

U.S. HISTORY IN 13 ACTS

The New School
NHIS3211, Spring 2014
Tuesdays, 4-5:50pm
Rm 702, 66 W. 12th St.

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Margaret Bourke-White, At the Time of the Louisville Flood (1937)

Most of us learn a straightforward narrative of the history of the United States that begins with the arrival of colonizers from Europe and ends with the current presidency, presented with a coherence that obscures the messiness and contradictions experienced by the historical actors. This cohesive story omits consideration of possibilities that could have led to very different outcomes and also the contested interpretations of what happened and what it means. This survey course offers an alternative approach to U.S. history by organizing the subject into 13 “acts” and investigating each in depth. Each week, we use a primary document, image, building, or other object as a starting point for an investigation that branches out to explore the various, often-contentious interpretations it has evoked. Our activities range from analyses of the familiar (such as the Constitution) to the often overlooked (a tenement house). Close reading of selected texts and examination of ongoing debates about their meaning allows us a fuller and more complex view of our past.

The structure of each week’s readings conveys these aims. Readings are organized into the categories primary, secondary, and “use.” Primary sources are items created during the time period under discussion; they present a window onto that moment. Secondary sources are generally academic writings that provide an interpretive framework to understand that item; they build an understanding of that moment in the past from a collection of primary sources. A use is a contemporary, often political, reference to that primary source in a more public realm of debate than academia. These categories often blur together and the point of the readings is not to maintain strict distinction between them but to see the relation between primary and secondary sources and contemporary uses as ways to create meaning of and from the past.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the interpretive nature of history by comparing different analyses over time.
- Understand the difference between primary and secondary sources and how historians build a vision of the past from the relationship between these two types of sources.
- Learn about archives, how to navigate them, and how to build historical interpretations from sources in them.
- Consider the ongoing political consequences of historical acts and interpretations.
- Write papers that convey analytical thinking, a command of the readings, original ideas, and accurate acknowledgement of sources.

READING AND MATERIALS

The required reading and materials are available on Canvas and are compiled by week. To access the materials directly, log on to canvas.newschool.edu with your New School user name and password.

ASSIGNMENTS

Take Home Exam (20%): The class will determine questions for a take home exam due on March 18 that incorporates the readings and class discussion of the first part of the semester.

Debate (20%): We will engage in a debate over the history and continuing use of the Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay. For the day of the debate, April 8, prepare an outline that lays out arguments of each side for whether to close the naval base or keep it open. Make sure to incorporate *history* into your argument; that is, what interpretation of past events leads to each opinion? For the following week, April 15, write a 3-5pg paper that lays out an opinion about whether or not to close the Naval Base that incorporates arguments on both sides of the debate, evidence, and a historical perspective on the issue.

13th Act (25%): The class will work in small groups to identify a 13th Act, finding archival items in the collection of the New York Public Library to investigate and interpret. Tasks will include conducting archival research in the collection to better understand the context of the item; analyzing secondary sources for how the archival item has been used in historical interpretations; and identifying contemporary uses of the archival item and its interpretations.

Reflection Paper (15%): Write a 3-5pg that describes your investigation into the past. You can include discussion of archival items, different interpretations and uses of it, or class readings, but you should focus primarily on how the process changed or confirmed your idea of history and the meanings of the past.

CLASS POLICIES

The class discussed policies on Attendance, Cell Phone + Laptop Use, and Participation during the first class session and agreed on the following policies.

For credit students, participation will be a significant part of your grade (20%). This includes active engagement in discussion (both speaking and listening) and responsibility for work assigned and work missed because of absence or lateness. If there is a significant lapse in participation, the instructor will speak to the student directly about it and discuss consequences such as a lowering of the grade or failure of the course. Federal law covering financial aid also

requires that the instructor inform the appropriate university personnel if any credit student misses two consecutive sessions.

We agreed to follow an honor policy regarding cell phone and laptop use, expecting everyone to keep their use restricted to classroom activities during class time. If used during class time, all electronic devices should be silenced (i.e., neither ringing or buzzing).

Academic Honesty. Plagiarism -- the use of another person's words or ideas in any academic work -- or any other form of academic dishonesty will result in serious academic penalties, from a failing grade in the class to expulsion from the university. For information on avoiding plagiarism through proper acknowledgements, including expectations for paraphrasing source material and forms of citation in research and writing, students should visit The New School Learning Center.

Please note that students must receive prior permission from instructors to submit the same or substantially overlapping material for two different assignments. Submission of the same work for two assignments without prior permission is plagiarism.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Libraries. The New School Library offers frequent research workshops for students, the day, time, and location of which are posted to the Library webpage (<http://library.newschool.edu/events/>) each semester. The library also provides one-on-one support for students who want additional assistance in conducting research. Students can contact the library about scheduling a one-on-one appointment with a reference librarian at the following link: <http://library.newschool.edu/reference/request.php>

Learning Center. Students are highly encouraged to take advantage of the university writing center, located at 71 Fifth Avenue, 9th floor (between 14th and 15th Streets). To make an appointment, you can e-mail the center at learningcenter@newschool.edu or call 212.229.5121. For further information, please visit the Learning Center web site: www.newschool.edu/learning-center/

