

History 323: Emergence of Modern America, Spring 2009

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Course Description:

This class explores the economic, cultural, social, political, and intellectual currents that shaped communities and individuals within the United States from the end of the Reconstruction to the end of World War I, roughly 1877-1920. This period, which historians refer to as the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, was one of dramatic transformations, as forces including industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and imperialism helped forge a "modern" America. Although many of these changes took place on a national and global level, they also unsettled and challenged the lifestyles of ordinary Americans' lives. Rather than any one unified response, Americans constructed myriad new ideas, values, and practices in order to accommodate these transformations. We will explore all these issues through reading, writing, and discussing both primary and secondary sources.

Key themes will recur throughout this course:

- the widespread repercussions of industrialization
- expanding roles for the U.S. government at home and abroad
- Americans' anxiety and excitement about modernity
- new definitions, experiences, and tensions of race, ethnicity, class, and gender
- the creation of new intellectual, social, and cultural practices

Required Texts: These books are available at the RIC bookstore and at the Library Reserve

Leon Fink, ed., *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era: Documents and Essays* 2nd Ed.

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1900*

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*

Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*

Grading Breakdown:

- 15% Discussion (includes class attendance and participation)
- 15% 2 three-page papers on *Looking Backward*, **February 5**; *Barbarian Virtues*, **March 5**;
Cheap Amusements, **April 2**
- 20% Midterm, **March 16**
- 25% Research Paper, **due May 4**
- 25% Final Exam

You will receive further details and guidelines on exams and paper assignments as they draw closer.

Note: Students must complete all elements of the course in order to pass the course.

Assignments:

- **Discussion (Attendance and participation):** Class participation forms a key part of each student's grade. Students should come to class having read and ready to discuss the assigned reading. Class participation will be evaluated based on the student's contributions to the weekly class discussions. Students are expected to attend class regularly, make every effort to be on time, and remain for the entire period. Lectures and discussions will not necessarily duplicate material in the assigned reading. More than 2 unexcused absences will cause your discussion grade will suffer. Disruptive behavior shall not be tolerated.
- **Exams:** there will be a midterm on and a final exam during exam week. They will cover material from lectures, assigned readings, and class discussions.
- **Book Analyses:** During the semester you will write two three-page papers on the additional reading. You will choose two of the following reading assignments on which to write your papers: *Looking Backward*, *Barbarian Virtues*, and *Cheap Amusements*. These assignments will be due in class on the day we discuss those books: **February 5, March 5, and April 2.**
- **Research Paper:** For this assignment, you will write a 10-12 page research paper on a Gilded Age and Progressive Era topic using online collections of primary documents. Due **May 4.**

For all assignments:

You are expected to follow the guidelines for academic honesty set out in the student handbook (see <http://www2.ric.edu/studentlife/pdf/RICStudentHandbook.pdf>) Any cheating and plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment as well as the possibility of failing the course and further disciplinary action from the university. Late assignments will be penalized.

How to Read Primary Sources:

Throughout the semester we will be exploring and discussing primary documents in the *Major Problems* book. Here are some tips and questions to help you think critically about these historical documents.

1. Who wrote this document? Under what circumstances? For what purpose? What were they trying to accomplish? Who was the intended audience?
2. Whose point of view is expressed in the document? What assumptions or biases lie behind that point of view?
3. How believable is the document? How can you tell?
4. How representative is the document? Are the ideas expressed typical or unusual in this era? How can you tell?
5. What does this document reveal about the ideas and issues of its period of American history? What historical events or issues influenced this author's beliefs and writing?
6. How do the ideas of a document relate to both other documents from that day's reading or previous discussions?

How to Read the Secondary Articles and Books:

1. What is the historian's thesis or argument about this time period? What are the author's main conclusions?
2. What types of evidence does the author use in support of his or her claims?
3. How does this article or book relate to other reading, either primary or secondary, from today's assignment or earlier ones? Does it seem to support or challenge the claims and conclusions of the other authors? If there is disagreement, what reasons might explain their different perspectives on this period?
4. How does this work contribute to or influence your ideas about the Gilded Age and Progressive Era?

