Kathleen Belew
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Social Sciences 225C

**History of the Present**

Lectures: Monday and Wednesday, 10:30-11:20 a.m. HGS 101

Section 1, Wednesday, 3:30-4:20 p.m., Young 106
Section 2, Wednesday, 5:30-6:20 p.m., Cobb 104
Section 3, Wednesday, 6:30-7:20 p.m., Cobb 104
Section 4, Friday, 10:30-11:20 a.m., Cobb 403
(Students attend all lectures and one section meeting)

This course takes a reverse approach to the study of history, defining issues relevant to the current moment—some determined by the students—and exploring the long stories required to understand the present. We might examine the election of 2016, social movements, climate change, debt, gun ownership, statelessness, and other issues. Each topic will occupy one week of the class. Students will learn historical thinking skills, critical reading, and argumentation, and will complete a final assignment geared towards providing historical context for an ongoing debate in the public sphere. This lecture course is an elective open to non-majors and to first- and second-year students, although upper-year students and History majors and minors are welcome. No previous History coursework is required. This class has no exams or long papers.

**Teaching Assistants**
Roland Black, rdblack@uchicago.edu
Trish Kahle, kahle@uchicago.edu
Andrew Seber, andrewseber@uchicago.edu
Alyssa Smith, alyssas@uchicago.edu

**Course Objectives**
1. To recognize historical argumentation when it appears in your news stories, Twitter feed, and conversations, and to learn to evaluate its merit.
2. Introduction to elements of historical thinking and the evaluation of historical evidence.
3. To understand how history informs some major issues of the present moment.
4. To produce a work of public historical scholarship in a condensed form.

**Evaluation**
Students are responsible for completing assigned readings prior to class, regular attendance, and active participation (in class, section, or in office hours). Students will
complete short written assignments every other week and one final project. Course grades will be based on attendance, participation, writing, and the final project.

**Biweekly Assignments:** With the exception of Week 1, students will meet in sections on alternate weeks. On off weeks, students will complete assignments such as worksheets, textual readings, and short response essays (not to exceed 1-5 pages). These assignments will be graded with regard to historical thinking, use of evidence, and style.

**Final Project:** Students will complete a creative final project, choosing from several options outlined and explained at length in class. These may include: a Twitter thread, edits to a Wikipedia page, an op-ed for the Chicago Maroon, or a script for a ten-minute podcast segment. In each case, publication is not required—rather, you don’t in fact have to post the Twitter thread, just to craft one. You are also responsible for creating comprehensive and correctly formatted citations. Projects will be evaluated for historical argumentation, evidence, structure, and style.

**Required Materials**
Available for purchase as an e-book or in hard copy at the Seminary Co-op, and on reserve at Regenstein Library. It is also available online and at many bookstores, and older editions, used copies, and ebooks will satisfy our purposes for this course (although pagination may vary). Please check that you have the volume that covers the twentieth century.

Articles: Posted to Canvas.

**Office Hours**
Teaching assistants will hold open office hours during alternate-week section meeting times. Because this course is so large, please contact a TA first. Then, if needed, you may schedule with Professor Belew at belew.youcanbook.me.

**Calendar**
This course will respond to current events and to requests from students, so the calendar will be determined as we go. The teaching staff will post an updated syllabus weekly.

**INTRODUCTIONS**
**Week 1:** What Historians Do

**Reading:** Jill Lepore, “After the Fact,” *The New Yorker*

**Monday, April 1:** “Fake news,” Fox News, and historical thinking
What is a fact? How do historians, scientists, and others use facts? How do historians find, interpret, and weigh evidence? What sustains a historical argument?

**Wednesday, April 3:** Guest Lecture, Nicole Hemmer, University of Virginia
Facts, God, and the *Bible*: Truth on the Right

**Section:**
- Review of the syllabus
- Logistics
- Divide into A and B groups

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**UNIT 1**

**Week 2:**

Monday, April 8:

Wednesday, April 10:

**Section:**
A: Meet
B: Work

**Week 3:**

Monday, April 15:

Wednesday, April 18:

**Section**
B: Meet
A: Work

Conference on white power and nativist violence, Th-Fri

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**UNIT 2**

**Week 4:**

Monday, April 22:

Wednesday, April 24:

**Section:**
A: Meet
B: Work

**Week 5:**
Monday, April 29:

Wednesday, May 1:

