

# **America since 1973**

## **History 389, section 2. George Mason University. Fall 2007**

MW 3:00 – 4:15 pm. Robinson Hall B203

Course website: <http://americasince1973.pbwiki.com>

Course discussion board: <http://schrag.freeforums.org>

General advice: <http://www.schrag.info/teaching>

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10am - noon, and by appointment.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meeting and other commitments force me to cancel scheduled office hours several times each term, so individual appointments generally work better. If you would like to meet with me, please send me an e-mail with two or three proposed times. Monday and Wednesday mornings will generally be best, but other weekdays are possible as well.

### **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, from the VCR to the Internet to the MRI, have given Americans more ways to amuse themselves, heightened economic productivity, and longer lives. 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 on the shifting political economy of the country during the resurgence of conservatism, the political debates over culture and identity, and the waning of the Cold War and its replacement with other international concerns. In particular, it will argue that Americans found themselves split between two competing ideals: that of personal responsibility, and that of the general welfare.

In addition, this course 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.

## Readings

*Required—Available at the bookstore in the Johnson Center*

- Harvey, Gordon. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- Rieder, Jonathan. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Dudley, Kathryn Marie. *Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America's Heartland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Luker, Kristin. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Bowden, Mark. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*. 1999. Rev. ed., New York: Penguin, 2000. [note: the Signet edition is also fine.]
- DeParle, Jason. *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare*. New York: Penguin 2005.
- Dudziak, Mary L., ed. *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

*Required—available online*

- Zachary M. Schrag, "Guidelines for History Students," <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/teaching.html>.

These guidelines offer suggestions for reading efficiently, building strong thesis statements, and organizing essays. Following them closely will improve your grade.

### Administrative information

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

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.

All work for this course must be original. 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.

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 Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

All students are expected to check their **gmu.edu e-mail** regularly and are responsible for information sent to their GMU addresses.

Please do not send **Microsoft Works** (.wps) attachments; I cannot open them. If you need to send me word-processing documents, save your files as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf formats.

## **Assignments**

### **Attendance and Participation (15 percent)**

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. 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.

You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at 3 pm; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by 3 pm. 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.

You are expected to attend class twice a week. To allow for family and medical emergencies, up to two weeks' absence is excused. After that, absence for any reason will sharply lower your grade, until you have missed half the course. At that point, you will receive no credit for participation. Chronic absence or tardiness will also affect the grades on your written work.

### **Responses (7 percent each; 70 percent total)**

On twelve occasions, you are assigned responses to the readings and lectures. Responses should be 400-600 words (no longer). **Postings are due at 9:30 am.**

The top ten scores will count toward your final grade. You may miss two weeks without penalty, to allow for illness, family emergencies, and other misfortunes, but I encourage you to complete all the assignments to maximize your grade and to prepare for the final exam.

## **Discussion Board: <http://schrag.freeforums.org>**

You will use this site to post responses to readings and lectures. You will need to register to use the board:

- a. On the first page of the board, click “Register.” For your user name, please type your full name, e.g., “Zachary Schrag,” not “Zach,” “zschrag,” or “RetroGirl92.” Please use your gmU.edu address to register. I will need to approve your registration.
- b. Once you have received the registration confirmation, please login and test the system. Go to the home page, then click “Practice Forum” You will see one topic: restaurants. Hit “Post Reply” to answer the question.

## **Lecture Response Instructions**

### *Goals*

The goals of this assignment are to encourage you to:

1. **Pay close attention** to the lectures.
2. **Ask questions** of the lectures. The lectures are not infallible pronouncements of truth, but the incomplete, flawed efforts of one historian to make sense of the past. The flaws in those efforts should leave you with questions.
3. **Conduct research** by finding primary sources that can answer those questions.
4. **Analyze primary source material**, using the techniques described in “How to Read a Primary Source” <<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/primary.html>>
5. **Communicate in writing**, by crafting a short essay that conforms to academic standards of argument, style, and citation.
6. **Contribute to class discussions** by sharing your findings.

### *Assignment*

On six occasions, no reading is assigned. In these cases, your task is to ask yourself a question about something I say in lecture and then answer it using a document from the period being discussed.

Your question should show that you have grasped not only the specific fact but also its relationship to the broader argument of the lecture.

The easiest source of materials is the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, linked at [http://oscr.gmu.edu/sql/subdb.php?Arts\\_&\\_Humanities](http://oscr.gmu.edu/sql/subdb.php?Arts_&_Humanities). The easiest way to find a source is to use the News and Current Events database page <[http://oscr.gmu.edu/sql/subdb.php?News\\_&\\_Current\\_Events](http://oscr.gmu.edu/sql/subdb.php?News_&_Current_Events)>. The Historic Documents,

LexisNexis, and ProQuest databases should also be particularly helpful. You are also free to find a document on microfilm or even in print.

