

# **The Automobile in the United States**

## **History 389, section 3. George Mason University. Spring 2010**

Science and Technology I, room 224. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12 – 1:15 pm.

Course Blackboard site: [courses.gmu.edu](http://courses.gmu.edu)

General advice: [www.schrag.info/teaching](http://www.schrag.info/teaching)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4 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.

## **Course Description**

This course examines the biography of one of the most important characters in twentieth-century U.S. history: the automobile. Embracing the histories of business, policy, labor, the environment, technology, and culture, this course seeks a holistic understanding of the role of the car in American life. It will examine the invention and adoption of the automobile, the rise of assembly-line manufacturing, the evolution of roadside architecture, and the challenges posed by oil shortages. It seeks to draw a variety of students and encourage them to think about one of the fundamental interactions between humans and machines in the history of the nation and in their own lives.

## **Goals**

In this course, students will:

- Reflect on the significance of the automobile in shaping the America we know today, including their own daily lives.
- Use the automobile to understand the interconnections among technology, business, labor, culture, and politics.
- Practice critical reading of primary and secondary sources, including texts, images, music, and motion pictures.
- Practice research skills using sources in electronic databases, on paper, and in the world around us.
- Practice skills of writing, editing, and revision.

## **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.

**Laptops** may be used for notetaking and other course purposes, provided they do not become a distraction. If they do, permission to use them may be revoked for individual students or the class as a whole.

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

## **Readings**

- Kathleen Franz. *Tinkering: Consumers Reinvent The Early Automobile*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. ISBN-10: 0812238818
- Stephen Meyer. *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921*. State University of New York Press, 1981. ISBN-10: 0873955099

- Chester Liebs. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. The Johns Hopkins University Press; Reprint edition, 1995. ISBN-10: 0801850959
- Tom McCarthy. *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment*. Yale University Press (2009), Paperback. ISBN-10: 0300158483. ISBN-13: 9780300158489
- Gordon Harvey. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Second edition. Hackett, 2008. ISBN13: 9780872209442
- Zachary M. Schrag, "Guidelines for History Students," <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/teaching.html>.

## **Collaboration**

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.

You must credit your classmates for the help that they give you, since a scholar should be proud of the use she has made of others' work. Citation need not be terribly formal, but I suggest the following forms for citing work by your classmates:

- Joanna Student, "Lincoln's Imagery," 26 January 2010, History 389 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).

## **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://courses.gmu.edu>. You will also receive essay comments electronically.

## **Assignments**

Please note that 105 percentage points are available, to allow for illness, family emergencies, and other mishaps.

### **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 12 noon; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by 12 noon. 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.

At the end of each unit, you will submit a **participation memo**, explaining your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions.

### **Reading Responses (8 percent. 1 percent each)**

On twelve occasions during the course, you are assigned short responses. They are **due at 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.

There are two kinds of responses:

*Reading responses (1 point each)*

On eight occasions, you are assigned responses to the readings. Questions will be posted on Blackboard:

1. Choose one of the questions for that day's reading and write a one-paragraph response, roughly 125 – 175 words. Write your response as if it were part of a longer essay. Begin with a clear topic sentence (See <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/topicsentences.html>) that makes an argument rather than just stating facts. Then support that argument with specific facts and quotations from the reading. 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.

### **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. Points are based on the ability of your choice of documents and analysis to spark class discussion.

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. Write a one-paragraph analysis of the document or image following the examples at "Document Analysis" <<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/documentanalysis.html>> or "Image Analysis"
3. Post the document on the appropriate Blackboard discussion, along with the document as an attachment.

## Essays (60 percent. 15 percent each)

On four occasions, you are assigned six-ten paragraph essays (roughly 800-1200 words). Please keep in mind the instructions at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/index.html>, especially those on thesis statements and topic sentences.

The essays require the following steps:

1. Read the essay question, posted on Blackboard.
2. Assemble evidence from the assigned readings, from the documents you and your classmates have gathered, and from music and films played in class. Each essay should contain a mix of evidence from primary and secondary sources from the appropriate unit. Evidence from other units of the course may be helpful as well.
3. Develop a thesis statement that answers the question and can be supported by your evidence. See <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/thesistemplate.html> for a suggested form.
4. Write a rough draft of your essay. **Bring two copies to class.**
5. Share your rough draft with two of your classmates during the peer editing session. If you do not receive helpful comments, demand them.
6. Revise the draft according to the helpful comments you received.

## 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 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?

## Final Exam (10 percent)

The final exam will be an in-class essay exam that will ask you to reflect on the course as a whole and to analyze primary documents.

**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. For each week of the course, you may write a two-paragraph journal entry. Up to three entries will count toward course credit, but you may only submit one per week. The first paragraph should describe something that happened to you or that you witnessed involving ground transportation. 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.

## Schedule

### Week 1

January 19 Introduction—Cars and Choices

### Unit 1: What is a car? 1878-1940

January 21 Lecture: The Invention of the Car.

### Week 2

January 26 Discussion. **Reading 1 due:** *Tinkering*, 1-73

January 28 Workshop: reading primary sources.  
Read: “How to Read a Primary Source,” “Document Analysis,” and “Image Analysis.” <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/>

### Week 3

February 2 Discussion. **Group 1. Research 1 due:** early automobiles (*Harper’s*)

February 4 Discussion: **Reading 2 due:** *Tinkering*, 74-102; 130-166

### Week 4

February 9 Discussion. **Group 2. Research 2 due:** early automobiles (NYPL brochures)

February 11 Peer Editing. **Essay 1 draft due**

### Unit 2: Are cars democratic? 1908-1945

### Week 5

February 16 Lecture: Making the Model T.

**Essay 1 final due.**

February 18 Discussion: **Reading 3 due:** *Five Dollar Day*, 1-65.

### Week 6

February 23 Discussion: Industry films

February 25 Discussion **Group 3. Research 3 due:** (ProQuest historical newspapers).

### Week 7

March 2 Discussion: **Reading 4 due:** *Five Dollar Day*, 67-147.

March 4 Peer Editing. **Essay 2 draft due**

### SPRING BREAK

### Unit 3: How should we build for cars? 1945-1973

### Week 8

March 16 Lecture: The Automotive Landscape. **Essay 2 final due**

March 18 Discussion: **Reading 5 due:** *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, vi-73

### Week 9

March 23 Discussion: **Group 1. Research 4 due** Postcards/photos

March 25 Discussion: **Group 2. Research 5 due** Postcards/photos

### Week 10

March 30 Discussion: **Group 3. Research 6 due:** Photographs/photos

April 1 Peer Editing. **Essay 3 draft due.**

**Unit 4: Are cars sustainable? 1955-2010**

*Week 11*

April 6 Film: *Who Killed the Electric Car?* **Essay 3 final due**

April 8 Discussion: **Reading 6 due:** *Auto Mania*, 99-147

*Week 12*

April 13 Discussion: **Groups 1 and 3. Research 7 due:** Car Ads

April 15 Discussion: **Reading 7 due:** *Auto Mania*, 148-92

*Week 13*

April 20 Discussion: **Reading 8 due** *Auto Mania*, 193-252

April 22 Discussion: **Group 2. Research 8 due** Government documents

*Week 14*

April 27 Peer Editing. **Essay 4 draft due**

**Conclusion**

April 29 Exam Review. **Essay 4 final due.**

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 11, 10:30 am – 1:15 pm.