Course Schedule: Topics and Readings:

Unit 1: Industrialization and Modern America

Thur., Jan. 22 **Introduction to History 323**

Mon., Jan. 26 **Industrialization**
Major Problems: 2-7, 17-20, 27-34, 427-431

Thur., Jan. 29 **Theories of Industrial America**
Major Problems: 23, 229-231, 237-239, 253-262
Reluctant Modernism: "Ideal of Success": 111-116

Mon., Feb. 2 **The Industrial City**
Major Problems: 116-123, 132-141

Thur., Feb. 5 **Intellectual Concerns about Industrialization**
 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*
Major Problems: 20-24

Mon., Feb. 9 **Labor Activism**
Major Problems: 24-26, 34-45, 188-193, 201-208

Thur., Feb. 12 **Farm Activism**
Major Problems: 24-26, 34-45, 188-197, 208-224

Unit 2: "Others" and Modern America

Mon., Feb. 16 **Immigration**
Major Problems: 123-125, 128-131, 141-157

Thur., Feb. 19 **Native Americans and the West**
Major Problems: 46-49, 52-55, 78-85

Mon., Feb. 23 **The New South and Race Relations**
Major Problems: 88-910, 93-97, 126-128, 295-306, 315-323

Thur., Feb. 26 **The Rise of Imperialism**
Major Problems: chapter 9

Mon., Mar. 2 **The American Empire**

Thur., Mar. 5 **New Racial Ideologies**
Barbarian Virtues
Reluctant Modernism: chapter 3: "Anthropology, Progress, and Racism"

Week of Mar. 9 **No Class, Spring Break**

Unit 3: New Social and Cultural Practices

Mon., Mar.16 **Midterm**

Thur., Mar, 19 **New Women**

Reluctant Modernism: chapter 4: “Woman as Intellectual and Artist”

Mon., Mar. 23 **New Men**

Major Problems, 287-294, 307-315

Thur., Mar. 26 **Ideas and Practices of Sex**

Thur., Apr. 16 **Consumer and Leisure Culture**

Major Problems: chapter 11

Reluctant Modernism: chapter 5: “Consuming Culture”

Mon., Mar. 30 **Consumer Culture cont.**

Thur., April 2 **Discussion of *Cheap Amusements***

Mon., Apr. 6 **Religion**

Major Problems; 226-228, 363-364

Reluctant Modernism: chapter 1: “The ‘Tangled Bank’ of Evolution and Religion”

Unit 4: Reforming America

Thur., Apr. 9 **Theories of Progressivism**

Major Problems, chapter 12, 231-233, 235-236, 239-244

Reluctant Modernism: chapter 2: “The Experiences of American Philosophy”

Mon., Apr. 13 **Theories of Progressivism cont.**

Mon., Apr. 20 **Women and Progressive Reform**

Major Problems, 164-165, 244-253, 305-307, 365-366, 388-389, 425-426

Cheap Amusements, review chapter 7

Thur., April 23 **The Progressive State**

Major Problems, chapter 13, 440-444

Mon., Apr. 27 **World War I**

Major Problems, chapter 15

Thur., April 30 **Woman Suffrage**

Mon., May 4 **Progressivism after World War I**

Research Paper Due in Class

Final Exam to be scheduled during finals week

Learning Outcomes: Successful completion of this course and its assignments will enable students to achieve the following History Department Learning Outcomes:

1. Understand how historians gather, interpret, and analyze a wide range of primary and secondary source data/material (including literary, geographical, political and socio-economic material) and how historians construct a coherent narrative from this information.
2. Demonstrate the skills of historical analysis and interpretation, such as the abilities to compare and contrast, differentiate between historical facts and interpretation, consider multiple perspectives, analyze cause and effect relationships, compare competing historical narratives, recognize the tentative nature of historical interpretation and analyze the influence of the past.
3. Think chronologically and comprehensively, identifying temporal structures of historical narratives and comprehending the meanings of historical texts, monographs and documents, including their audiences, goals, perspectives and biases.
4. Understand the historical context for the interaction and interdependence of politics, society, science, and technology in a variety of cultural settings.
5. Formulate and explain your own interpretations of the past by examining and communicating them with clarity and precision in a variety of oral and written assignments.
6. Demonstrate the skills necessary to be an independent and lifelong learner.