

HY206: US History Since 1860

Spring 2017 Block 8
Palmer 223 9:15-12:00

Professor Amy Kohout

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Palmer 215C; 719-389-6525 (office)

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-3:30 PM and by appointment

Course description

Broad approach to the history of the United States since the Civil War, focusing on multiple meanings of American freedom and the rise of the modern United States as a global power, including attention to Emancipation and Reconstruction; Industrialization, Migration, and Immigration; Civil Rights Movements and Protest Politics; the Great Depression, New Deal and WWII; American Foreign Policy and the Cold War; the Great Society, Vietnam, and the Challenge to the New Deal Order. Meets Critical Perspectives: Social Inequality requirement.

Course rationale

How did we get here? How does the study and practice of history help us to understand our present moment? The relationship between the past and the present is something we'll be grappling with as we consider the history of the United States from 1860 to, well, yesterday. Obviously, we can't cover everything that happened in these decades; whole courses exist on tiny snippets of this expansive period – I even teach some of them! Instead of aiming for exhaustive coverage of everything that happened between 1860-2017 (a losing battle, in my opinion, even if we had several blocks), I'm hoping we'll use a rich variety of materials to explore changing ideas about work and identity in the history of modern America. Our investigation begins with the story of John Henry, a man whose labor became legendary—and whose history allows us access to freedpeople's experiences of Reconstruction. From there, we'll consider other kinds of work and workers: farming families who crossed the Pacific from China, Japan, and the Philippines to settle in California amidst pervasive anti-Asian sentiment, women who worked in factories in New York City's garment district, soldiers who served the state during several wars, from the Indian Wars to the Iraq War, and families who worked in support of both the American and Soviet nuclear programs during the Cold War. We'll also consider the conditions of all sorts of work in modern America alongside activism deeply tied to questions of labor, dignity, equality, and citizenship.

Learning outcomes

This course is designed to introduce you to key concepts in the history of the United States since 1860, and to support you as you develop the skills historians use to make sense of the past. Your work for this course should demonstrate that you can:

- (a) explain key concepts and debates in the history and historiography of modern America
- (b) locate, contextualize, analyze, and interpret both visual and textual primary sources
- (c) craft arguments about the history of the modern United States and support them with evidence, in your writing and in conversation
- (d) make informed connections about modern American history across texts, time, and space

Required texts (please acquire hard copies)

Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend* (2008)

Cecilia M. Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (2013)

Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (2015)

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2011 edition)

The American Yawp (free, online, collaborative textbook): www.americanyawp.com (we'll use this for reference and recommended reading)

These texts are available at the Colorado College Store. They are also on reserve at Tutt Library. All other assigned readings will be made available to you on Canvas; **please print* them out (double-sided, if you can) and bring them to class on the day we are scheduled to discuss them.**

*Yes, I'm asking you to print out course materials. I realize that this might seem particularly strange, since I'm an environmental historian, or at least a little hypocritical. But in lots of ways, the study of history is about making things that are hard to see more visible. It turns out that it is quite complicated to determine whether reading digital or print materials has a greater impact on the size of your carbon footprint. Factors include the amount of time spent reading, the specific emissions of the electricity you're pulling from the grid, the materials and energy used to produce our various devices, etc. So please consider powering down (or putting to sleep) the laptop and reading with a pen in hand this block! (However you read, I would like you to have hard copies of the texts with you in class.)

A note on participation

This course is designed to introduce you to—and immerse you in—the work historians do, and as such, it is organized around discussions of primary and secondary source material. Sometimes I'll lecture, sometimes we'll work in small groups, and sometimes we'll have conversations as a whole class. I expect that you will show up each day prepared to jump into these conversations. We'll talk more about how to read like a historian, and how to prepare for an analytical discussion—these are skills we will be practicing a lot this block—**but I want to highlight here that regular, thoughtful (and vocal) participation is necessary to do well in this course.**

