HIST 550.01E – Seminar in American Disaster History
CALL #: 22081
TIME / DATE: W 7:20 – 10:00 PM
LOCATION: SS 124

COURSE SYLLABUS: SPRING 2013

Instructor: Jonathan C. Bergman, J.D., Ph.D.
Office Location: Ferguson Social Sciences 106
Office Hours: M 3:15 – 3:45pm,
T 12:15 – 2:00pm,
W 3:15 – 4:00pm & 6:50 – 7:20pm,
R 12:15 – 2:00pm, by appt.
Office Phone: (903) 468-8742
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Email Address: Jonathan.Bergman@tamuc.edu

COURSE INFORMATION

Textbooks / Readings / Supplementary Materials

Required Texts:
1) Charles Rosenberg, The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866
   (University of Chicago Press)
2) John Barry, Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed
   America (Simon & Schuster, Touchstone)
3) Steven Biel, American Disasters (NYU Press)
4) William McCullough, The Johnstown Flood (Simon & Schuster)
5) James R. Chiles, Inviting Disaster: Lessons from the Edge of Technology

The remainder of the materials will be provided by the instructor on the first day of class on
a data DVD for the sum of $2 each.

Books are available in the College Bookstore located in the Rayburn Student Center and
the East Texas Bookstore. I strongly recommend buying online and used ... check out
and http://www.addall.com/Used/

Late breaking materials and announcements will be posted on eCollege.
Course Description

The Social History of Disaster in America (HIST 597) is a graduate level seminar designed to explore the social fabric of disaster in American society through its varied evolutions. We will start with a definition of the elusive term. Disasters will be chosen as representative of particular eras and themes in American history and the social, cultural, economic, and political facets of disaster production and outcomes. Students will be expected to engage in a robust dialogue with the materials and one another—e.g., you guys are going to “run” the class. Writing skills will be honed through a series of feedback, review and long papers.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will identify the social elements of disaster at work in the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Activities / Assessments / Grading

There are several requirements, obligations, and expectations for students attending The Social History of Disaster in America (HIST 597). The course requirements will be followed by the respective grade weight of each particular category.

1. Weekly Précis/Q&A/Participation: Each week a reading, or selected group of readings, will be assigned. Students will be expected to read the materials, and actively participate in class discussion. This is a seminar after all and you will be expected to “mix it up.” For 2 classes that you do NOT have a primary role as reading leader you must nonetheless (a) bring in a two page précis of the book/articles assigned AND (b) another page with 5 intelligent questions that you will raise and talk about during the discussion period—these should be questions that vex you, you would like to explore more, discuss present day parallels, etc. Grading will be based on the substance and quality of written materials and the ability to frame, answer, and “spitball” questions raised in class. (10% per Précis/Q's (20% Total Grade))

2. Seminar Leaders: On most weeks, you—that’s right, YOU, YOU, YOU, and, oh yeah, YOU!—will be running the class. On designated weeks a tag team duo of y’all will be responsible for guiding the history, disaster and discussion for readings covered in class. Sign-up sheets will be handed out on the first day of class. Tag team duos should meet outside of class to coordinate materials, handouts, arguments. The secondary leader will start with a background of the era in American history to be explored—this should be second nature to all of you. Get an old American history text and prepare a 10 minute presentation and hand out for the class giving us the historical background of the era to be explored in the particular week (this presentation should NOT mention the disaster at all, but facts should be cherry picked with an eye towards contributing factors and outcomes of the disaster). The primary leader should prepare a 20 minute presentation (general and specific) that ties in the secondary leader’s fact pattern to the disaster. A targeted disaster handout should also be prepared that walks the class through your presentation and hits the following areas—social/economic/political/etc. inputs of disaster (pre-impact); elements of the disaster at work (impact); social/economic/political/etc. outputs of disaster (trans-impact); and, most importantly, use the disaster as a tool of historical analysis to uncover nuances of American history laid bare. (20% Total Grade)

3. Short Paper: Movie Review: Read the Quarantelli disaster movie article and watch a disaster movie. Using the article as a theoretical roadmap and analytical fulcrum, pluck out the disaster themes in the film and comment on their salience in the particular epoch in American history and the deeper historical meaning of the disaster film being studied. Film
MUST be cleared by me. 5 pp. (20% Total Grade)

