HIST 3324 The Emergence of Modern America

Dr. Megan Birk

megan.birk@utrgv.edu (preferred contact method) According to university policy, you must use your utrgv email account for all class business.

Office: ELABS 347C Hours: T/Th 11-1:30 Phone: 665-3563 (only active during office hours)

Class Description: This class is intended to serve as an intensive examination of the time period in U.S. history between the close of the Civil War and the start of the Great Depression. As you will come to appreciate, many of the changes and issues of this time period are very relevant to our current nation. Our semester will cover issues of race, immigration, reform, expansion, industrialization, and social issues. For those of you considering teaching as a career, this course provides a great deal of information you will need in the classroom. For everyone else, this class should help contextualize some of the greatest changes in American government and society.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will engage primary source material to complete a research paper about a relevant topic
- Students will analyze and summarize three secondary source works to gain a deeper understanding of the time period
- Students will assess the historical outcomes of events and themes through essay writing and discussion
- Students will historicize the major themes and dilemmas of the Progressive and Gilded Ages, while actively discussing ways in which this time period affects current events and policy by integrating that knowledge into their writing assignments and assessments

Required Books (any version/you can rent, Kindle, buy used etc...)

Destiny of the Republic by Candace Millard

Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Otta Benga by Pamela Newkirk

The Big Burn by Timothy Egan

Class Policies: Attendance is not required for this course. However, students who miss class regularly will not pass the class. All your information for the exams comes from class, and there are no notes posted online. If you miss class you are encouraged to come to office hours where you can copy down the notes you’ve missed. But be aware that getting notes is not the same as learning – so if you do not plan to attend class, you should probably not enroll in this course. Your enthusiastic participation is welcome, but every student
must be respectful of differing opinions. If you are having a hard time discussing things in an adult and intellectual manner, using historical facts to support your opinion, you may be asked to leave. Please turn off your phones during class, texting and other various distractions are not tolerated and you may be asked to leave the classroom. In general, any behavior that makes learning difficult for your classmates is not acceptable. Please do not bring guests to our class without asking Dr. Birk first.

**Plagiarism and Cheating Policy:** There is ZERO tolerance for cheating or plagiarism in this course. Using another student’s work, using your own work from another course, using the words and/or ideas of others and passing them off as your own without proper citation, and/or the duplication of another’s writing are ALL considered plagiarism and will be awarded a ZERO for that assignment. Serious offenses will be referred to the Dean of Students Office. In this course, proper citation means the following: Quotation marks around direct quotes, and a foot or endnote for direct quotes or borrowed ideas that includes the author’s name, the name of the book or website where the words or ideas came from, the publication information, and the specific page from which the information came from. All citations must be done in footnotes or endnotes and follow Chicago or Turabian Style. If you do not know what these are, please consult the library web page which has guides – you can also ask Dr. Birk for assistance. A link is available for you to view a style manual online.

**Assignments:**

**Book reviews** - You will write a book review for each of the three assigned books.
- These reviews will be between 750-1000 words.
- Each review MUST be handed in through Blackboard on SafeAssign.
- Each review MUST be submitted on time to receive credit. No late work is accepted or graded.
- Each review should not only provide a brief summary of the book, but should also provide a thoughtful analysis of the book’s relevance, your opinion of it, an assessment of the sources used in the book, and be well written. A review guide will be provided for you on Blackboard with additional details. Please see the handout for further instructions.
- 25 points each

**Research Assignment** - You will select a research paper topic from the list provided for you at the end of this syllabus. The topics on this list are intended as a starting point for your research. Your paper is not simply identifying the law, or the case, but should be used as a way to investigate why the law was passed, or the circumstances leading to a Supreme Court case. You will use both primary and secondary sources to explore the topic you’ve chosen and begin to understand how historians use sources to synthesize information and “tell a story” about an event or topic.
- For example: if you were working on the Homestead Act, you would not just explain the legislation, but discuss the reasons it was passed, the significance of it, how it affected people, and what long term consequences happened as a result.

- The paper will be between 6-8 pages in length.

- The paper requires you to locate and use at least 2 primary sources and at least 2 secondary sources.

- Your paper should have a point made clear with a strong thesis statement, and should be a professional presentation of ideas and historical research.

