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HIST 7010: Issues and Interpretations in American History (CRN 85342)
Georgia State University / Fall 2009
Dr. Marni Davis

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Class Meets: Wednesdays 5:30-8:00 PM
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 4:00-5:00 PM

OBJECTIVES:

This seminar is a readings course that examines a selection of scholarly works about the social, cultural, political, and economic history of the United States, from colonization to the present. We will engage a range of topics – race and ethnicity, class and labor, gender, politics and ideology, and regionalism, to name only a few. Our primary mission in this seminar is to read each of these monographs and articles closely and carefully, and to evaluate their arguments. I have chosen these readings not only because they represent a topical range, but also because they will help us to think about different ways of “doing” history. Each of these methods has interpretive implications. It is our job to figure out what they are.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will learn to recognize and evaluate historical texts, and to communicate about them in both written and verbal form at the graduate level.
- Students will become familiar with some of the major interpretive problems in U.S. history and in history as a discipline.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE ASSESSMENT:

- 1) Over the course of the semester, you will write three short papers (1250 words) evaluating the required readings for weeks 3-15. You will choose the weeks you’re going to write about by the second week of class. Your paper must include analysis of all of that week’s reading. You must turn in your paper at the beginning of the class session. (Each of these papers will be worth 20% of your final grade.)
- 2) Everyone is required to bring a discussion question, based upon that day’s reading, to every class. We will begin every class by going around the room so that everyone can pose their question; we’ll use these questions to orient our conversation. This will be part of your overall participation grade. You are required to take part in class discussions, and to contribute productively and thoughtfully to our conversations. Your participation will be assessed by its quality rather than its quantity. In other words: speak up, but don’t seek to dominate; if you only utter a sentence or two in each class, but those sentences are consistently insightful and interesting, you will do fine in this portion of your final grade. (Participation is worth 10% of your final grade. Every time you come to class without a discussion question, five points will be taken off this portion of your grade. If you fear that shyness will impede your participation, please come see me.)
- 3) At the beginning of the exam period, you will turn in a 2500-word book review on three books from our reading list. You cannot choose for this assignment any of the books you’ve already written about. (You can include articles and other selections we’ve read in

Exhibit 5 - 1



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your analysis, but your final review must discuss at least three monographs.) You are to put these three books in conversation with one another. Summarize each work, compare and contrast them, assess their relative strengths and weaknesses, and speak to the historiographic trajectory manifested in these three books. (This final paper will be worth 30% of your final grade.)

Attendance Policy:

- You will be allowed two absences without any penalty. (Please note that I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences.)
- If you miss three or more classes, your final grade automatically drops one full letter grade. (An A becomes a B, a B+ becomes a C+, etc.)
- You will be allowed two tardy arrivals to class without penalty. (Tardy = arriving after we have finished sharing discussion questions; no excuses for tardiness will be accepted.)
- After two tardy arrivals, every tardy arrival will count as an absence.

Additional Issues Regarding Grades:

- Papers turned in late will be penalized one full grade per day, unless there are significant circumstances, which must be discussed with me in advance or within 24 hours of the due date.
- If you want to dispute a grade, please submit a written rationale for why you think that you deserve a higher grade for that assignment. You must give me this rationale, along with the original marked assignment, within a week after I returned the original assignment to you.
- All cell phones, blackberries, computers, ipods, and other electronic devices must be turned off for the entirety of the class meeting.
- All forms of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, are strictly prohibited. All incidents of academic dishonesty will be considered grounds for serious penalty, which may include anything from an “F” on an assignment to an “F” for a final grade. For Georgia State University’s Policy on Academic Honesty, which includes definitions of “plagiarism” and “cheating,” look to the following website:

http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwdos/codeofconduct_conpol.html

I expect you to take this policy as seriously as I do. If you have any questions about a particular case, see me before it is too late – that is, *before* submitting any written work.

