

History 241: US History since 1865
Spring 2022
Dr. Alexander Olson
Western Kentucky University

Email: alexander.olson@wku.edu
Office hours: any weekday by appointment

Course Description:

Amidst the horrors of the twentieth century, many Americans found comfort in the belief that their nation was growing more powerful, modern, and free. As Martin Luther King, Jr., put it, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Although this hope has been a great motivating force for citizen activists, backlash to change has also played a major role in shaping US history. Events of great magnitude like the Civil Rights movement, the fall of the Soviet Union, or the 9/11 attacks had ripple effects that were difficult to predict. Our schedule will follow a non-linear path across time and space in order to examine how events can take on new meanings in hindsight. Along the way, we will interpret primary sources, wrestle with discoveries, and challenge our most basic assumptions about the past.

Required texts:

- Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (2019)
- Garrett Graff, *The Only Plane in the Sky: An Oral History of 9/11* (2021)
- Judy Yung, Him Mark Lai, and Genny Lim, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (2nd Edition, 2014).
- All other readings available in Content section of Blackboard.

Course Structure:

This course will be taught asynchronously, which means there is no specific time when everybody will be logged on simultaneously. There will be no quizzes, exams, or zoom meetings. Instead, 65% of your grade is based on your writing in the discussion board. Rather than memorizing facts, you should think of this class as a college-level book club where we will analyze, critique, and discuss the readings. In addition to the discussion board, there are three essay assignments worth a total of 35% of your grade.

Monday and Tuesday: These days are reserved strictly for reading. During this time, I will post a set of framing remarks to guide the discussion.

Wednesday: Each student will submit a 500-word post (which can be longer if you wish) to the Blackboard discussion board.

Thursday and Friday: Each student will post a minimum of 500 words spread across at least three comments responding to the posts submitted by your fellow students. These response posts cannot be written within 12 hours of your original post on Wednesday.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will acquire knowledge of the major themes in United States history since 1865.
2. Students will learn to identify and utilize primary sources to develop credible interpretations of the past. This course supports WKU’s Quality Enhancement Plan, *Evidence & Argument*.
3. Students will be able to articulate how American history is embedded global networks of political, economic, and cultural exchange.
4. Students will analyze selected examples of historical scholarship and contextualize these writings within historiographical debates.
5. Students will be able to assess representations of American history in popular media.

Technology Requirements:

Students are required to have access to a computer and reliable Internet connection to use Blackboard and to write and submit your assignments. To avoid losing your work in progress, you are encouraged to compose your drafts in a word processing program before submitting your posts on Blackboard. Although your discussion board posts can be conversational in tone, they still require careful thought, planning, and proofreading. You should also have a plan for an alternate way to connect to the internet in case of emergency. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, visit the Online Orientation for Online Learners at <http://www.wku.edu/online/orientation/index.php> before the course begins. Readings are located in the Content section and assignments can be found in the Essay Assignments section. If you have any problems using the online tools for this course, please contact me as soon as possible.

Grading Scale:

The assignments for this class add up to exactly 1000 points. This allows you to calculate your final grade using the following scale. No grades will be rounded up or rounded down.

- A (90-100%, or 900-1000 points)
- B (80-89%, or 800-899 points)
- C (70-79%, or 700-799 points)
- D (60-69%, or 600-699 points)
- F (0-59%, or 0-599 points)

Late Assignments:

Late assignments will result in a penalty of 10 points per day for essays and 20 points per day for the discussion board. Participation in the discussion board is integral to the success of this class. This class will only work if we honor the weekly schedule. *Submissions posted after Friday are like speaking aloud in an on-campus class to an empty room after the class has been dismissed.*

Academic Dishonesty:

The maintenance of academic integrity is at the heart of higher education. Acts of plagiarism or any other form of cheating will not be tolerated. Engaging in academic dishonesty risks serious punishment, including a failing grade in the class. Please read the relevant section of the WKU Student Handbook: www.wku.edu/handbook/academic-dishonesty.php.

The Learning Center Peer Tutoring Services

The Learning Center (TLC) provides free tutoring services that empower students to achieve academic success. Trained peer tutors are available to review course content, answer questions, and demonstrate effective study strategies. TLC offers individual appointments and group sessions (PASS) for hundreds of undergraduate courses. For more information or to make an appointment, visit www.wku.edu/tlc

ADA Notice:

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor without a faculty notification letter from the Student Accessibility Resource Center.

