



FWIS 173: Legendary Americans

Dr. Caleb McDaniel

Fall 2013

Course Website: <http://legendary.blogs.rice.edu>

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Course Description

Some historical figures loom larger than others in American memory and popular culture. Harriet Tubman, George Washington, Sacagawea: these are names that you probably have known for as long as you can remember. But why do these figures matter so much to Americans? Are the stories we tell about them to each other and to our children historically accurate? If so, how do historians go about documenting their lives, and if not, what do the inaccuracies, exaggerations, emphases, or omissions in their legends tell us about different moments in American history? What function do legendary Americans play in our society and politics? Do we need them or would we be better off without them?

These are some of the questions we will consider this semester. By consulting scholarly articles and books as well as historical documents and cultural artifacts, we will attempt to separate what we can establish about legendary Americans from the myths that have often become associated with them. At the same time, we will consider why and how “legendary Americans” have become iconic and explore the relations between history, biography, and collective memory.

Learning Objectives

As a Freshman Writing-Intensive Seminar, this course has several general objectives. As outlined in the FWIS program’s mission, it will:

- Enhance your understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.

- Give you strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, organizing, and responding to college-level materials.
- Improve your ability to communicate effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
- Teach you the process of writing and provide strategies for working through that process.
- Introduce you to appropriate ways of using and citing the work of others.

In addition to these writing-specific goals, this course will also teach you:

- The basic methods historians use to learn about the past.
- How to read and evaluate scholarly works of history.
- To formulate, defend, and communicate your own positions on contested historical questions.
- To develop critical and informed perspectives on representations of American history in the media and popular culture.

Required Books

The following books are required reading and are recommended for purchase. They are available at the Ley Student Center and are also available for 2-hour checkout at the Fondren Library reserves desk.

- Francois Furstenberg, *In The Name Of The Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, And The Making Of A Nation* (paperback, Penguin, 2007). ISBN: 0143111930
- James E. Crisp, *Sleuthing The Alamo: Davy Crockett's Last Stand And Other Mysteries Of The Texas Revolution* (paperback, Oxford, 2005). ISBN: 0195163508
- William Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard: A Cultural History* (paperback, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). ISBN: 1421407299
- Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story Of An American Legend* (paperback, Oxford, 2008), ISBN: 0195341198

Other required readings will be made available electronically.

What to Expect

This course is designed as a seminar, rather than as a lecture course. That means that you will complete a large amount of reading (from 100-200 pages per week). Class time will be focused on discussion about those readings, as well as instruction on how to write and communicate.

In this course, intensive writing means *regular* writing. You will have a longish final paper, with an opportunity to revise it. But the more intensive part of your writing will be done in weekly, short assignments throughout the semester. Your short writing during the semester will build cumulatively towards the longer assignments. But you won't just learn to write; you will write to learn.

To succeed in this course, you will need to prepare for each class by making notes to yourself about the readings. Come to the seminar ready to share your thoughts. Read the assigned books and articles with an eye towards discussing their major points and arguments, rather than with an eye towards recalling all of the specific facts and information in the text.

Assignments

More information about class assignments will be provided throughout the semester. If at any point you have questions about my expectations for any of these assignments, or would like to ask about how you are doing on them, don't hesitate to ask!

Also, please note that at the beginning of the semester, you will be placed in a group of three to four students. That is why you will see some references in the assignments below to "your group."

Blog Posts

Each group will be given a group blog on the Rice network, and *every week* you will have assigned writing to publish on this blog. As many as two posts of at least 400 words each may be required each week.

Sometimes these assigned posts will require you to respond to questions from me about the assigned readings; at other times your posts will pertain to projects you will be doing with your group. See the [Schedule](#) for specifics about how many posts will be due each week.

After Week 5 and Week 9 of the semester, you will write one longer post of about *800 words* that should synthesize, revise, and extend a selection of three earlier blog posts from Weeks 1-4 or Weeks 6-9, respectively. *Each* of these long posts will be worth **15 percent** of your grade.

Your shorter, weekly blog posts will not be graded individually. However, *I will not give you a grade for the long posts unless you have completed all of the assigned earlier posts.* It is important for you to take the weekly posts seriously as they will make your longer posts and paper easier to write.

Group Presentations

Your group will deliver two formal presentations to the class. At the beginning of the semester, your group will deliver a 15-minute **proposal** presentation in which you discuss two “legendary Americans” from a list I will give you and argue for their inclusion on our class schedule. Your proposal will outline the significance of these two figures, explain why your group believes they are relevant to this course, and briefly survey three books or articles about them in the available scholarly literature. On the basis of feedback from me and your classmates about this proposal, your group will then select *one* of these figures and lead a second **class discussion** about him or her.

For this second presentation, your group will be responsible for conducting research and selecting some materials about your figure to share with the entire class for discussion. Examples of relevant materials might include scholarly articles, historical documents, artifacts about the historical figure from popular culture, film clips, etc. Use our schedule of readings as a model for the kinds of things you might select for discussion, but be wide-ranging in your research so that you can select the best possible readings. Some of the blog post assignments will assist you in thinking about and planning for your group discussion.

