Hist. 80010: Historiography Survey: American History I
Fall 2023, Fridays 11:45 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.

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Office hours (Rm. 5405): by appointment

This course introduces Ph.D. students to the historiography of the U.S. through the Civil War and prepares students for the First Written Examination or an outside field in U.S. history.

One of our primary concerns will be periodization. To what extent should the colonial period be considered a prologue to U.S. history? What’s more important, the origins of distinctly modern or American developments—the making of the United States—or the distinctly early dimensions of seventeenth and eighteenth century North America? What is the status of the Revolution and the Civil War, and the political history that drives or used to drive the narrative of U.S. history between these events, amid transformations otherwise seen as social, cultural, economic? Is there a coherence or continuity to U.S. history beyond the particularities of the early republic or Civil War periods? Are there explanations, or themes, that that cut across centuries and thus can organize the larger story? Another important theme of the course is space, within and beyond the places that became the United States during this period and afterwards. Is U.S. history the story of provinces or regions becoming a nation-state, or of sections of regions converging or diverging? What weight should be given to the local in a moment when historians are reassessing the international or even global nature of early modern as well as modern history? Should “Atlantic” and “continental” approaches change the narrative? Can empire or empires provide a more compelling and honest as well as capacious history while allowing for the different experiences of different groups in different places?

The books and articles we shall discuss include prizewinning narratives, classics that are still in print after decades, recent monographs born as dissertations, leading and lauded (and this year, a brand-new) syntheses, and historiographical essays. An important part of what we will be doing is attempting to read these in light of each other. The reading is extensive, in recognition of the five credits this course carries and its status as a prerequisite for the first qualifying examination. Our goal is to prepare for the exam, of course, but also to prepare to teach this period at the college level and to lay a substantial foundation for future research and teaching in any specialty and period of U.S. history.

Instead of a seminar paper or historiographical essay, each student will write several papers of approximately 1000 words stating the main interventions (historiographical, methodological, structural, theoretical) of a particular assigned book, while also summarizing (by reading available scholarly reviews) the critical response to the book. These papers will be circulated to the entire class on Thursdays by 5:00pm via email and will serve as jumping off points for our Friday seminar discussions. These papers will rotate equally among students, in accordance with a schedule determined on the first day of class.

Schedule of readings/discussions
Books with a + are available electronically via the GC library. Articles and book chapters will be posted on Blackboard.
WEEK ONE (Aug. 25): Introduction

WEEK TWO (Sept. 1): National History, Historians, and Changing Terms
Annette Gordon-Reed, *On Juneteenth* (2021), Preface, chaps. 1, 3, Coda (pp. 11–14, 17–9, 57–73, 139–41)


[Note: class does not meet on Friday, Sept. 15]

WEEK FOUR (Sept. 22): Organizing Early America
+Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* (2016) [for e-book, access via the “Oxford Academic” database via NYPL—it does not show up on Onseach]

WEEK FIVE (Sept. 29): Settler Colonists and the Indigenous in Early America
Jeffrey Ostler, Nancy Shoemaker, et al., “Settler Colonialism in Early American History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, 3 (July 2019): 361–450
WEEK SIX (Oct. 6): New York Before the Empire State

WEEK SEVEN (Oct. 13): Questions about the Long Revolutionary Era
[Note: This class will not meet at the usual time and will have to be rescheduled.]
Barbara Clark Smith, The Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America (2009)

Andrew Shankman, “Toward a Social History of Federalism: The State and Capitalism to and From the American Revolution,” Journal of the Early Republic 37 (winter 2017): 615–53

WEEK NINE (Oct. 27): “Early Republic”: Political Culture and Broad Ideas of Polity
Caitlin Fitz, Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions (2016)

WEEK TEN (Nov. 3): Antebellum Slavery as War

WEEK ELEVEN (Nov. 10): Cities, Environment, and Health
+Catherine McNeur, Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City (2014)
WEEK TWELVE (Nov. 17): Sexuality in Early America
+Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same Sex Marriage in Early America* (2014)

[Note: class does not meet on Fri., Nov. 24; CUNY is closed for Thanksgiving]

WEEK THIRTEEN (Dec. 1): Slavery and Capitalism

WEEK FOURTEEN (Dec. 8): Rethinking the Civil War
Scott Hancock, “Crossing Freedom’s Fault Line: The Underground Railroad and Recentering African Americans in Civil War Causality,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (June 2013), 159–92
Kevin M. Gannon, “The Civil War as a Settler-Colonial Revolution,” *Age of Revolutions* blog (Jan. 18, 2016)
Ariel Ron, “How Twitter Explains the Civil War (and Vice Versa): Political Violence and Communications Revolutions],” *The Strong Paw of Reason* blog (Jan. 6, 2021)

Monday, Dec. 18: FIRST WRITTEN EXAMINATION