Grades range numerically as follows:

- 97-99 = A+ (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 98)
- 93-96 = A (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 95)
- 90-92 = A- (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 92)
- 87-89 = B+ (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as an 88)
- 83-86 = B (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as an 85)
- 80-82 = B- (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as an 82)
- 77-79 = C+ (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 78)
- 73-76 = C (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 75)
- 70-72 = C- (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 72)
- 66-69 = D (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 68)
- 65 or less = F (A paper receiving this letter grade will be counted as a 65)

PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE

It is expected that you come to this class with some basic knowledge of American history. If you feel that you would benefit from some background reading on our time period, I recommend the following:

The Great Republic: A History of the American People, Volumes One and Two by Bernard Bailyn, Robert Dallek, David B. Davis, David Herbert Donald, and Gordon Wood (Houghton Mifflin, 2000)

IN ADDITION...

- I am always more than happy to meet with you on a one-on-one basis, to discuss matters historical and otherwise. Note my office hours at the top of this syllabus, or make an appointment to come see me at a time that is more convenient for you.
- If you email me, please be patient: expect a 24-hour turnaround for a response, and more than that on weekends. You should feel free to call me at my office (see number above), but be aware that most weeks, I am only in my office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Email is probably the best way to reach me.
- You must always bring that day's assigned text(s) to class. This is crucial, since the bulk of our time together will be spent discussing the language of these texts, and you will need to be able to refer directly to them in order to participate intelligently.
- All of the assigned books are available for purchase at the Georgia State Bookstore. They are also on reserve at the University Library. Any additional readings will be distributed as handouts, or made available at eReserve. (<http://reserves.gsu.edu/eres/default.aspx>)
- Make sure that you have access to the class uLearn website. I will post reading materials, announcements, and links to the site when necessary.
- This syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary. The professor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus, if needed. It is the professor's responsibility to inform the class of such changes in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to be attentive to these changes, when and if they happen.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE:

1. August 19: Introduction to Class
2. August 26: Doing History, Reading History, Teaching History
 - Marc Bloch, Chapter 1 ("History, Men, and Time") from *The Historian's Craft*
 - William Cronon, "Getting Ready to Do History," *Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate*, Carnegie Foundation, Palo Alto, 2004, 1-18
 - Sam Wineburg, "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts," *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, Temple University Press, 2001, 3-28.

PART I: THREE SURVEYS

3. September 2: Competing Master Narratives
 - Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*. Harper Perennial, 1999.
 - Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*. WW Norton, 1999.(Each book will be read by half of the class)

4. September 9: Against American Exceptionalism

- Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*. Hill and Wang, 2006.

PART II: CREATING AN AMERICAN IDENTITY

5. September 16: The American Paradox

- Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. WW Norton, 2003.
- Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History." Edward Kousser and James McPherson, ed.s., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*. Oxford University Press, 1982, 143-177

6. September 23: How Revolutionary Was It?

- Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. Vintage, 1993.
- Gary B. Nash, "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism." Alfred F. Young, ed. *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1976, 3-36.

PART III: ANTEBELLUM AMERICANS AT WORK

7. September 30: Labor and the Invention of the Color Line

- David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Verso (revised edition), 2007.
- Karl Marx, selections from *The German Ideology* (1845)

8. October 7: Life Under Slavery

- Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. Vintage, 1976.
- Lawrence Levine, "Slave Songs and Slave Consciousness: An Exploration in Neglected Sources." Tamara Hareven, ed. *The Unpredictable Past*. Oxford University Press, 1993, 35-58.

9. October 14: Historians and "Stories"

- Edward Jones, *The Known World*. Amistad, 2006.
- Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. 26-57.
- James Goodman, "For the Love of Stories." *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Mar. 1998), 255-274

PART IV: THE NATION AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

10. October 21: Modernization and its Discontents

- Robert Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920*. Hill and Wang, 1966.
- Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Address to the American Historical Association, Chicago IL, 1893.

11. October 28: Social History and Industrialization

- Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*. Vintage, 1977.
- E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec. 1967), 56-97

12. November 4: Gender History and Culture

- Gail Bederman, *Martiness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880-1917*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec., 1986), 1053-1075

PART V: RACE AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA

13. November 11: History as Advocacy

- C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Howard N. Rabinowitz, "More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing the Strange Career of Jim Crow." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Dec., 1988), 842-856

14. November 18: Local History and the Big Picture

- Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton University Press, 2007.

November 25 – Thanksgiving – No Class

15. December 2: History and the Memoir

- Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*. Three Rivers Press, 2005.

FINAL PAPER DUE DECEMBER 10, BY 5:00 PM, VIA EMAIL