

History 201: The History of Now
Spring 2023 / T 2:25-5:25
Ingraham 115



(photo credit: Beacon Rock Golf Course, 2017)

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Sections:

310 – Wednesdays 12:05-12:55 pm

2125 Mosse Humanities

311 – Wednesdays 1:20-2:10 pm

2121 Mosse Humanities

312 – Wednesdays 3:30-4:20 pm

2131 Mosse Humanities

History is the study of change over time and requires hindsight to generate insight. Most history courses stop short of the present, and historians are frequently wary of applying historical analysis to our own times, before we have access to private sources and before we have the critical distance that helps us see what matters and what is ephemeral. But recent years have given many people the sense of living through historic times and clamoring for historical context that will help them to understand the momentous changes in politics, society, and culture that they observe around them. This course seeks to explore the recent past from a historical point of view, using the historian's craft to gain perspective on the present.

The course will consider major developments—primarily but not exclusively in U.S. history—of the last twenty years, including 9/11 and the War on Terror, the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath, social movements from the Tea Party to the Movement for Black Lives, Covid-19, and political, cultural, and the technological changes that have been created by and shaped by these events. These will be compared to other episodes in U.S. and world history, providing greater context and understanding. Some of the topics that we cover will be chosen by the class.

This class is designed to be an introduction to historical reasoning, analysis, writing, and research. We will practice looking at current events and developing the research skills to place them in historical context. We will practice reading the world around us as a primary source. We will practice finding historical materials that can give us a deeper understanding of our times. We will explore the promise and limits of historical analogy. And we will work to understand how we too are shaped by our own historical context.

The course will teach you how historians think and how to write a research paper using historical sources. We will work on finding good primary and secondary sources, asking historical questions, developing an argument, building a bibliography, and writing up your findings. The final product, which you will have chances to revise and improve, is an approximately 12-page original paper. Many weeks you will have a preparatory writing assignment that will help you build skills and think historically. There is no expectation that you have any particular views about politics or current events, and we will work to foster open conversation and communication.

I would like to acknowledge Marlana Margaria, Peter Shulman, Kathleen Belew, Margaret O'Mara, Seth Cotlar, and Giuliana Chamedes who have all contributed ideas that have improved this syllabus. All decisions about what to include are my own.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

<http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

<https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

HISTORY LAB

The History Lab is a resource center where experts (PhD students) will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process – choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts – the History Lab staff can help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Schedule a one-on-one consultation at <http://go.wisc.edu/hlab> or drop by Humanities 4255.

Course Objectives

This course fulfills your General Education Communication B Requirement. Throughout this course, we will practice skills like critical thinking, evaluating evidence, constructing arguments, and engaging with opposing viewpoints in writing and in speech. By the end of the course, you will become proficient in asking scholarly questions, analyzing primary and secondary sources, and situating sources within their proper context. You will also learn to find answers to questions that you have about the world by growing accustomed to using search engines, finding sources, evaluating source limitations, and taking advantage of the resources available in the campus libraries and through interlibrary loan. Finally, you will grow adept at group work and at building knowledge in a collective fashion. Because this class is dedicated to pressing intellectual, historical, and moral issues, and because it focuses on building up the skills you already have, it does not ask you to memorize and regurgitate facts and dates. There is no exam for the class.

This particular version of History 201 is organized to teach these skills through an analysis of the recent past: your own lifetime. Although the course is listed as a “lecture” course, there will only be some lecturing. We will be working on learning how to use university resources in activities as individuals and in groups. We will learn how to analyze primary sources and situate them within their historical context. We will read and critically engage with secondary sources. Throughout the semester, we will be building up to help you complete a final capstone paper. You will learn to formulate a viable and interesting research question, carry out original research, and build a persuasive argument that emerges out of the historical sources. The capstone paper will give you the opportunity to choose a topic that most interests you. You will learn to explore the historical origins of some feature of contemporary life. The research and writing skills that you practice in the final paper – and in this course more broadly – are not limited to the discipline of history; they will be useful to you regardless of where your lives take you.

