

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Professor Eric Foner
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-4 pm

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
Fall 2007; Monday 2:10-4 pm
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History G8500x

THE LITERATURE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

“I doubt whether faithful history ever was or ever can be written. 300 years after the event it cannot be written without offending some powerful and popular individual family party, some statesman, some general, some prince, some priest or some philosopher. The world will go on always ignorant of itself, its past history, and future destiny.”

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, August 31, 1809

“The past is the key of the present and the mirror of the future.”

Robert G. Fitzgerald Diary, July 1867

This course is designed to acquaint first-year graduate students in American history with some current scholarly debates and categories of analysis, with recent methodological and interpretive innovations in the study of the American past, and with the scholarship of current Columbia faculty members and recent phds. The choice of readings is necessarily highly selective and personal.

For each week, one student will be assigned to prepare four or five discussion questions for the class. These should be sent by email to participants and the instructor at least one day before the class meeting. In addition, each student will write a 20-page historiographical essay examining the literature on a problem or question in American history. The paper is due at the final class meeting.

The readings below are all required. The books are available at Labyrinth Bookstore on 112th Street, and on reserve in Butler Library. Copies of the articles and book chapters are available either online via the library website (*), or in the xeroxing room next to the department office in Fayerweather (**).

The class will have three library sessions, Friday 10:00 am to noon, to introduce you to resources for historical research at Columbia. All students are required to attend:

Sept. 14: 306 Butler. General introduction. John Tofanelli

Sept. 21: 306 Butler. Government documents. Mary Cargill

Sept. 28: Rare book and Mss. Library, 6th floor, Butler. Archival research.

Michael Ryan, Susan Hamson, John Tofanelli

September 10: Is History Possible?

Joyce Appleby, et al, Telling the Truth About History

**Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism, 81-100

*Daniel Wickberg, "Heterosexual White Male: Some Recent Inversions in American Cultural History," Journal of American History, June 2005, 136-57

September 17: Atlantic History

J. H. Elliott, Empires of the Atlantic World

**Bernard Bailyn, Atlantic History: Concept and Contours, ch. 2

September 24: Gender

Jeanne Boydston, Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic

*Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as Other: Redefining the Parameters of Labor History," Labor History, Spring/Summer 1993, 190-204

October 1: Society

Michael Zakim, Ready-Made Democracy

*Jürgen Kocka, "Losses, Gains and Opportunities: Social History Today," Journal of Social History, Fall, 2003, 21-28

October 8: Memory

David Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory

**Raphael Samuel, Theaters of Memory, vol. 1, pp. 3-48

**Aleida Assmann and Peter Novick, "Europe: A Community of Memory?," Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Spring, 2007, 11-38

October 15: Class

Sven Beckert, The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896

October 22: Citizenship

Mae Ngai, Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America

**Oscar V. Campomanes, "New Formations of Asian American Studies and the Question of U. S. Imperialism," Positions, Fall, 1997, 523-50

October 29: Community

Becky Nicolaides, My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965

November 5: No class: election day holiday

November 12: Politics

Sean Wilentz, The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln

November 19: The Environment

Sarah Phillips, This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal

*Richard White, "The Nationalization of Nature," Journal of American History, December, 1999, 976-86

November 26: Americans in the World

Daniel T. Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age

December 3: American History and the World

Thomas Bender, A Nation Among Nations

Thomas Bender, The La Pietra Report (www.oah.org/activities/lapietra/final.html)

December 10: Is Synthesis Possible?

Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom