

## The Making of Modern America

SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND WRITING

WED 4-6:50 MHRA 2207

INSTRUCTOR: DR. SUSAN W. THOMAS

EMAIL: [swthoma3@uncg.edu](mailto:swthoma3@uncg.edu)

OFFICE HOURS: 2108 MHRA, T/TH 8:30 -9:15 AND 12:30-1:30; WED 3:00-4:00, OR BY APPT.

---

### Required Texts Available in Campus Bookstore

Edwards, Rebecca. *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age," 1865-1900*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Fink, Leon, ed. *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, Third Edition. (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015).

Lears, Jackson. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009).

### Course Purpose

HIS 411 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 16-18 page research paper and present their findings to the class.

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. Be aware that the course has a heavy reading load. Aside from the required texts, you will also be assigned occasional scholarly articles and/or book chapters. These readings will be provided as PDF files on Canvas or linked through Jackson Library.

### Course Description

This course examines the half-century 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) and the Progressive Era (1890-1920), often shorthanded as the GAPE. Characterized by greed and excess, poverty and

despair, reform and retrenchment, these decades saw individuals and the government grapple, often violently, 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. Additionally, America wielded its muscle on the world stage during two wars encompassed the GAPE. Out of this miasma emerged much of what we recognize as Modern America.

### Course Goals

*Learning Goals for History Majors: Thinking in Time*

History Graduates will be able to:

1. Analyze historical duration, succession, and change in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of places and periods. [Historical Comprehension]
2. Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view. [Historical Analysis]
3. Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources. [Historical Research]
4. Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing. [Historical Interpretation]

More specifically, upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the skills of historical thinking and critical analysis in both 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

- Grasp the level of contingency and human agency in the development of historical events

### Graded Course Components

#### **1. Two Primary Source Analysis Papers: 10 pts**

Using the Primary Sources included in the Major Problems text, students will write a 3-4 page summary/analysis of a set of the assigned documents for 2 weeks (choosing from the 15 collections). One set should be drawn from the period before Spring break, the second from the concluding half of the semester.

#### **2. Comparative Book Review (5-6 pages) of the required texts by Lears and Edwards: 15 pts**

#### **3. Research assignments: 15 pts**

All undergraduate students will be required to complete a series of research exercises during the course of the semester. Detailed descriptions of these assignments will be included on Canvas. Here is a summary list of these assignments:

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

#### **4. Historiographical Essay: 10 pts**

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 4-5 page historiographical essay, in which they will compare the main arguments of the 6-8 secondary sources they have located for their research paper.

#### **5. Leading Discussion: 10 pts (5 for the paper, 5 for in class discussion leader)**

All students will be required to lead discussion (as part of a group) for selected readings once during the semester. On the date you lead discussion, you will be expected to submit a 2-3 page evaluation of the main points of the readings. The discussions will take place in the last half of the class period and will rely on articles posted on Canvas, not the textbook readings.

#### **6. Final Paper: 30 pts (25 for paper, 5 for presentation)**

All students will produce a 16-18 pg research paper based on original research in primary sources and contextualized with secondary sources. Paper topics may vary by individual interest within the chronological time frame and based on themes we discuss during 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 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>.

#### **7. Attendance/ Class Participation/Preparation: 10 pts.**

The discussion and exchange of ideas are very important in this seminar class. Everyone will be expected to participate, and you should feel free to ask questions in every class.

Obviously, you cannot participate if you are absent. I allow only 1 unexcused absence from the course, after which I will deduct one point

from your final grade for all additional absences.

### **Missed Assignments and Late Policies**

- Late submission of assigned work in Canvas will lose **one half letter grade per day** until received, including weekends. This is because the work is submitted to Canvas, not turned in as hard copies.
- **You will have one full week to submit a missed assignment, after which I will no longer accept your work and you will receive a zero.**
- Since these assignments are known in advance and are submitted electronically, anyone with an excused absence will still be expected to submit the work by the deadline.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

I allow the use of laptops/tablets/smart phones (silenced) in the classroom only for accessing documents on Canvas or doing impromptu research about issues we will address. **If you abuse the privilege, I will discontinue this option and you will then be required to print out all readings on Canvas.**

### **\*\*\*Academic Integrity and Plagiarism\*\*\***

Plagiarism is a serious offense that could result not only in failure for the particular assignment, but also in failure for the entire course. You must provide references for materials consulted and/or quoted in your writing assignments.