Learning Outcomes

All Comm-B courses at UW-Madison are expected to help students develop advanced skills in:

- Critical reading, logical thinking, and the use of evidence
- The use of appropriate style and disciplinary conventions in writing and speaking
- The productive use of core library resources specific to the discipline

In this class, we will work on those skills by supporting students to:

- Refine their skills in reading, analyzing, and critically engaging with primary and secondary sources.
- Research and identify relevant primary and secondary sources, so as to best answer the questions they have about the past.
- Craft sophisticated analytical arguments and practice communicating those arguments through speech and in writing.
- Bring their knowledge of the past to bear on our historical present.

Credit information

This is an in-person course that counts for 4 credits. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled instructor-student meeting times, including three hours of class time, one hour of section, and reading, writing, and research assignments to be done outside of class, as described in the syllabus.

Grading

What is the purpose of an education? What is the purpose of a grade?

The purpose of an education, it seems to me, is to provide you with skills and perspectives that are useful to living. These skills may be job skills or life skills, or some combination, as well as a certain amount of wisdom that is hard to measure. A good education should help you to live a full life in ways that are both personally satisfying and help you contribute to your society and community.

A grade is supposed to measure your performance in mastering the body of material presented in a class. It is not intended as a measure of your worth as a person, nor does it even capture the totality of the value of your education. It simply reduces your experience to a single letter. The biggest problem with this, it seems to me, is that an education is about growth and development. In theory, one could learn a lot and get a bad grade; another student could learn little and get a good one. Given the realities of various forms of social inequality in our society, something about this seems wrong. In addition, young adults are carrying heavy burdens these days. Grades have become another burden that you are asked to carry.

If it were up to me, I would be inclined to abolish grading. But it isn't up to me, and even I admit that they can serve certain functions. They do have some value as an accountability mechanism: something we all need. They can push us to do our best work, though there are plenty of times when a good grade is simply the byproduct of enthusiasm for learning, and not its cause.

Because of this, I have worked to create a grading system that foregrounds educational progress for all, reduces student anxiety, while still rewarding commitment and hard work. It requires some new things from the student, and some new things from the instructor.

Most of the points are simply earned on a credit/no credit basis. We will provide feedback on ongoing work without *grading* it per se, with the goal of helping you improve, no matter where you are. You will be given credit will be given for making requested improvements to your work. For the most part, you should know exactly what you need to do to earn your points. There are a few features to protect against abuse of this system. First, on small assignments, if your work doesn't indicate mastery, you may be asked to make revisions in order to earn the assignment credit. Second, a few quizzes will check that you have been doing the outside work required during this class. Finally, a few points on the final paper will be held in reserve to evaluate the overall quality of your work.

At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio of all the work that you have done, including reflections on your education. This portfolio will give you an opportunity to suggest amendments to points assigned. For example, if you miss a point because you miss a meeting of section, you can include the make-up work you did to meet that week's learning goal. If special circumstances emerge during the semester that

affect your participation in the class, you can address them in the portfolio. Beyond this, there is no absence or special late work policy. The way that points are awarded should make clear how important attendance and on-time work are to making the class function for everyone. Asking for permission in advance can be a good start towards demonstrating that you should earn missing points if you know you will be absent or need an extended deadline, but it isn't the only thing you will have to do.

So, though you don't "pick" your own grade in your portfolio, but you can present evidence that the numbers don't fully reflect your work. Therefore, throughout the semester, you should be able to calmly accumulate points by keeping up with the classwork, with the knowledge that the numbers provide a floor under your grade, but are not a ceiling. This policy, it seems to me, also reflects the way adults often work, at least in professional careers. Your job has expectations of you, and you can either meet them in a standard or a non-standard way if circumstances require it. But you are responsible for meeting goals and expectations.

