

History 104: American History, 1877 to the Present: Major Problems of Interpretation

Professor Jason Petruslis
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Class hrs: Tu/Th 11AM-12:15PM, King 323
Office hrs: W 9:30AM-11:30AM, Rice 305

Course description. This course will explore American politics, society, and culture from the post-Civil War era to the present. We will focus on changes in power relations in American society produced by social and political movements. We will also examine the construction and contestation of gender, race, ethnic, and class. This course will emphasize the use of primary sources, different modes of historical analysis and interpretation, and scholarly controversies.

Required texts.

- Jo Ann Argersinger, *The Triangle Fire*
- *Third Edition,* Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History, Vol. 2*
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, As Told to Alex Haley*

Additional readings will be posted to the course web site or are available at the library.

Please read all assigned reading carefully and critically, and come to class prepared for discussion. You should take careful notes on the reading and are strongly encouraged to keep a reading journal. Since we will refer to specific examples in the monographs and texts, you must bring the required reading to class, and bring Foner to each session.

Assignments.

- *Active, thoughtful, and engaged participation* (determines borderline grades). Including discussion, group work, and occasional in-class writing assignments.
- *Paper assignment 1* (20%). A 2-pp paper analyzing a document from the Triangle Fire, DUE THU FEB 28 at 11 AM, in class.
- *Midterm exam* (20%). Take-home, covering all reading and in-class material.
 - DISTRIBUTED in class on THU MAR 14
 - DUE by email to petruslis@oberlin.edu, THU MAR 21 at 12:15 PM
- *Paper assignment 2* (20%). A 2-pp paper analyzing a magazine advertisement (1945-73), DUE THU APR 25 at 11 AM, in class.
- *Final exam* (40%). Take-home, covering all reading and in-class material.
 - DISTRIBUTED in class on TUE MAY 7
 - DUE by email to petruslis@oberlin.edu, WED MAY 15 at 2:00 PM

Learning objectives.

- Hone reading skills, including argument identification and strategic reading
- Navigate scholarly controversies and formulate responses
- Analyze and contextualize primary sources; use primary sources in an original research paper
- Deploy secondary sources as support, not summary

Learning objectives, continued.

- Write concise, well-crafted essays that construct an original argument, supported by primary source evidence and secondary source analysis
- Contribute to the community of the classroom through discussion, group work, and writing
- Engage as citizens with contemporary and historical issues

Additional details.

- Academic honesty. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable, and easy to avoid. Familiarize yourself with Oberlin's [Honor Code](#), and talk to me to clear up any questions; ignorance is no excuse. Per Oberlin requirements, I will refer all suspected academic dishonesty to the appropriate dean. Offenders will receive a zero on the assignment and an F in the class.
- Accommodations. Please let me know about any issues or accommodations (activities, disability, religious, etc) during the first two weeks of class.
- Attendance. You are expected to attend every class session. You can miss two sessions for any reason – illness, job interview, hamster death, lassitude – and will make up any in-class assignments you miss. Each additional unexcused absence will drop your overall grade by 1/3 grade per absence. (Use your absences wisely.) You must inform me in a timely way to request an excused absence, including religious holidays or extended/severe illness (which requires a note from the dean's office).
- Communicating with the professor. Office hours are Wednesday, 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM. I am also available to chat immediately after class on Tuesdays. I respond to emails as quickly as possible, and at least once a day during the week. I do not check email regularly on weekends, vacations, or holidays. Email is business correspondence, and should be composed accordingly.
- Drafts. I am happy to meet with you at any stage of the paper writing process, and will review drafts until one week before the paper due date. I also encourage you to consult with peers and the Writing Center early and often! I will not answer substantial paper questions the day before the paper is due, so plan ahead.
- Due dates. Papers are due at the beginning of class; once class has started, a paper will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a grade per day.
- Sources. You may only use academic secondary sources, and may not use Wikipedia or similar sources in your work. Please consult with me if you have questions about a source.
- Technology. There is no “connecting” in class: no phone calls, texts, email or other internet use, or the like. The first infraction will cost 5 percentage points from your overall grade; the second costs an additional 10 percentage points; and so on. If you want to use a computer in class, you must sign a computer “honor code.”

Any other issues will be discussed in class; important communication will be posted on the course web site. Please check it regularly.