Problems?

If you are struggling or not getting the grades that you want, please contact me. I am happy to answer questions by email, and we can make an appointment to speak by Zoom or phone. I recognize that we are living through a global crisis, and many of you may be experiencing grief, illness, and other stressors. Please let me know if any pandemic-related issues are impeding your performance in this class.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

There are a total of 1000 points available based on the following breakdown. Please note the very high percentage of the grade devoted to the discussion board. *The best way to succeed in this class is to actually do the readings every week.* Our goal is not to memorize facts and arrive at a “right” answer each week, but rather to engage deeply and critically with the readings.

1) Discussions (65% of grade)

Weekly discussion of reading—560 points (56% of grade).

Each week, you must write one 500-word-minimum original post (due by Wednesday at 11:59pm) and three shorter responses to your classmates’ posts (due by Friday at 11:59pm). Each thread is worth 40 points. Your grade is divided equally between your main post and responses. Although you can write with a casual, conversational tone, you are expected to proofread all submissions. You will not receive full credit for posts that simply mirror my remarks rather than demonstrating your own thoughts on the readings.

Engagement with peers—90 points (9% of grade).

At the end of the semester, I will go back through all fourteen discussion forums and assess the overall quality of your responses to others. Although your comments are part of your weekly grade, these points are reserved for stepping back at the end and assessing overall quality.

2) Essays (35% of grade)

Time and perspective essay—worth 100 points (10% of grade)

One challenge of studying recent history is learning to navigate the blurry line between history and current events. The presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump are vividly remembered by most Americans, but most efforts to discuss them in history classes would likely be perceived as biased due to the political polarization of the country. But how do we know when enough time has passed for something to count as history? Please share your reflections on this question in a short essay of at least 600 words. No outside research is required. **Due 2/11**

Pandemic personal narrative—100 points (10% of grade)

We are living through a global pandemic of great historical significance. The WKU Archives have virtually no records of how students responded to the flu pandemic of 1918, but it is gathering personal narratives of the current crisis to create an archive for future historians. A description of this project can be found here: <https://www.wku.edu/library/services/archives/218.php>. For this assignment, please write an essay (at least 800 words) sharing your experience of the pandemic as a student. You are encouraged, but not required, to submit your narrative to the WKU Archives after the semester. Please see the Essays section of Blackboard for more guidelines. **Due 3/11**

Oral history essay—worth 150 points (15% of grade)

Over the course of the semester, we will reflect on the challenges of using personal narratives as sources. For this essay, you will use an event in the lives of your own family or friends to investigate the benefits and challenges of oral history. Select any event at least two years ago, either light-hearted or serious, that was experienced by four members of your personal network who are willing to be interviewed separately by phone. Take detailed notes and, if possible, record the interviews in order to capture the precise details. Be careful to avoid leading questions that could influence how your interviewees remember the events in question. After all four interviews are complete, compare the similarities and differences between your interviews and write an essay (at least 800 words) reflecting on your findings. What does this exercise teach us about whether oral history sources can be trusted? **Due 5/2**

Schedule

Readings are due the week they are listed on the syllabus. You are expected to read carefully, not skim. Aside from books required for purchase, all readings can be found in the Content section of Blackboard.

Weekly structure:

Monday and Tuesday: These days are reserved strictly for reading. During this time, Dr. Olson will post a set of framing remarks to guide the discussion.

Wednesday: Each student will submit a 500-word post (which can be longer if you wish) to the Blackboard discussion board addressing the weekly readings.

Thursday and Friday: Each student will post a minimum of 500 words spread across at least three comments responding to the posts submitted by your fellow students. These response posts cannot be written within 12 hours of your original post on Wednesday. You are encouraged to check back several times on Thursday and Friday to keep up with the discussion.

Readings and Deadlines:

Week 1 (January 18-21): The Bombing of Philadelphia, 1985

- Watch: “The Day the Police Dropped a Bomb On Philadelphia” (2020).
- Watch: “The Forgotten Police Bombing of a Philadelphia Pro-Black Group” (2016).
- Nicholas Riccardi, “MOVE Still Wants to Shake Up Things” (2000).
- Chrystos, “No Rock Scorns Me as Whore” (1981).

