

The Graduate School and University Center  
City University of New York  
Ph D. Program in History

### **History 84900: First Year Seminar in American History**

Thomas Kessner  
212 817-8437; [Tkessner@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:Tkessner@gc.cuny.edu)

Fall, 2021  
Office hours: Th: 11-1:30 or by appt.

This seminar is designed to train incoming graduate students in the craft of historical research and writing. Over the course of the term, each student will formulate a research topic, prepare a bibliography of relevant primary and secondary sources, write an historiographic essay, and present and defend a formal project proposal for the substantial research paper that is to be completed in the second semester seminar. Weekly meetings will discuss common readings, share and critique written work, and develop and refine the research proposals. We will also be devoting some time to methods and issues involved in undergraduate teaching.

Students should focus primarily on framing a topic and honing a well defined, focused, and reasonable research proposal for their papers. The purpose of the collateral assignments is to help push this process forward. Thus, from the very beginning students should be thinking about their research project, sampling secondary readings, and investigating the availability of accessible sources.

**Course learning objectives:** Familiarize students with the full range of issues we confront as historians trying to do original work: how to shape researchable questions; how to find and cull through appropriate sources; how to weigh and interpret evidence, construct arguments, and situate one's own work in the wider debates in the discipline.

Over the course of the semester students will be expected to:

- formulate an historical research question
- master the research process
- assemble a relevant and effective bibliography
- shape a methodology for a historical research project
- demonstrate effective use of evidence and research
- read historical works critically and analytically
- propose a well defined research project for an article length historical paper
- critically review and analyze the work of others

#### **Schedule of class meetings with assignments and timetables**

\*Aug. 26. Introductions, Orientation: Selecting a Topic

\*Sept. 2. Read:

Barbara Young Welke, "The Cowboy Suit Tragedy: Spreading Risk....,"  
*Journal of American History*, 97-122, June 2014.

Then select one of the articles cited at the end of this syllabus from a recent *Journal of American History* or *American Historical Review* volume.

Prepare a 3-4 page paper that summarizes the main argument and discusses: the central question; approach and methodology; identify the main sources used as the basis of the articles; and conclude with an assessment of the overall quality and persuasiveness of the essays.

Finally, compare the strengths and weaknesses of the article you have read with the Welke article.

- Sept. 9      Individual meetings. Discuss your topic: scope, sources and secondary readings.
- Sept. 23      “Between Footnotes and Plagiarism: Imagination, Creativity and Scholarship.” Read the *Journal of American History*, March, 2004 Round Table discussion pp. 1325-1357 and write a 3 page essay addressing one of the fundamental issues raised.
- Sept. 30      For the topic you have selected do the following:  
                 a. prepare a list of primary and secondary sources  
                 b. discuss how these sources are central to your paper and will be useful in addressing your research question
- Oct. 7        Read one of the following historian interchanges. References to articles and http: info on Pp. 6-8.  
*HISTORIANS AND NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES*,  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020.
- 
- Or  
*JULIUS S. SCOTT’S THE COMMON WIND: AFRO-AMERICAN CURRENTS IN THE AGE OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION*, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020.
- 
- Or  
*RETHINKING THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD* *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020.
- 

Discussants each define a topic and prepare short talk..

Prepare and circulate a one page description of the central question that you propose to investigate and its significance. Discuss in class.

Oct. 14 Prepare a four page discussion of the historiography (the present state of relevant scholarship) surrounding your topic with a bibliography of important monographs in your area.

Oct. 21 In a one page submission discuss a book or article that might best serve as a model for the type of study you intend to do.

\*Oct. 28 Undergraduate Teaching. Read:

Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, Joel Breakstone, What Is Learned in College History Classes? *Journal of American History*, Volume 104, Issue 4, March 2018, Pages 983–993, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jax434>

Bridget Ford, Katherine Chilton, Christopher Endy, Michael Henderson, Brad A. Jones ..., Beyond Big Data: Teaching Introductory U.S. History in the Age of Student Success, *Journal of American History*, Volume 106, Issue 4, March 2020, Pages 989–1011, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaz679>

David J. Voelker, Beyond Coverage: Tackling Student Success in the Introductory History Course, *Journal of American History*, Volume 106, Issue 4, March 2020, Pages 1012–1015, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaz680>

Laura M Westhoff, Robert D Johnston, Thinking beyond the Essay: Varieties of Student Historical Writing, *Journal of American History*, Volume 107, Issue 4, March 2021, Pages 922–925, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaaa463>

Lendol Calder, Robert Williams, Must History Students Write History Essays?, *Journal of American History*, Volume 107, Issue 4, March 2021, Pages 926–941, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaaa464>

Kelly King-O'Brien, Gordon Mantler, Nan Mullenneaux, Kristen Neuschel, Reimagining Writing in History Courses, *Journal of American History*, Volume 107, Issue 4, March 2021, Pages 942–954, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaaa465>

Sheila McManus, Go beyond the Research Essay with Engaging, Effective History Assignments, *Journal of American History*, Volume 107, Issue 4, March 2021, Pages 963–967, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaaa467>

Discussants: Report and Critique.  
Department requirements, the syllabus, a bow to the local learning culture, selecting texts, preparing lessons, priming discussions, exams, grades.

