

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
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620 Fayerweather  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-4 pm

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
Fall 2009; Tuesday, 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 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

“The only obligation we have to history is to rewrite it.”

Oscar Wilde

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 Book Culture on 112<sup>th</sup> Street east of Broadway. 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 (\*\*). All books are also available in the Reserve Room in Butler.

The class will have two 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. 11: General introduction. John Tofanelli, 306 Butler

Sept. 18: Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Butler

September 8: 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

\*Walter Johnson, "On Agency," Journal of Social History, 2003, 113-34

September 15: Atlantic History/ Borderlands History

James Brooks, Captives and Cousins

\*Jeremy Adelman and Steven Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," American Historical Review, June 1999, 814-41

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

September 22: Gender

Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism

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

\*Alice Kessler-Harris, "In the Nation's Image: The Gendered Limits of Social Citizenship in the Depression Era," Journal of American History, December 1999, 1251-79

September 29: Society/ Culture

Michael Zakim, Ready-Made Democracy

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

October 6: 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 13: Class

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

October 20: 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 27: Community

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

\*Alice O'Connor, "The Privatized City: The Manhattan Institute, the Urban Crisis, and the Conservative Counterrevolution in New York," Journal of Urban History, January 2008, 333-53

November 3: No class: election day holiday

November 10: Politics

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

November 17: The Environment

Thomas G. Andrews, Killing for Coal

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

December 1: Americans in the World

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

December 8: American History and the World

Thomas Bender, A Nation Among Nations

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

December 15: Is Synthesis Possible?

Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom