

Recent U.S. History, 1945 to Present

History 623. George Mason University. Fall 2010.

Tuesdays, 7:20 – 10 pm. Krug Hall 210

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

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

Syllabus last revised: 24 August 2010.

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Office: Robinson B 357A. Tel. 703/594-1844.

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3-5 pm, and by appointment.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meeting and other commitments sometimes force me to cancel scheduled office hours, 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, preferably on a Monday or Friday. I am also happy to answer questions by e-mail, and to try the chat function of Blackboard or a video call via Skype.

Course Description

This graduate seminar introduces students to historiographical debates concerning key postwar events: the reevaluation of the New Deal in a time of postwar prosperity, the African American struggle for equality, the resurgence of conservatism after a period of apparent liberal consensus, and the return of gender as a major political concern. Students will also investigate topics of their own choosing in an original research prospectus.

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, materials found online, and the work of classmates. Gordon Harvey’s *Writing with Sources* 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. Please post your longer assignments in .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf formats.

Readings

Lizabeth Cohen. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. Vintage, 2003.

Ellen R. Baker. *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Kim Phillips-Fein. *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Thomas J. Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries. *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Robert O. Self. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Lisa McGirr. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Princeton University Press, 2002.

Ruth Rosen. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, Revised Edition. Penguin, 2006.

Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

Course Organization

Online Components

This course is designed to be paperless; all assignments should be posted on Blackboard, <http://courses.gmu.edu>. You will also receive comments electronically.

Small Groups

In mid-September, I will assign you to groups of three or four based on your chosen topics for individual papers. You will spend two class sessions discussing the work of your group, and you will act as a panel for the presentations.

Assignments

Discussion participation (20 percent)

The success of this seminar depends on students' critical reading of assigned texts and challenging both the texts and their colleagues' reading of those texts. Students are expected to come to class with questions and to participate actively in class discussions.

Basic classroom rules

- Bring the books we are discussing to class each week.
- Do not eat in the classroom, before or during class.
- Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other noisemakers.

Mini-Responses (1.25 percent each, 10 percent total)

For each week that reading is due, each student not presenting a primary source handout will write a **three-sentence** response. The responses are designed to get you thinking about the books in ways that will provoke discussion, and to give me a chance to get some of your thoughts ahead of the class meeting.

Please post your response on the Discussions section of Blackboard by **10am each Tuesday** for which reading is assigned. Formal footnotes are not required, but please provide page numbers for quotations and key facts.

Each response should consist of the following elements:

1. One sentence explaining the thesis of one chapter of the book or the book overall.
2. One sentence noting a fact, quotation, or illustration (with a page reference) from the book and explaining how that fact, quotation, or illustration supports the thesis stated in the first sentence.

3. One sentence noting a fact, quotation, or illustration (with a page reference) from the book and explaining how that fact, quotation, or illustration contradicts or complicates the thesis stated in the first sentence.

Example:

Gijs Mom argues that for a wide variety of uses, electric vehicles were superior to their gasoline counterparts, which Mom finds “noisy, unhygienic, and unreliable.” (13) Berlin’s 1906 ordinance (150) supports the argument about noise. But his repeated references (102, 123, 170) to the short life span and fragility of batteries suggest that electric cars were even less reliable than gasoline cars, contradicting the thesis.

Review Essays (10 percent each, 30 percent total)

For each unit of the course, you are asked to write a review essays comparing and contrasting the three assigned texts. Each paper should run roughly 1000-1500 words (4-6 pages). It should present a thesis that explains what we learn from reading the three books in combination. You are welcome to elaborate on points raised in your own mini-response or, with proper citation, those of your classmates.

For general instructions on writing a reading response, please see “How to Read a History Book,” “How to Write a Review,” and “How to Write a Reading Response,” all available at <http://historyprofessor.org> For a model of how to write about three books at once, see Howard Gillette, Jr., “Urban Renewal Revisited,” *Journal of Urban History* 33 (2007): 342-350, or other review essays in that journal. Since your reader has read the books about which you are writing, you need not include as much summary as those reviews. But do include key factual details.

Primary Source Handout and Discussion Leading (5 percent)

At the start of the course, each student will choose one week for which she will be responsible for a primary-source handout. The goals of this assignment are to spark discussion and to get you thinking about how you might deploy primary sources in an undergraduate class, website, museum exhibit, documentary, or other venue.

For each of those weeks, the student should find a primary source not presented in that week’s reading that the student feels supports or contradicts the thesis of the book. For example, for a discussion of Gijs Mom’s *Electric Vehicle: Technology and Expectations in the Automobile Age*, an advertisement, magazine article, or song lyrics from the early twentieth century, showing what motorists expected from their vehicles, would be helpful. It is fine to use a source cited or quoted only briefly in the assigned reading, but do not choose a text that is quoted at length or an illustration that is reproduced in the book.

Please limit your source to one page or four minutes of audio or video, excerpting as necessary. Please format texts so they can be printed on a single sheet, which can be distributed in class. If you need a computer projector or speakers, please let me know by e-mail.

