

United States since 1973

History 332. George Mason University. Spring 2011

MW 3:00 pm - 4:15 pm. Robinson Hall B222

Syllabus last revised: 20 January 2011.

Course Blackboard site: <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.

General advice: <http://historyprofessor.org>

Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 3-5 pm.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meetings and other commitments occasionally force me to cancel scheduled office hours, so please let me know in advance if you are coming to office hours. If you would like to meet some other time, please send me an e-mail with two or three proposed times, preferably on Tuesdays, Thursdays, or Fridays.

Course Description

At first glance, the years since 1973 have been very good ones for the United States. Despite a few recessions, the economy has grown steadily, more than doubling the real gross domestic product. The worst abuses of individual rights, such as state-sanctioned racial segregation and legally permissible sex discrimination in employment, are fading memories. New technologies have heightened economic productivity. And the Soviet Union, the only nation ever to have threatened America's existence as a country, no longer exists.

On the other hand, Americans have suffered severe disappointments. Prosperity has come more slowly than it did in previous decades and has not been evenly distributed, so that inequality in income and wealth is far greater now than it was thirty years ago. Americans still battle over questions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as the role of the government in regulating those issues. Families are weaker, more Americans sit in prison, and political leaders are unable to agree on basic rules for the elections that define American democracy. Internationally, the nation remains vulnerable to economic competition and military attack. These problems have left many asking the question posed by Rodney King during the Los Angeles riots of 1992: can we all get along?

This course will suggest some answers to that question, focusing particularly on three long-term debates: the role of state in regulating decisions about sex, the replacement of the Cold War with concerns about the Middle East, and the shifting political economy of the country during the resurgence of conservatism. In addition, it will suggest ways in which historical analysis can illuminate the recent past. By focusing on events, narrative, and the question of change over time, a historical appreciation of these years can complement the work of other social science disciplines and prepare students for further study of contemporary America.

Goals

In this course, students will:

- Study some of the deepest divisions in American society of the period since 1973, especially debates about sex, the Middle East, and economic inequality.
- Practice critical reading of primary and secondary sources, including texts, images, music, and motion pictures.
- Practice research skills using sources in electronic databases.
- Practice skills of discussion, writing, editing, and revision.

Administrative Information

The **University Catalog**, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

In case of **inclement weather**, please call the main switchboard at 703-993-1000 or consult the main web page at <http://www.gmu.edu/> to see if classes are cancelled. I expect to cancel class only when the university cancels all classes.

If you are a **student with a disability** and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>.

Citation and Collaboration

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University **honor code**, online at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>. Except as instructed, you are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online.

This course is designed to encourage the kind of collaboration that makes scholarship so much fun. While you are responsible for your own essays, you will get a great deal of help from each other identifying and interpreting primary and secondary sources, and revising your work. Please credit this help as appropriate. You may not submit work based whole or in part on work you have done for credit in **other courses** without written permission of the instructor.

Gordon Harvey's *Writing with Sources* is required reading and should answer most questions about **citation**, but ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course. Papers should include footnotes written according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; bibliographies are not necessary.

Online Components

Except for the peer-editing, this course is designed to be paperless; all assignments except for the essay drafts should be posted on Blackboard, <http://mymason.gmu.edu>. (Please note we are using Blackboard Learn 9.1, accessible through the My Mason portal.) You will also receive feedback on Blackboard. Please include your last name in the file name of any attachment you post to Blackboard or send by e-mail; e.g., jones_essay2.doc, not essay2.doc. Please do not send **Microsoft Works** (.wps) attachments; I cannot open them. Please do not send **Microsoft shortcuts** (.lnk) which work only on your local computer. Please save your files as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf formats.

Students must use their **Mason email accounts**—either the existing “MEMO” system or a new “MASONLIVE” account—to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information..

Classroom Rules

Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices may not be used in the classroom except by written permission.

Please do not eat in the classroom, before or during class.

