

## HIST 610: *The Making of Modern America* [DRAFT SYLLABUS]

Prof. Jared Farmer  
Department of History  
University of Pennsylvania  
Spring 2021, W 2:00–4:50 EST  
<https://sasupenn.zoom.us/j/2850056762>

*This graduate-level colloquium in U.S. history focuses on the century-long period from 1845 to 1945, with particular emphasis on the post-Civil War period. It is designed in part to help Americanists prepare for their exams. As you would expect, some of the books begin and/or end outside that semi-arbitrary century-long period. I have chosen a reading list that complements rather than duplicates Prof. Gronningsater's Fall 2019 colloquium on the long nineteenth century, meaning that certain obvious titles (e.g., Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*) don't appear here because they appeared on her list. Indeed, many classic titles (e.g., Foner's *Reconstruction*, *Blight's Race and Reunion*, *White's Railroaded*) didn't make the cut. In general, I've given preference to newer books over older books, monographs over syntheses. Within the theme "the making of modern America," I've tried to cover a variety of topics and approaches.*

### Written assignments (3)

#### **1. An opinion piece inspired by any one of the 23 books listed on the syllabus through Week 7.**

Your opinion should be in the genre of a blog post written for an online community (imagined or real) of American historians and history teachers. Write as if your piece would be freely viewable/sharable by anyone. In that spirit, this assignment (unlike the next two) will be shared with the entire class. The heading for everyone is "Books that Help Explain WTF Happened in 2020." Give your contribution a subheading, if you like. Please list the word count on your submission. As "content editor," I am asking for 1,000–2,000 words. Due no later than March 17. On that date we will discuss the opinion pieces collectively. Also, for that day, everyone will be asked to nominate a media commentary—digital humanities project, video, podcast, radio or TV interview, blog, hashtag, tweet thread—from 2016–2020 that exemplifies, in either a positive or negative way, how professional U.S. historians engage with current events.

#### **2. An essay on any book from the syllabus (not counting the subject of your opinion piece) in the house style of *Reviews in American History*.**

Please familiarize yourself with back issues of *RAH* over many years before you write your essay. Please list the word count on your submission to me. As “journal editor,” I am asking for 3,000 words, give or take. Due no later than April 21.

### 3. State-of-the-field essay

Step A: Read several chapters of Foner and McGirr, eds., *American History Now*, to learn the genre of the historiographical review. Likewise, look for forums, roundtables, conversations, and state-of-the-field essays in *JAH*, *RAH*, *Journal of the Civil War Era*, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*—e.g. Paul S. Sutter, “The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History.”

Step B: Pick a subfield within U.S. history for the period 1845–1945—for example:

Civil War-Reconstruction history; Gilded Age-Progressive Era history; interwar and WWII history; history of state power; military history; diplomatic history; political history; reform movement history; history of democracy; history of citizenship and citizen rights; history of capitalism; labor history; legal history; environmental history; history of landownership, land use, and landscape; urban history; carceral history; social history; cultural history; history of religion; history of gender and sexuality; women’s history; history of the family; African American history; Chinese American history; American Indian history; Chicanx history; Latinx history; history of immigration and ethnicity; history of race; history of U.S. in the world; history of U.S. expansionism, settler-colonialism, and American empire; frontiers and borderlands history; western American history; Pacific history; southern history; midwestern history; etc.

Step C: Write a 15–20-page historiographical paper that covers some or all of the following:

- the origin and brief history of the historical subfield
- the development of the subfield over the past several decades
- the major questions/problems, and current trends
- the most influential thinkers, books, and articles of all time
- the subfield’s interaction with U.S. history as a whole
- how books on this syllabus engage—or fail to engage—this subfield
- prospects for the future of the subfield

Due no later than May 4.

## Oral assignments

On one week, you will help me choose discussion questions for the core reading, and serve as co-leader of that discussion. We will confer via email/phone/video prior to class.

On two weeks, you will not read the core reading. Instead, you will give a 10-minute oral report on a complementary book on the syllabus, followed by 5 minutes of Q&A. Your report could include some or all of the following:

- A brief intellectual biography of the author. Who did they study with? What are their previous works (books and/or articles)? What are their academic specialties and proclivities? What big themes and/or questions do they repeatedly engage with? Etc.
- Your identification of the major historical questions/trends/arguments the book engages with.
- A summary of the book's scope and contents, and a synopsis of its core arguments and conclusions. But spare us a chapter-by-chapter abstract, please!
- A description of the book's methodology.
- Your assessment of those arguments, conclusions, and methodology—and literary merit, if noteworthy.
- An appraisal of the book's historiographical significance.
- Your summary of the academic consensus (if it exists) about the book based on reviews. (I strongly suggest you read the reviews *after* you have read the book yourself.)

Practice your report at home. Do not go over 10 minutes.

## CALENDAR

### Week 0 (January 13)

Consult via email to set up class schedule

### Week 1 (January 20)—one common reading

**Hahn, *A Nation without Borders***

### Week 2 (January 27)

**Levy, *Freaks of Fortune***

—Report 1: Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*

- Report 2: Cook, *The Pricing of Progress*
- Report 3: Jones, *Routes of Power*

### Week 3 (February 3)

#### **Gordon, *The Mormon Question***

- Report 1: Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*
- Report 2: Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*
- Report 3: Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*

### Week 4 (February 10)

#### **Garrett-Scott, *Banking on Freedom***

- Report 1: Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*
- Report 2: Haley, *No Mercy Here*
- Report 3: Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

### Week 5 (February 17)

#### **Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness***

- Report 1: Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*
- Report 2: Martínez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*
- Report 3: Lytle-Hernández, *City of Inmates*

### Week 6 (February 24)

#### **Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings***

- Report 1: Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*
- Report 2: Davis, *The Gospel of Kindness*
- Report 3: Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*

### Week 7 (March 3)

#### **Enstad, *Cigarettes, Inc.***

- Report 1: Specht, *Red Meat America*
- Report 2: Haag, *The Gunning of America*

[March 10: SPRING BREAK]

### Week 8 (March 17)

Discuss Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” other opinion pieces, and U.S. historians in the media

Week 9 (March 24)

**Katznelson, *Fear Itself***

- Report 1: McGirr, *The War on Alcohol*
- Report 2: Dauber, *The Sympathetic State*
- Report 3: Schickler, *Racial Realignment*

Week 10 (March 31)

**Canaday, *The Straight State***

- Report 1: Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*
- Report 2: Stahl, *Enlisting Faith*

Week 11 (April 7)

**Ngai, *Impossible Subjects***

- Report 1: Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*
- Report 2: Igo, *The Averaged America*

Week 12 (April 14)

**Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic***

- Report 1: Kwak, *A World of Homeowners*
- Report 2: Logemann, *Trams or Tailfins?*
- Report 3: Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient*

Week 13 (April 21)

**Black, *The Global Interior***

- Report 1: Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings*
- Report 2: Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission*

Week 14 (April 28)—one common reading

**Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America***