- Nov. 4 Discuss the methodology for your paper. Remember methodology does not mean which library you intend to visit or which sources you plan on working with, it does mean discussing your research strategy. It may help you to think in terms of how you propose to structure the various sections of the paper (perhaps in the form of sections) and how this will move the analysis forward to your conclusion.
- Nov. 11 Presentation, critiquing and revising draft research proposals. The seminar will read and critique all proposals prepared by its members. Drafts will be sent by email for review and preparation of oral critiques to be discussed in class.
- Nov. 18 Presentation: critiquing and revision of draft research proposals.
- \*Dec. 2 15-minute Power Point conference-paper style revised presentations (with comments from critic/ discussant) of the final research plan/ proposal with potential implications of research findings on current scholarly understanding. Group I
- Dec. 9 15-minute Power Point conference-paper style revised presentations (with comments from critic/ discussant) of the final research plan/ proposal with potential implications of research findings on current scholarly understanding. Group II
- Dec. 16 Submit the final proposal

### **Article selections for week Two**

Joanne Meyerowitz, 180 Op–Eds: Or How to Make the Present Historical, *Journal of American History*, Volume 107, Issue 2, September 2020, Pages 323–335, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaaa335>

Kaeten Mistry, A Transnational Protest against the National Security State: Whistle-Blowing, Philip Agee, and Networks of Dissent , *Journal of American History*, Volume 106, Issue 2, September 2019, Pages 362–389, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jaz345>

Jonathan Bell, Rethinking the “Straight State”: Welfare Politics, Health Care, and Public Policy in the Shadow of AIDS, *Journal of American History*, Volume 104, Issue 4, March 2018, Pages 931–952, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jax430>

Mary Beth Norton, History on the Diagonal, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 124, Issue 1, February 2019, Pages 1–19,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhy572>

Manisha Sinha, The Problem of Abolition in the Age of Capitalism  
*The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823*, by David Brion Davis,  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 124, Issue 1, February 2019, Pages  
144–163, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhy578>

Joseph Fronczak, The Fascist Game: Transnational Political Transmission and the  
Genesis of the U.S. Modern Right, *Journal of American History*, Volume 105, Issue 3,  
December 2018, Pages 563–588, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/jahist/jay279>

.....

### ***HISTORIANS AND NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES***

---

Introduction, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages  
517–518, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa199>

David J. Silverman, Living with the Past: Thoughts on Community Collaboration and  
Difficult History in Native American and Indigenous Studies, *The American Historical  
Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 519–527,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa193>

Christine M. DeLucia, Continuing the Intervention: Past, Present, and Future Pathways  
for Native Studies and Early American History, *The American Historical Review*,  
Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 528–532,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa194>

Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Contexts for Critique: Revisiting Representations of Violence  
in *Our Beloved Kin*, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020,  
Pages 533–536, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa195>

Philip J. Deloria, Cold Business and the Hot Take, *The American Historical Review*,  
Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 537–541,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa196>

Jean M. O'Brien, What Does Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) Do?

*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 542–545,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa198>

David J. Silverman, Historians and Native American and Indigenous Studies: A Reply  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 546–551,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa197>

***AHR REVIEW ROUNDTABLE: JULIUS S. SCOTT'S THE COMMON WIND:  
AFRO-AMERICAN CURRENTS IN THE AGE OF THE HAITIAN  
REVOLUTION***

---

Introduction, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages  
915–916, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa292>

Laurent Dubois, Going to the Territory  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 917–920,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa277>

Matthew J. Smith, Pursuance: The Movement of *The Common Wind*,  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 921–925,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa230>

Natasha Lightfoot, *The Common Wind: A Masterful Study of  
the Masterless Revolutionary Atlantic*, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125,  
Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 926–930,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa192>

Cristina Soriano, Julius Scott's Masterless Caribbean and the Force of Its Common Wind,  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 931–935,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa229>

Brandon R. Byrd, African Americans, Haiti, and the Incessant Common Wind,  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 936–940,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa234>

Sasha Turner, In the Shadow of the Wind, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125,  
Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 941–947,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa232>

***AHR EXCHANGE: RETHINKING THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD***

---

Introduction, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Page 1260, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa467>

Sarah Maza, The Kids Aren't All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1261–1285, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa380>

Steven Mintz. Children's History Matters, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1286–1292,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa382>

Nara Milanich, Comment on Sarah Maza's "The Kids Aren't All Right"  
*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1293–1295, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa381>

Robin P. Chapdelaine, Little Voices: The Importance and Limitations of Children's Histories, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1296–1299, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa377>

Ishita Pande, Is the History of Childhood Ready for the World? A Response to "The Kids Aren't All Right", *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1300–1305, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa383>

Bengt Sandin, History of Children and Childhood—Being and Becoming, Dependent and Independent, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1306–1316, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa369>

[Sarah Maza](#), Getting Personal with Our Sources: A Response, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 1317–1322,  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/ahr/rhaa479>