HIST 588: Readings in 19th-Century U.S. History

Prof. Caleb McDaniel

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Mondays, 2:00-5:00 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; (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; and (c) to write about these issues for a public audience using individual blogs.

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:

- 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;

- writing a blog post by midnight on the Sunday 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;

- reading the blog posts of the other participants in the seminar in preparation for the in-class discussion on Monday.
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.¹

In the second half of the semester, we will all read one book each week. In this half, all participants are responsible for reading the week’s common reading. But on the first day of class each week’s book will also be assigned to one seminar participant who will be responsible for (a) leading that week’s discussion of the book in class; (b) identifying one of the broad historiographical literatures, questions, or problems the book addresses; (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 you 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. It can either be a review of the book that addresses its historiographical contributions, rejoinders, questions, answers, etc., or a thematic essay in which the book features prominently.

Schedule of Readings

Part I

January 7

Organization; assignment of readings

January 14


¹If you would like to read more about how to maintain a blog or website for your professional work, see Ryan Cordell’s Proflacker post, “Creating and Maintaining a Professional Presence Online: A Roundup and Reflection.” Some good examples of good history blogs maintained by graduate students or junior faculty members are Religion in American History, U.S. Intellectual History, and The Junto.


**January 21**

NO CLASS: I recommend that you begin reading your book assigned for end of semester so that you can create a list of other things to read.

**January 28**


February 4


February 11


**Part II**

**February 18**


**February 25**

NO CLASS: Spring Break

**March 4**


**March 11**


**March 18**


**March 25**

Maria: Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*
April 1

Wes: Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2006).

April 8


April 15