

# History 728: Colloquium in United States History Since 1900

## Dr. William Sturkey

### Spring, 2017

### Syllabus

Location: 523 Hamilton Hall  
Time: T: 3:30-6:00 pm

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Office: Hamilton 552  
Hours: W, 2-4, R, 2-3, & by appointment

### Course Description:

This seminar is designed to introduce students to the basic narrative and historiography of American History since 1900. The primary purpose of this course is to provide students with a representative sampling of classic and contemporary historical literature that engages major debates, themes, and trends in the study of Modern American History. This class cannot, of course, offer complete coverage of every aspect of the study of Modern American History, but it uses the interconnected themes of Race, Gender, Labor/Capital, and the Welfare State to offer a broad examination of the events that most profoundly shaped America in the twentieth century and introduce students to historical approaches to studying these major themes. The readings and discussions in this course should help students establish a foundation for comprehensive exams, teaching, and future research projects.

Each week, we will read and discuss at least one book. These readings will at times be supplemented by historiographical essays in the book *American History Now*. These historiographical essays are designed to help broaden student perspectives of a particular topic, theme, or approach to history. They can also be used to help students gain a better understanding of historiographical trends that will help inform students' book reviews. These book reviews, which will be submitted by students to the entire class, will also comprise part of our weekly reading assignments and help guide in-class discussions.

### Objectives:

1. Introduce students to major themes, topics, and approaches in the study of Modern American History.
2. Improve student critical thinking, analytical, and verbal skills.
3. Enhance student ability to compose review essays and historical prose.

**Assignments and Evaluation:** Final Grades in this course will be determined by the following criteria:

1. Five Book Reviews: 10% each (50% total)
2. Participation: 50%

### Participation:

- All students are expected to read all course materials, including their peers' book reviews, and engage in spirited class discussions.
- The final Participation Grade will be determined at the instructor's discretion. Students will be evaluated based on their ability to vocally contribute to reading-based in-class discussions.

### Book Reviews:

- Each student is responsible for writing **five 1,250-1,500-word** book reviews.
- Students will be assigned book reviews based on their preferences and in accordance with the class schedule.
- Each book review should be e-mailed to the entire class by midnight on the Sunday night before each Tuesday's class.

- Think of these reviews as a hybrid between typical academic journal book reviews (600-1,000 words) and featured reviews found in journals such as *The Journal of American History* or *American Historical Review*, or *Reviews in American History*.
- Book reviews should not only analyze the strengths, weaknesses, and historiographical contributions of each book, but also place the work in conversation with broader historical scholarship, either thematically or temporally. This may be challenging for graduate students early in their careers, but you have some help. The book *American History Now* should serve as a tool to help students think more broadly about historiographical interventions. And the books on this list engage many common themes, meaning that you should be able to place them in conversation with one another as we move through the syllabus.
- Several Additional Tips for Book Reviews:
  - Consider universal standards of good prose: Avoid unnecessary jargon and seek concision and clarity.
  - Get to the point. Rambling introductions or false steps will not help any of us.
  - Use active verbs. These books and authors are doing something. They illuminate, clarify, alter, shift, reshape, redefine, reveal, etc. When you write, think of them as having a life. What do they do?
  - Do not ask a book to do something it does not intend to do. Be firm, but fair. But do think creatively about a book's objectives. Based on the book's stated argument and goals, what is inadequate or missing?
  - Consider your own biases.
  - Consider sources and closely examine important footnotes and usage of evidence.
  - Place works within broader thematic contexts. How do they alter our thinking of a particular topic in Modern American History?
  - Interrogate style and organization as appropriate. Some important books are hard to read. Others flow like a dream, but add very little to our knowledge. Avoid clichés such as “easy to read” or “well written” (everybody says these kinds of things), but engage with style and organization as they affect execution.
  - Examine reviews in journals such as *The Journal of American History*, *The Journal of Southern History*, or *American Historical Review* for appropriate models.
  - Examine the UNC Writing Center's Book Review Handout: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/book-reviews/>. Look for other guides.
  - Remember professional standards. Only a handful of people will read these reviews, but approach them as if they were to be published in a scholarly journal where each book's author might also read the review.

### **Course Meeting and Reading Schedule:**

- T (Jan. 17): Introductions
  - *American History Now*, Volume Editors' Preface
- T (Jan. 24):
  - Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*
  - *American History Now*: Robert D. Johnston, “The Possibilities of Politics: Democracy in America, 1877 to 1917,” 96-124
- T (Jan. 31):
  - David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*
  - *American History Now*: Mae M. Ngai, “Immigration and Ethnic History,” 358-375
- T (Feb. 7):
  - Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*
  - *American History Now*: Sarah T. Phillips, “Environmental History,” 285-313
- T (Feb. 14):
  - Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*
- T (Feb. 21):
  - Alan Brinkley, *The End Of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*
  - *American History Now*: Lisa McGirr, “The Interwar Years,” 124-150

- T (Feb. 28):
  - Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*
  - *American History Now*: Rebecca Edwards, “Women’s and Gender History,” 336-357
- T (March 7):
  - Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*
- **March 10-20: SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**
- T (March 21):
  - Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*
  - Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*
- T (March 28):
  - John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*
  - Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263
- T (April 4):
  - Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*
  - *American History Now*: Meg Jacobs, “The Uncertain Future of American Politics,” 151-174
- T (April 11):
  - Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*
  - *American History Now*: Kim Phillips-Fein, “1973 to the Present,” 175-197
- T (April 18):
  - Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*
  - *American History Now*: John T. McGreevy, “American Religion,” 242-260
- T (April 25):
  - Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*