4. Long Paper: Each student will be required to complete one (1) 15 page paper, which will be due on the LAST CLASS, Wednesday, 5/6. You should (a) identify an American disaster not covered in class, (b) assemble a primary and/or secondary reading list of articles, books and/or alternative media examining the disaster (whether or not you use primary source material is up to you, but it couldn’t hurt (Hint: Old newspapers on microfilm in the library are a great primary resource)), (c) review the materials, (d) choose a theme/issue/area/or, blind spot in the scholarship on that particular disaster and write a lengthy discourse on it. Paper benchmarks will be due over the course of the semester—note week breakdowns and stay tuned for details. (40% of total grade)

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

The following technology is required

A working email address on file with the university. Be sure that your listed email is working and you regularly access it for updates. When I send an email a presumption of delivery arises

Internet connection (If you don’t have one at home use the school’s high speed connections)

Word Processor program (If you don’t have one try Open Office – it’s free and works just like MS OFFICE)
http://download.openoffice.org/

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

This course is web-enhanced through eCollege, the Learning Management System used by Texas A&M University-Commerce. eCollege will be used to send you announcements and reminders, and to provide access to course materials such as handouts and assignments. Combined with your university email address, eCollege will be a key means for course communication. THE SET UP AND USE OF eCollege IS A COURSE REQUIREMENT.

To get started with the course, go to: https://leo.tamu-commerce.edu/login.aspx You will need your CWID and password to log in to the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, please contact Technology Services at 903-468-6000 or helpdesk@tamu-commerce.edu.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you cannot see me during regular posted office hours, please send me an email so that we can make an appointment. I am quite happy to see students at any time as long as I don’t have a prior commitment.

Texas A&M University-Commerce provides students technical support in the use of eCollege. The student help desk may be reached by the following means 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you experience any technical issues, feel free to contact the
support desk.

- **Chat Support**: Click on ‘Live Support’ on the tool bar within your course to chat with an eCollege Representative.
- **Phone**: 1-866-656-5511 (Toll Free) to speak with eCollege Technical Support Representative.
- **Email**: helpdesk@online.tamuc.org to initiate a support request with eCollege Technical Support Representative.
- **Help**: Click on the ‘Help’ button on the toolbar for information regarding working with eCollege (i.e. How to submit to dropbox, How to post to discussions etc…).

## COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

### Course and University Procedures

**Attendance**: Attendance is mandatory. 3 or more absences and you get bounced from the class. Excessive tardiness and absences may impact your grade.

**Class Participation**: Each week you are responsible for a group of readings. Students are expected to read the material, and actively participate in class discussion. If you are shy or awkward in public speaking situations I encourage you to speak up. The ability to formulate an argument and present it in public is critical to your development as a citizen, scholar, and member of the workforce. **Sleeping, talking and/or general disinterest will lower your final class grade up to a full letter grade. Likewise, spirited debate, preparation and participation may raise your final class grade up to a full letter grade.**

**Plagiarism and Academic Honesty**: Plagiarism, the use of the ideas, words, and theories of another author without proper attribution, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Students are expected to produce their own work on a timely basis. The tenets of academic honesty, and university policy, demand that any such infractions be met with severe penalties. **IF you are caught, you will be immediately thrown out of the class and receive a grade of F.** If you contest the matter, I will seek a permanent mark on your record noting a violation of the school's honor code. DON'T DO IT! SEE [http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html](http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html) for details.

**Civility, Decorum, and Good Conduct Policy**: All students enrolled in the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. Students are required to comport themselves in a way that is courteous and respectful to his/her fellow students and the instructor. Ad hominem attacks, disruptive conduct, and harassment will be met with the sternest possible sanctions including punishment assignments, seizure of cell phones, and/or expulsion from the class. **THIS INCLUDES TURNING OFF/MUTING ANY AND ALL MP3 PLAYERS, CELL PHONES, COMMUNICATION, AND NOISE GENERATING DEVICES, AND STOWING THEM AWAY DURING CLASS.**

**Writing Center**: Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of the Writing Center for assistance with drafting papers. The Writing Center is an open resource available to all. They will not write your paper; they will help you improve your writing skills. If you use the Writing Center, please plan ahead. They can only help you if you see them in advance and have time to incorporate their suggestions into the final paper. More information can be found at [http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/artsSciences/departments/literatureLanguages/writingCenter/default.aspx](http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/artsSciences/departments/literatureLanguages/writingCenter/default.aspx)
ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu
Student Disability Resources & Services

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

The course materials will be broken down thematically (and temporally) tracing salient issues in American Disaster History. The following outline contains a brief description of the units to be discussed, and the assigned materials for each unit.