Assignments

Short Writing Assignments (4), usually 2 pages each

Paper 1, 5-6 pages

Paper 2, 5-6 pages

Final Exam (take-home essay, cumulative), 5-6 pages

Guidelines for submission of written work

Unless otherwise specified, you will submit writing assignments to Canvas 45 minutes before class starts on the due date. The work you submit for this class should be double-spaced (except when directed otherwise), in 12 pt Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins. Put your name, the course number, and the date at the top of the first page. Everything you hand in is pledged work; please indicate this on your assignments. (This can be done by typing something like Honor Code Upheld, or even HCU, at the start or the end of the assignment.) When citing ideas and/or texts that are not your own, please use a standard citation format (for historians, Chicago or MLA). Also, **remember to proofread!**

Grading*

Participation (large/small group discussions, primary source analysis, informal writing) 20%

Short Writing Assignments (SWAs) 20%

Paper 1 20%

Paper 2 20 %

Final Exam (Take-home essay, cumulative) 20%

***Note: you must complete all assignments in order to pass this course.**

Grading scale

For a full explanation of Colorado College policies on credit and grades, see the Academic Policies section of the Colorado College Catalog of Courses. I use the same grade schedule to calculate final grades in my courses: A = 4.0; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3.0; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2.0; C- = 1.7; D+ = 1.3; D = 1.0; and NC = 0.0.

Please also review the college's statement on what these letters and numbers mean:

A – Excellent work that reflects superior understanding and insight, creativity, or skill.

B – Good work that reflects a high level of understanding and insight, creativity, or skill.

C – Adequate work that indicates readiness to continue study in the field.

D – Marginal work, only minimally adequate, raising serious question about readiness to continue in the field.

S – Work that falls in the range of A to C-.

CR – Work equivalent to a D+ or D.

NC – Failing work, clearly inadequate, and unworthy of credit.

Policy on absences and lateness

Because discussion is central to the study and practice of history, attendance is critically important. As such, unexcused absences will impact your grade in this class: for each unexcused absence beyond the first (which you can take with no grade penalty, no questions asked), your final grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a letter.

If you do miss a class meeting, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and making up the work so that you are prepared for the next class meeting. Please be on time; lateness will also affect your grade. If you need to miss class due to illness, emergency, athletics, religious observance, etc., please email me or talk with me as soon as you can.

More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade in the course.

Late work

I will accept late work; however, it is in your best interest to submit work on time, as late assignments will be penalized 2/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late, and one full increment for assignments graded check plus, check, check minus. So, a B+ paper turned in up to 24 hours after the deadline would earn a B-; a B+ paper submitted 2 days late would earn a C, etc. **Being absent from class does not excuse you from any work due that day. If you know you are going to be late with an assignment, talk to me as soon as you can. I very rarely grant extensions on late work on or after the due date.**

Colorado College policies

I respect and adhere to Colorado College policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays, assistance available to students with disabilities, plagiarism and academic integrity, sexual harassment, and racial or ethnic discrimination. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with these policies and encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns they may have with me.

Inclusion and diversity in the classroom

We are going to talk about hard things this block—the history of the United States from the Civil War to the present is, in many ways, a history of violence, and I don't just mean the violence that occurred on battlefields at home and overseas. To understand this history, as well as how our historical narratives have developed, we're going to need a discussion space that is equal parts rigorous and generous – to the scholars we'll read, and to each member of our discussions.

I am committed to fostering a classroom community that is productive for all participants, and to do that, I'm going to need your help. We'll talk together about what this looks like, but here, as we begin, I want to highlight how important it is that we appreciate and respect that a diversity of identities, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives only enriches the work we will do together. After all, the discipline of history is built on using a range of source material to construct arguments about the past. Which actors and perspectives we look for—and which voices we find in the historical record—help to shape the arguments we make and the stories we tell.

Accommodations for students with disabilities and learning differences

Full accommodations are the legal right of students with all kinds of disabilities, whether learning differences or physical disabilities. I am happy to provide these accommodations. If you experience a disability and are requesting accommodations for this course, please speak with me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss how best to put accommodations in place. If you have not already done so, please connect with Accessibility Resources (Armstrong 211, 719-227-8285), the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities.

