



**HIST 550.01E – Seminar in American Disaster History**  
**CALL #: 22365**  
**TIME / DATE: TH 7:20 – 10:00 PM**  
**LOCATION: SS 124**

**COURSE SYLLABUS: SPRING 2015**

**Instructor:** Jonathan C. Bergman, J.D., Ph.D.  
**Office Location:** Ferguson Social Sciences 106  
**Office Hours:** T 11 – 12:30pm, 5:45 - 6:30,  
W 12 – 3:00pm,  
TH 11 - 12:30pm, 6:45 - 7:20pm,  
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#### 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, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History* (Penguin, 2005).
- 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* (New York, N.Y.: HarperBusiness, 2001)
- 6) Richard Preston, *The Hot Zone* (Simon & Schuster, 1987).
- 7) Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief* (Simon & Schuster, 1987).

The remainder of the materials will be provided by the instructor **BRING A THUMB DRIVE WITH AT LEAST 1 gig OF FREE SPACE ON THE FIRST DAY.**

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 [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/283155/ref%3Dtab\\_gw\\_b\\_3/002-0198031-3764822](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/283155/ref%3Dtab_gw_b_3/002-0198031-3764822) and <http://www.addall.com/Used/>

Late breaking materials and announcements will be posted on eCollege.

## Course Description

Seminar in American Disaster History (HIST 550) 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 Influenza Pandemic of 1918.

<b>COURSE REQUIREMENTS</b>
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## Activities / Assessments / Grading

**Précis / Q's:** For 2 classes that you do NOT serve as a SEMINAR LEADER you must nonetheless (a) bring in a three page précis of the book (summary/historiographical review/above the line analysis) **AND** (b) another page with 5 intelligent questions to be discussed during classroom debate — these should be questions that vex you, you would like to explore more, present day issues, etc. Staple them all together and hand in at the beginning of class. Sign-up sheets will be handed out on the first day of class. Grading will be based on the prescience of the review, prose, **and** above the line analysis ... surprise me. **You should also address, in part, the above “Student Learning Outcome.” (5% per Précis/Q's (10% of Total Grade))**

**Participation:** Students are expected to read the materials, and actively participate in class discussion. This is a seminar after all and I expect you to “mix it up.” Commentary, questions, and debate should be focused, intelligent and professional. Ad hominem attacks, non sequiturs and unintelligent banter do not suffice as acceptable participation, nor will they be tolerated. **If you are silent throughout the semester your prospects are dim. (10% of TOTAL GRADE)**

**Seminar Leaders:** On most weeks *you* — that's right, YOU, YOU, YOU, and, oh yeah, YOU! — will be running the class. Solo and/or tag team duos of y'all will be responsible for guiding the history, decadal themes and discussion. Sign-up sheets will be handed out on the first day of class. Teams should meet outside of class to coordinate materials, handouts (if appropriate), arguments, and the presentation. Leaders should prepare a 20 minute .ppt presentation that includes (a) a historical treatment of the featured decade and historical landscape (GENERAL BACKGROUND), and/or (b) the SPECIFICS of the featured book/material/historical episode. You will be graded based on the quality of your presentation, materials used (which must be handed in), and stage presence. **(5% per Presentation (10% Total Grade))**

**Short Paper: Movie Review:** Watch a movie thoroughly grounded in a particular decade in American history from the 20's forward and write a paper discussing themes contained in the movie which are emblematic of that age. Tell me what the themes are, how/why *these* themes are illustrative of this decade/era in American history and what end they serve in society. Film **MUST** be approved by me beforehand. **NO COLD WAR MOVIES.**

You will be graded based on the quality and quantity of themes you can pluck out of the movie and the value of your discussion. **7-10 pp. (20% Total Grade)**

**Long Paper: Students are required to complete one (1) 25 page RESEARCH PAPER due on the LAST WEEK OF CLASS, Friday, 12/5.** Any weekly theme we discuss or some other theme not covered in class is acceptable. Paper topics should be cleared by me before you begin. Paper benchmarks will be due over the course of the semester. Note week breakdowns and stay tuned for details. **(50% 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](mailto: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...).

<b>COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES</b>
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## 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> 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.tamuc-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/artsSciences/departments/literatureLanguages/writingCenter/default.aspx>

### ***Nondiscrimination Statement***

A&M-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status.

Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

### **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@tamuc.edu](mailto:StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu)  
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

<b>COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR</b>
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Week One: Introductions. Expectations. Course Nuts and Bolts. (1/22)

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 Precs/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. (1/29)

- 1) Bergman, "Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *History Compass* 6/3 (2008): 934-946.
- 2) Quarantelli and Wenger, "Disaster: An Entry for an Italian Dictionary of Sociology," Preliminary Paper # 97 (Newark, D.E.: University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center, 1985).
- 3) Steinberg, "What is a Natural Disaster?", *Literature and Medicine* 15 (1996) 1: 33-47.
- 4) "Tunguska," *Rotten Library*.
- 5) Dynes, "Seismic Waves in Intellectual Currents: The Uses of the Lisbon Earthquake in 18<sup>th</sup> century Thought," Preliminary Paper # 272 (Newark, D.E.: University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center, 1998).
- 6) Ludlum, "Voyages of Columbus," excerpt.
- 7) Perley, READ assorted materials on disasters in Colonial New England.

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 Discovery. The Old World Meets the New. The Columbian Exchange. Of Microbes and Men. (2/5)

- 1) Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (Sep., 1992)3: 369-385.
- 2) Assorted Materials in "Environmental Discourse."

- 3) Johnson, "The Anasazi Collapse: Social Strife May Have Exiled Ancient Indians," [http://cpluhna.nau.edu/People/anasazi\\_collapse.htm](http://cpluhna.nau.edu/People/anasazi_collapse.htm) reprinted from *NYT* 20 Aug. 1996.
- 4) Diamond, "Ecological Collapses of Ancient Civilizations: The Golden Age that Never Was," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 47 (Feb., 1994) 5: 37-59.
- 5) Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* excerpt.
- 6) "The Columbian Biological Exchange" chart.
- 7) John Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America*, excerpt.

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 beasts 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)**. (2/12)

- 1) Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (University of Chicago Press).
- 2) "Cholera," *The Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease*.  
This class covers New York City in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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?

Week Five: The Johnstown Flood. The Gilded Age. Industrialization. Land Occupance. Class. Wealth. Work. Bureaucracy. Disaster Relief. (2/19)

- 1) McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*.
- 2) Watch assorted videos and examine 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: Modernity and Disaster. The Great Chicago Fire, Haymarket and Pullman. Disaster and Creative Destruction. Class and Catastrophe. Disaster as a National Event. (2/26)

- 1) Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*.
- 2) Rozario, "What Comes Down Must Go Up: Why Disasters Have Been Good for American Capitalism" in Biel's *American Disasters*, 72-102.  
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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century? What does it tell us about the social, economic and political order?

Week Seven: Progressivism and Disaster. The Great San Francisco Earthquake & Fire. 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).**

(3/5)

- 1) Marie Bolton, "Recovery for Whom? Social Conflict after the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, 1906-1915," (Ph.D. Diss., UC Davis, 1997).
- 2) Bixel, "'It Must Be Made Safe': Galveston, Texas, and the 1900 Storm," in Biel's *American Disasters*, 223-246.
- 3) McEvoy, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911...", *Law & Social Inquiry* 20 (Spring, 1995) 2: 621-651.
- 4-5) 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 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> 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: **MOVIE REVIEW WEEK.** (3/12)

Read the Quarantelli "Disaster Movie" article, watch a disaster movie, pluck out the disaster themes and intelligently converse with the material. 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! (3/19)

Week Ten: The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918. (3/26).

- 1) Barry, *The Great Influenza*

Week Eleven: Disaster Relief and the Rise of the Welfare State. The New Deal. Politics. The 'Hurricane of '38.' The Universe of Relief. (4/2)

- 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) Briefly examine "19<sup>th</sup> 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: Technological Disasters. Modern Lifestyles, Modern Disasters. Are Disasters Getting More Frequent and Worse? (4/9).

- 1) Chiles, *Inviting Disaster: Lessons from the Edge of Technology* (New York, N.Y.: HarperBusiness, 2001).
  - 2) Quarantelli, "More and Worse Disasters in the Future," Preliminary Paper # 158 (Newark, D.E.: University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center, 1991).
- In this unit we explore the growing technological complexity of society and the corresponding increase (?) of technological and natural disasters.

Week Thirteen: Outbreaks, Ebola, the Jet, Globalization and Politics. (4/16)

- 1) Preston, Richard. The Hot Zone

Week Fourteen: **DRAFT WEEK.** (4/23)

You should have a completed draft—if not in raw pages (but at least 7 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 Tuesday Night before class. Each student should read everyone else's draft and offer at least a few written remarks and a few oral questions. Everyone will have the floor for about 20 minutes—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. This is about raising the level of the debate and shaking the bugs out of your papers.

Week Fifteen: WEEK OFF. WORK ON YOUR FINAL PAPER. (4/30)

Week Sixteen: **Yo! Wrap It Up! FINAL PAPERS DUE.** (5/7)