There will be a total of 100 points that you can earn during the semester, distributed as follows:

Class participation, 50 total points

Weekly attendance

14 points

1 point each in weeks 1-14

Weekly preparatory writing

12 points

1 point each in weeks 1-12

In-class work

20 points

From a mix of in-class activities and a few quizzes

Sometimes in the form of an "exit ticket" from class

In-class paper presentation

4 points [a rubric will be provided]

Section participation, 20 total points

Weekly attendance

13 points

1 point each in weeks 2-13

Section participation

7 points total

1 point for setting goals for your participation

5 points maximum for meeting those goals

1 point for reflecting on your participation

Final paper, 25 points

A more detailed rubric will be provided later in the semester, but your basic goals are these:

Introduction explains the paper's question and its approach, 2 points

Paper makes a historical argument, 2 points

Body:

points Consults at least 5 primary documents from at least 3 different sources, 2

Consults at least 3 historical secondary sources, 2 points

The evidence presented appropriately supports the argument, 2 points

The argument is based on an interpretation of primary sources, 2 points

Conclusion summarizes and reflects on the findings, 2 points

Bibliography and footnotes are properly formatted, 2 points

Final paper makes improvements in areas that came up to target during peer and professor review, up to 4 points

Overall paper quality, up to 5 points

Final portfolio, 5 points

1 point Final portfolio containing all of the semester's writing assignments is submitted,

Portfolio contains statement of goals, 1 point

Portfolio contains mid-term reflection, 1 point

Portfolio contains final reflection, 2 points

Grading scale:

96-100 A

90-95 AB

85-89 B

80-84 BC

75-79 C

70-74 D

<70 F

Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday, January 24:

- Introduction to the class
- Before class, please read these two pieces, which present opposing viewpoints:
 - Emma Camp, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/opinion/campus-speech-cancel-culture.html>
 - Moira Weigel, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/30/political-correctness-how-the-right-invented-phantom-enemy-donald-trump>
 - After reading these two pieces, I want you to think about three rules or guidelines that you want us to use to guide the conversations and debates that we have with each other this semester. Write them down and bring them with you to class.
- In class we will develop a framework for conversation.

Week 2, January 31: What is history?

This week, we are looking at what history is and how it gets produced.

- This is a work by a historian, writing about the ways that the historical method is and is not like other ways of generating knowledge:
 - John Lewis Gaddis, Chapter 3, “Structure and Process,” from *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, pp. 35-52.
- To prepare for class, I also want you to read a journal article about a topic that you probably know almost nothing about. Annotate this article using the reading guide we will provide. What is the article’s argument? What kind of evidence does it use?
 - Stuart B. Schwartz, “Indian Labor and New World Plantations: European Demands and Indian Responses in Northeastern Brazil,” *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (February 1978): 43-79.

Week 3, February 7: 9/11

- This is a *primary source*, the “raw material” of historical analysis. It is a page from the community blog Metafilter that unfolded in real time on September 11, 2001.
 - This article briefly describes the context:
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-internet-reacted-two-planes-crashing-wtc-91101-180952675/>
 - And this is the actual post, which is long:
<https://www.metafilter.com/10034/Plane-crashes-in-to-the-word-trade-center>).
- This article about what followed is by a *journalist*, not a historian. *Journalists* and *historians* have some overlapping skills and approaches, but their work is not identical. Both benefit from the work of the other.
 - Terry Anderson, “9/11: Bush’s response,” from *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, edited by Beth Bailey and Richard Immerman, 54-74.
- This chapter is by a *historian* of World War II and post-war Japan, writing to connect his knowledge with what he is observing in the present.
 - John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor | Hiroshima | 9-11 | Iraq* (New York: Norton, 2010), pp. 394-436.

To prepare for class, read the metafilter forum and the two articles. Fill out a Venn Diagram comparing the three sources. What are the differences between the primary document and the two secondary sources? How do the secondary sources differ from each other? What sort of claims does each of them help you to make?