- Primary sources are considered any form of documentation from the period, including but not limited to: newspaper stories, Congressional records, photographs, speeches, writings done during the time period.

- Secondary sources are considered anything written by someone as a reflection or analysis of the issue. For example, historians’ books and articles, and websites summarizing sources can be considered secondary sources. People’s random opinions about things that are not supported by sources and factual evidence are not considered sources appropriate for this class.

- No late assignments are accepted. 100 points

**Primary Source analysis activities** - On Blackboard, you will do three activities designed to get you engaged with primary source material and become more familiar with how to tell a primary from a secondary source. These three activities will send you to source websites and require you to write thoughtful reflections about the sources you found, and consider their relevance for historical story.

- No late assignments are accepted. 15 points each

**Exams** - There will be two exams for this course, a midterm and a final.

- Both will be held in class and will require you to write responses in the form of essays. You will need Blue Books for both exams. Those are available at the bookstore and I usually have some for sale on the day of the exam. There are no makeup exams and no late exams accepted. Only university excused absences, with advance notice, will be accepted.

- 100 points each

**Bonus Activity** – There will be no class on Thursday Jan. 19th because I will not be available. On this day, you will complete the ONLY BONUS ACTIVITY of the semester. On BB, I will post a variety of news articles. Some will be historic, some will be contemporary. You need to select two, and determine whether or not it is real, or fake. In today’s world, fake information circulates widely, but that is not a new phenomenon, it is just easier to access because of the internet. Historically, news has often been bent or created for political purposes. But as history students and thinking people it is our job to be smart consumers of information. Where did it come from – what is that outlet’s angle? Can you verify the information from a trusted source? You will select one story, determine its validity, and trace your steps. Where did you go to check the content? What did you learn about this outlet of information? You will account for this project and walk me
through your process in an email to my utrgv account. This is worth up to 10 bonus points. It is my warm suggestion that you complete the assignment. It is due on Friday, Jan. 20th at 8 am. In other words, I want you to use your no-class day to complete the assignment.

Total points possible in class: 420

A: 420-376
B: 375-334
C: 333-292
D: 291-250

Schedule:

Week 1 Jan. 16 – Introductions - Bonus Activity Research Day on Thursday Jan. 19
Week 2 Jan. 23 – Western Expansion and Indigenous People Policy
Week 3 Jan. 30 – The South – Primary Source Activity #1 due Thursday by 8 pm on Blackboard
Week 4 Feb. 6 – Immigration – Book Review for Destiny of the Republic due Thurs. by 8 pm
Week 5 Feb. 13 – Industrialization and Labor
Week 6 Feb. 20 – Gilded Age and Middle Class Life - Primary Source Activity #2 due Thursday by 8 pm on BB
Week 7 Feb. 27 – Book Review for Spectacle due Thrs. By 8
Week 8 Mar. 6 – Test prep – Exam 1 held Thrs. March 10 during class
Week 9 – Spring Break
Week 10 Mar. 20 – Progressive Era Reforms
Week 11 Mar. 27 – Progressive Era cont. Book Review for The Big Burn due Thrs. By 8
Week 12 April 3 – Expansionism and Imperialism
Week 13 April 10 – World War I
Week 14 April 17 – The Turmoil of the 1920s - Primary Source Activity #3 due Thrs. By 8 pm
Week 15 April 24 – Conclusions about Modern America
Week 16 May 1 - Research Paper Due Tuesday May 2 by 8 pm on Blackboard

May 8 – EXAM WEEK

--
– Exam #2 to be held on regularly scheduled exam day through University exam week scheduling

Research Paper topics:
- Sheppard Towner Act
- Pure Food and Drug Act
- Meat Inspection Act
- Dawes Severalty Act
- Volstead Act
- Interstate Commerce Act
- Sherman Anti-Trust Act
- Newlands Reclamation Act
- Federal Reserve Act
- Federal Trade Act
- Hepburn Act
- Muller vs. Oregon
- Plessy vs. Ferguson
- Keating Owens Act
- Lochner vs. New York
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- 16th Amendment
- Espionage and Sedition Acts
- Northern Securities Co. vs. United States
- Workingmen’s Compensation Act
- Immigration Act of 1924
- Smith Lever Act
- Morrill Land Grant Acts
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be provided at any time. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD: Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Online evaluations will be available April-May. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE: In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.