Readings

- Kristin Luker. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. ISBN: 9780520055971
- David Farber. *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0691127590
- Kathryn Marie Dudley. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. ISBN: 9780226169101
- Gordon Harvey. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Second edition. Hackett, 2008. ISBN13: 9780872209442
- Zachary M. Schrag, "Guidelines for History Students," <http://historyprofessor.org/>

Assignments

Attendance and Participation (12 percent. 4 percent per unit)

Much of this course is discussion based, which means that each student's learning depends on the other students' being prepared, punctual, and active. The participation grade is designed to encourage you to help other students learn, and to prepare you for a lifetime of meetings.

The participation grade is based on your prompt arrival and active participation in discussions. You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at the start of class; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by start of class. To be counted present, you must sign the late attendance sheet. If you need to leave early, please speak to me before class. If you leave early without notifying me, you will be counted absent. Occasional absence or tardiness is not a big deal, but chronic absence or tardiness will affect both your participation score and the grades on your written work. Attendance is particularly important on peer-editing days.

Perfect attendance is not sufficient for full credit. The highest participation grades will go to students who animate class discussions by asking questions of their peers. The most valuable contributions often begin with the words, "I don't understand." Answering such questions, and questions posed by the instructor, is also helpful.

At the end of each unit, you will submit a **unit memo**. This should include a description of your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions. Please include this at the end of the final draft of each essay.

You will receive a participation grade at the end of each unit.

Note: To give you full credit for participation, I need to know your names. To help me learn them, we will use name cards for the first few weeks of class. In addition I will photograph students using an application designed for the purpose. If you do not wish to be photographed, please let me know by e-mail.

Reading Responses (7 percent. 1 percent each)

On seven occasions during the course, you are assigned short responses to the assigned readings. Questions will be posted on Blackboard. Responses should be posted on Blackboard by **9 am on the day indicated**. On discussion days for which you submit a response, you should be prepared to be called on to describe your findings to the class.

The goals of this assignment are to ensure that you read the assigned texts carefully and promptly and prepare for class discussions.

Read the instructions on Blackboard and write a one-paragraph response, roughly 125 – 175 words. Use parentheses to indicate page numbers. I suggest you compose your response in a word processor or text editor, then paste it into the discussion board.

If I am able to arrange a guest speaker, you will be asked to attend the talk and write a response in lieu of one of the assigned reading responses.

Research Responses (9 percent. 3 points each)

On three occasions, you are asked to complete small research assignments. You will be assigned to a group, which will determine specific deadlines. Responses should be posted on Blackboard by **9 am on the day indicated**.

The goals of this assignment are:

- Develop skills in finding historical evidence.
- Develop skills in analyzing historical evidence.
- Create a body of evidence that you and your classmates can use for your essays.
- Practice citation.

Points are based on the ability of your choice of documents and analysis to spark class discussion, and the usefulness of your documents to the essay assignment.

Specific assignments will be posted on Blackboard. All research assignments require the following steps:

1. Find a document or image according to the specific assignment instructions.
2. Summarize the document or image in one paragraph.
3. Write a one-paragraph analysis of the document or image. For instructions and examples, see <http://historyprofessor.org/research/>
4. Post the response on the appropriate Blackboard discussion. Ideally, you will post three versions of the document:
 - a. Post the document as an attachment, e.g., a PDF or JPG file. Click on the attachment link to make sure it works.
 - b. Post a link to the document. Post the link into new browser window to be sure it works.
 - c. Post complete citation information in *Chicago Manual of Style* footnote format. This will allow your classmates to cite the document properly in their work, and it serves as a backup in case the attachment link you provide does not work. For help with footnote format, see *Writing with Sources* and http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. The complete *Chicago Manual of Style Online* can be accessed through the university library: <http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?URL=http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/contents.html>

Essays (72 percent. 24 percent each)

On three occasions, you are assigned essays that will address the main themes of the course. Each essay should run between 1000 and 2000 words, roughly 4 to 8 pages. This is a broad range, so I will be disappointed to receive papers outside those bounds.

Please keep in mind the instructions at <http://historyprofessor.org>, especially those on thesis statements and topic sentences.