Week 4, February 14: The Financial Crisis

- This is *journalism* that helps you understand the Financial Crisis
 - Podcast: Giant Pool of Money, *This American Life*, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/355/the-giant-pool-of-money>
- From there, let's go back to a *historian* providing context for the Financial Crisis through an analysis of what he describes as the transition from the "New Deal" order to the "Neoliberal" order. We can't read the whole thing, but try to understand the transition from one way of organizing society to another.
 - Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, Oxford University Press, 2022, Chapter 1 "Rise," pp. 19-47, and Chapter 5, "Triumph", pp. 141-188.
- And then let's go forward, with a *historian* writing about the consequences of the Financial Crisis:
 - Eric Rauchway, "Neither a Depression nor a New Deal: Bailout, Stimulus, and the Economy," pp. 30-44 in *The Presidency of Barack Obama: A First Historical Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

For today's writing assignment, I want you to do a small oral history project. Talk to an older person about how the financial crisis affect *their* life and *your* life. The most obvious thing to do here would be to talk to a parent or guardian. What do they remember happening? What do they remember feeling? What changed for them as a result? Assuming that you were young in this period, did anything change for you that you may not have been aware of? If you didn't grow up in the United States, what was your experience like of this period?

To prepare for this interview, you should generate some questions in addition to those above after listening to and reading this week's materials. To class, you should bring a document that describes the questions that you generated and at least three paragraphs describing and summarizing the most interesting answers that you got. You don't have to have an exact transcript of the interview; a summary is fine.

Week 5, February 21: The End of the Neoliberal Order?

This week, we're going to look at recent political changes from multiple perspectives. Everyone should read:

Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, Chapter 7 "Coming Apart", pp. 230-267.

Then, I want you to choose whether you want to focus more on thinking through changes on the political left or the political right. Your choice doesn't imply that you're more politically sympathetic to one side or the other, it is simply the one that you are picking this week to study.

If you choose the left, then read:

- Eric Foner, "Why is there no socialism in the United States?" *History Workshop* no. 17 (Spring 1984): 57-80.

And pick one of these two:

- Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, "From Color-Blind to Black Lives Matter," 198-218 in Julian Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump: A First Historical Assessment*, Princeton University Press, 2022.
- Michael Kazin, "The Path of Most Resistance," 335-350, in Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump*.

If you choose the right, then read:

- Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, Princeton University Press, Chapter 3 "Education or Indoctrination?", pp. 69-102.

And pick one of these three:

- Julian Zelizer, "Reckoning with the Trumpian GOP," 27-48, in Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump*.
- Kathleen Belew, "Militant Whiteness in the Age of Trump, 83-102, in Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump*.
- Geraldo Cadava, "Latinos for Trump," 103-120, in Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump*.

For your writing assignment this week, I want you to work on outlining an argument. Imagine that you're going to write a paper about how the U.S. left and right have changed since 2015. What features are new, and which are not? Pick an overall argument (what has caused changes), the sub-arguments (examples of changes and continuities), and list the evidence that supports your sub-arguments. If there are any arguments that you want to make but feel you lack evidence for, note that, and thus the provisional nature of the argument.

Week 6, February 28: Pandemic

- This is the work of a historian and classicist, taking a *very* long view:
 - Walter Scheidel, “The Black Death,” from *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, 2018, pp. 291-313.
- This is written by a historian but intended for a wide audience:
 - Steven Burg, Wisconsin and the Great Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918, *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84, no.1 (Autumn 2000), <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wmh/id/43606>
- This is written by a historian and Professor of Sociomedical Sciences about the recent past:
 - Merlin Chowkwanyun, “The 60/40 Problem,” pp. 315-334, in in Zelizer (ed.), *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump*.

Your writing assignment this week is a brief autobiography. In about 750 words, explain your life. You may include whatever details and events that you wish to in your account and exclude what you wish to exclude. (*But please note that your assignment will be read by your peers in class.*) Please do think about the ways that your life has been shaped by forces and historical events that we have discussed in class. You can use first or third-person point of view in your writing. You may conduct a bit of research on yourself if you like, but it is not required or expected. Bring two copies to class: one with your name on it, and one with the name removed.

Week 7, March 7: Global Perspectives

For most of this class, we have been thinking about the recent past from the vantage point of the United States. But the U.S. is not the whole world, and as powerful and important as it is, it contains only a tiny fraction of the totality of human experiences around the globe. The “History of Now” for people living elsewhere (including members of our class, not all of whom grew up in the United States) would certainly highlight other qualities of the contemporary world. To prepare for our discussion, I want you to think about the many ways that someone could have experienced the recent past. To do that, please:

- Watch the documentary:
 - *American Factory* [available on Netflix]. I strongly recommend making this a social event. Get together with your classmates some evening, and then talk about the movie once you’re done.
- And read this essay by a *novelist* and *journalist*:
 - Valeria Luiselli, *Tell me How it Ends*, in *Freeman’s* (2016), pp. 141-183.
 - This essay eventually became the basis for the novel *Lost Children Archive* (which is not assigned), but which I do recommend very highly if you found yourself moved by the essay.