**Week One:** Introductions. Expectations. Course Nuts and Bolts. (1/16)

The class will begin with introductions, contact information and administrative nuts and bolts. We will review the syllabus line by line with grading/assignments explained in detail. Sign-up sheets will be distributed for “Seminar Leaders” and Precis/Q&A assignments.

**Week Two:** What is a Disaster? The Evolution of the Elusive Term. Its Usage in the Past and Today. Its Uses in History, Historiography, and the Class. (1/23)


We will examine the elements, presuppositions, and theories of disaster. Sociological, historical, & social scientific literature will be examined to plumb the limits of disaster & its gestations in the human mind. The evolution of disaster will be followed alongside the development of human society. Social & physical characteristics of these events will also be touched on next to more enigmatic concerns. Hopefully, we will have a working definition of what it is—and isn’t!—by the end of class. Assignment—Bring in a newspaper clipping of a disaster, and tell me why it is one.

**Week Three:** Pre-Contact. Native Americans. Native Landscapes. Land (Mis) Use. The Age of

2) Assorted Materials in “Environmental Discourse.”
8) Crosby, *The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians* pamphlet.
10) “American Environmental History,” assorted documents on Indian cultural responses to the Columbian Exchange.

This segment covers disaster in the New World before, during and after contact. New World land use patterns will be explored. The landscape of the Americas will be looked at, and the myth of the virgin landscape will be debunked. The impact of microbes, men, and beasties will also be touched on. The collision of cultures—microscopic and otherwise—will be studied as integral to the process of exploration and disaster. But was it a disaster or a necessary corollary of peoples, plants and “bugs” being thrown together as a result of social, economic and political dynamics of the Age of Exploration.

Week Four: Nineteenth Century Disaster. From Religion to Science to Urban Decay, or, Disasters: What God, Nature and Man Hath Wrought. **LONG PAPER FORUM (ID TOPIC).** (2/6)

SEMINAR LEADER WEEK


This class covers New York City in the 19th century—the Age of Cholera. How did the bustling metropolis handle outbreaks in various time periods? How were the outbreaks interpreted—the same, differently? What about the social, economic, political and medical capacity of early industrial society? Was this disaster “natural,” divine, scientific, modern?


SEMINAR LEADER WEEK

1) McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood.*
4) Watch documentary video, pts. 1-3.
5-8) Watch and explore assorted links.
This class covers post-bellum American disaster history. The effects of industrialization, progressive politics, and regulation on American society will be explored. Was this a “natural” or technological disaster? What does this moment in history tell us about Gilded Age plutocrats, workers, lifestyles, landscapes? What of the site choice? Was it wise to build a settlement at Johnstown, even without the dam/development?

**Week Six:** The Great Chicago Fire. Modernity and Disaster. Disaster and Creative Destruction. Class and Catastrophe. Disaster as a National Event. (2/20)

**SEMINAR LEADER WEEK**

6-8) Read and explore assorted links.

The role of urban disasters in the social and economic development of American society will be examined. We will look at how events before, during and after the Chicago Fire of 1871 were a model of 19th century American life. Was disaster an opportunity for capitalism? How did this disaster unify the country? What does this disaster tell us about urban America in the 19th century? What does it tell us about the social, economic and political order?

**Week Seven:** The Great San Francisco Earthquake & Fire. Progressivism and Disaster. A Rebirth from the Ashes (?). Galveston, Engineers, Reform, and the City Manager Plan. Triangle Shirtwaist, Legal Action, and Public Reform. **LONG PAPER FORUM (ASSEMBLE BIBLIO & REVIEW MATERIALS TO BE HANDED IN).** (2/27)

1) Robert Weibe, “Progressivism Arrives,” in *The Search for Order*.
4) Bixel, “‘It Must Be Made Safe’: Galveston, Texas, and the 1900 Storm,” in Biel’s *American Disasters*, 223-246.
6-7) Read Sanitary Condition and Quarantine Reports.
8-9) Explore assorted links.

This class will concentrate on progressive disaster politics and society. While we will kick off our class with a look at the Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, I also want to explore the Galveston Storm of 1900 and the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. Progressives were generally concerned with mastery over industrial problems of the late 19th-early 20th century. But, disasters also were an opportunity for reform and experimentation. What type of progressive experimentation was exhibited in each disaster and how did the enigmatic group accomplish it?
Week Eight: **ARTICLE & MOVIE REVIEW DISCUSSION. HAND IN SHORT PAPERS.** (3/6)
Read the Quarantelli “Disaster Movie” article, watch a disaster movie, and pluck out the disaster themes and intelligently converse with deeper historiographical themes. Bring in your paper to be handed in. Each person will get 15 minutes to discuss their paper and field questions.

Week Nine: Spring Break Kiddies! Enjoy! (3/13)

Week Ten: Race, Gender and the “Other” in Disaster. (3/20).

1) Barry, *Rising Tide*

This class will examine the dispossessed and minority interests as they intersect with disaster. Through an examination of the Great Mississippi Floods of 1927, Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the Titanic Disaster, we will uncover the often hidden voices in the landscape of American disaster. What do these voices tell us of the disaster at bar? What do they tell us of the social fabric of America? Do these voices differ from majority group interests during disaster? If so, how and how much?


1) Michele Dauber, “Helping Ourselves: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, Department of Sociology, 2003), skip chaps. 3 & 5.
2) Bergman, “A New Deal for Disaster.”
3) Platt, *Disasters and Democracy* excerpt.
4) Popkin “History of Disaster Relief” excerpt from Kirby Hardcover.
5) Watch “Shock Troops of Disaster” video.
6) Examine “19th century Disaster Legislation” folder.

This section focuses on the evolution of disaster relief in the United States. Particular attention will be given to the social, economic, and political forces at work during the New Deal, which gave rise to an expansive federal colossus and relief arm. We will also take a look at some of my own work and the variety of federal programs during the ‘Hurricane of ’38.”

Week Twelve: **WEEK OFF. WORK ON YOUR DRAFT.** (4/3)
In the words of the eminent scholar Larry the Cable Guy: “Get ’er done.”

Week Thirteen: **DRAFT WEEK.** (4/10)
You should have a completed draft—if not in raw pages (but at least 8-10 pp.), then in theory, sources, structure, and for readability—that should be distributed to the entire class, including me, via an email attachment by the Saturday Night before class (4/11). Each student should read everyone else’s draft and offer at least a few written remarks (to be distributed to one another during class (1 page of musings/suggestions/bullet points is fine) and a few oral questions. Everyone will have the floor for about 15 minutes—3-5 minutes to present your project, choices, questions to be explored/answered, structure, sources, etc. with the rest devoted to Q&A/insights/commentary/suggestions with myself and other members of the class. If you’ve never done this before don’t fret…it is an extremely useful tool to sharpen your scholarship. Additionally, if you haven’t grown a thick
skin, there is no better time than the present. But I would caution brown-nosers and wisenheimers…this will not be a forum to cut people up or engage in ad hominem attacks. This is about raising the level of the debate and shaking the bugs out of your papers. Confine remarks—positive and negative—to reasonable and intelligent matters related to the work at issue, and the author’s vision—not yours. Likewise, authors should not and must not get defensive…it’s about the ideas and the paper, not you.


SEMINAR LEADER WEEK
3) Pamela Lueders, “Disaster, Trauma, and Community: The Impact of Floods on Buffalo Creek and Riley County” (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, Department of Sociology, 2003), just read the introductory pieces and those pertaining to Buffalo Creek.
5) Explore assorted links.
This section focuses on disaster, memory and community in the late 20th century American hinterland. How does a local area cope with disaster? How does the history of a place—e.g., coal country W.V., old stock Scots-Irish, etc.—and a country—post-industrialization, globalization, energy use, stagflation, ‘Nam—intersect with disaster? And, how is disaster a construct of this place, and these times? How do we remember disaster? How are local/national, rural/urban, Fed/personal issues negotiated?


SEMINAR LEADER WEEK
In this unit—the final substantive class of the semester—we will explore the growing technological complexity of society and the corresponding increase (?) of technological and natural disasters. While the Chiles book explores various technological facets of the modern world, I want you to come to class armed with some novel tech disasters of your own; and, I would like to explore the nexus between society and disasters today and in the future. What does the future hold? Is tech our salvation or doom?

Week Sixteen:  Yo! Wrap It Up! FINAL PAPERS DUE. (5/1)