Disabilities. In keeping with the university's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who may need academic accommodations should contact the office of Student Disability Services. Students requesting any accommodations will need to meet with Jason Luchs, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter. All conversations will be kept confidential. Mr. Luchs's office is located at 80 Fifth Ave, 3rd Floor (luchsj@newschool.edu, 212.229.5626 x3135). You may also access more information at <http://www.newschool.edu/student-services/disability/>

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introduction
28 Jan

Week 2 Discovery?
4 Feb Primary: Christopher Columbus, *Diario* (1492)
 Secondary: Samuel Eliot Morison, *Christopher Columbus, Mariner* (1955)
 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (1995)

Use: Jamaica Kincaid, "In History," *Callaloo* (1997)

Week 3
11 Feb
Visit to the Archives of New York Public Library
Meet in Astor Hall, by Information Desk, main entrance on 5th Ave. and 42nd St.
Look at the Finding Aids of the following NYPL collections: Thomas Addis Emmet, Women's Prison Association Papers, Matthew Brady Registry, and the Century Fund
G.J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (1950): ch. 1
Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs" (1985)
13th Act Step Due: Topic of Interest

Week 4
18 Feb
"a Citty upon a Hill" – American Exceptionalism
Primary: John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)
Secondary: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)
Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1954)
Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth* (1995)
Use: Ronald Reagan, "We Will Be A City Upon A Hill" (1974)
Stephen Colbert, *America Again, Re-Becoming The Greatness We Never Weren't* (2012)

Week 5
25 Feb
Colonial Encounters
Primary: Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" (1682/1720)
Secondary: Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significance of the Captivity Narrative" (1947)
Jill Lepore, *The Name of War* (1998)
Use: Susan Faludi, "America's Guardian Myths," *New York Times* (7 Sept 2007)

Week 6
4 Mar
Revolution (Guest Lecturer: Laura Auricchio)
Primary: George Washington to Congress (27 December 1776)
Secondary: Emmanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) (at MET)
Barbara Groseclose, "Washington Crossing the Delaware: The Political Context" (1975)
Use: Robert Colescott, *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* (1975)
Michael Lobel, "Black to Front: Michael Lobel on Robert Colescott" (2004)

Week 7
11 Mar
The Making of the Federal Government
Primary: The Federalist, No. 1 (1787)
Secondary: "Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America," Exhibit (N-YHS)
Use: Michael McConnell, "What Would Alexander Hamilton Do?" (2011)
cabaretic, "Alexander Hamilton and Today's Financial Complexities" (2012)
Thomas McCraw, "Mr. Hamilton's Growth Strategy" (2012)

Week 8
18 Mar
The Making of the Middle Class
Primary: George Ellington (pseud.), *The Women of New York; Or, The Underworld of the Great City* (1869)
Secondary: Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant

Woman” (1971)
John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility* (1990)
Use: *Girls*, Season 1, Episode 1 (2012)
Matt Richtel, “Eat, Drink, Be Nice,” *New York Times* (26 December 2012)
Take Home Exam Due

25 Mar NO CLASS—Spring Break

Week 9 Civil War – Forging a Nation
1 Apr Primary: Photographs by Matthew Brady
Secondary: James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988)
Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (2009)
Use: Elisabeth Bumiller, “Pentagon to Allow Photos of Soldiers’ Coffins,” *New York Times* (26 February 2009)

Week 10 Guantánamo Naval Base – Empire
8 Apr Primary: Teller Amendment (1898); Lease of Guantánamo Bay (1903); Platt Amendment (1903)
Secondary: Frank Freidel, *The Splendid Little War* (1958)
Amy Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo?” (2005)
Jana Lipman, *Guantánamo* (2009)
Use: Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray, *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know* (2004)
“State Dept. Closes Office Working on Shutting Guantánamo Prison” (2013)
Debate Outline Due

Week 11 A Building, Story by Story
15 Apr Primary: 97 Orchard Street (please visit and go on a tour, if possible)
Secondary: Liz Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor” (1980)
97 Orchard Street National Historic Landmark Nomination (1993)
Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place* (1995)
Use: Tenement Museum
Debate Argument Due

Week 12 The Pill -- Sexual Revolution
22 Apr Primary: Patricia Robinson, “Poor Black Women” (1968)
Secondary: Harry Schwartz, “The Fear That Birth Control May Mean Genocide” (1971)
George Vecsey, “The Diaphragm is Regaining Acceptance Among Some Women” (1977)
Elaine Tyler May, *America and The Pill* (2010)
Use: Editorial, “Respect for Women in Uniform,” *New York Times* (2010)

Week 13 The Rise of the Carceral State (Guest Lecturer: Jeff Smith)
29 Apr Primary: James Wilson and George Kelling, “Broken Windows” (1982)
Secondary: Million Dollar Blocks, Columbia University (2005)
Ruth Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* (2007)
Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* (2010)
Use: Michele Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010)

Week 14 The Rise of Inequality
6 May Primary: *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* (1984-95)
Secondary: Tony Judt, *Ill Fares The Land* (2010)
 Nick Serpe, “Reality Pawns: The New Money TV” (2013)
Use: “President Obama on Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” (2013)
13th Act Due

Week 15 13th Acts—Presentations
13 May Reflection Papers Due