tone of a discussion as well as its surface content. If you find viewpoints described by historians as abhorrent, don’t abandon your values, but try to take historical perspective, regarding people who we might disparage as three dimensional actors with difficult pasts and uncertain futures. Their uncertain future is our own imperfectly knowable past. By the same token, appreciate that historical consciousness involves an ever deepening knowledge of human behavior, norms, and patterns of cause and effect, insights that past actors did not have available to them. Appreciate that outcomes were never inevitable, and that a range of choices were always considered and debated within any situation.

Graded Requirements:

Class Participation, 40%. Criteria for evaluating verbal participation: 1. Comments should be pertinent to the analytical question before the class. 2. Analytical claims should be backed up by concrete evidence and focused examples. 3. Quality and focus rather than quantity governs, i.e. just talking doesn’t translate into credit. I will gently cut your remarks short if it seems like you are monopolizing. 4. Comments are best situated in response to other people’s points in a way that reveals careful listening. 5. Criticisms of the work are balanced with critical appreciation. 6. Respectful disagreement is valued and encouraged, as is concurrence. If you concur, give a supportive example. Each of your three presentations to the class will count and receive constructive feedback.

Class Blogs, Discussion Boards, Comments (weekly, but I take the best 10) 30%. Informal 1–2 pages (300-500 words). As with everything, these are reflective and evaluative, not simply descriptive or comprehensive. Don’t write about everything, but don’t simply pick some small insight or surprising revelation from one chapter. Go with a theme or thread that is sustained in the book. You don’t have to have finished all the reading to crystalize your thoughts in writing. Write these and then finish if you, like me, prepare right up to the start of a class. Focus on perhaps two of the overarching questions that I pose in the weekly Canvas assignment page. Please be succinct. Make sure you find a chance in class to verbally share your main observations. THEN after class, go back and respond to one other person’s blog entry, or elaborate upon your own, with added insight or with a question or thoughts we may have missed during class (I’ll try to synthesize these in “wrap up” emails after the class). If you miss class for whatever reason, these are still required of you. These follow ups should be used especially by less vocal class members.

Paper and report on historiography 10%: 5 pp. and 10 minutes; (see above); signups are coming soon.
In addition to a 5 page essay in Canvas and in hard copy handed to the professor, historiographers will distribute a 1 pp. MAX digest of main points, quotes, and citations to other works, as the basis for their presentations.

Final Synthetic essay 20%. 12-15 pp. Due the hour of the Final exam. You’ll take a thread of inquiry and trace it over the course, drawing insights from no fewer than half the works that we have read. These will be delimited and crafted in 30 minute conferences with me. We can have these conferences whenever you want. But the themes are most usefully defined within 3 weeks of beginning, and elaborated in a conference with me within 3 weeks of the end of the semester. Examples: African Americans’ and immigrants’ struggles for inclusion, and the political and economic dimensions of citizenship. The impact of war and militarism on American culture and society. Ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism as contending ideologies in history. State formation, and the impact of earlier policies on later options.
and decisions. Social movements and movements in reaction to insurgent politics. Other questions and interests you bring into the class.

**Resources:**
Aside from Jackson Library’s many subscriptions and search engines, you may request my access to HaithiTrust.org through the Library of Congress, and any of the University of Virginia’s research databases not available to graduate students here. Just bring your laptop and I can log you into these accounts for a session. Also, check two places for a rich array of readings: The Google Docs Folder titled “Historio/Comps” to which Canvas gives you access for the semester; and a Zotero Group titled “Historiography UNCG” that Kyra Turnage helped me build last semester. (You must request to be included as a group member).

**Attendance:**
Attendance is required. Absence will have an adverse effect on your participation grade. Email me in advance if you must miss class and your excuse falls within the range of UNCG exemptions: sickness, serious family emergency, unsafe travel conditions, nuclear war.

**Course policy on sustainability:** Campus-wide policies are being adopted that require students, staff and faculty to act in ecologically conscious ways while at UNCG. No grade here, just the grade the biosphere gives us all! Here are a few links to sustainability information at UNCG, including a recycling guide.

