

The Making of Modern America

Research Seminar—Spring 2021

University of Florida

Office Hours: M 2-3, T 11-1, & happily by appt.

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This course is an in-depth exploration of the emergence of modern America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Situated between Reconstruction and the Great Depression, how might we best understand this period? The period witnessed both radical experimentation and conservative retrenchment; an enormous accumulation of wealth and grinding poverty; hopes for peaceful democracy and political violence, racial violence, and world war. While complex historical developments have been reduced to labels such as “The Gilded Age,” “The Jim Crow Era,” or even “Modern America,” we will seek to develop a more nuanced portrait of American life in this time.

Looking at historical literature written about the United States during this period, this senior seminar will closely explore what historians have argued about the central developments of the era—in culture, society, and politics—to better understand the emergence of “modern America.” The course will focus on several animating questions: What exactly is “modernity” in the context of American history? In what ways did individuals seek to make meaning, find moral guidance, and maintain cultural traditions in an age of increasing secularization, mobility, urbanization, and pluralization? What was the role of violence in social change? How did the relationship between the individual and society change in this period? The readings in the course will expose to students to the main themes of the period, and students will develop a final research paper using original, primary sources.

Required Reading

E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (Plume, 1996 edition)

Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2001)

Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (UNC, 1996)

John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (Hill and Wang, 1978)

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 1994)

Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (1931; Harper 2000 edition)

Primary and secondary sources in class or online

Grading

Participation—25%

Response Essays—15%

Proposal—10%

Writing Workshop—10%

Final Presentation & Essay—40%

Course Policies

Attendance

Since this is a discussion-based seminar that only meets one time per week, unexcused absences are not allowed. If you absolutely must miss class, notify me beforehand and we will work out a way for you to make up the work. If you do not notify me and have an unexcused absence, this will adversely affect your participation grade; if you have three unexcused absences, you will receive a failing mark on the participation portion of your final grade.

Do not text in class. Arrive on time to class.

Participation

A significant portion of your final grade (25%) will be tied to your participation in class. The participation grade has three parts:

--*class attendance*: come to class, and be on time.

--*class participation*: read the texts for that day carefully and thoughtfully; come to class prepared to discuss them. Speak up. Ask questions. Debate and discuss with your peers.

--*quality of participation*: I expect you not just to speak in class, but also to speak in a way that is productive, thoughtful, and engaged.

All work is due on the date listed on the syllabus. Late work will be penalized by one letter grade per day.

Academic Honesty & Accommodations

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. All cases of plagiarism will be dealt with according to the policies laid out by the Dean of Students. For more information, see the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct code at: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation. For more information regarding University policies on this issue, please visit: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Schedule

Week One

Mon Jan 11 Introductions; What is Modern America?

Week Two

Mon Jan 18 NO CLASS: MLK Day

Week Three

Mon Jan 25 READ: *Ragtime*
DUE: Reading Response One

Week Four

Mon Feb 1

READ: *American Crucible*, Intro and Ch's 1-3.

DISCUSS: How to Find a Research Topic

DUE: Reading Response Two

Week Five

Mon Feb 8

READ: *Amusing the Million*

DISCUSS: Primary Sources

DUE: Reading Response Three; List of possible paper topics

Week Six

Mon Feb 15

READ: *Gay New York*, Intro and Ch's 1-2

DISCUSS: Thesis and Argumentation

DUE: Reading Response Four

Week Seven

Mon Feb 22

READ: *Gender and Jim Crow*, Intro and Ch's 1-2

DISCUSS: Academic Honesty

DUE: Reading Response Five; Primary Source

Week Eight

Mon Mar 1

READ: *Lynching and Spectacle*, Intro, Ch. 1, and Conclusion

DISCUSS: Writing Style

DUE: Reading Response Six

Week Nine

Mon Mar 8

READ: *Only Yesterday*

DISCUSS: Citation

DUE: Reading Response Seven

Week Ten

Mon Mar 15

No Class, Individual Meetings

DUE: Project Proposals

Week Eleven

Mon Mar 22

CLASS: Writing Workshop

DUE: 4-6 Page Rough Draft

Week Twelve

Mon Mar 29

Independent Research

Week Thirteen

Mon Apr 5

CLASS: Presentations

Week Fourteen

Mon Apr 12

CLASS: Presentations

Week Fifteen

Mon Apr 19

CLASS: Presentations

Final Essays Due at **Noon Tuesday, April 27.**