Your writing assignment for this week is to generate a proposal for next week’s readings. There is so much that we haven’t been able to cover in the class so far and won’t be able to cover. I want you to practice identifying information about something that you think is worth further study. Choose an aspect of the present that you think is *significant* and locate a *primary source* and a *secondary source* (of chapter or article length) that you think would help the class better understand the phenomenon in historical perspective. To do this, I want you to read *two primary sources* and *two secondary sources*. Then write up a brief argument that explains why you preferred the ones that you did. What was more compelling about the primary and secondary documents that you chose? You can describe the contents of the primary documents and summarize the arguments and evidence of both secondary sources. Why will the ones you chose help the class more than the ones that you didn’t?

In class, we may use your proposal to decide what to read for next week!

March 14 is SPRING BREAK.

Week 8, March 21: Student choice week

Readings to be determined, by the class, in week 7. The instructor may add an additional reading.

Your writing assignment this week is write a proposal for your final paper. The topic should be something that is relevant to the recent past that you will work to set in historical perspective. Remember that your job here is to be a historian of this topic, not a journalist about it. Your research should help us understand the event better through historical analysis; the purpose of your paper is not to provide a detailed explanation of the event itself. So, for example, if you chose the January 6 insurrection as a topic, you aren't going to do a deep dive on the day itself. Instead, you might choose to consider other examples of political violence in U.S. history, or other examples of contested elections, or some historical angle that helps us to think about the present. That will be the purpose of your final research paper. Your proposal should describe the topic, state the question that you hope to answer, and suggest the scope of your research. Remember to keep the topic small: it's better to go deep than to be shallow. It's much better to say that you'll study the Bretton Woods conference of 1944 than it is to say that you will study U.S. economic power in the 20th century, even if you are using the former to understand the latter.

Week 9, March 28: How to work

Reading: short selections from Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

Your work for the week is to come to class with a bibliography for your final paper. What sources are you going to use? You will want to use at least 5 primary and 3 secondary sources. Even if you haven't read them completely yet, try to identify them by today. Make sure that they are entered into Zotero. Have Zotero generate a bibliography for you and bring that to class.

Week 10, April 4: Paper preparations

There are no readings this week. Your only job is to work on your final paper, and to come to class with an outline for it. An outline should describe the structure of the paper, which will help you find your argument. Briefly explain what will go in your introduction. What question do you seek to answer? How is it connected to the present, and how will you study it historically? Then lay out what will go in the body of the paper, including what sort of evidence will go where. Finally, explain what will go in the conclusion.

Print *four* copies and bring them to class.

Week 11, April 11: Paper preparations

There is no reading this week. Your only responsibility is to work on your final paper. You should have a complete introduction, and a partial draft of the rest. They'll be read by your peers, who will give you supportive feedback.

Print *four* copies and bring them to class.

Week 12, April 18: Paper preparations

Come to class with a complete draft of the paper.

Print *one* copy and bring it with you.

In section this week, we will be having individual meetings with an instructor.

Week 13, April 25: Paper presentations

This week, we will be holding an in-class "conference" where you can present your work. You will need to prepare a "PowerPoint" to accompany your paper, which you will need to present in about 7-8 minutes. This means you won't want more than a few slides to accompany the presentation. The most important thing is that you must practice your presentation, and you've got to fit it in the short time allotted! That means cutting it down to key points and evidence, and practicing to get the length right.

Week 14, May 2: Final preparations

This week, we will continue the in-class "conference." Just keep working on your final paper, if it isn't done.

Exams are May 7 – May 12

Turn in portfolios on canvas on May 9th.

For your information, the grading deadline for instructors is May 15th.