Section:
   B: Meet
   A: Work

UNIT 3
Week 6: Kruse/d'Souza
   Monday, May 6: Guest Lecture, Michael Allen, Northwestern University

   Wednesday, May 8:

   Section:
      A: Meet
      B: Work

Week 7:
   Monday, May 13:

   Wednesday, May 15:

   Section:
      B: Meet
      A: Work

   THURSDAY: Heather Thompson at US History Workshop

UNIT 4
Week 8:
   Monday, May 20:

   Wednesday, May 22:

   Section
      A: Meet
      B: Work

Week 9:
   Monday, May 27: NO CLASS: Memorial Day

   Wednesday, May 29:
Section
A: Meet
B: Work

UNIT 5
Week 10:

Monday, June 3:

Wednesday, June 5:

Section
All meet together

Reading Period: June 6-7

Final Projects due for graduating seniors: Wednesday, June 5, 2:00 p.m.

Final Projects due for all other students: Monday, June 10, 2:00 p.m.

Course Policies

Discussion
This class engages serious and complicated material. Because the goal of this course is to foster critical engagement and lively discussion, offensive or insulting comments; behaviors that disrupt the learning process; visible signs of boredom or disrespect; and abusive language are not acceptable in our conversations. We will strive to create a learning environment in which all students feel safe. Please feel free to vocalize personal reactions to the material as well as critical, scholarly responses.

Accommodations
If you require accommodations for this course, please provide a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) in the first week of class or as soon as possible. The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. Please contact Student Disability Services (773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186) or disabilities@uchicago.edu for further information.

Laptops
Research has repeatedly shown that taking notes by hand enhances learning, whereas laptops lead to distraction and inactive listening. Thus, no laptop computers may be used
in this class except for students with documented disabilities and their note-takers (see above), who may use laptops with prior written permission. Students using laptops must sit in a location determined by the teaching staff in order to reduce distraction to their classmates.

**Recording**
University of Chicago policy states, “Instructors may permit a student to record a class session for the convenience of the student, for the benefit of another student who is unavoidably absent, or as part of an accommodation for a student with a disability. Students must understand that under University policy, permission given by a member of the faculty to record a class is limited to permission to record for personal use only. It is, for example, **never permissible to copy, file-share, sell, distribute, or Web-serve such recordings.**” The use of recording devices in this course is prohibited without advance written permission, and will be permitted only for students with documented disabilities and their note-takers. Recordings made for permitted purposes may not be shared, as sharing such material may violate intellectual property, University of Chicago policy, and the privacy of fellow students.

**Grading**
Late assignments lose one grade per day (your A paper submitted two days late will receive a B+; your B-paper submitted one day late would receive a C+). Extensions are sometimes possible with advance notice and my written consent. Failure on any one assignment, including failure to complete an assignment, constitutes failure in the course; all late work must be made up even if it can no longer earn credit. I do not give reminders, and I may require documentation of emergencies (including technological glitches). Withdrawal from this course after Week 8 may be subject to a “WF” designation in accordance with course policies.

**Attendance**
Attendance at all classes is mandatory. Chronic absence or flagrant disregard of the syllabus will result in an automatic F in the course at my discretion. If you miss class, you should get notes from a classmate and find out what discussion topics and work you have missed before contacting your professor or TA about the possibility of makeup assignments. In-class work can be made up only for excused absences. Content will never be re-delivered or posted online; you can make up course content only by getting notes from a classmate. **Please do not come to class if you are sick.** All medical absences are excused.

**E-mail and Canvas**
You are responsible for reading any e-mail communications and/or Canvas announcements in a timely fashion; they often contain crucial information.

**Style**
Please use *The Chicago Manual of Style* to determine proper language use, citation format, and other stylistic questions that may arise during this course. We will accept assignments
in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, with standard 1-inch margins and numbered pages. Your name and the date should appear on the upper right-hand corner of the first page. If you are changing anything about your paper’s formatting to make it longer or shorter, you are shirking the work of thinking and writing and your grade is likely to reflect this.

**Academic Integrity**
Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism, and to familiarize yourself with the appropriate sections of the *Student Manual of University Policies and Regulations*. Procedures for dealing with plagiarism are mandatory, complicated, and severe. Some consequences of plagiarism include failing the assignment, failing the class, suspension, and expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own.

**Changes**
This syllabus will update several times a week due to the nature of the course. New versions will be posted on Canvas regularly. It is the responsibility of students to consult the latest syllabus for new readings and assignments.