

**History 593:**  
**U.S. Intellectual History since the Civil War**

Fall Semester 2012

Lawson 1106

1:30 p.m.-2:45 p.m.

**Professor Susan Curtis**

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**Office Hours: Wednesdays,**

**1:00 -4:00 p.m.**

**& by appointment**

**Required Books**

All available at Follett's

T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*

William Dean Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria*

Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*

Howard Brick, *The Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s*

Michael Harrington, *The Other America*

**U.S. Intellectual History since the Civil War**

This course invites students to grapple with some of the most important and influential currents of thought and belief that have shaped American life since the Civil War. It takes an expansive view of "intellectual history" as being something more than the history of Intellectuals—a history of ideas as both prefiguring and shaping social relations and the distribution of power. Implicit in this definition is the assumption that ideas are best interrogated in relation to the social relations within which they are articulated.

In the century and a half since the Civil War, the social relations of the United States have been organized by industrial and global capitalism. Making sense of a world so structured has called into being theoretical justifications of inequality in a democratic nation, radical/utopian alternatives to the dominant society, and reformist ideas meant to mitigate what their authors viewed as the worst of the excesses of capitalism. Ideas related to the "good society"—whether focused on such issues as the proper role of government, the meaning of citizenship, the nature of race and identity, what it means to be a man or woman, or the common good—constitute key parts of America's intellectual history in these years.

The course is organized into three parts, each of which focuses on three particular moments when the nature of the "good society" was being most hotly debated: The period from 1877 to 1920, which Jackson Lears sees as a period of "rebirth"; the decade of the 1930s, which Michael Denning identifies as the "laboring of American culture," and the 1960s, an age of "contradiction," according to Howard Brick. Books by Lears, Denning, and Brick provide a context within which we can examine the ways Americans imagined social life could be.

**Part I: 1877-1918—Reconstructing America**

**Week 1 (August 21 – 23)**

**T:** Introduction to the course and syllabus

**TH:** The Promise and Betrayal of The Gettysburg Address

**Read:** Lears, *Rebirth*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

**Week 2 (August 28-30)**

**T:** The Known World: Self-making, Self-Control, Individualism, Piety and Prosperity

**TH:** Clash between Ideals and Reality (be prepared to discuss what you have read of *Rebirth of a Nation*)

Read: Lears, *Rebirth*, Chapters 3-5

**Week 3 (September 4-6)**

**T:** 1893: Society on the Brink of Collapse

**TH:** Social visions (Discussion of Howells and the paper for Part I)

Read: Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria*, 1893, 1984

**Week 4 (September 11-13)**

**T:** Social Visions: Shoring up the Status Quo with Militarism, Individualism, and Social Darwinism

**TH:** Social Visions: Rethinking Beauty and Truth

Read: Lears, *Rebirth*, Chapters 6-7, Conclusion

**Week 5 (September 18-20)**

**T:** Social Visions: Social Salvation and the “Play Ethic”

**TH:** Social Visions of Reform: New Values, New Laws, Old Structures

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**PART II: The 1930s: A Red Decade in the American Century**

**Week 6 (September 25-27)**

**T:** Victor Schuster: A Young Man’s Search for Guidance in Depression America (meet in BRNG 1289 for class) **DUE IN CLASS: Paper for Part I**

**TH:** Voices of Despair in 1920s America: Fundamentalists, Mass Media Critics, and “100% Americans”

**Week 7 (October 2-4)**

**T:** Saving Capitalism: Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, and John Maynard Keynes

**TH:** Social Christianity: Reinhold Niebuhr, Neo-Orthodoxy, and Christian Realism

Read: Denning, *Cultural Front*, Part I and Part II (Chapters 1-3)

**Week 8 (October 9-11)**

**T:** No Class – Fall Break

**TH:** The Fall of the Lincoln Republic and Visions of Rebirth

Read: Denning, *Cultural Front*, Chapters 4-8

**Week 9 (October 16-18)**

**T:** Representations of America as fantasies of a worker’s republic: New Deal Art

**TH:** “The River”

Read: Denning, *Cultural Front*, Chapters 9-12, Conclusion

**Week 10 (October 23- 25)**

**T:** Student presentations

**TH:** Student presentations

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**PART III: The 1960s: The Collapse of Consensus and the Rise of Cultural Contradictions**

**Week 11 (October 30 - November 1)**

**T:** Student presentations (**DUE IN CLASS: Paper for Part II**)

**TH:** The Myth and Reality of “Consensus” in 1950s America

Read: Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, Chapters 1-2

**Week 12 (November 6 -8)**

**T:** 1962: Environment, Empire, and “the Establishment”

**TH:** Race, Class and Citizenship

Read: Harrington, *The Other America*

**Week 13 (November 13-15)**

**T:** Culture and Counterculture (be prepared to discuss Harrington’s *Other America*)

**TH:** Beatitude and the Graham Crusade

Read: Brick, *Age*, Chapters 3-6

**Week 14 (November 20-22)**

NO CLASS THIS WEEK

Use the free class period to catch up on reading or to work on your third paper for the course, and enjoy the break at the end of the week!

**Week 15 (November 27-29)**

**T:** Community, Individualism, and the Common Good

**TH:** Regeneration through Technocracy

Read: Brick, *Age*, Chapters 7-8

**Week 16 (December 4-6)**

**T:** Discussion of Brick

**TH:** The “Silent Majority” Speaks

Final Paper is due Wednesday, December 12, by 5:00 p.m.

## Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on three papers and class participation/attendance as follows:

Paper for Part I = 20%

Paper for Part II = 30%

Paper for Part III = 40%

Participation/Attendance: 10%

The assumption behind this grading scheme is that as you become more comfortable with analyzing and contextualizing ideas, your skills will improve. Learning and improvement are rewarded with increased weight over the course of the semester. The participation and attendance grade is meant to encourage all students to be actively engaged in class discussions and activities.

### Assignments

#### 1. Paper for Part I – DUE Tuesday, September 25

Two of the most important analytical skills employed by intellectual historians are: 1) to be able to situate a particular idea or school of thought in the period during which it is articulated—i.e. explaining how it arose from the social circumstances of its day, seeing it in relation to other ideas or cultural works, and determining the extent to which the author, his/her idea or work, or a particular theme had an impact on then current conditions; and 2) to analyze ideas in relation to interpretive narratives. In Part I of this course, you are asked to read two assigned books—one a primary source from the period, *A Traveler from Altruria*, and the other an interpretation of the period during which Howells wrote this novel. In the paper, I want you to think about the relationship between these two works from a perspective that aligns with your own intellectual interests. The first task is to consider what to make of the novel—is it the only? best? worst? most significant? Utopian novel of the late nineteenth century? Is it consistent with Howells's other works? Does the novel raise issues related to, say, gender, sexuality, or race that would lead you to think about how common or uncommon his ideas are? Once you have thought about what makes Howells's novel resonate for you and have read at least one other primary source and done a bit of research, then consider whether your reading of *A Traveler from Altruria* challenges, underscores, or otherwise engages *Rebirth of a Nation*. In short, the challenge for any historian is not merely to uncover something new or understudied, but also to show how knowing it gives us new understandings of the moment in which it occurred. Your essay will have two elements—a discussion of Howells in relation to his own day, and a discussion of his relationship with Lears's interpretation of the turn of the century.

Your paper should be between 7 and 12 pages in length, typed and double-spaced, of course. **BE SURE TO PAGINATE!** This paper is due on Tuesday, September 25, in class.

#### 2. Paper for Part II – DUE Tuesday, October 30

In part II of this course, I want to make use of a very particular archive for which the American Studies program is caretaker—a collection of books, pamphlets, and ephemeral material from the 1930s and early 1940s collected by Victor Schuster, who was a young man at the time, living in Chicago. It is a fairly significant collection of items, and its relationship to this part of the course will become obvious when you visit the collection for the first time on September 25. Like many young men looking for work, for a future, for understanding the complex situation of the 1930s, Schuster found the ideas made available by writers, activists, and artists on the left to be both trenchant and inspiring—and widely available in 1930s Chicago. Instead of assigning a single text for every student in the class, I want each of you to select something from the collection and do the research you need to do to figure out how to situate it in the era and within Denning's framework for the 1930s. The same guidelines apply to this paper as to the one for Part I; the only difference is that I am asking you to make a brief (no more than 20 minutes) presentation to the class to introduce the person/work/theme/idea to your colleagues.

Your paper should be between 7 and 12 pages in length, typed and double-spaced, of course. **BE SURE TO PAGINATE!** This paper is due on Tuesday, October 30, in class.

### **3. Paper for Part II –DUE Wednesday, December 12, by 5:00 p.m.**

**In this part of the course, all students read Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, and Howard Brick's *The Age of Contradiction*, which includes a brief discussion of Harrington's work in the introduction. The elements of the paper assignment are the same as for the first two parts. Situate Harrington's *The Other America* in the thought of his day and think about whether your research has led you to challenge Brick's analysis of it. Even if you ultimately agree with Brick, you should explain how and why your research findings compliment his interpretation.**

**Your paper should be between 7 and 12 pages in length, typed and double-spaced, of course. BE SURE TO PAGINATE! This paper is due on Wednesday, December 12, by 5:00 p.m.**

### **Academic Dishonesty**

At this level in a dual Graduate- advanced Undergraduate course, it should be taken for granted that the work you submit is your own. Since you will be conducting research for each paper, be sure to cite sources you consult. If you are not sure when or how to properly cite a work, as the instructor for assistance—"I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to footnote document X" will not be an acceptable excuse. This is a course in which you can develop your analytical skills and increase your comfort with the best practices of the historical profession. Taking other scholars' work and passing it off (inadvertently or purposefully) is intellectual thievery and it won't be tolerated in this course.

### **Pandemic Policy**

**In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course.**

**Contact Professor Curtis via email: [curtis@purdue.edu](mailto:curtis@purdue.edu)**

**Contact Professor Curtis via telephone: Office: 494-4159**

### **Course and Instructor Evaluation**

During the last two weeks of the semester, you will be provided an opportunity to evaluate this course and your instructor. To this end, Purdue has transitioned to online course evaluations. On Monday of the fifteenth week of classes, you will receive an official email from evaluation administrators with a link to the online evaluation site. You will have two weeks to complete this evaluation. Your participation in this evaluation is an integral part of this course. Your feedback is vital to improving education at Purdue University. I strongly urge you to participate in the evaluation system.