Finally: all course materials are the property of the professor, and are NOT to be posted, shared, or otherwise made public without my permission.

Course schedule.

Week of Feb 5

Tu: The World in 1877

- Foner, Preface, Ch 15

Th: Industrialization, the Closing of the Frontier, and Populism

- Foner, Ch 16
- Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Week of Feb 12

Tu: Jim Crow America

- Lynching Figures in the US, 1882-1930; Literacy Test and Poll Test, 1899; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896; Nell Painter, "Social Equality, Miscegenation, Labor, and Power"

Th: US Empire and the Spanish-American War

- Foner, Ch 17
- Albert Beveridge, "The March of the Flag" (1898); Anti-Imperialist League Platform (1899), available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1899antiimp.asp>

Week of Feb 19

Tu: Immigration, Nativism, and the Shift to an Urban Nation

- Argersinger, *The Triangle Fire*: Introduction (pp 1-36); Documents 1-10 (pp 39-71)
- Edward Ross, "Racial Consequences of Immigration," Madison Grant on the New Immigrants as Survival of the Unfit, 1918; Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America"

Th: Managing Modern Life

- Argersinger, *The Triangle Fire*: Documents 11-25 (pp 72-121)

Week of Feb 26

Tu: Progressivism

- Foner, Ch 18; William Sumner, "The Concentration of Wealth"

Th: World War I and the League of Nations

- Foner, Ch 19
- PAPER 1 DUE AT THE START OF SESSION ON FEB 28

Week of Mar 5

Tu: The Jazz Age

- Foner, Ch 20

Th: The Great Depression

- Great Depression Photo Essay online at <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/photoessay.htm>
- Read a selection of letters to Eleanor Roosevelt, available online at <http://newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/er3a.htm> ;
- Southern Tenant Farmer's Union: Oral History; "The Sit-Down Strike at General Motors" (1937)

Week of Mar 12

Tu: The New Deal

- Foner, Ch 21; Norman Thomas, "What Was the New Deal?" (1936); Herbert Hoover on the New Deal and Liberty (1936); Father Coughlin, "Roosevelt and Ruin"

Th: World War II

- Foner, Ch 22; Franklin Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, February 3, 1942
- TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

Week of Mar 19

Tu: World War II at Home

- US Department of War, "Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942"; "A Call to March on Washington," *The Black Worker*, May 1941; Melissa Dabakis, "Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood"

Th: NO CLASS;

- TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE THU, MAR 21 at 12:15 PM via email to petrusis@oberlin.edu

Week of Mar 26: SPRING BREAK

Week of Apr 2

Tu: The Cold War and Korea

- Foner: Ch 23; George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”

Th: American Politics and Culture in the 1950s

- Foner, Ch 24; “He May Be a Communist” (US Armed Forces Propaganda Video); “Survival under Atomic Attack,” Civil Defense Pamphlet (1950)

Week of Apr 9

Tu: The Civil Rights Struggle

- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Th: The Great Society and the Modern American State

- Foner, pp 1036-53

Week of Apr 16

Tu: New Left, New Rights

- Foner, pp 1062-77; Port Huron Statement (1962); Rachel Carson, “And No Birds Sing” (1962); Cesar Chavez, “Letter from Delano” (1969); Terry Anderson, “The Sea Change,” in *The Movement and the 60s*

Th: Vietnam War

- Foner, 1053-62; documents on My Lai massacre

Week of Apr 23

Tu: Gender Trouble

- Betty Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name,” from *The Feminine Mystique*; George Chauncey, Chapter 2 of *Why Marriage?*

Th: The Age of Limits

- Foner, Ch 26, pp 1082-1101; Jimmy Carter, the “Crisis of Confidence” Speech, July 15, 1979
- PAPER 2 DUE AT THE START OF SESSION ON APR 25.

Week of Apr 30

Tu: The Rise of Conservatism

- Foner, Ch 26, pp 1101-19; The Sharon Statement; Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals” (1983)

Th: Globalization and The New Economy

- Foner, Ch. 27

Week of May 7

Tu: The New World Order?

- Foner, Ch 28; George HW Bush, “Address to Congress on Persian Gulf Crisis,” Sep 11, 1990; “National Security Strategy of the United States,” 2002

Th: America Today

TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE by email to petrus@oberlin.edu, WED MAY 15 at 2:00 PM