Your group must provide your materials for class discussion (which should amount to no more than about 50 pages of text) to me by **November 6** so that everyone in the seminar can look them over, and you should also provide a few questions for discussion about your materials. Then, on November 13 and November 20, we will devote about 40 minutes of class time to discussing the materials prepared by your small group. In these discussions, you and your fellow group members are responsible for serving as facilitators of discussion and “resident experts” on the “legendary American” that you have been learning about.

More information about these presentations and how they will be graded will be distributed in class. The **proposal** presentation will be worth **10 percent** of your final grade and the group-led class discussion will be worth **20 percent**. The entire group will receive one grade for each presentation.

Final Paper

Your final assignment for the course will be a **7 to 10 page**, thesis-driven paper on some question that has arisen in the course.

You may write about the figure your group focused on, or on one of the figures or readings we discussed as a class, and you may even choose to expand further on one of your blog posts from the first half of the semester. There are, however, two requirements: (a) your paper must have a clear thesis defended by a well-reasoned and sufficiently evidenced argument; (b) it must draw from class readings and *at least one* additional, scholarly source not assigned in class at any point.

Several required but ungraded blog posts will be assigned after Week 9 to help you select a topic, develop a question, craft a thesis, and outline your paper. After turning in a complete final paper on **December 4**, you will also be required to revise your paper in response to my comments. This final, revised paper, due on **December 18**, will be worth **30 percent** of your grade. As

with the long posts, I will not give you a grade for this final paper unless I received the required first draft on time.

Seminar Participation

For this seminar to be successful, it is essential that you contribute to our intellectual community in the course. Community is the key word here: by joining this course, you are entering a collective intellectual enterprise with your fellow classmates as well as your professor. All of us will learn more if all of us take responsibility for nurturing that community.

One of the best ways you can do that is by *contributing to in-class discussions during the seminar*, both by making comments or asking questions about the readings, but also by listening attentively and responding to the comments of others.

You can also *comment on blog posts* by your fellow group members or classmates on other group blogs; all writers benefit from knowing that someone else read a piece of writing and responded to it in some way, whether the response was agreement, disagreement, or a question that the writer's post raised.

Consider it your responsibility to regularly monitor, at the very least, the main course blog and your small group's blog. Sometimes you might contribute to our intellectual community by sharing with us something you learned or found outside the class that related to course themes; in addition to your required weekly blog posts, for example, *you might post a link or a brief note to your blog* about something you saw that reminded you of class.

These are only three examples of the ways you can contribute to intellectual community in the course; your assignment is not to do *all* of these things on a weekly basis, but in every week you should give some evidence of participation in the seminar, perhaps by doing one of the above things.

Finally, it is vital to the success of the course that you *keep up with the weekly readings* and *complete your other assignments on time*; much of our discussion in class will revolve around the assignments and readings that you are doing during the week, so when you don't read or don't complete your assigned weekly posts to the blog on time or don't submit materials by their due dates, you are harming the education of your fellow classmates as well as your own.

Your seminar participation will be assigned a grade at the end of the semester worth **10 percent** of your final grade.

Grading Guidelines

Your assignments will be graded on [Rice's 4.0 grade point scale](#). To recap the weight given to each assignment:

Assignments	100%
Two Synthetic Blog Posts	30%
Proposal Presentation	10%
Group-led Class Discussion	20%
Final Paper	30%
Seminar Participation	10%

General Policies

Attendance in class is mandatory. You should not miss class unless you have a medical or personal emergency that is documented to my satisfaction. It is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible if you will not be in class due to illness.

Plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty are violations of the Rice Honor Code and will be reported to the Honor Council. [Plagiarism is defined by the Honor Council](#) as “quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise using another’s words or ideas as one’s own without properly crediting the source. . . . The Honor Council assumes that, unless otherwise credited, all work submitted by the student is intended to be considered as his or her own work. Any time a student draws particularly or generally from another’s work, the source should be properly credited.”

Specific information about how to credit the ideas and words of other writers will be provided to you in class, but I, like the Honor Council, assume that all the work you submit is your own original work and that doing otherwise is a form of intellectual dishonesty. Because this is a seminar, some of the work you do in this course will require you to collaborate with other students, but since I will make clear when it is okay to work with other students, you should assume that in all other cases you must complete your work independently. If any of the course requirements are unclear, students are responsible for coming to me directly for clarification. For more information on these policies, you can also consult the [Rice Honor Council webpage](#).

Resources

From the CWOVC: “You are encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication for your assignments in this course. These consultants do not proofread or edit your work, but they will provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and grammatical errors. You can make an appointment at the Center’s website: <http://cwovc.rice.edu>.”

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me outside of class to discuss accommodations confidentially. You will also need to contact and register with the [Disability Support Services Office](#) in the Allen Center.

