

History 9817
United States History and Historiography
Winter 2024

Professor Rob MacDougall

rmacdou@uwo.ca

Department of History, Lawson Hall 2228

Office Hours: TBA (but you may drop in or email any time)

This is a draft outline, subject to change.
Please see our course OWL site for an up-to-date syllabus once the term begins.

Course Description

“Historiography” means both the writing of history and the study of historical writing itself. This seminar approaches historiography in both senses. It will introduce you to some major themes and famous works of United States history, and invite you to develop your skills as readers and critics of historical literature. We will also try to analyze the writing of history—how history is constructed as a written craft. This course is not a comprehensive survey of American history (hardly possible in thirteen weeks!), but rather a history of historical writing about the United States. We will read and discuss a combination of classic and modern texts to see how American historiography has changed over time, and how history is always shaped by the historical, intellectual, and biographical circumstances of those who write it. We will learn a great deal about United States history along the way, but the course is really an intellectual history of history, in the American context.

Assignments and Evaluation

This is a graduate course. **Thorough reading** and **informed discussion**—in every seminar—are the central requirements. You are expected to attend every meeting prepared to **engage actively** with the readings and with each other. Each week, you will also be expected to post online (or email me) a **short response to the readings** for that week or complete some other small assignment.

In the first half of the term, you will write **one historiographic book review** (1250-1750 words, or about 5-7 pages) locating a classic work of U.S. history in its own historical context. In the second half of the term, you will write **a longer historiographic essay** (2500-3500 words, or about 10-14 pages) analyzing a historiographical problem or tracing and discussing the development of historiography on a specific subject over time. This assignment is flexible and can be adapted to meet your needs. (If you are working on a U.S. or U.S.-adjacent history topic for your MA cognate, thesis, or PhD dissertation, you are welcome to use this assignment to develop the historiography section of your research.)

- 20% Preparation, participation, and engagement (in class every week)
- 20% Short homework assignments / online responses
- 20% Historiographic Book Review (due February X)
- 40% Historiographic Essay (due April X)

Objectives and Outcomes

Successful students in History 9817 will learn to:

- Recognize major themes and core works of United States history, and trace the evolution of historical writing on the American past.
- Analyze the relationship between historical scholarship and the historical, intellectual, and biographical circumstances in which that scholarship was produced.
- Make and analyze historiographical arguments.
- Understand and employ a theoretical vocabulary relevant for historiographical discussions.

Readings

The readings for this class are extensive. On most weeks we will be discussing two books, along with some historiographical articles to put those books in context. We will discuss strategies for efficient reading, and I will often direct you to focus on particular chapters or sections of these texts, but the bottom line is that there is a lot of reading, and you are responsible for coming to each class prepared to discuss all readings assigned.

You are welcome to buy the books we read, but I do not require to do so. All readings should be available online or on reserve at D.B. Weldon Library and/or online. I also have copies of some books which I may lend the class, though you will obviously have to share.

Schedule

This is only a tentative list of topics and readings. It will give you an idea of the kind of things we'll be discussing (and the volume of reading), but everything here is still subject to change! Please check our course OWL site in January (and thereafter) for the most up to date information.

After an introductory week, the first half of our course offers a short tour through the major "generations" of American historiography, and some of their most important works. We will often read what several scholars from different eras said about the same subject, in order to illuminate the history *of* history, and how each generation revises, builds upon, or critiques what has gone before.

Week 1 | January X | How To Talk About Books

- Pierre BAYARD, *How To Talk About Books You Haven't Read* (2007).
- Barbara KAMLER and Pat THOMSON, "Persuading an Octopus into a Jar" (2014).

Week 2 | January X | Six Ways to Spot a Witch

Excerpts from:

- George Lyman KITTREDGE, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (1929).
- Perry MILLER, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953).
- Paul BOYER & Stephen NISSENBAUM, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974).
- Carol KARLSEN, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (1987).
- Mary Beth NORTON, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (2002).
- Gretchen ADAMS, *The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America* (2008).

Week 3 | January X | Turner, Beard, and Du Bois

Excerpts from:

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- Frederick Jackson TURNER, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).
- Charles BEARD, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913).
- W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935).
- David BROWN, *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in Historical Writing* (2009).
- Nancy FRASER, “Why Black Reconstruction Matters” (2022).

Week 4 | January X | From Consensus to the New Social History

Excerpts from:

- Richard HOFSTADTER, *The Age of Reform* (1955).
- Lawrence GOODWYN, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (1976).
- David BROWN, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (2006).
- Charles POSTEL, *The Populist Vision* (2007).

Week 5 | February X | Slavery and Agency

Excerpts from:

- Stanley ELKINS, *Slavery* (1959).
- John BLASSINGAME, *The Slave Community* (1972).
- Eugene GENOVESE, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974).
- Deborah Gray WHITE, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985, 1999).
- Walter JOHNSON, “On Agency” (2003).
- Stephanie CAMP, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (2004).
- Edward BAPTIST, “Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor” (2016).

Week 6 | February X | From Women’s History to Gender

Excerpts from:

- Eleanor FLEXNER, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (1959).
- Caroll SMITH-ROSENBERG, “The New Woman and the New History” (1975).
- Joan SCOTT, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (1986).
- Linda KERBER, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (1988).
- Gail BEDERMAN, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (1995).
- Laurel Thatcher ULRICH, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (2007).

Historiographic Book Review due X February.

February 19-23 | Reading Week | No Class

In the second half of our course we will turn (mostly) to more recent works on a variety of subjects. I make no claim to complete coverage of all U.S. history or all the approaches to U.S. historiography; but these are all valuable, interesting books that will expose you to a range of approaches to U.S. history in both method and content. Most weeks, we will read two books—sometimes an older classic and a work that builds upon it, sometimes two contemporary works that speak to or bounce off one another in interesting ways—along with some kind of historiographical overview to help you put these works in context.

Week 7 | February X | The Strange Career of Whiteness

- C. Vann WOODWARD, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955, 1966, 1974).
- Grace Elizabeth HALE, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation, 1890-1940* (1998).

Week 8 | March X | The Bad War

- Christian APPY, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (1993).
- Jerry LEMBCKE, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (1998).

Week 9 | March X | Sex and the City

- George CHAUNCEY, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (1994).
- Saidiya HARTMAN, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019).

Week 10 | March X | Borderlands

- Linda GORDON, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (1999).
- Benjamin HOY, *A Line of Blood and Dirt: Creating the Canada-United States Border across Indigenous Lands* (2021).

Week 11 | March X | Secret Origins

- Scott Reynolds NELSON, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend* (2006).
- Jill LEPORE, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (2014).

Week 12 | April X | The Political is Personal

- Margot CANADAY, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2009)
- Linda GORDON, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (2017).

Historiographic Essay due April X**Week 13 | April X | Networks of Light and Smoke**

- Nan ENSTAD, *Cigarettes, Inc.: An Intimate History of Corporate Imperialism* (2018).
- Jeremy ZALLEN, *American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light, 1750-1865* (2019).