CAST/HIST 443
CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE: U.S. HISTORY AND CULTURE IN THE 1970s

Oberlin College
Fall 2014
Professor Shelley Lee

Class time and location:
T 1:00 – 2:50
Severance 204

Professor office hours and location:
M 1:00 – 3:00 (or by appointment)
King 141-G
shelee@oberlin.edu

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In this seminar, we will explore American history and culture during the critical decade of the 1970s. While the 1970s will be our main chronological focus, many of the issues we will address and the books we will read reach beyond this ten-year period, so it is a broader interest in late twentieth century U.S. history that informs this course. Often described as a time of unprecedented “malaise” during which Americans faced a “crisis of confidence,” the 1970s have become a major focus of new scholarship in U.S. history, with themes like cultural experimentation, loosening social constraints, international uncertainty, political corruption, and economic scarcity and restructuring being especially salient. We will read historical works, both to learn about the important events of the decade and to grasp the major analytical, interpretive, and thematic developments in the scholarly literature.

As this class is cross-listed in History and Comparative American Studies, we will cultivate an interdisciplinary outlook on some of the course themes, although the primary methodological anchor will remain historical. In History, 400 level seminars focus on historiography, in short, the “history of history.” In other words, in addition to discussing events, we will turn our attention to the scholars themselves, asking how their interests, objectives, ideological positions, the context in which they are writing, and other factors inform historical analysis and change over time. Due to the proximity of the 1970s to the present, the historiography is not as rich as it is for earlier periods, so our discussions will be informed less by the question of how scholarship has changed over time than how historians are integrating this period into the longer 20th century, why it is important to now consider the late 1900s in a historical perspective, and the challenges of doing recent history.

This class is an advanced reading seminar, and though it has no formal prerequisites, it does help to have some college-level modern U.S. history courses in your background. Also important, in terms of the workload, is that you can manage large reading loads, as we will be moving at a pace of a book per week. In addition to completing assigned readings for class, you are
expected to stay on top of course deadlines and requirements and conduct yourself in a respectful and non-disruptive manner. If you have any concerns or questions regarding the expectations or requirements, do speak with me as soon as possible.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at Oberlin Bookstore)
David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America’s First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton UP, 2006)

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Final grades will be based on a 200-point scale

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Final grades will be based on the following:

Attendance and participation (25%). In a small, weekly seminar such as this class, each student’s attendance and participation is vital for the course’s success. Show your respect for your classmates and the instructor by arriving on time and prepared (we start at 1:00!). Unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 6 points (approximately 1/3 of a grade) from your final grade; however you cannot pass the class if you miss more than two classes. Excessive tardiness and disruptiveness will likewise negatively affect your grade. On participation, you should be a thoughtful discussant as well as attentive listener. Above all, I am looking for you to demonstrate that you have read and thought critically about the reading, are engaged with the topic at hand, are respectful of your classmates’ ideas and opinions, and are reflective in your comments. If for any reason you have difficulty with class discussion, see me as soon as possible. I will give you a score and feedback on your participation during Weeks 7 and 15, but you may also consult with me in office hours if you wish to know how you are doing in this area.

Blackboard (10%). To encourage critical thinking and facilitate class discussion, you are to post responses to the readings on Blackboard by 8pm the night before class, FIVE times during the semester. This assignment is a space for expressing your initial thoughts about the reading as well as a preview for class discussion. In your postings you are asked to simply address the following: What is the author’s main intervention in trying to shape or change our understanding of history? What are two things you learned that surprised or resonated with you? In what way did the book illuminate the challenge of doing history in a way that you can appreciate? Students doing presentations should consult these postings to shape their remarks. Each post counts for two points and while these are not graded, posts that fail to make substantive comments will not receive credit.
Presentation and discussion facilitation (10%). Once during the semester you and a partner will be in charge of facilitating discussion. I will assist and direct as needed, but for approximately the first 30 minutes of our meeting, you will be responsible for the design and structure of class. You may choose the format, but be sure to cover the following: explain/discuss the historical significance of the book’s topic, review and assess its argument, closely discuss example(s) from the book. You will be graded on the thoughtfulness of your lesson plan/presentation, clarity of your remarks, demonstrated mastery of the text and historical issues, and effectiveness in engaging the rest of the class. Plan ahead and be creative with this task. You might consider incorporating a debate, small group discussion, multimedia, and/or other materials and exercises, always doing so in a purposeful way. You should NOT lecture or talk at the class non-stop. Though you are not required to, I encourage you to touch base with me in office hours to discuss your ideas.

Thematic essays (30%). You will write three essays (5-6 pages) examining a major theme in the study of the 1970s. Although each paper is to focus on a particular book, you are to discuss your book in relation to the theme you’ve selected, discussing how the book develops and offers insights on understanding a particular aspect of the 1970s. Possible themes you may focus on include law and family, U.S.-Middle East relations, or anti-war activism, although you are free to develop your own based on the readings. Another approach you may take is to select a topical focus (e.g., women and gender, race relations) and discuss how your book contributes to understanding that particular topic as an important aspect of 1970s history. Your papers must include a concise articulation of the author’s argument; a critical analysis and evaluation of the arguments, with attention on evidence, methods, and interpretations; and consideration of this analysis within the larger discussions and themes of this class. All papers should be clearly written and organized and free of spelling and grammatical errors. These are worth 20 points and constitute 30% of your grade. There are four possible deadlines for these three assignments (you may not turn in more than one at a time) so you have some flexibility. The rolling deadlines on these assignments are: Sept. 30, Oct. 14, Nov. 11, and Dec. 9.