The essays require the following steps:

1. *Read the essay question, posted on Blackboard. Then define a narrower question for yourself.*

Each unit poses a broad question about how Americans understood a major social debate of the period 1973 to the present. You are not expected to answer the question definitively, but you do have the power to contribute to an answer by choosing a smaller, more focused question.

To frame a smaller question, you need three elements:

1. The individual or group of people who most interest you.
2. A debate in which that individual or group took part.
3. A surprising thing that that group did or said.

2. *Assemble evidence*

The most important source of evidence for your answer are the primary sources gathered by you and your classmates. **You must use at least four primary sources gathered by other students for this unit.** Papers that do not meet this requirement will receive limited credit. I *recommend* you also use **at least two primary sources** that you yourself have gathered from the designated databases and websites.

Other evidence may come from the assigned readings, from lecture, and from music and films played in class. Evidence from other units of the course may be helpful as well. And you may wish to conduct additional research using the databases for the course. But such research is no substitute for engagement with your classmates' sources.

All sources must be cited properly. This includes assigned readings and handouts, sources gathered by your classmates, and sources you find yourself. (See "Collaboration.") Citations should be written in *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

When citing a source gathered by a classmate, please credit that person I suggest the following forms for citing work by your classmates:

For a comment written by a student:

- Joanna Student, "Lincoln's Imagery," 26 January 2011, History 332 Discussion Board.

For a document posted by a student, but written by someone else:

- Lisa Rein, "Daring to Dream of Reducing Tysons Traffic," *Washington Post*, 10 December 2009 (posted by Joanna Student).

3. *Read your sources critically*

Read your sources slowly and carefully. Look not only for facts, but for surprises. See <http://historyprofessor.org/research/> for additional guidance.

4. *Develop a thesis.*

Develop a thesis statement that answers the question and can be supported by your evidence. See <http://historyprofessor.org/argument/> for suggestions.

I strongly recommend your thesis statement take the following form: Why did [person/persons] [do/say/write something surprising]? [Plausible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation]. If you choose not to use this form, I suggest you explain your decision in your edit memo.

5. Outline your paper

For an ten-paragraph essay (about 1250 words), I suggest a two-paragraph introduction, two paragraphs to present one point of view, two paragraphs presenting an opposing point of view, two paragraphs analyzing the similarities and differences, and a two-paragraph conclusion. If you need more space for the body sections, you will end up with a longer paper. Make sure that each body paragraph begins with a strong topic sentence.

6. Write and rewrite your paper.

Write a rough draft of your essay. **Bring two copies to class.** Share your rough draft with two of your classmates during the peer editing session. If you do not receive helpful comments, demand them. Revise the draft according to the helpful comments you received.

7. Describe your experience of the unit

Add your **unit memo** at the end of the final draft. This should include at least two sections:

- **Participation.** Describe your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions.
- **Revision.** Explain how you revised your essay in response to feedback from your peers and (for essays 2 and 3) the comments you received from me on previous work.
- **Course evaluation** (optional). Add any comments you wish about how the unit met the goals of the course and what could be improved.

8. Post your essay

Post your final draft to Blackboard before the start of class on the day it is due. Bring your marked-up drafts to class on that day.

Essay evaluation

Your essay score will break down roughly as follows, though I reserve the right to score elements above the maximum (e.g., 6 points out of 5) for exceptional work.

- **Question and thesis: 5 points.** A *why* question about the words or deeds of people, the weighing of alternative explanations, and a compelling claim.
- **Topic sentences and organization: 5 points.** Topic sentences that support the thesis, summarize the evidence, interpret the evidence, and relate to one another in a clear way.
- **Evidence and critical reading: 8 points.** Ample primary evidence from sources posted by classmates. Analysis as well as summary.
- **Mechanics and style: 4 points.** Clear grammar, adequate citation.
- **Peer editing and revision: 2 points.** Good comments on your peers' work and good use of the comments you received.

