

History 4990 (Special Topics in History)

The 1930s

Fall 2008

Mondays, 4:30-7 p.m.
Old Main 201

Dr. Jennifer Ritterhouse
Office: Main 323J
Office phone: 797-0917
Email: jennifer.ritterhouse@usu.edu
Office Hours: Wed. 1-3 p.m.
and by appointment



Course Description and Objectives:

This course encourages students to develop their own perspectives on a fascinating period in American history: the 1930s. Your main objective is to write a clear and compelling historical analysis based on primary sources. Your research paper should demonstrate your ability to select and analyze historical evidence related to a specific topic that you have chosen from within the larger framework of the course. Your essay should also reflect your efforts to think critically, write cogently, and revise carefully in order to produce your best work.

There will also be in-class discussions and presentations, allowing students to improve their oral communication as well as their research and writing skills.

Final papers should be **15-20 pages** in length, not including the endnotes or the bibliography, all of which should follow the Chicago style that will be explained in class.

Required Book:

Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*

Evaluation and Grading:

Class Contribution (30 points=15%)

The success of this seminar depends on the active and thoughtful participation of every student as well as the instructor. Come to class prepared to present ideas, ask questions, and discuss problems that you and your classmates have encountered in completing the reading, writing, and research assignments. The quality of your final presentation on December 1 will also determine part of your class contribution grade.

Attendance: Attendance is vital. Students who miss a class or fail to show up for a prescheduled appointment will lose 10 points (5%) from their course grade for each instance. If you must miss class or cancel an appointment for a valid reason, please talk with me **in advance, if at all possible**. I may not be able to honor explanations given after the fact.

Research and Prewriting Exercises (50 points=25%)

The assignments in this course are designed:

- to introduce you to the variety of primary sources available to historians
- to encourage you to take an analytical approach to sources
- to guide you through the research process as you work toward a final product.

For the class to function effectively, **you must turn in all assignments promptly on the days they are due.** Specific instructions for each assignment will be provided as the semester unfolds, but the following is a list of the assignments that count toward this part of your grade. Each assignment is worth **10 points.**

1. Newspaper exercise (due on Sept. 15)
2. Documentary photo exercise (due on Sept. 22)
3. Oral History exercise (due on Sept. 29)
4. Topic description and research plan (due on Oct. 6)
5. Outline and draft paragraph (due on Oct. 20)

Peer Review (20 points=10%)

Each student will serve as a peer reviewer for two other students. Peer review groups will be able to share their work electronically through the course website. On Oct. 6, you will share your preliminary topic descriptions and research plans. Peer reviewers' comments will be due on Oct. 13. I will evaluate these comments with an eye to how fully each student has engaged with his or her two partners' work. This assignment counts **5 points.**

On Nov. 3, you will submit your rough drafts to your peer review partners at the same time you turn them in to me. Peer reviews are due Nov. 10 and will count **15 points.** Remember, the goal is constructive criticism that will help your partners improve their final papers.

Final paper (100 points=50%)

Rough drafts are required but not graded. Final papers should present an argument based on your research in primary sources and put that argument into historiographical context to the fullest extent that your reading of secondary sources will allow. On the same day you turn in your final paper, December 1, you will give a brief presentation of your research findings in class.

Two words of warning

Plagiarism: Students should read the University's rules concerning academic honesty, which can be found online at <http://www.usu.edu/policies/PDF/Acad-Integrity.pdf>. Any cheating, falsification, or presentation of another's work as your own will result in a failing grade in the course and might lead to even more serious consequences, such as suspension or expulsion. If you have *any questions* about whether something constitutes plagiarism, ASK ME. If you are contemplating plagiarism out of desperation, particularly over a deadline, TALK TO ME. I would much rather grant you an extension or help you with your work than fail you for cheating. However, be aware that I have failed students for plagiarism almost every semester that I have taught at USU.

Incompletes: University policy states that students can receive an “I” for the course only in the case of a verifiable serious illness or family emergency and only when a small amount of the coursework remains to be done. An incomplete cannot be used to avoid a poor grade.

Course Schedule:

August 25	Course introduction
September 1	No class
September 8	Discuss Sullivan, <i>Days of Hope</i> , pp. 1-101
September 15	Newspaper exercise due in class
September 22	Documentary photo exercise due in class
September 29	Oral history exercise due in class. Schedule individual meetings for Oct. 13
October 6	No class. Submit topic description and research plan to instructor and peer reviewers through course website
October 13	No class. Individual meetings this week. Submit peer reviews to instructor and peers through course website
October 20	Outline and draft paragraph due to instructor in class. Schedule individual meetings for Oct. 27
October 27	No class. Individual meetings this week. Schedule individual meetings for Nov. 10
November 3	No class. Rough draft due to instructor and peer reviewers through course website
November 10	No class. Individual meetings this week. Submit peer reviews to instructor and peers through course website.
November 17	No class
November 24	In-class writing workshop
December 1	In-class presentations. FINAL PAPER DUE

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Newspaper Exercise

Newspapers are one of the most important sources historians rely on to reconstruct the past. This assignment asks you to examine the most frequently used newspaper of record, *The New York Times*, and then compare its reporting to that of an important black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Your final product should be a report of **2-3 typed pages, with footnotes, due in class on September 15.**

First, skim through the *New York Times* for your assigned month: _____

Take notes as you read, being careful to write down all of the information you need to footnote individual articles. This information includes: author (if stated), title, newspaper title, date, page number, and (if applicable) section number or letter. The proper form for the first footnote to a given article is as follows:

¹ John Smith, "The Story of My Life," *New York Times*, 5 March 1984, sec. 1(A), p. 3.

Subsequent references should be footnoted as follows:

² Smith, "Story of My Life," sec. 1(A), p. 3.

Questions about the *New York Times*:

1) What do you see as the most interesting or important event covered in your assigned month? Summarize this event in 1-2 paragraphs, citing specific articles about it in properly constructed footnotes. **Why do you consider this event interesting or important?**

2) What other trends, episodes, personalities, etc. receive sufficient news coverage in your period to make you think they might make good topics for research? Summarize two or three and suggest where you think further research might lead. For example, what kinds of questions would you ask and what kinds of historical sources might help you answer them? **Again, footnote the specific articles covering the material you discuss.**

Once you've skimmed through the *Times* and at least tentatively answered questions 1 and 2 above, **skim the *Pittsburgh Courier* for a week or so surrounding the event you chose for question 1.**

If the same event is covered in the *Courier*, write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the two newspapers' coverage. Organize your report so that this paragraph comes right after your paragraphs on question 1 and make sure to cite the *Courier* article(s) in your footnotes.

If the event you chose is not covered in the *Courier*, write 1-2 paragraphs explaining what were the most important trends or events in the lives of black Americans that week, based on your reading of the *Courier* (and citing the appropriate articles). How does that picture compare to what you saw in the *Times*?