Schedule

August 28: Introduction

September 4: Sacagawea

Read before class “Sacagawea” entry in [American National Biography](#) (Rice only)

Thomas P. Slaughter, “Porivo’s Story,” in *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York, 2003), pp. 86-113 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Donna Barbie, “Sacajawea: The Making of a Myth,” in *Sifters: Native American Women’s Lives*, ed. Theda Perdue (New York, 2001), pp. 60–76 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Scott E. Casper, “Revising the National Pantheon: The American National Biography and Early American History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (April 2001), pp. 449-463 (Rice only)

Write before class

- One blog comment responding to a posted reading question.
 - One blog comment responding to the posted question about the list of “Legendary Americans” not on our syllabus
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September 11: George Washington

Read before class Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York, 2006), pp. 1-145, 233-239 (required book)

Write before class

- One blog post responding to posted reading questions.
 - One blog post (using posted guidelines) to propose a “Legendary Americans” to your group as candidates for your presentation.
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September 18: Davy Crockett

Read before class “Davy Crockett” entry in [American National Biography](#) (Rice only)

Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, “King of the Wild Frontier,” in *A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York, 2001), pp. 230-253 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Margaret J. King, “The Recycled Hero: Walt Disney’s Davy Crockett,” in *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786-1986*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 137-158 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Write before class

- One blog post responding to posted reading questions.
- One blog post reporting on research assigned to you by your group, using posted guidelines.

During class Your group should settle on the two historical figures that you will present about in your proposal to the class and begin planning your presentation.

September 25: Davy Crockett

Read before class James E. Crisp, *Sleuthing the Alamo: Davy Crockett’s Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution* (New York, 2005), entire (required book)

Write before class

- One blog post responding to posted reading questions.
- One blog post reporting on research assigned to you by your group.

October 2: Johnny Appleseed

Read before class William Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard: A Cultural History* (paperback, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), entire (required book).

Write before class

- One blog post responding to posted reading questions.
 - One blog post about your upcoming proposal presentation.
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October 9

During Class Each group will present for about 10-15 minutes on your Proposal for which “Legendary Americans” to add to our schedule.

Before Class Post your first Long Blog Post, which should synthesize, revise, and extend a selection of three earlier blog posts from previous weeks.

October 16: Harriet Tubman

Read before class Milton C. Sernett, *Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory, and History* (Durham, 2007), pp. 1-104 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Sarah H. Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869 edition on [Google Books](#)), pp. 1-53

Write before class

- One blog post responding to the posted reading questions.
 - One blog post proposing a scholarly reading to your group for inclusion in your class discussion.
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October 23: John Henry

Read before class Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York, 2006), entire (required book)

Write before class

- One blog post responding to the posted reading questions.
- One blog post discussing a major historical or historiographical question surrounding the figure your group is researching.

Important note Scott Reynolds Nelson, the author of this week’s book, will be visiting Rice University on October 24 and 25 *specifically to have lunch with our class* and to deliver a public talk. Please plan to attend his talk on Thursday, October 24, at 5:30 p.m., and stay tuned for information about an exclusive lunch with our class at Cohen House, either on Thursday or Friday.

October 30: Contemporary Debates

Read before class James W. Loewen, “Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-Making,” from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York, 1995), pp. 9-27 (available on [OWL-Space](#))

Sam Wineburg, “Goodbye, Columbus,” [Smithsonian.com](#)

Michael Frisch, “American History and the Structures of Collective Memory: A Modest Exercise in Empirical Iconography,” in *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989), pp. 1130-1155 (Rice only)

Stephanie Simon, “The Culture Wars’ New Front: U.S. History Classes in Texas,” *Wall Street Journal*, 14 July 2009

Write before class

- One blog post written as a mock op-ed about the U.S. history curriculum for public schools in Texas, using the posted guidelines.
 - One blog post proposing a discussion question to your group for inclusion in your class discussion.
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November 6: Planning

Before Class

- Finalize the readings that your group is assigning to the rest of the class, scan them, and send them to Professor McDaniel for posting on OWL-Space.
- Write your second Long Blog Post, which should synthesize, revise, and extend three earlier blog posts written since your last long post.

During Class We will prepare for your class discussions and also begin talking about how to plan for the final paper.

November 13: Group Presentations

Read before class The readings assigned by Group A, Group B, and Group C.

Write before class

- One blog post responding to one of the posted reading questions.
 - One blog post proposing two potential questions for your final paper, using posted guidelines.
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November 20: Group Presentations

Read before class The readings assigned by Group D and Group E.

Write before class

- One blog post responding to one of the posted reading questions.
 - One blog post settling on a question and provisional thesis for your final paper.
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November 27

Paper Conferences We will not be meeting as a class this week. Instead, you and a partner should schedule a conference with Professor McDaniel on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday morning to discuss your plans for the final paper. Bring a draft outline and introduction to the meeting.

December 4: Full draft of final paper due

December 18: Revised, graded version of final paper due