



SELF PROGRAM 2021/2022

Gilded Age America (1865-1930): The industrial revolution and the birth of the modern world

M. Trevor J. Kallimani

Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours

Hours taught per week: 2,5 hours

Teaching period: fall 2021

Course description:

Historical periods have a tendency to fall in and out of vogue depending on contemporary social, political, and economic trends, and at this moment the world is experiencing a “second Gilded Age”. Any who doubt this assertion I would encourage to do a simple Google search of the term “Gilded Age” and filter for recent news items; everyone is talking about the “Second Gilded Age”, from the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* to *Forbes* and the *Financial Times*. So, if it is true that we are living in a second “Gilded Age”, then it seems imperative that we attempt to understand the first, which is the objective of this course.

The course will be more thematic than purely chronological in its organization, but roughly speaking the time period covered stretches from the end of the American Civil War in 1865 to the beginning of the Great Depression around 1930. Strictly speaking most historians tend to

end this period either at the election of William McKinley in 1896 or his reelection in 1900. From that moment the country has theoretically entered into a period of reform, which historians have labelled the “Progressive Era”. However, as we will see many of the economic and political trends of the end of the 19th century endure into the 20th, precipitating the economic boom and bust of the 1920’s. From this perspective “progressivism” really only achieves political hegemony with the first election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, and so I have stretched the focus of this class to encompass the beginning of the 20th century.

Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of 19th century American history is desirable, but not required

Course objectives

As historian Richard White has stated, the parallels between the Gilded Age and the era we are living in today are obvious and abundant, “Partisan stalemate, check. Immigration and reaction, check. Corruption in both politics and business, check. Rising inequality, double-check. Environmental crisis, check. Claims of white supremacy, check. Attempts to restrict suffrage, check. All of these things were true then. All of these things are true now.” It was also a period where people were on the move and empires were being built, both of which resulted in contact between ethnic and racial groups that were not always friendly. With that in mind the course attempts to help students to better understand the world they are living in today by first showing them the origins of ideas and institutions that make up that world, and secondly by showing them a world that is in many ways a mirror image of the one they live in every day. However, we must also take care to keep in mind the differences, because as Mark Twain, the man who gave the era its name, purportedly said, “History never repeats itself, but often rhymes.” And, going back to historian Richard White, “If all we are interested in is people just like us, why bother? We can study us...but the past is going to give you something else. It’s the strangeness of the past. It’s the ways in which an age like the Gilded Age, which sort of parallels our own, still can come up with ideas that we don’t have.” Understanding the lost ideas of their Gilded Age can offer clues on how to deal with ours.

Richard White: America in the Gilded Age

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YM7KE576K0&t=534s>

Assessment:

10% Participation
45% Midterm essay
45% final written exam

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Required reading:

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.

White, Richard. *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Note: *The Story of American Freedom* can be purchased in several bookstores in Lyon, however for the *Republic for Which it Stands* (the main course book) I would encourage students to buy an ebook either from Amazon or iTunes.

Suggested reading:

Belich, James. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Brinkley, Alan. *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. Print.

Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty!* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014. Print.

Tuttle, William. *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

White, Richard. *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Print