**Hist. 84900: Seminar in American History I**

**Professor Andrew W. Robertson | Ph.D. Program in History, CUNY Graduate Center | Fall 2020**

Class time: T 10:30-12:30 Office hour: Tuesdays 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

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**Course Description:** This is the first course in a two-semester sequence for first-year students whose major field is the United States. By the end of the *second* semester, each student will have written an article-length paper that is substantially based in primary-source research, makes an original argument, and advances the scholarly literature on its topic. Working towards that goal, the first semester seminar focuses on training students:

1.) in refining their understanding of the craft of history
2.) in developing a well-defined project proposal that each student can reasonably expect to complete by the end of the second semester.

Students will identify topics, hone their questions, develop a bibliography of relevant primary and secondary sources, and write a historiographic essay. They will also become acquainted with issues of professional ethics in research and writing. By the end of the course, each student will have produced a formal research proposal and presented it to the class in the format of an academic conference presentation complete with an accompanying slide show. Seminar members will also circulate drafts and constructively criticize one another’s work.

**Working and Collaborating Remotely:** Given the limitations of the pandemic, this seminar will meet virtually via Zoom for each seminar session, on Tuesdays from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. We will be meeting in joint Zoom sessions with Hist 82600, the First-Year Seminar in European and non-US History. Professor Francesca Bregoli and I have scheduled joint sessions for Weeks 1 and 3, which will be virtual tours of the GC Library and the New York Public Library. In Weeks 10-14 the two seminars will meet jointly for presentations and comments by students, with two students presenting each week, one in US history and the other in European/World. The final session of the semester will also be a joint session with a wrap-up discussion and break-out sessions for small group conversations.

Each student will meet virtually in conference with Professor Robertson twice during the semester. Every student will also need to make an appointment to meet virtually with their faculty adviser at least once.

All written assignments must be submitted via Blackboard under “Assignments.”

**Learning Goals:** Students successfully completing this course will demonstrate their abilities to:

- formulate a historical research question
- assemble a bibliography of relevant sources
- plan a methodology for the research project
- read historical works analytically and critically
- write a well-defined research proposal for an article-length historical paper
- constructively criticize the work of others
Assignments:
• (25%) Five short (1-5 pp.) writings call for either a critical response to an assigned reading or an update on some aspect of your project.
• (40%) Research proposal should be from 10-15 pages long (not counting the bibliography) and consists of the following five elements: 1. Statement of the problem (1-2 pages) 2. Historiography (4-5 pages) 3. Sources and Methodology (3-5 pages) 4. Possible Significance (2-3 pages) 5. Bibliography of primary and secondary sources
• (15%) Conference-style presentation of the final proposal will be 15 minutes, replete with a slide show, followed by feedback from a designated commenter and the audience.
• (20%) Attendance and participation. Your attendance is expected at every session, and, since this is a graduate seminar, your active participation in discussion is essential and required.

Required Reading:

The full text of these books are available online through the Graduate Center library.


Schedule of Meetings, Topics, and Assignments:
(Meetings in Joint Session with Hist 82600 are marked with an asterisk*)

*Week 1, 9/1: Introductions and orientation  Virtual tour of the Mina Rees Library Gaddis, The Landscape of History, pp.1-34.

Week 2, 9/8: Selecting your topic and refining your question
➤ Read Booth, Craft of Research, pp. 29-64.

*Week 3, 9/15: 10:30-1:00 Visit to the New York Public Library; 12:30-1:30 Tour of the Manuscript and Archives Division. Developing your bibliography
➤ Read The Craft of Research, pp. 65-104; Foner and McGirr, American History Now, pp. 201-260.

Week 4, 9/22: Discussion of topics: scope, sources, and secondary readings
➤ Read Foner and McGirr, pp. 261-313.
➤ By noon on Friday, 9/25, circulate to the seminar a preliminary bibliography of both key primary-source collections and approximately twenty secondary sources of books and journal articles.

Week 5, 9/29: No Class (Following Yom Kippur).
➤ Read Foner and McGirr, pp. 314-420.
➤ Prepare and circulate by noon on Friday, 10/2, a 1-page description of the central question that you propose to investigate and its significance. ➤ Submit to Professor Robertson via email a 4- to 5-page discussion of the historiography surrounding your topic.

Week 6, 10/6: Discussion of central question that you propose to investigate and its significance. Discussion of Historiography
➤ Read the following articles:

Week 7, 10/13: Elements of the journal article genre
For the article that you have chosen, write a 2- to 3-page paper that addresses the following questions: What are the author’s central question and main argument? What major types of primary sources (e.g., newspapers, letters, or government records) does the article rely on? If the author cites unpublished material, what are the principal collections and archives cited? How does the article situate itself within the relevant historical literature? (This is sometimes referred to as the article’s “scholarly intervention.”) Finally, what does the author claim as the larger significance for the article?

Week 8, 10/20: A model for your project
➤ In a 1-page submission due on Friday 10/23, discuss a book or article that might best serve as a model for the type of study that you intend to do.
➤ Make an appointment to discuss with Professor Robertson the research strategy for your paper. It may help you to think in terms of how you propose to structure the various elements of the paper (perhaps in the form of sections) and how this will move the analysis forward to your conclusion.

Week 9, 10/27: Plotting your research strategy
Professional ethics in research and writing

*Week 10, 11/3: Group 1 Presentations and Critiques (Pre-circulate papers by 10/31)

*Week 11, 11/10: Group 2 Presentations and critiques (Pre-circulate papers by 11/6)

*Week 12, 11/17: Group 3 Presentations and critiques (Pre-circulate papers by 11/13)

*Week 13, 11/24: Group 4 Presentations and critiques (Pre-circulate papers by 11/20)

*Week 14, 12/1: Group 2 Presentations and critiques (Pre-circulate papers by 11/23)

*Week 15, 12/8: Final wrap-up Final proposals are due 12/15.