I expect that in most cases you will find your sources online, either on the open Web or in one of the proprietary databases to which the university subscribes. However, you are free to scan, photograph, or type a source that has not been digitized.

Please post your source to the class Blackboard site, along with a brief analysis or two or three discussion questions. For instructions on writing an analysis, see “How to Read a Primary Source,” “Document Analysis,” and “Image Analysis,” all at <http://historyprofessor.org>.

Research Prospectus (35 percent)

The major assignment of this course is a research prospectus of roughly 3000 to 5000 words (12 to 20 pages), not including notes. Students may choose topics that they might work on while in graduate school, or topics that they do not intend to address any time soon but might want to one day. I encourage you to imagine that you are scoping out an article-length research project, though it is hard to know in advance of actual research how long a project will ultimately be.

The goals of this assignment are to allow you to explore a topic of your choosing and to gain practice doing the kind of work needed to begin a new project. Your task is to answer three questions about some element of the history of the United States between 1945 and the present:

What have historians learned about this topic?

To answer this question, you must identify significant books, journal articles, and dissertations that address your topic. For books and dissertations, keep an eye out for those that cover your topic in some depth, even if they are not exclusively devoted to it. For example, if you were writing about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, you would want to include not only works wholly devoted to that event, but also accounts in major biographies of King and major histories of the Civil Rights movement. Ideally, you will choose a topic narrow enough that you can read all the major accounts of it.

Once you have found a good range of secondary sources, look for areas where scholars disagree or emphasize different elements. See Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 322-31, for a model of this kind of analysis.

What questions remain to be answered?

Look for gaps in the existing historiography. If an event has been only told from a top-down perspective, look for opportunities for bottom-up research. If case studies of a trend all concern one region, consider how it may have played out differently elsewhere. It is not enough to show that a topic has not been covered from a particular angle. Explain how that angle would help answer pressing questions.

How might one answer those questions?

Consider sources. Sure, we might like to know how the homeless experienced the Reagan years, but unless you can identify sources with their voices, you can't tell their story. Identify primary sources with which one might begin to research the questions you have identified, or redefine the questions so that they can be answered with identifiable sources.

You are expected to work on the paper throughout the term, and to complete it in stages. Two portions must be posted on Blackboard on Thursdays, to allow members of your small group to read them in advance of the course meetings devoted to discussing them.

Topics

For **September 14, by 10am**, please post a one- or two-paragraph statement of your general topic and the questions that interest you. I will use this to assign you to a **small group** for the remainder of the term.

Prospectus and bibliography

For **September 23** (a Thursday), please post a one- or two-page annotated bibliography explaining your topic and your selection of sources. At the minimum, I expect you to search the America: History & Life database for books, journal articles, and dissertations, and to use your results to find an appropriate scope for your paper (i.e., not one with no established historiography nor one with too many sources for you to read in the time available.). Please note areas in which you would like help from your classmates and instructor.

For **October 5**, please read the work of the members of your small group and come to class with questions and comments.

Rough draft

For **October 28** (a Thursday), please post a rough draft of your essay. At a minimum, the rough draft should include one-third of the paper, plus an outline of the remainder. The more complete the paper, the more valuable feedback you will receive. Again, please note areas in which you would like help from your classmates and instructor.

For **November 2**, please read the work of the members of your small group and come to class with questions and comments.

Presentations

Our last two meetings will give you a chance to present your work to the class. Please plan a presentation of your findings, lasting no more than **12 minutes**. If you wish to use a PowerPoint file, please send it to me in advance.

Schedule

August 31	Introduction
<i>Unit 1: Class</i>	
September 7	Cohen. <i>Consumers' Republic</i> .
September 14	Baker. <i>On Strike and on Film</i> Topics due 10am. Last Day to Add
September 21	Phillips-Fein. <i>Invisible Hands</i>
September 23 (Thurs.)	Post prospectus and bibliography to Blackboard
September 28	Small group workshop: Annotated bibliography. Please come with comments and questions on your groupmates' work
October 1	Last Day to Drop
<i>Unit 2: Race</i>	
October 5	Sugrue. <i>Origins of the Urban Crisis</i> . Unit 1 review essay due
October 12	NO CLASS (Columbus Day; Monday schedule)
October 19	Jeffries. <i>Bloody Lowndes</i>
October 26	Self. <i>American Babylon</i>
October 28 (Thurs.)	Post rough draft to Blackboard
November 2	Small group workshop: Rough draft. Please come with comments and questions on your groupmates' work.
<i>Unit 3: Gender?</i>	
November 9	McGirr. <i>Suburban Warriors</i> Unit 2 review essay due
November 16	Rosen. <i>World Split Open</i>
November 23	Schulman and Zelizer. <i>Rightward Bound</i>
<i>Presentations</i>	
November 30	Presentations. Unit 3 review essay due for those not presenting
December 7	Presentations, continued. Unit 3 review essay due for those not presenting
December 9 (Thurs.)	Final papers due on Blackboard. Please send by e-mail as well, just to be sure.