

HIST 389/395

Crime in Modern America

Fall 2022

Professor Stephen Robertson

Monday/Wednesday, 12.00-1.15

Nguyen Engineering Building 1103

Course website: <http://drstephenrobertson.com/hist395>

COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course is a thematic study of the history of crime and its policing and prosecution in the United States from the 1870s to the 1920s. The history of crime provides a perspective on changing ideas about what behavior was deemed illicit in different periods, about the scope, operation and limits of state power, about how social, economic and political structures shaped the actions of individuals, and about the lives of groups who do not appear in other historical sources. You will use newspapers in the Library of Congress' Chronicling America collection to explore the incidence, definition, and policing of offenses such as murder, assault, prostitution, rape, sodomy, theft, counterfeiting and forgery, and arson. To make sense of that evidence, we will examine the history of how newspapers reported crime, the development of criminal law and how the criminal justice system developed. Each student will choose a newspaper from a particular time and place, research each offense in that publication and the criminal law that applied for the class meetings, and for the major assignment develop a digital project that examines the reporting of one of those crimes in their chosen newspaper.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- You will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the history of crime and the criminal justice system in the United States since 1865
- You will Identify and interpret written and visual primary sources and secondary materials such as monographs, scholarly articles, and websites.
- You will have an understanding of how new technologies are transforming historical research, writing, and publishing
- You will learn how to do historical research and scholarship using a range of tools and resources that are available on the web
- You will successfully develop and publish historical scholarship on the web

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Prof. Stephen Robertson
- srober30@gmu.edu
- Office: Horizon Hall 3214
- Office Hours: Monday, 2-3; Wednesday, 2-3; or Zoom Office Hours by appointment

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Important Dates

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| • Last day to add classes—all individualized section forms due | AUGUST 29 |
| • Last day to drop with no tuition penalty | SEPTEMBER 6 |
| • Final Drop Deadline (50% tuition penalty) | SEPTEMBER 13 |
| • Unrestricted Withdrawal (100% tuition penalty, W grade) | SEPTEMBER 14-
SEPTEMBER 27 |

Academic Integrity

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code: “not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, and/or lie in matters related to academic work.” If you are uncertain what that policy covers, see the information provided by the Office of Academic Integrity. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review.

If you are copying and pasting text that someone else wrote, you might be plagiarizing. Pasted or manually retyped text is not plagiarized only when all of the following three conditions are true: 1) the pasted text is surrounded by quotation marks or set off as a block quote, and 2) the pasted text is attributed in your text to its author and its source (e.g., “As Jane Smith writes on her blog . . .”), and 3) the pasted text is cited in a footnote, endnote, and/or a bibliography (e.g., “Smith, Jane. Smith Stuff. Blog. Available <http://smithstuff.wordpress.com>. Accessed August 1, 2012.”)

Disability Accommodations

Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should Contact me to make necessary accommodations. Students should present appropriate verification from the Office of Disability Services (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>, 703-993-2474). All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Diversity Policy

George Mason University is an inclusive community of learners. Your instructor and all classmates should abide by the University's Diversity Policy found at Mason Diversity Statement (<http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/>).

Student Privacy

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See Mason Live (<http://masonlive.gmu.edu>) for more information.

Student Services

- Writing Center < <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu> > (703-993-1200)
- Ask A Librarian < <http://library.gmu.edu/ask> >
- Counseling and Psychological Services < <http://caps.gmu.edu> > (703-993-2380)

Resources and Support Services,

<https://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/undergraduate/resources-and-support-services>

Grading Scale

A+	99-100	4.00
A	93-98	4.00
A-	90-92	3.67
B+	87-89	3.33
B	83-86	3.00
B-	80-82	2.67
C+	77-79	2.33
C	73-76	2.00
C-	70-72	1.67
D	60-69	1.00
F	60 & below	0.00

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment	Percentage of grade	Due Date
Newspaper Description	15	September 11
Search Results	45	September 14-November 7
Dataset	15	November 21
Online Exhibit	30	December 12

1. **Newspaper Description (15% of grade)** ***due by 11.59PM, September 11***

The goal of this assignment is to develop an overview of the paper that you have chosen to research to provide a context for understanding the crime reporting that you will be investigating in the rest of the course. Skim a week of issues of the newspaper you have chosen from two different years (1880 & 1900 or 1900 & 1920), and write a 750-1000-word essay that answers the following questions:

- Identify the newspaper (location, editors, audience etc)
- Identify the two weeks of issues you have examined
- How many pages and columns are in each issue?
- What kind of content is on each page? (news (local, state, national; international); features; ads etc)
- What style of content? (Melodramatic, Sensational, Objective)
- What format of presentation? (headlines, illustrations, length of stories)
- In what ways was the paper different 20 years later? (1880 vs 1900 or 1900 vs 1920)
- How, and on what basis, would you categorize the paper, in terms of the genres of the penny press, yellow journalism, informational press?
- Estimate the accuracy of the OCR for your newspaper – select 100 words from a story in 1880 or 1900, compare with the image of the story, and count how many characters are correct; repeat for a story from 1900 or 1920. What caused the errors? Are there patterns in what letters are wrong, or where on the page the mistakes are?

