

The Automobile in America

History 389, section 6. George Mason University. Fall 2007

MW 1:30 – 2:45 pm. Robinson Hall B203

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

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

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

Professor Zachary M. Schrag

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Office: Robinson B 375C. Tel. 703/993-1257. <http://www.schrag.info>

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

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meetings 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

This course examines the biography of one of the most important characters in twentieth-century American 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 car from many angles, from questions of engine displacement to questions of gender and ethnicity, from management to environmentalism. 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 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.

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
- Karen R. Merrill. *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. ISBN-10: 0312409222

- Gordon Harvey. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Hackett, 1998. ISBN: 0872204340
- 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," 14 October 2006, History 389 Discussion Board, <http://schrag.freeforums.org> (cited 30 October 2006).
- Joanna Student, "State Barge of the King of Burma," <http://automobile.pbwiki.com/State%20Barge%20of%20the%20King%20of%20Burma> (cited 30 October 2006).

If you just want to cite a primary source, cite that rather than your classmate's comments:

- J. Robert Brown, "State Barge of the King of Burma," *Harper's*, 3 April 1875, <http://automobile.pbwiki.com/State%20Barge%20of%20the%20King%20of%20Burma> (cited 30 October 2006).

Online Components

This course will require you to use two online components: a discussion board and a wiki.

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:

- 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.
- 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.

You are encouraged but not required to add a photograph of yourself to your profile. Image files may be no larger than 100 x 100 pixels and 6KB.

Wiki: <http://automobile.pbwiki.com>

A wiki is a collaborative website. We will use ours to post the research responses, since the discussion-board software does not handle images well.

To use the wiki, you really only need two basic skills: creating a new page, and uploading pictures and files. Links to instructions for doing this are posted on the opening page of the wiki.

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 1:30 pm; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by 1:30 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.

Weekly Responses (15 percent. 1 or 2 points each)

On twelve occasions during the course, you are assigned short responses. They are **due at 9:30 am on the day indicated**. A maximum of 15 points will count toward your final grade, but 17 points are assigned, so you may miss two reading responses or one research response 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 essays and final exam.

There are two kinds of responses:

Reading responses (1 point each)

On seven occasions, you are assigned responses to the readings. Questions will be posted on the discussion board: <http://schrag.freeforums.org>.

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.

2. Print a copy of your response to bring to class and to include in your portfolio.

Research responses (2 points each)

On five occasions, you are asked to complete small research assignments. Specific assignments will be posted on the course wiki, <http://automobile.pbwiki.com/>. 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. Go to the course wiki page for the assignment. Add a link (which creates a new page) with the title of the document or image you are analyzing. Include your name with the link. For an example, see <http://automobile.pbwiki.com/Early+Automobiles>
4. Post the document or image on its own page on the course wiki, along with your analysis. For an example, see <http://automobile.pbwiki.com/State-Barge-of-the-King-of-Burma>
5. Print a copy of your response to bring to class and to include in your portfolio.

Essays (60 percent. 20 percent each)

On four occasions, you are assigned five-to-seven 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 the course wiki.
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?

Portfolios

On four occasions you will submit portfolios for grading. Each portfolio should include the following items, stapled otherwise fastened together:

1. Copies of each of your responses for the unit.
2. The two rough drafts of your essay, with your editors' comments.
3. A clean copy of the final draft.
4. 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.

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 10 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 ten 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

August 27 Introduction—Cars and Choices

Unit 1: What is a car? 1878-1940

August 29 Lecture: The Invention of the Car.
Due: Discussion board and wiki exercises

Week 2

September 3 NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)
September 5 Discussion. **Response 1 due:** *Tinkering*, 1-73.

Week 3

September 10 Workshop: reading primary sources.
Read: “How to Read a Primary Source,” “Document Analysis,” and “Image Analysis.” <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/>

September 11. Last Day to Add
September 12 Workshop: finding sources online. **Meet in Fenwick 214A**

Week 4

September 17 Discussion. **Response 2 due:** early automobiles (*Harper’s*)
September 19 Discussion: **Response 3 due:** *Tinkering*, 74-102; 130-166.

Week 5

September 24 Peer Editing. **Essay 1 draft due.**

Unit 2: Are cars democratic? 1908-1945

September 26 Lecture: Making the Model T.
Portfolio 1 due.

Week 6

October 1 Discussion: **Response 4 due:** *Five Dollar Day*, 1-65.
October 3 Discussion: Industry films

Week 7

October 9 Discussion **Response 5 due:** Democracy (ProQuest).
October 10 Discussion: **Response 6 due:** *Five Dollar Day*, 67-147.

Week 8

October 15 Peer Editing. **Essay 2 draft due.**

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

October 17 Lecture: The Automotive Landscape
Portfolio 2 due.

Week 9

October 22 Discussion: **Response 7 due:** *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, vi-73.
October 24 Guest Lecture. No office hours.

Week 10

October 29 Discussion: **Response 8 due:** *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, any three chapters (pp. 75-224) + epilogue; Postcards
October 31 Discussion: **Response 9 due:** Photographs

Week 11

November 5 Peer Editing. **Essay 3 draft due.**

Unit 4: Are cars sustainable? 1973-2007

November 7 Lecture: The Energy Crises and the Japanese Challenge
Portfolio 3 due.

Week 12

November 12 Library Workshop: Transportation journals. **Meet in Fenwick C-201. Bring a digital camera if you have one.**

November 14 Discussion: **Response 10 due:** *The Oil Crisis*, 1-85

Week 13

November 19 Discussion: **Response 11 due:** *The Oil Crisis*, 86-157.

November 21 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 14

November 26 Video

November 28 Discussion: **Response 12 due:** Transportation journals.

Week 15

December 3 Peer Editing. **Essay 4 draft due.**

Conclusion

December 5 Exam Review
Portfolio 4 due.

Final Exam: Wednesday, 12 December, 1:30 pm – 4:15 pm.