UNCG’s **Academic Integrity Policy** [http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/)
Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy will be handled in accordance with UNCG procedures, which are quite strict in the case of graduate students. Nuff said.

**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; N/C: 0 (as in No Credit in cases of failure to produce any work, and oh yes, in cases of plagiarism).

**Schedule of Meetings and Assignments**
(Check Canvas for fuller assignments, with suggestions for supplementary reading, Historiography reports, and guiding questions as you read).

1/10: **Introductions**
What is your favorite historical study and why? Who do you imagine your most important audience(s) will be in your career? Where do you hope to make a mark? What questions about past and present have motivated you the most?

1/17: **Revolutions in American Power: From the Liberal State to the Leviathan State? An Inclusive Democracy?**
Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion*

**Suggested syntheses of comparable interpretive sweep:**
ANY of the Oxford History of the United States titles, especially Richard White, David Kennedy, and James Patterson.
1/22: Reconstruction from Several Angles
Foner, Eric, and Joshua Brown. Forever Free EBOOK through EBSCO (online reading only)

Though a trade publication, Forever Free contains Foner’s main theses from his larger study, with an updated emphasis on black political agency that was but one of several contributions of the larger work, Reconstruction (1988). Joshua Brown’s analysis of visual culture is succinct and represents his distinctive approach more fully realized in his other work.

Historiography:

[NB: This is a large topic, as are many. A useful historiographical essay might focus upon conflicts over land and labor control; the achievements and shortcomings of reconstruction state governments; the role of the Freedmen’s Bureau in mediating conflict and/or disciplining the southern agricultural labor force; the origins of the modern black community, examining black agency within the context of expanded rights and persistent violence.]

Suggested:

1/29: Empire and Nationalism – A Search for Order or National “Regeneration”?
Lears, T. J. Jackson. Rebirth of a Nation

Historiography:
Essay should take an “angle” on Guilded Age: class conflict; surveillance and militarization of urban spaces; capitalism and the state; women’s public roles.


Suggested:


On Political Capitalism:


On Cities:


On Labor:


On Empire and Immigration:


On Gender and Manliness:


2/5: Labor and Environment in the Progressive Era
Andrews, Killing for Coal

**Historiographical Essay:**

**On Progressivism(s)**

2/12: **Prohibition: The State as Mediator for Racial-Ethnic, Class, and Cultural Conflict in the 1920s**

**Choose One:**

**Historiographical Essays:**
To Be Determined: Students will definitely want to talk to me about the multiple historiographies of prohibition, the Klan, Immigration Restriction, and coercive state development and civil liberties before crafting an essay and report. There is a LOT going on in the 1920s!


**Alternative Texts:**


2/19: Race, Property, and Urban Segregation

**Historiography:**


**Recommended:**

2/26: The Achievements and Limits of the “New Deal Order” – Regional and Constitutional Structures and Social Policy in Depression and War
Katznelson, *Fear Itself*

**Historiography:**
Cowie, Jefferson, and Nick Salvatore. “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History.” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74, no. 01 (September 2008): 3. AND ESSAYS IN RESPONSE FROM Levy, Boyle, Kazin, Klein, MacLean

**Alternative Texts:**


**SPRING BREAK**


Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*

**Historiography:**


**Alternative Texts:**


**3/20: Cold War – War of Necessity?**

Craig and Logesval. *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*

**Historiography:**


**Recommended:**


**4/4: Vietnam: Trauma, Memory, and Forgetting**

Appy, *American Reckoning*

**Historiography:**

See any of the essays in two collections contained in a folder linked in Drive. I also have a large Zotero bibliography. Ask me.


**Recommended:**


*Self, All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s.*

**Historiography (ask me – a BIG topic you can only capture part of):**


**Recommended:**


**4/16: Mass Incarceration: Debating the Roots**

Hinton, Elizabeth, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*

Choose One:


**Historiography: Consult me for further.**


**Recommended:**


**Historiography: Consult me—too lengthy and diffuse to list**

**Recommended:**


See several of Simon’s footnotes if you want to focus on the historiography of Americans’ increasingly unhealthy fast food diet.

Honorable Mention OPTIONAL From Last Year

**3/1: Immigration, Immigrants, Citizenship, and the State**