2. **Search results (45% of grade)** ***due before each Wednesday class****

In weeks 4-12, after spending the Monday class examining historical accounts of a crime, we will spend the Wednesday class analyzing the reporting of that crime in the newspapers each student has chosen to research (**except for Week 12, when we will analyze both historical accounts and reporting in the Monday class*)

Search your newspaper for the crime that is the subject of that week in *either 1880 & 1900 or 1900 & 1920*.

- a. For *each of the two years*, begin by searching for the period June 1 – June 30
- b. Each of the two years of results should include approximately 15-20 items, for *a total of 30-40*
 - a. if a search for the whole month produces too many results, search for June 1 – June 15; continue to reduce the time frame until you have a manageable set of results
 - b. if a search for the whole month produces too few results, extend the period of the search to include additional months or years
- c. Check each result to ensure the story relates to a crime (eg is not a fictional story)
- d. For items that are crimes, scroll to the bottom of the page and copy the url
- e. Paste the URL into a Google sheet titled with the name of the paper, the term you searched and the dates you searched; add a brief note on the details of the crime
- f. Share the completed sheet with Prof. Robertson: srob4757@gmail.com
- g. Come to class prepared to discuss your search results; a portion of the grade for each week will be determined by class participation.
- h. Each set of search results is worth 5% of your grade, for a total of 45%.

3. Dataset (10% of grade)

due by 11.59PM, November 21

Choose one of the crimes studied in the course and develop your search results for that crime into a data set of at least 30-40 stories

- a. Create and complete a Google Sheet that analyses your stories, modeled on the example provided (including columns for location, keywords describing the nature of the crime, and gender and race of the alleged victim and offender). More detailed instructions are on the course website.
- b. Copy the OCR transcription for each story from *Chronicling America* & correct the OCR
- c. Save the Google Sheet as a csv file and import it into Omeka - instructions are on the course website
- d. In Google Sheets, create charts showing the patterns in the data in terms of the location, the nature of the crime, the identities of the participants and law enforcement personnel, and what stage of the legal system is being reported (crime, arrest, arraignment, trial, sentencing).

4. Online exhibit (30% of grade)

due by 11.59PM, December 12

Create an Omeka exhibit interpreting your dataset (assignment #3) that outlines the patterns in the data and interprets them by answering these three questions

1. How do these stories fit with historians' accounts of crime reporting? (refer to the lectures and readings for Weeks 1 & 2)
2. How do these stories fit with historians' accounts of that crime? (refer to the resource for that crime included in the schedule)
3. How do these stories compare with those discussed in an existing student project on this type of crime?

The site should include:

- An about page that describes your newspaper and the search you did to create your dataset (use material from assignment #1; make sure you review the feedback on that assignment)
- A map of the location of the crimes made with the Omeka Map Plugin - instructions are on the course website
- At least one page discussing patterns in where the crimes took place, referring to the map you made, and discussing if there was any change over time
- At least one page discussing the nature of the crime, including an analysis of patterns in the keywords you assigned to the stories, and discussing if there was any change over time. You will likely find that this analysis requires more than one page – with separate pages for each pattern that you found
- At least one page discussing the gender of the alleged victims and offenders, and discussing if there was any change over time
- At least one page discussing the race of the alleged victims and offenders, and discussing if there was any change over time
- At least one page discussing what stages of the legal system feature in the stories
- At least one page comparing the stories with those discussed in an existing student project on this type of crime (and comparisons on relevant pages on specific topics)
- Each page should include the stories you are discussing and any relevant charts you created of your dataset (use material from assignment #3; make sure you review the feedback on that assignment)

- Each page should discuss how the stories fit with that aspect of historians' accounts of the crime and of crime reporting
- The total writing in the exhibit should be 1500-2000 words
- Instructions for creating an exhibit in Omeka S are on the course website; the class in Week 12 will cover exhibit building

SCHEDULE

Week 1:

8/22 - *WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF CRIME? WHAT IS DIGITAL HISTORY?*

8/24 - *UNDERSTANDING TURN-OF-THE-20th-CENTURY NEWSPAPERS & CRIME REPORTING (1)*

Reading: Anne Rubenstein, "Newspapers," *World History Sources*,
<https://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/newsmain.html>

Week 2:

8/29 - *UNDERSTANDING TURN-OF-THE-20th-CENTURY NEWSPAPERS & CRIME REPORTING (2)*

Reading: Michael Trotti, *The Body in the Reservoir: Murder and Sensationalism in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2008), chap. 3: "The Disenchantment of Sensational Murder," 80-109.