Academic honesty

It is expected that you will abide by the Colorado College Honor Code. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with the Honor Code, and in particular, the policy on plagiarism. If you

have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or proper citation, please ask! (We'll review what this means in the context of the work we'll be doing together this block.)

A note on technology

The technological developments of the last few decades have transformed the ways that historians research and write history. Digital photography in the archive, electronic access to scholarly journals and digitized materials, new software to help with organizing sources and ideas—there are so many reasons why I'm thrilled to be a historian in the digital age. I imagine that we will all use digital tools to complete the work we'll do together this block (in fact, some activities will be explicitly digital), but I ask that we keep our group discussions analog. Please bring hard copies of the assigned readings—and your notes on them—to class, and keep laptops, tablets, and phones stowed during discussion (unless I have specifically asked you to bring them or you and I have made other arrangements as part of a conversation about learning differences and accommodations). This course is discussion-centered, and it can be hard to connect across a table or around a room when we're all looking at screens instead of at the people we're talking with!

Note: Once you've reached this point in the syllabus, please do two things:

- (1) Confirm that you can access the Canvas site for this course. This is where you'll find many of the course readings. It is also where you'll upload your writing assignments.
- (2) Email me at amy.kohout@coloradocollege.edu. Please tell me your preferred pronouns, and let me know if you can't access Canvas. (If that's the case, I'll add you manually ASAP.)

Course calendar (subject to change)

Please come to class ready to discuss the readings listed for each day. Writing assignments, unless otherwise noted, are due to Canvas by 8:30 AM before class. Readings with (C) next to them on this calendar can be found on Canvas.

Note: I have mapped the relevant chapters of *The American Yawp* onto the syllabus below. You are not strictly required to read this material before class, but I would recommend it on days where the subject matter is unfamiliar to you. We're all coming to this course with different amounts of exposure to and experience with recent American history. These chapters are intended to be a resource – each serves as a synthetic overview of a key period in American history.

Week 1: The Beginning of Modern America?

Monday, 4/24 Introductions and Expectations

In class: Timeline exercise. Why does history matter? Snapshot of the present?

Tuesday, 4/25 The Civil War and Reconstruction

Read: The full syllabus; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend* (2008), pp. 1-92; [*American Yawp*, Chapter 15]

Wednesday, 4/26 Expansion, Dispossession, and the Gilded Age

Read: Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, pp. 93-173; [*American Yawp*, Chapters 16-17]

Write: **Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #1 due to Canvas by 8:30 AM**

Thursday, 4/27 Immigration, Labor, and the Progressive Era

Read: Cecilia Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (2013), "Introduction," pp. 1-13; Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire narrative & documents, here: <https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/introduction.html> and **complete handout**; [*American Yawp*, Chapters 18, 20]

Friday, 4/28 American Empire

Read: *Garden of the World*, 15-106; [*American Yawp*, Chapter 19]

Prompt for Paper 1 distributed

Week 2: The Nation at War (Both Abroad and at Home)

Monday, 5/1 The Great War (World War One)

Read: Tsu, *Garden of the World*, 107-165; Read one issue of *The Stars and Stripes* (soldiers' newspaper published 1918-1919 – find it here: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/stars-and-stripes/about-this-collection/> and look through World War 1 poster collection (focus on US posters), here: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-posters/?fa=location%3Aunited+states>; [*American Yawp*, Chapter 21]

Tuesday, 5/2 The Great Depression and the New Deal 9 AM START

Read: Tsu, *Garden of the World*, 167-222; [*American Yawp*, Chapter 22-23]

In class: Pare Lorentz, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*

Write: **SWA #2 Tsu précis**

[class ends at 10:30; Honors Convocation at 11:00]

