



HIST 587: Methods in U.S. Cultural History

Professor Caleb McDaniel

Spring 2014

Time and Place: Mondays 3-6 p.m., Humanities 327

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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 historical article based on original research and suitable for submission to a professional history 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. 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.

Because many U.S. cultural historians now make use of either born-digital or digitized primary sources, a minor theme throughout the semester will also concern how the “cultural turn” in American historiography is (or is not) being impacted by the “digital turn.”

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 write further drafts and 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 may 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.

Required Book

Schedule

In addition to the readings listed on the schedule, I will periodically be distributing short readings of early rough drafts and notes for one of my own research projects in the hopes of sparking discussion about our different writing and research processes. I may also make slight adjustments to the readings selected based on the

January 13: Course Introduction

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

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.

James W. Cook, "The Kids Are All Right: On the 'Turning' of Cultural History," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012), 746-771, [online](#)

Please read these historiographical articles before our first meeting, focusing especially on the 2012 Cook article. Be prepared to discuss their specific arguments as well as these general questions:

1. What did it mean to practice "cultural history" when Hunt wrote about it in 1989? What does it mean to practice "cultural history" today? What are the stakes in defining a method of "cultural history"?
2. How does the use of digital article databases inform and shape James W. Cook's arguments about the history of "cultural history"? Can you reproduce his own results using the databases he named? Are there other methods he might have used to query these databases

that might have returned substantively different results or suggested different arguments? (Two blog posts by [Ted Underwood](#) and [Benjamin Schmidt](#) may provide useful spurs to reflection on these issues.)

On this date we will also talk about course themes and determine who will lead the discussions in the following few weeks of class.

January 20: NO CLASS

In lieu of meeting this week, please schedule a one-on-one meeting with me to discuss potential topics and sources for your article-length research paper.

January 27: What is “culture”? (Cleve and Erika)

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, [OWL-Space](#)

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, [OWL-Space](#)

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, [link](#)

February 3: Sample Articles (Maria and Bill)

Walter Johnson, “The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000), 13-38, [link](#).

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 (2007), 1050-1084, [link](#).

Joseph Yannielli, “George Thompson among the Africans: Empathy, Authority, and Insanity in the Age of Abolition,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (2010), 979-1000, [link](#).

February 10: More Sample Articles (Nate and Mark)

Paul A. Kramer, “The Military-Sexual Complex: Prostitution, Disease and the Boundaries of Empire during the Philippine-American War,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, Issue 30, July 25, 2011, [link](#)

Melani McAlister, “A Cultural History of the War without End,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 439-455, [link](#)

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 (2002), 958-983, [link](#)

February 17: Problems and Methods, Part I: The Interpretation of Culture (Wright and Keith)

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, [link](#)

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

Robert K. Nelson, "Of Monsters, Men—And Topic Modeling," *New York Times* Disunion Blog, May 29, 2011, [link](#) and [introduction](#) to "Mining the *Dispatch*"

Also, circulate a short, informal prospectus (no more than 3-4 pages) of your research project to seminar members 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.

February 24: Problems and Methods, Part II: Causation and Culture (Cara and Wes)

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

March 3: SPRING BREAK

Workshops

For our meetings on **March 10**, **March 17**, **March 24**, and **March 31** 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.

For these workshop weeks, 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.

Depending on the way topics and research projects develop, you may be assigned as a “respondent” to the work of one of your peers in order to jumpstart discussions during these workshops.

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. You may circulate your materials by email to the group, or you may wish to begin a blog using <http://blogs.rice.edu> for the purpose of sharing your thoughts throughout the semester.

April 7: No Group Meeting

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

April 14: Complete draft of article due

April 21: In-seminar discussion of articles

Please read papers circulated the week before in preparation for this week’s discussion.

May 7: Deadline for final draft

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.