Week 2 (January 24-28): The View from 2018

- Monica Lewinsky, “Emerging from ‘The House of Gaslight’ in the Age of #MeToo” (2018).
- Francine Prose, “New York Supergals Love that Naughty Prez” (1998).
- Brooke Blower, “V-J Day, 1945, Times Square” (2017).

Week 3 (January 31-February 4): The Black Freedom Movement, Part 1: Legacies of the Civil War

- Letter from Jourdan Anderson, August 7, 1865.
- Watch: *The Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy*, Intro and Parts 1-6 (2015)

Week 4 (February 7-11): The Black Freedom Movement, Part 2: Race in Modern America

- Barbara Ransby, “The Preacher and the Organizer” (2003).
- Listen: Interview with Richard Rothstein, *Fresh Air* (2017).
- Conor Friedersdorf, “Ferguson’s Conspiracy Against Black Citizens” (2015).
- Browse: Weldon Cooper Center, Racial Dot Map of the 2010 U.S. Census.

- **Essay:** Time and perspective essay due by Friday, February 11th, at 11:59pm.

Week 5 (February 14-18): US and the World, Part 1: Iran Air Flight 655

- Max Fisher, “The Forgotten Story of Iran Air Flight 655” (2013).
- John Barry and Roger Charles, “Sea of Lies” (1992).
- Watch: “Public War / Secret War,” *Nightline with Ted Koppel*, ABC News (1992).
- Watch: “The U.S. and Iran Weren’t Always Enemies. What Happened?” (2018).
- Listen: “How the CIA Overthrew Iran’s Democracy in 4 Days” (2019)

Week 6 (February 21-25): US and the World, Part 2: The Vietnam War

- Elizabeth Rosen, “The Vietnam War, as Seen by the Victors” (2015)
- Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War* (2008), 27-40 and 168-172.
- Ho Chi Minh, “Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” (1945)

Week 7 (February 28-March 4): US and the World, Part 3: Remembering World War Two

- Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire* (2019), 3-19, 187-212, and 278-297.
- Watch: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Available Amazon. Note: graphic violence first 30 minutes.

Week 8 (March 7-11): US and the World, Part 4: Angel Island and Ellis Island

- Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island* (2014), 2-141, and 230-237.
- Watch: Clip from *The Godfather* (1972).

- **Essay:** Pandemic personal narrative due by Friday, March 11th, at 11:59pm.

Week 9 (March 14-18): Spring Break (no readings or discussion)

Week 10 (March 21-25): Economic History, Part 1: Capitalism in the Gilded Age

- Richard White, “Westward the Course of Reform” (2017).
- William Jennings Bryan, “Cross of Gold” Speech, Democratic Convention, 1896
- Excerpts from David Bennett Hill and Ben Tillman’s speeches, Democratic Convention, 1896

Week 11 (March 28-April 1): Economic History, Part 2: Capitalism and the Great Depression

- William Leuchtenburg, “Waiting for Lefty,” *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (1963).
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress” (1941).
- Packet of Documents: “Was the New Deal a Success or Failure?”

Week 12 (April 4-8): Economic History, Part 3: The American Century

- Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire* (2019), 298-316 and 355-371.
- Tony Judt, “The Rehabilitation of Europe” (2005).
- Byrne Hobart, “Why the US Dollar Could Outlast the American Empire” (2020).

Week 13 (April 11-15): Time and Perspective, Part 1: An Oral History of 9/11

- Garrett Graff, *The Only Plane in the Sky* (2019), 1-177, 209-217, 242-257, 331-341, and 373-375.
- Watch: Peter Arnett, “Interview with Osama bin Laden” (1997).
- Watch: “Killing Bin Laden,” *60 Minutes* (2011).

Week 14 (April 18-22): Time and Perspective, Part 2: Science and Sexuality

- George Chauncey, “Trade, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood” (1994).
- Maria Cohut, “The Controversy of ‘Female Hysteria’” (2020)

Week 15 (April 25-29): Time and Perspective, Part 3: The Long Red Power Movement

- Michael Witgen, “The Long Invisibility of the Native New World” (2012).
- David Treuer, *Rez Life* (2012), 1-20.
- Watch: “Richard Oakes and the Occupation of Alcatraz” (2019).
- Gillian Brockell, “Harris will be the first female, Black, and Asian vice president. But not the first VP of color.” *Washington Post*, November 12, 2020.

- **Essay:** Oral history essay due by Monday, May 2nd, at 11:59pm.