

Making Modern America: Business & Politics in the Twentieth Century

Professor Margaret O'Mara

Spring 2023

Course Description

How has the past century of American history shaped the political and economic landscape of the early twenty-first century? What is the broader context and historical backstory of contemporary political and social movements, business practices, and global flows of people, capital, and ideas? How can we use historical knowledge and the tools of historical analysis to better understand and address present-day challenges? With these questions in mind, this course explores key moments and people in the history of the United States from the end of World War I to the present.

Course organization is both chronological and thematic, performing deep, evidence-based study of particular events and people in recent US history to explore the evolving role of government, grassroots activism and fights for individual and group rights, partisan political change, technology as a product and shaper of society, changing patterns of production and consumption, migration and immigration, financial systems and global markets, and America's changing role in the world.

Course Readings

1. Hinton, Elizabeth. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
2. O'Mara, Margaret. *The Code: Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2020.
3. Rauchway, Eric. *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
4. Wall, Wendy L. *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. Refine understanding of how governments, markets, and individuals and groups have functioned as agents of historical change.
2. Develop an understanding of the causes and contingencies behind America's transition from an agrarian nation to an industrial and post-industrial superpower.
3. Develop an ability to apply this historical awareness to understanding present-day political, economic, and social structures.

Class Schedule

Week 1: February 9: The "Roaring" 1920s

Readings

- Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), Introduction and Chapter 1. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 1 module.)
- Paul Douglas, "The Problem of Labor Turnover," *American Economic Review* 8, no. 2 (1918): 306–316. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 1 module.)
- Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: Ford Motor Company and the Five-Dollar Day," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 399–424. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 1 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: February 16: The Crisis of Capitalism and What the New Deal Did

Readings

- Rauchway, full

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
 - Short Paper One due February 22
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 3: February 23: The Making of a Superpower

Readings

- Wall, Introduction and Chapters 1–5.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question due March 1
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the topic of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

Q&A Session One: Tuesday, February 28 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 4: March 2: The Early Cold War

Readings

- Wall, Chapters 6–8 and Conclusion.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - Short Paper Two due March 8
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 5: March 9: The Business of Suburbia

Readings

- David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Chapter 5. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)
- Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996): 1050–1081. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)
- C. Wright Mills, *Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), Chapter 8. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)
- William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), Chapter 6. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)

module.)

- John C. Keats, "The Crack in the Picture Window," *Esquire*, January 1957, 70–72. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - Revised Topic Proposal and Proposed Bibliography due March 15
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
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Week 6: March 16: The Military-Industrial Complex and the Birth of Silicon Valley

Readings

- O'Mara, Introduction and Chapters 1–6.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due March 22
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Monday, March 20 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 7: March 23: The Revolution Will Be Televised

Readings

- Hinton, Introduction and Chapters 1–4

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
- Short Paper Four due March 29
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Tuesday, March 28 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 8: March 30: The Stagflating 1970s

Readings

- Hinton, Chapters 5–9 and Epilogue.

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due April 5
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Week 9: April 6: Reagan Revolution

Readings

- Meg Jacobs, "The 1980 Election: Victory without Success," in *America at the Ballot Box: Elections and Political History*, ed. Gareth Davies and Julian Zelizer (Philadelphia, PA: Penn Press, 2015), 196–218. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)
- O'Mara, Chapters 7–18

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
- Short Paper Five due April 12
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 10: April 13: Clintonomics

Readings

- Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker, dirs., *The War Room*, produced by R. J. Cutler, Wendy Ettinger, and Frazer Pennebaker, Pennebaker Associates, 1993. ([This video can be accessed through Kanopy with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- R. J. Cutler and David Van Taylor, dirs., *A Perfect Candidate*, produced by R. J. Cutler, David Van Taylor, Dan Partland, and Ted Skillman, Seventh Art Releasing, 1996. ([This video can be accessed through Kanopy with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Assignments

- Rough Draft due April 19
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Four: Monday, April 18 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 11: April 20: America Online

Readings

- O'Mara, Chapters 19–25 and Epilogue

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Tuesday, April 25 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: April 27: The History of the Present

Readings

- Nelson Lichtenstein, "Wal-Mart's Tale of Two Cities: From Bentonville to Shenzhen," *New Labor Forum* 15, no. 2 (2006): 8–19. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, "Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (2014): 804–831. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- *Left Behind America*, Episode 16, produced by Shimon Dotan, ProPublica and Frontline, 2018, accessed on PBS. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project due May 3

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers

Throughout each term students will complete five short papers. Each of these assignments should be 1–2 pages in length, in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings.

Discussion Board Posts

Students will respond to nine virtual discussion board posts for each course. Discussion boards are led by the section professor, who will provide an analytical prompt related to course material and instructions for participation. These prompts will give students the opportunity to interact with fellow students and share their interpretation of course themes.

Question-and-Answer Sessions

Throughout the semester the lead scholar of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2 paragraph evaluation within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If students cannot attend three of the five Q&A sessions, they may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 1–2 page review of topics covered for each missed Q&A.

Final Paper/Project

For the final assignment of each term, students will choose to complete either a 15-page research paper or a research project. The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts, documentary editing and transcription, podcasts, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. The section professor must approve research projects.

Both final assignment options require students to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that they do not yet know the answer to. They will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether students choose to pursue a paper or project, papers and projects are broken down into smaller assignments, or scaffolded, throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows students time to incorporate instructor feedback into their assignment.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Paper/Project Proposal (2%):

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information on and historical context for your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be very specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing), and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (What is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked, such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%):

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan to use in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Paper or Project Preview (5%):

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.