

AMH 6290
Readings in Modern American History
Spring 2015

Wednesdays, periods 8-10 (3-6 pm)
Flint 013

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Office hours:
Monday/Friday 1-2, or by
appointment

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Course description and objectives

This course seeks to expose graduate students to the changing interpretations about modern America. Although the class is organized chronologically, our emphasis will be primarily topical and historiographical, including a sampling of social, cultural, intellectual, diplomatic, and political approaches. In each of the classes, students will be asked to consider important issues and the diverse ways in which historians have attempted to address them.

Students should keep in mind that this is a readings seminar, *not* a research seminar. Our primary focus will be on how the historical literature on particular topics has changed over time and where it might head for the future, how historians have agreed and disagreed, and how compelling their arguments are for us as historians. Necessarily, the class will be entirely discussion in format, based upon a program of readings completed in common and individually. Students must read all of the required books listed above, and there will be additional reading requirements as described below.

Readings

The following books are required reading:

Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (2008)

Margot Canady, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2011)

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*

Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (2012)

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male Work, 1890-1940*

Kevin Kruse, *White Flight* (2008)

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

Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance-- A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (2010)

Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (2010)

Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti*

Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (2003)

Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West*

James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (2011)

Grading:

Class discussion (including serving as discussion leader and resource person): 30 percent; 6 analytical book reviews, 40 percent; historiographical essay, 30 percent.

NB: As a matter of policy, I do not give out incompletes.

Attendance policy:

Students are expected to attend ALL classes.

Minimal expectations:

1. Attend all classes. . I will allow one excused absence, if students provide notice of the need to miss class for an acceptable reason at least 24 hours in advance. After a first excused absence, I will deduct a full grade for every class missed.
2. Complete the assigned weekly readings before each class.
3. Criticize your peers' work constructively.
4. Participate regularly in class discussions.
5. Complete all papers by the deadline. Late papers will be penalized by a full

grade for every 24 hours.

Writing assignments:

All papers must be posted on elearning no later than 3:00 on the day of class. I will return the papers to you, barring unforeseen circumstances, no later than a week after you have turned them in. I require two different sorts of papers, but in both I'm looking for good, crisp writing, clear thinking, tight organization, and general coherency and cogency. These are NOT "book reports": instead of summarizing the books, I expect you to identify the author's argument, show how well that argument is demonstrated, and assess the work against the general literature on the subject. Writing assignments include the following:

1. **Analytical book reviews:** All students are required to complete 4 analytical book reviews of approximately 1,500 words from our list of common readings. These will include two of the books among the common readings (see below).
2. **Final review essay:** Complete a 3,000 word historiographical paper which summarizes, analyzes, and critiques the common reading in combination with a mix of six-eight books. The topic of the paper addresses the final section of class—Race, Ethnicity, and Identity—and is due the last day of class.

General discussion responsibilities:

All students are expected to come to class prepared to engage in dialogue and discussion. This doesn't mean necessarily dominating the discussion; good discussion very often means listening and reacting to the thoughts and responses of your peers. In whatever form it appears, good discussion means active engagement. I will periodically adopt various strategies to insure wide participation, such as asking students to read their papers or calling on people to speak. Each student should come to class with a brief statement of the book's thesis and its significance: we will start class by asking everyone to read and discuss these.

Discussion facilitators:

Each student will serve as a discussion facilitator for one class session. The discussion facilitator will work ahead of time with the instructor in devising questions. Students should submit their questions and bibliography (see below) no later than Monday morning, and I will expect a conference in advance of class.

Discussion facilitators will shape discussion, but I intend to be very actively involved in interjecting with my own questions. In addition to leading class with questions, facilitators will be specifically responsible for providing 1) an analysis of relevant book reviews about the common readings, 2) an overview of the historiography of the topic, and 3) a one-page bibliography of the most important books on that week's topic.

Discussion facilitators will consult with me ahead of time, and devise a strategy for discussion for our Wednesday class meeting.

I will make assignments for discussion facilitators during the first part of the semester.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 January 7: Introduction to class

I The Rise and Fall of the Liberal State

WEEK 2 January 14: Imperialism

Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti*

WEEK 3 January 21: Progressivism

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

Book review # 1 due

WEEK 4 January 28: The New Deal

Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (2010)

WEEK 5 February 4: The Militarized Society

James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (2011)

(also required attend William Chafe's talk; details to follow)

Book review # 2 due

II Sexuality and Gender

WEEK 6 February 11: Gay New York

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*.

WEEK 7 February 18: The Straight Society

Margot Canady, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2011)

Book review # 3 due

WEEK 8 February 25: Cultural Politics and the Modern American Right

Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*

March 4 SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9 March 11: Consumerism

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*

Book review # 4 due

III Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

WEEK 10 March 18: Race and Ethnicity in the American West

Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West*

WEEK 11 April 1: The Jim Crow South

Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (2008)

WEEK 12 April 8: Modern Conservatism

Kevin Kruse, *White Flight* (2008)

WEEK 13 April 15: Race in the Urban West

Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (2003)

WEEK 14 April 22: Civil Rights

Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance-- A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (2010)

AMH 6290: Modern America Seminar, Spring 2015

1/5/15

Page 7

Essay Review due