An article, editorial, or advertisement from the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* should be sufficient material, though you are welcome to choose other primary sources.

### *Process*

1. Listen to the lectures and take careful notes. Be sure you understand the thesis of the lecture. If you do not, ask. As you listen, consider questions you have about the material.
2. After lecture, find a primary source that helps answer your question. Print or photocopy a copy of the source.
3. Compose your response. I suggest you do this off-line. Then post your response to the class discussion board: <http://schrag.freeforums.org/>. Print one copy to bring to class. **Postings are due at 9:30 am.**
4. At the start of class, give the copy of your response to a classmate and get a classmate's response. (You need not read the response of the same person who is reading yours, but you are welcome). Write "Edited by" with your name and the date on each copy you receive. Follow the instructions for editing, to be given in class.
5. At the end of the workshop period of class, return the draft you have edited and collect yours.
6. At home, revise your draft as appropriate and print out a final copy for inclusion in the next packet.

## **Reading Response Instructions**

### *Goals*

The goals of this assignment are the same as for the lecture responses, though here you are asking questions of the books and not doing outside research.

### *Assignment*

On six occasions, reading is assigned. In these cases, questions will be posted on the discussion board. Your task is to answer one of the questions posed using evidence from the readings.

### *Process*

1. Prior to starting the reading, read the questions on the discussion board.
2. Begin your reading with a careful study of the author's introduction and conclusion. Figure out what the author wants you to believe, and keep that in mind as you continue reading.

3. Complete the reading, watching for specific facts that support or contradict the author's argument, and that bear on the discussion questions. Please include these facts, telling quotations, and page numbers in your response.
4. Compose your response, post it, and bring it to class as in steps 3-6 of the lecture response instructions.

### **Packet Submission**

On four occasions, you will submit packets of your responses to me on paper. Each packet should include the following items, stapled together:

- The draft copy of each response with your editors' markings.
- A clean, double-spaced final copy of each response.
- Copies of all primary sources used for lecture responses.
- A process memo explaining how you revised your drafts based on your editors' comments and, for packets after the first one, my feedback. The more you can show you are responding to feedback, the more feedback you will get.

### **Evaluation**

Each response will be graded on a 7-point scale.

- **Timeliness (1 point).** First drafts must be posted on time and packets submitted at the start of class for this point. Packets submitted more than one week late will receive no credit at all.
- **Completeness (1 point).** See above for all the components of a packet. If you are missing any, you will be penalized. This is especially true if you fail to bring drafts to class and are therefore missing your peers' comments.

The remaining five points will be based on the final draft of each response. I will evaluate your work by judging the degree to which it meets the goals of the assignment. Specifically, I will look for:

1. **Close attention.** By including specific facts (and for reading assignments, quotations), you can show that you took good notes. By including facts and quotations that are important to the lecturer's or author's argument, rather than random tidbits, you show that you read the entire assignment and grasped the most important points.
2. **Questions.** This assignment is designed to encourage you to think critically about lectures and readings. Critical thinking includes looking for flaws, but a more important component is looking for opportunities to complicate, rather than contradict. For example, if a book describes the thoughts of one group of Americans, you might ask how another group of Americans might

have thought about the same issue. Or if the lecturer or author gives one interpretation of an event, you might ask how that same event could be interpreted differently.

3. Research (for lecture responses). Your choice of documents is important, so do not settle for the first document you find. Find a few, and choose the best. The most credit will be given to documents that do more than confirm the thesis of the lecture, by providing a different perspective.

4. Analysis. Show your close reading of your primary or secondary source by quoting from it and analyzing the quotations. For a primary source, explain why the document was created—by whom, and for whom. For a secondary source, consider whether the author’s arguments are persuasive.

5. Communication. The first thing I will look for is a thesis statement, near the start or at the end of the essay. Your thesis statement should be surprising; it should show that by reading the primary source, you learned something you did not know before. See “The Thesis Statement” <<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/thesis.html>>. I will look for paragraphs with clear topic sentences, correct grammar and style, and complete citations in Chicago style. Before submitting your essay, print it out and compare it to the Pre-Submission Checklist: <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/checklist.html>. Also, make sure to stay within the 600 word limit.

6. Contribution. Your contribution to class discussion will factor into your participation grade, but you should think about class discussions as you write your essays, and work at them until you have something to say out loud. To please your instructor, teach your classmates.