8/31 - *UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL NEWSPAPERS: Chronicling America, digitization, OCR, & search*

Projects using *Chronicling America*:

- [Chronicling America Data Visualizations](#)
- Projects Using Chronicling America
 - [Mapping Texts](#)
 - [Newspaper Navigator](#)
 - [US News Map](#)
 - [Viral Texts: Mapping Networks of Reprinting in 19th-Century Newspapers and Magazines](#)
 - [America's Public Bible: Biblical Quotations in U.S. Newspapers](#)
 - [American Lynching: Uncovering a Cultural Narrative](#)

Week 3:

9/5 - LABOR DAY – NO CLASS

9/7 - WORKING WITH DIGITAL NEWSPAPERS

- Choose the newspaper that will be the focus of your work in this course. When you choose a paper, use this list and make sure there are issues of the paper in the database for either the years 1880-1900 or 1900-1920.
- *Chronicling Crime* (the course project site):
<https://drstephenrobertson.com/chroniclingcrime/>

Week 4:

9/12 – MURDER

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Eric Monkkonen, "Homicide: Explaining America's Exceptionalism," *American Historical Review* (2006): 76-94
- Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Harvard University Press, 2009)
- Jeffrey Adler, *First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt: Homicide in Chicago, 1875-1920* (Harvard University Press, 2009)

9/14 – MURDER – in *Chronicling America* newspapers

Search term: Murder

Week 5:

9/19 – ASSAULT

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Joshua Stein, "Privatizing Violence: A Transformation in the Jurisprudence of Assault," *Law and History Review* 30, 2 (2012)
- Pamela Haag, "The ill-use of a wife: Patterns of working-class violence in domestic and public New York City, 1860-1880," *Journal of Social History* 25, 3 (1992): 447-77.
- Donna Graves, "'We'll Fight It Out Fair Right Now': Homicide, Felony Assault, and Gender in Kansas City, Kansas, 1890-1920," *Kansas History*, 26, 1 (2003)

9/21 – ASSAULT– in *Chronicling America* newspapers

Search term: assault

Week 6:

9/26 – MORALS OFFENSES: GAMBLING

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Mark H. Haller, "The Changing Structure of American Gambling in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social Issues* 35 (1979): 87-114.

- Shane White, "City of Numbers: Rethinking Harlem's Place in Black Business History," in *Race Capital? Harlem as Setting and Symbol*, ed Andrew Fearnley and Daniel Matlin (Columbia University Press, 2019)

9/28 – *MORALS OFFENSES: GAMBLING – in Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: gambling; lottery; cards; dice

Week 7:

10/3 – *MORALS OFFENSES: LIQUOR & PROHIBITION*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*, chap. 3: "Selective Enforcement," 67-102

10/5– *MORALS OFFENSES: LIQUOR & PROHIBITION – in Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: liquor; drunkenness; prohibition; smuggling; license; bootlegger; padlocking; conspiracy; raid

Week 8: *Class on Tuesday

10/11* - *PROPERTY CRIME: THEFT*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Katherine Unterman, "Boodle over the Border: Embezzlement and the Crisis of International Mobility, 1880–1890," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, 2 (2012): 151-189

10/12 - *PROPERTY CRIME: THEFT – in Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: embezzlement; theft; stealing; stolen

Week 9:

10/17 – *PROPERTY CRIME: COUNTERFEITING & FORGERY*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- David Johnson, *Illegal Tender: Counterfeiting and the Secret Service in Nineteenth-Century America*, chap. 2: 37-64; & chap. 7: Crime and Power, 171-180

10/19 – *PROPERTY CRIME: COUNTERFEITING & FORGERY – in Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: counterfeit; forgery

Week 10:

10/24 – *PROPERTY CRIME: ARSON*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Victor Jew, "The "meanest man in the world": arson in the United States: A history of legal and social responses to incendiarism, 1870-1920 (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994), Conclusion, 383-393
- Albert Smith, "'Southern Violence' Reconsidered: Arson as Protest in Black-Belt Georgia, 1865-1910," *Journal of Southern History* 51, 4 (1985)

10/26 - *PROPERTY CRIME: ARSON* – in *Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: arson

Week 11:

10/31– *SEX OFFENSES: RAPE*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Estelle Freedman, "'Crimes which startle and horrify': Gender, Age, and the Racialization of Sexual Violence in White American Newspapers, 1870-1900," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, 3 (2011): 465-497

11/2– *SEX OFFENSES: RAPE* – in *Chronicling America newspapers*

Search: criminal assault; rape

Week 12:

11/7 – *SEX OFFENSES: SODOMY*– in *Chronicling America newspapers*

Resources for assignment #4 (links on website):

- Stephen Robertson, "Shifting the Scene of the Crime: Sodomy and the American History of Sexual Violence," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, 2 (May 2010): 223-242

Search: sodomy; crime against nature; unnatural act; buggery

11/9 - *EXHIBIT BUILDING IN OMEKA S*

Week 13:

11/14 – *THE SYSTEM (1)*

Reading: William Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), chap. 5: "Criminal Justice in the Gilded Age," 129-157

11/16 – *THE SYSTEM (2)*

Reading: Elizabeth Dale, *Criminal Justice in the United States, 1789-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chap. 5: "Criminal Justice 1900-1936," 97-121.

Week 14:

11/21 – NO CLASS

11/23 - THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

Week 15:

11/28 – *WORKING WITH YOUR DATA*

11/30 – *WORKING WITH OMEKA S*