Wednesday, 5/3 Japanese Internment and World War Two

Read: Josi Ward, "Following a Migrant Route," *The Appendix*, January 2014, 2:1, pp. 76-82 (C); Annie Correal, "Love and Black Lives in Pictures Found on a Brooklyn Street," *The New York Times* 27 January 2017, READ ONLINE here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/nyregion/love-and-black-lives-in-pictures-found-on-a-brooklyn-street.html?>; and Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans* (1944), VIEW ONLINE at the Library of Congress (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>) and look at both text and images up through pp.43. **Consider the images in all of these texts; choose one image from the Adams text to discuss in class, and come prepared with notes (both observations and some preliminary analysis) about it;** [*American Yawp*, Chapter 24]

PAPER 1 DUE WEDNESDAY AT 10 PM VIA CANVAS

Thursday, 5/4 9:15 AT Fine Arts Center visit to see Don Coen's *The Migrant Series*. YOU DON'T NEED TO BRING ANYTHING WITH YOU. (Easiest to leave large bags at home.)

Read: No reading (paper due last night), but **please arrive rested and ready** to analyze paintings with Jessica Hunter-Larsen, Director of Academic Engagement!

11:15 Breaking Bread Lunch at Amy's apartment!

Friday, 5/5 History Day! NOTE 9 AM START.

Read: Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (2015), pp. 3-71. Note: you are reading a big chunk of this book for Monday. Pace yourself however you'd like.

Write: **SWA #3 based on Don Coen exhibit (see prompt) due to Canvas by 8:30 AM**

Week 3: "Recent American History" OR Our Parents' Lives

Monday, 5/8 Nuclear America and the Start of the Cold War

Read: Brown, *Plutopia*, pp. 75-267; [*American Yawp*, Chapter 25]

Tuesday, 5/9 Protest: Civil Rights Movement, the Counterculture, and Vietnam

Read: Brown, *Plutopia*, pp. 271-338; carefully read your table's assigned primary sources and be ready to share with the class in a thoughtful way (C); [*American Yawp*, Chapters 26-27]

Wednesday, 5/10 The 1970s

Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *The Atlantic*, October 2015, READ ONLINE (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>); Jefferson Cowie, "Introduction: Something's Happening to People Like Me," in *Staying Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, p. 1-19 (C); [*American Yawp*, Chapter 28]

Thursday, 5/11 Reagan and The Rise of the Right

Read: Kim Phillips-Fein "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (December 2011), pp. 723-743; Rick Perlstein, "I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong." *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 April 2017 (C); [*American Yawp*, Chapter 29]

PAPER DUE AT 10 PM VIA CANVAS

Friday, 5/12 Remembering 9/11; Histories of Terrorism and Torture

Read: Paul Kramer, "The Water Cure," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2008, 11 pp. (C); Mark Danner, "Abu Ghraib: The Hidden Story," *The New York Review of Books*, October 7, 2004 issue, 13 pp. (C); Beverly Gage, "Terrorism and the American Experience: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (June 2011), pp. 73-94 (C); Steve Kandell, "The Worst Day of My Life is Now New York's Hottest Tourist Attraction," *Buzzfeed*, 19 May 2014, 7 pp. (C); [*American Yawp*, Chapter 30]

Week 4: The History of Our Lives (Or, The History of the Present)

Monday, 5/15 Work and Wages in Modern America 9-10:30/10:30-12 (groups assigned)

Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, all.
Listen: Alex Blumberg and Adam Davidson, "The Giant Pool of Money," Episode #355, *This American Life* and NPR, May 2008, online here: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/355/the-giant-pool-of-money?act=1>
Write: **SWA #4 (primary source analysis)**
Final take-home exam prompt distributed in class today.

Tuesday, 5/16 Where are we now and how did we get here? (Or, the 2010s: Obama, Trump, and American values.)

Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Fear of a Black President," *The Atlantic*, September 2012, READ ONLINE: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>; explore "Trump Syllabus 3.0" at *Public Books* here: <http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-3-0/> I'd like you to read the articles that interest you here, play with some of the data/visualization tools, and also consider the whole syllabus as a text. What arguments might its creators be making about Donald Trump's election and presidency?

Wednesday, 5/17 NO CLASS.

FINAL EXAM DUE TO CANVAS WEDNESDAY AT 12 NOON; HAPPY SUMMER!