### **Final Exam (15 percent)**

An in-class, closed book essay exam will ask you to analyze primary documents from the period 1973-2007.

### **Extra Credit (2 percent each, up to 10 percent total. Maximum 4 points per week)**

There are two kinds of extra-credit assignments. You may get credit for only one of each kind each week, for a maximum of ten points in the semester.

#### *1. Glossary entries*

Some of the readings will include words and terms with which you are unfamiliar. If you find one of these terms, do the following:

1. Look up the term in a reputable reference source. Wikipedia is not a reputable source; consult the course website, a librarian, or me for suggestions. For words, I suggest the *American Heritage Dictionary*, searchable at <http://www.bartleby.com/61/>.

2. Write a one-paragraph entry showing how the term is used in the reading, what it means, and how knowing what it means helps you understand the reading. Be sure to cite both the assigned reading by page number and the reference source you used.

3. Post your entry in the discussion-board forum for glossary entries.

## 2. *News items*

History helps us understand the world we live in, and current events give us perspective on events in the past. To encourage you to make these connections, I will give credit for the following:

1. Find a news item that bears some comparison with the week's topic. The item must be less than a month old and must come from a reputable source—newspaper, magazine, or website. I will not consider any blog to be reputable unless you show me that it is.

2. Write a one-paragraph entry explaining how the course material helps us understand the news item or vice versa. The relationship must be precise. I will give no credit for a vague comparison like, "Abortion is still controversial." Instead, focus on the details: "Luker depicts the pro-life movement as primarily Catholic, but this article focuses on the role of evangelical Protestants." Be sure to cite course materials—readings or lectures.

3. Post your entry in the discussion-board forum for news entries. If your source is online, include a link.

4. Print-out a copy of the news item and submit it with a printout of your entry at the start of class.

## **Peer Editing Instructions**

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 listening to the lecture (or 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 response?



## Schedule

### Week 1

- August 27. Course introduction  
August 29. Lecture: America at 1973—Inflation and Vietnam

### Week 2

- September 3 NO CLASS (Labor Day)  
September 5 Lecture: Backlash

### Week 3

- September 10 Discussion: RESPONSE 1 DUE:  
*Canarsie*, 57-167, 233-263, and photographs following 54 and 167

### September 11 **Last day to add a class or to drop without tuition liability**

- September 12 Lecture: The Diplomacy of Human Rights

### Week 4

- September 17. Discussion: RESPONSE 2 DUE (Backlash, Diplomacy)  
September 19. Lecture: Reaganomics

### Week 5

- September 24. Discussion: RESPONSE 3 DUE: *Debt and Dispossession* (entire)  
September 26. Lecture: The War on Drugs **PACKET 1 DUE (responses 1-3)**

### **Last day to drop with no academic liability**

### Week 6

- October 1. Discussion: RESPONSE 4 DUE (Reaganomics, War on Drugs)  
October 3. Lecture: Abortion and the Law

### Week 7

- October 8. NO CLASS (Columbus Day). Class meets on Tuesday instead.  
October 9. Discussion: RESPONSE 5 DUE:  
*Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 1-11, 92-245.

- October 10. Lecture: AIDS

### Week 8

- October 15. Discussion: RESPONSE 6 DUE (Abortion, AIDS)  
October 17. Lecture: End of the Cold War **PACKET 2 DUE (responses 4-6)**

### Week 9

- October 22. Discussion: RESPONSE 7 DUE (End of the Cold War)

- October 24. Guest video. No office hours.
- Week 10**
- October 29. Discussion: RESPONSE 8 DUE: *The Day After*
- October 31. Lecture: New World Order
- Week 11**
- November 5. Discussion: RESPONSE 9 DUE: *Black Hawk Down*, 331-346; 1-179 [Signet edition: 406-422; 1-215]. Start with the epilogue.
- November 7. Lecture: Welfare as We Knew It **PACKET 3 DUE (responses 7-9)**
- Week 12**
- November 12. Discussion: RESPONSE 10: *American Dream*, 175-338
- November 14. Lecture: Globalization—Trade and Immigration
- Week 13**
- November 19. Lecture: The Culture Wars
- November 21. NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)
- Week 14**
- November 26. Discussion: RESPONSE 11 DUE (Welfare, Globalization, Culture)
- November 28. Lecture: A Nation Challenged
- Week 15**
- December 3. Discussion: RESPONSE 12 DUE: *September 11 in History*, 1-9, 35-215.
- December 5. Course Review **PACKET 4 DUE (responses 10-12)**
- Final Exam**
- Monday, December 17. 1:30 pm – 4:15 pm.