HIST 588: Readings in Nineteenth-Century American History
Spring 2011 / Rice University / Dr. Caleb McDaniel
Thursdays, 2:30-5:30 pm, Humanities 327

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Objectives:
The objectives of this seminar are (a) to introduce graduate students to some of the major recent problems and questions in the field of nineteenth-century American history and (b) to learn to identify the historiographical issues that recent works of scholarship address and connect their individual arguments to larger debates in the field.

Assignments:
The semester is roughly divided into two parts. In the first half of the semester, all seminar participants will complete a “common reading”—usually a journal article or set of articles that deals with a major problem in the field—as well as an individual reading assignment of one book that somehow addresses the debate(s) introduced by the common reading. In these weeks, all seminar participants are responsible for (a) completing both the common reading and the individual reading and preparing notes that will enable you to participate in a classroom discussion focused on the common reading, but informed by the individual readings; (b) writing a blog post by midnight on the Wednesday preceding class that provides a brief precis of the individual reading’s major arguments, points, and sources, and also discusses how the individual reading speaks to, expands on, or addresses the problems outlined in one or more of the common readings; (c) reading the blog posts of the other participants in the seminar in preparation for the in-class discussion on Thursday. Assignments of the individual readings and further guidelines for blogging will take place on the first day of class; other assignments may be indicated on the schedule or distributed in the seminar.

In the second half of the semester, we will all read one major recent book in the field of nineteenth-century American history each week. In this half, all participants are responsible for reading the week’s common reading each week. But on the first day of class each week’s book will also be assigned to two seminar participants who will be responsible for (a) leading that week’s discussion of the book in class; (b) working together to identify two broad historiographical literatures, questions, or problems the book addresses, and then to divide those two historiographical issues between them; (c) doing additional reading to identify other books with which the work in question is in conversation, in sympathy, or in dispute with, and working individually to write weekly, informal blog posts that keep seminar participants updated about what they are learning; these posts will precede and continue beyond the actual date of discussion of the book. Imagine this as your goal: if the book in question were on one of the “individual reading lists” of the sort provided in the first half of the semester, what other books would be on that list, and what “common reading” might it address? Your aim is both to create that list and by the end of the semester to work your way through the readings that you would put on it.
The final writing assignment for the semester is to write a more formal, 10- to 15-page historiographical essay, drawing on the work you have done in your blog posts during the second half, which (a) reviews the assigned reading book that you have been focusing on and (b) shows how it connects to a broader, coherent historiographical debate initiated by books or articles that preceded it on a particular question. Imagine this as a much more extended version of the sort of writing you did for your individual reading blog posts at the beginning of the semester—a review of the book that addresses its historiographical contributions, rejoinders, questions, answers, etc.

In sum, your work in this seminar will consist of (a) doing reading that is assigned for discussion that week in the seminar, as well as doing reading related to your particular assigned book for the second half of the semester; (b) writing weekly blog posts that either review the individual book you have been assigned (first half of the semester) or, in the second half of the semester, report informally and regularly on the work you are doing related to the major recent book that you have been assigned to with one other participant.

Schedule of Readings:

PART I

January 13
Organization; Assignment of readings
Also, read and discuss these articles:


January 20
By this week, have your blog set up on http://blogs.rice.edu. You may wish to introduce yourself further to other participants with a brief introductory post on your historical interests, but this is not required. You should, however, write and publish a post that either (a) compares and contrasts the Furstenberg and Mehta articles—how do their arguments explaining the exclusion of certain groups from a liberal society differ or resemble each other? OR (b) discusses how Furstenberg builds on or departs from the earlier historiography on republicanism discussed in the Rodgers article.

Common Reading:
January 27

Common reading:


Individual readings:


Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Onedia County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982)


Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989)


Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995)


February 3

Common Reading


Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of*
American History 89, no. 1 (June 2002).

Individual Readings
- Laura Tabili, "*We Ask for British Justice*": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994)

February 10

Common Reading
- Michael P. Johnson, "*Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,*" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. ser., 58, no. 4 (2001), 915-976.
- Walter Johnson, "*On Agency,*" *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (Fall 2003), 113-124.

Individual Readings
- Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton:
Stephanie McCurry, Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

February 17
Common Readings:

Individual Readings:


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PART II


March 3: No class: Spring Break


March 24: No class: Spring Recess


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