In all assignments, students are expected to do their own work and abide by the Honor Code. Much of your work for this class will be done outside of the classroom, and with current technology it can be tempting to find, copy, and paste someone else's work and pass it off as your own. Remember that I can easily identify such attempts and you will receive a zero on the assignment for the first offense. Any further offenses will result in filing necessary paperwork with the administration.

For complete information on the University Honor Code, follow this link: [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

### **Student Responsibilities/Classroom Decorum**

Each student bears the responsibility to attend class regularly and complete all assignments on time. I expect open and respectful dialogue during class discussions. When students disagree with one another, with the readings, or with me, that disagreement must be expressed in a civil manner.

### **Check your iSpartan email account regularly.**

- This is the system I will be using to contact you, should the need arise. **Always check your mail before class period in case something unforeseen happens and I need to cancel class.**
- My email address is at the top of the syllabus for your reference. Please check the syllabus and ask classmates your question before reaching out to me. I will respond to your email within 24 hours (48 hours on weekends).
- If I email you individually, I expect a response in the same time frame that I respond to your messages. You do not need to respond to class emails sent to everyone unless you have a question.

### **Schedule of Assignments**

Feb 13: Proposal and Research Questions  
Feb 27: First Primary Source Paper  
Mar 13: Preliminary Annotated Bibliography  
Mar 27: Historiographical Essay  
Apr 3: Rough Draft  
Apr 10: Peer Review  
Apr 10: Final Primary Source Paper  
Apr 17: Book Review  
May 8: Final Draft

Schedule of Class Meetings

THE SYLLABUS LISTS ONLY THOSE READINGS FOUND IN THE REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS.

Be sure to check Canvas for any additional weekly readings from other sources.

**Jan 16) Introduction to Course**

**Jan 23) Post-Reconstruction America**

Lears: Intro and Ch 1 (1-50)  
Edwards: Intro and Ch 1 (1-38)

**Jan 30) Gilded Age: Rise of Capitalism**

Major Problems (MP): Ch 1-2 (1-45)  
Lears: Ch 2 (51-91)

\*Discussion Group One

**Feb 6) Gilded Age: Regional Differences**

MP: Ch 3-4 (46-115)  
Edwards: Ch 2-3 (38-79) and Ch 9 (183-207)

\*Discussion Group Two

**Feb 13) Gilded Age: Urbanization and Immigration**

MP: Ch 5 (116-157)  
Lears: Ch 4 (133-166)

\*Discussion Group Three

**\*Proposal and Questions Due to Canvas by class time**

**Feb 20) Gilded Age: Politics and Economy**

MP: Ch 6-7 (158-224)  
Edwards: Ch 4 (79-100)

\*Discussion Group Four

**Feb 27) Race in the GAPE**

MP Ch 10 (295-324)  
Lears: Ch 3 (92-132)

\*Discussion Group 5

**\*First Primary Source paper due to Canvas by class time**

**Mar6) Spring Break**

**Mar 13) Progressive Era: Changing Culture and Politics**

MP: Ch 12 and 13 (355-411)  
Edwards: Ch 5-8 (101-159)

**\*Preliminary Annotated Bibliography due to Canvas by class time**

**Mar 20) Progressive Era: Empire**

MP: Ch 9 (263-294)  
Edwards: Ch 11 (235-257)  
Lears: Ch 5 (167-221)

**Mar 27) Progressivism and WW I**

MP: Ch 15 (445-485)  
Lears: Conclusion (327-355)

**\*Historiographical Essay Due to Canvas by class time**

**Apr 3) Meetings with Professor**

**\*Rough Draft Due to Canvas by class time**

**Apr 10) Meetings with Professor**

**\*Final Primary Source Paper due to Canvas by class time**

**\*Written Peer Reviews Due to Canvas by class time**

**Apr 17: Presentations**

**\*Book Review Due to Canvas by class time**

**Apr 23: Presentations**

✓ **Final Paper Due to Canvas by 7:00 p.m.  
May 8**