

## HIST 587: Methods in U.S. Cultural History

Fall 2009, Tuesdays 2:30-5:30 p.m.

Professor: Dr. Caleb McDaniel

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### Course Description

The primary objective for students in this research seminar will be to write a full-length draft of an article based on original research and suitable for submission to a professional journal.

Our related objective will be to consider the methods of – and methodological dilemmas posed by – cultural history. Readings in the first several weeks of the course will be focused on methodological questions of concern to cultural historians (e.g, What are we talking about when we talk about “culture”? How can claims about culture be empirically demonstrated? How should cultural sources be interpreted? Is culture a cause or effect of social change? etc.). The remainder of the course will be devoted to collaborative seminars, discussions of useful writing and research strategies, and one-on-one interviews designed to support the progress of your independent research and writing projects.

These independent research and writing projects will be based on a topic of your choice. They are not required to be exclusively or primarily examples of “cultural history.” Nonetheless, since most of our common readings and discussions will revolve around methods and problems in U.S. cultural history, the course will be most useful to those students who are somehow interested in or engaged in the practice of cultural history, broadly defined.

### Assignments and Assessment

Grades for the course will be based equally on (1) general participation in seminar discussions, (2) leadership of one seminar discussion (each student will prepare and circulate some questions for discussion at one of our early class meetings, and will also help to moderate that week’s discussion), (3) the article draft submitted at the end of the semester, and (4) a final in-class presentation about your article.

Your goal for the article should be to write a complete rough draft of an essay that you intend to submit to a professional journal. This essay will still be a *draft* in the sense that after the semester you will probably wish to make additional revisions, based on comments received in the seminar, before submitting it to a journal. But it should be a *complete* draft in the sense that it (a) presents a coherent, well-developed argument based on original research in primary sources; (b) contains complete bibliographical citations formatted according to the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style; and (c) is between 10,000 and 14,000 words, including endnotes.

Prior to your final in-class presentation on your research, these drafts will be circulated to any graduate students and members of the faculty in fields related to your research, who will be invited to attend your presentation and offer constructive feedback on how to move from draft to publication.

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

### *August 25: Course Introduction*

Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Harvard University Press, 1995)

David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Please read both books before our first meeting. Be prepared to talk about the methods and sources used by each author and the different ways in which John and Henkin approach their common subject: the “communications revolution” in nineteenth-century America. On this date we will also talk about course themes and determine who will lead the discussions in the following few weeks of class.

### *September 1: What is “culture”?*

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” and “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” both from *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973; New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 3-30, 412-453.

William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35-61.

Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and its Audiences,” and responses by Robin D. G. Kelley, Natalie Zemon Davis, T. J. Jackson Lears, and Levine, *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992), 1369-1430.

### *September 8: What is “cultural history”?*

James W. Cook and Lawrence B. Glickman, “Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History,” in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, ed. Cook, Glickman, and Michael O’Malley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3-57.

Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: History, Culture, and Text,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1-24.

David A. Hollinger, “Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals,” in *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 130-151.

### *September 15: Example Articles*

Elaine Frantz Parsons, “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 2005), 811-836.

Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, "Constructing G. I. Joe Louis: Cultural Solutions to the 'Negro Problem' during World War II," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 3 (December 2002), 958-983.

Kate Masur, "'A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation': The Word 'Contraband' and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March 2007), 1050-1084.

John F. Kasson, "Behind Shirley Temple's Smile: Children, Emotional Labor, and the Great Depression," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 185-216.

Robert MacDougall, "The Wire Devils: Pulp Thrillers, the Telephone, and Action at a Distance in the Wiring of a Nation," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2006), 715-747.

Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit of a Partnership between the Sexes: The Debate over YMCA Programs for Women and Girls, 1914-1933," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992), 1324-1346.

*September 22: NO GROUP MEETING.*

Schedule a one-on-one meeting with me about your research project.

*September 29: Problems and Methods, Part I: Culture and Causal Explanation*

Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (University of California Press, 1992).

Also, circulate a short, informal prospectus (no more than 3-4 pages) of your research project to seminar members by email by 8 a.m. today. Your prospectus should briefly introduce the topic of your research, identify the question(s) you believe your research will help you to answer, summarize some of the latest scholarship on this topic, explain how you envision the contribution your research could make to this scholarship, and describe the main primary sources you will use. This is an informal prospectus, not a binding contract. Our purpose in discussing it collectively will be to generate ideas, directions, and further questions for your research.

*October 6: Problems and Methods, Part II: The Interpretation of Culture*

Rhys Isaac, "A Discourse on the Method: Action, Structure, and Meaning," in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982; Norton, 1988), 323-357.

Dror Wahrman, "Change and the Corporeal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Gender History: Or, Can Cultural History be Rigorous?," *Gender and History* 20, no. 3 (November 2008), 584-602.

Carol Lasser, "Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 1 (2008), 83-114.

Ronald G. Walters, "The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism," *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (May 1973), 177-201.

*October 13: NO GROUP MEETING*

Optional one-on-one meeting with me about your research project.

*October 20, October 27, November 3, and November 10*

Plan to pre-circulate some piece of your research project to members of the seminar AT LEAST 24 HOURS before we meet on each of these days.

You should share whatever you most wish to get feedback about. Examples of material you might wish to circulate for discussion include, but might not be limited to, a rough draft of a section of your article, a primary source or group of primary sources that you are puzzling through along with some comments about them; a secondary source by another scholar with whom you want to engage, along with some of your thoughts about strengths or weaknesses in the work; or an outline of a piece of your article.

The purpose of these sessions is to help you improve your work, so take full advantage of them by circulating something substantial enough to get useful feedback about.

*November 17: NO GROUP MEETINGS*

Optional one-on-one meetings with me about your project.

*November 24: Complete draft of article due*

*November 31: In-seminar discussion of articles*

### **Note on Disability Support Services**

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.