Peer Editing Instructions

On three occasions you will exchange drafts with classmates and edit their work. Your job as a peer editor is not to correct spelling and minor errors, or to provide uncritical encouragement. Rather, it is to demand that your peers teach you something you did not know before. Your comments should begin with one of the following forms, or a close approximation:

1. Your paper corrected a misconception I had. Before reading it, I thought _____. But you showed me . . .
2. Your paper answered a question I had. Before reading it, I could not understand why _____. But you showed me . . .

3. Your paper explained the significance of _____. Before reading it, I couldn't understand why _____ was important. But you showed me . . .

4. For the most part, this paper did not teach me anything that wasn't pretty obvious from attending class and reading the book. But I was struck by your comment that "_____." This comment [insert phrase 1, 2, or 3]. Could you expand this point into a thesis for the whole essay?

Extra Credit (1 percent each; up to 3 percent)

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think about the course in relation to your daily life. Up to three entries will count toward course credit, but you may only submit one per unit. The first paragraph should describe something that happened to you or that you witnessed involving the history of the United States in the period we are studying. It can be something that just happened, a news story or article you saw, or a story from your past—but make it something you're willing to share with the class. The second paragraph should explain how that event or item illustrates or complicates the themes of the course.

To receive credit, you must post your item on Blackboard **before the final discussion** of the unit and be prepared to speak about it to the class.

Extra credit points will not raise the final course grade above a B+. To earn an A- or A, you must do so with the other assignments.

Evaluation

- Students who do everything that is asked of them for a given assignment can expect to earn B's. Students who challenge themselves to exceed expectations earn higher grades, while students who do not meet the expectations earn lower grades.
- There is no fixed curve for the course. At the end of the course, I rank students according to the points they have accumulated on various assignments, and then set cut-off points for letter grades to reflect the level of achievement represented by various point totals. For example, the cut-off between a B and a B+ may be 88 or 89 depending on which grade I feel better reflects the achievements of students with 88.5 points.
- Extra credit points will not raise the final course grade above a B+. To earn an A- or A, you must do so with the other assignments.

Schedule

Week 1

24-Jan Introduction—History in Our Lifetimes

26-Jan Workshop: reading primary sources.

Read: "How to Read a Primary Source," "Examples of Critical Reading," and "Image Analysis."

Unit 1. Sex

Week 2

31-Jan Lecture: The Politics of Sex

2-Feb Discussion. Reading I-1 due: *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 1-11, 92-157.

Week 3

7-Feb Discussion. Group 1. Research I-1 due.

9-Feb Discussion. Reading I-1 due: *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 158-245.

Week 4

14-Feb Discussion. Group 2. Research I-2 due.

16-Feb Movie and Discussion: *Saturday Night Fever* (excerpt)

Week 5

21-Feb Discussion. Group 3. Research I-3 due.

23-Feb Peer Editing. Essay 1 draft due

Unit 2. God

Week 6

28-Feb Lecture: Americans view the Middle East

2-Mar Discussion. Reading II-1 due: *Taken Hostage*, 1-101.
Class ends 3:45 pm.

Week 7

7-Mar Discussion. Group 1. Research II-1 due.

9-Mar Discussion. Reading II-2 due: *Taken Hostage*, 102-190.

SPRING BREAK

Week 8

21-Mar Movie: *Reel Bad Arabs*

23-Mar Discussion. Group 2. Research II-2 due.

Week 9

28-Mar Discussion. Reading III-2. TBD.

30-Mar Discussion. Group 3. Research II-3 due.

Week 10

4-Apr Peer Editing. Essay 2 draft due

Unit 3. Money

6-Apr Lecture: Reaganomics

Week 11

11-Apr Discussion. Reading III-1 due: *End of the Line*, xv-85.

13-Apr Discussion. Group 1. Research III-1 due.

Week 12

18-Apr Movie and Discussion: *Roger and Me*, part 1

20-Apr Movie and Discussion: *Roger and Me*, part 2

Week 13

25-Apr Discussion. Group 2. Research III-2 due.

27-Apr Discussion. Reading III-2 due: *End of the Line*, 86-182.

Week 14

2-May Discussion. Group 3. Research III-3 due.

4-May Peer Editing. Essay 3 draft due.

16-May (Mon.) Essay 3 final due. 4:15 pm