Historiography Essay (25%). Select a major theme from the course and write an 8-10 page historiography essay, examining at least three different works. One of these can be an assigned text, the rest must be outside readings. In order to trace how interpretations have changed, at least one text must have been published ten years before the others.

Grades on written work are based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of materials, and quality of expression. For all written assignments you must turn in hard copies. I do not give extensions and any late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late.

CLASSROOM RULES AND ETIQUETTE

Learning Community. While individual students bring their varied backgrounds, we are also a learning community, brought together by a common interest and desire to learn about and better understand history. I expect you to acquire, reflect upon, and digest knowledge, develop an understanding of why history has played out the way it has, and form your own historically grounded opinions on the issues, but not for you to think that there is any “right” way to think about the past. I also understand that course materials may sometimes raise issues that are controversial or evoke strong feelings. History, after all, is seldom pretty. Therefore, I ask that everyone commit to making this classroom a space for people to explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and engage in open and honest debate.

Additionally, do be aware that some issues discussed in this course may present personal “triggers.” I cannot always anticipate those triggers, but will always respect any student’s need to take care of themselves in response to them.

Courtesy. Related to the above, we will conduct class in a spirit of mutual respect. We may hold differing opinions, and I encourage you to question and debate with one another and me. I will not tolerate disruptive or disrespectful behavior that includes interrupting others, badgering, and making ad hominem attacks, and nor should you. It is also distracting and rude to engage in personal conversation or other diversions unrelated to class activity. Students who persist in such behavior may be asked to leave the class. Leaving the room during class is distracting to the instructor and your classmates, so please take care of your needs before class to avoid this disruption. I understand that compelling personal needs may force you to leave the room, so if this is the case, do inform me of any concerns. Otherwise, habitually leaving the room without explanation will be counted as absences.
Technology. The use of cell phones and other mobile devices in class is disruptive and disrespectful, and therefore prohibited, except in emergencies. Turn off your devices or put them on silent mode. Students are permitted to use computers for note-taking purposes or reading reference only. Although recent studies show that students absorb knowledge more effectively when writing notes by hand and having a laptop open during lectures often inhibits the learning of both the laptop user and students around them, I am not instituting a laptop ban at this time. I do strongly encourage you to take hand notes. If I receive complaints from students and others that computers in class are creating a disruptive learning atmosphere, I will have no choice but to enforce a ban.

ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES
If you find that you will be unable to complete the class for any reason, the College does allow two kinds of incompletes, educational and emergency. To find which applies to you, consult the Dean of Studies website:
http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-studies/policies/incompletes.dot

DISABILITY SERVICES
The college will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify the Office of Disability Services located in Peters G-27/G-28 (440-774-5588) and their instructor of any disability related needs.
SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION AND THEMES

WEEK 1 (Sept. 2): THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1970s IN AMERICAN HISTORY

WEEK 2 (Sept. 9): WRITING A DECADE
Reading: Borstelmann, The 1970s, Introduction – Chapter 3

WEEK 3 (Sept. 16): MAJOR THEMES AND APPROACHES
Reading: Borstelmann, The 1970s, Chapter 4 – Conclusion

HOPE AND FEAR AT HOME AND ABROAD

WEEK 4 (Sept. 23): U.S.-MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR ON TERROR
Reading: Farber, Taken Hostage (all)

WEEK 5 (Sept. 30): THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES…AND TRANSFORMS
Reading: Wu, Radicals on the Road (all)

WEEK 6 (Oct. 7): PATTY HEARST AND EXISTENTIAL CRISIS
Reading: Graebner, Patty’s Got a Gun (all)

CULTURAL FRONTIERS AND NEW SOCIAL FORMATIONS IN AMERICAN LIFE

WEEK 7 (Oct. 14): THE SEARCH FOR ORDER, 70s STYLE
Reading: Binkley, Getting Loose (all)

WEEK 8 *****FALL BREAK*****

WEEK 9 (Oct. 28): REMAKING THE AMERICAN FAMILY
Reading: Rivers, Radical Relations (all)

A RESTRUCTURED REALITY: INEQUALITY IN THE AGE OF FREE ENTERPRISE

WEEK 10 (Nov. 4): WORKING CLASS HERO
Reading: Cowie, Stayin’ Alive, Introduction – Chapter 4

WEEK 11 (Nov. 11): THE COLLAPSE OF THE NEW DEAL ORDER
Reading: Cowie, Chapter 5 - 8

WEEK 12 (Nov. 18): WALMART AND THE TRIUMPH OF FREE ENTERPRISE
Reading: Moreton, To Serve God and Wal-Mart, all

WEEK 13 (Nov. 25): GENTRIFICATION AND THE POST-INDUSTRIAL FRONTIER
Reading: Osman, Brownstone Brooklyn (all)
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

WEEK 14 (Dec. 2): THE AGE OF FRACTURE AND BATTLE OVER REALITY
Reading: Rodgers, Age of Fracture (all)

WEEK 15 (Dec. 9): COURSE WRAP UP
Reading: TBA

FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18 BY 4:00 PM OUTSIDE MY OFFICE AT KING-141-F

**The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. I will notify you in class and via Blackboard of any updates.**