Hist. 80010- Literature Survey II– American History 5 credits,  
Prof. Thomas Kessner  
Spring 2014, T, 2:00-4:00 p.m.,  
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N.B.: The assigned readings are tentative and a few may be changed. Also the page assignments have not been inserted yet. There will be an updated version of this list available later in the year.

Course description and objectives: The objective of this course is for you to read, analyze and understand key texts in American History; gain an understanding of the influence of prime forces like politics, economics, social forces, culture and technology in shaping American development; and emerge with a broad knowledge of the American historical experience 1870-present.

You will do a lot of thinking about the way American history has been conceived, structured and narrated. Some of the assigned works are classics that you may have dipped into in your undergraduate course work; others are important because they offer provocative theses or important new ways of looking at long established historical questions; yet others bring a new perspective to historical inquiry. Each of these books is on the list because in one way or another it has passed the test of significance and it is worthy of your thought.

You are advised to acquire a college level American History textbook and to consult it for an overview of the period/topic covered in the readings. Many of the assigned books are monographs and of necessity treat only a small part of the broader era with which they are concerned. The text will fill in important gaps and provide the context necessary for understanding the larger play of important historical forces.

The broad scope of readings is designed to provide you with an essential immersion in the literature of the field. You are encouraged to do as much of the Supplementary reading as you can. The more reading you do, the richer and more textured the perspective you will bring to subsequent colloquia and seminars. As you read pay attention to what interests you: a particular approach; a specific era; a method of analysis; a strategy for attacking a problem. This way at the same time that you are building your intellectual capital in the field you are thinking about how you might fashion your own research projects for your seminars and ultimately for your dissertation.

It is not likely that you can read every word of the assigned material. So focus on your goals: You are reading to understand the larger interpretive intent of the assigned histories and also for the critical details. You want to master as much important information as you can and to hone a strong critical sensibility.

Assignments: Students should come to class well prepared to discuss the assigned works. Reading, leading class discussions and participating in them are integral to this class.

Each session will have: a discussion leader who will direct the discussion of the assigned volume. The discussion should frame critical questions about the period, the book and its interpretive stance. It should close with a sample of the critical response to the book in reviews and an effort to place the book in its historiographical context. The discussion leader will hand out a synopsis of the reading and the reviews (about 1200 words) to the class after the discussion.

A second reader will offer a report on one of the Supplementary books (as well as a written précis) summarizing the volume and a selection of the reviews.
1. Orientation and Discussion

2. Reconstruction: Can the Nation be Put Back Together?

*Steven Hahn, A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (2003).

3. Transforming Capitalism


4. The Metropolitan Surge


5. The Peopling of America

Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made (1976).
Matthew Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917 (2001).
6. Adjusting Capitalism, Reining In Free Enterprise


7. War, Peace and Prosperity

*Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*.

8. Depression: Disillusions and Transformation


9. The New Deal Goes to War


10. From Hot to Cold War

11. Diversity and its Discontents

Mary Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights (2011).

12. Business, Workers and Consumers Reconfigured

Lizabeth Cohen, Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (2001)

13. Right Turn
Daniel Rodgers, Age of Fracture (2011).