

HIST 5103 READING SEMINAR
Early American Social and Cultural History
Fall 2009 Thu 330-600 MAIN 412
Department of History, University of Arkansas

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This seminar is organized around several major themes in the historiography of early America, including the market revolution, print culture and communication, religion, and slavery. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (c1835) will serve as an introduction to the period, framing the historiography on these topics.

In addition to the weekly readings, students will write five historiographical essays that synthesize and analyze the readings on each of the themes. All essays should cite at least one book review or historiographical essay from a historical journal. They should be approximately 1,500 words in length and should comprehensively address the readings and offer evidence for the thesis. They are due in class on the date specified; no late work will be accepted. They should be flawlessly typewritten, double-spaced in 12-point type.

Students will also prepare three discussion questions from the weekly reading assignments to be submitted to the instructor before class. This exercise has two goals: promotion of class discussion and practice in formulating good questions, a critical research and teaching skill. Students should be ready to engage the class on their questions, which should offer ways to think historiographically about the books we read and to make connections between them.

The final grade in the course will be based on the papers (50 percent) and class discussion (50 percent.) Expectations are that all students will attend all classes, barring extraordinary circumstances. The instructor should be notified before class of any such situation. University policies regarding Academic Honesty will be strictly enforced; transgressors will receive an F in the course.

ASSIGNED READINGS

Books can be purchased from online sources such as abebooks.com or powells.com. Those available in Mullins will be placed on 2-hour overnight reserve.

De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Edited and translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. University of Chicago Press, 2000. (N.B. many editions of this work are available, of course, but for ease of discussion, it is preferred that students read this edition.)

Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. Oxford, 2007.

Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic*. Vintage Books; Reprint ed., 1996.

Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. Oxford, 1994.

Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds. *Market Revolution in America*. University of Virginia Press, 1996.

Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford, 2002.

Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*. University of Chicago Press, 1979.

David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago, 2007.

Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America*. William Morrow, 1990.

Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. W.W. Norton, 2008.

Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Harvard, 2003.

Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds., *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*. University of Georgia Press, 2006.

CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change):

Week of 24 August: Introduction. De Tocqueville I. Vol 1, Part 1, pp. 3-161 and editors' introduction.

31 August: de Tocqueville II. Vol 1, Part 2, pp. 165-396.

7 September: Howe.

14 September: Taylor. Essay No. 1 due.

21 September: Sellers.

28 September: Stokes/Conway. Essay No. 2 due.

5 October: Noll.

12 October: Mathews. Essay No. 3 due

19 October: No class; reading week.

26 October: Henkin.

2 November: Kelley.

9 November: Cmiel. Essay No. 4 due.

16 November: Gordon-Reed.

23 November: Berlin.

30 November: Baptist/Camp. Essay No. 5 due

ESSAYS

No. 1: Compare the accounts of the early United States given in de Tocqueville, Howe, and Taylor. Where do they agree? Where do they differ?

No. 2: What was the “market revolution” in antebellum America? What is the evidence for it, according to Sellers? Is he persuasive? Why or why not? Did this revolution change the country, and if so, how?

No. 3: Noll argues that there is an ‘American religion.’ What is it? Is religion practiced in the South as described by Mathews ‘American’ by this definition? Why or why not?

No. 4: In a blistering recent review in the *New Republic*, the historian Sean Wilentz lamented that historians of late have slighted the importance of great politicians and political strategies--in short, political power--in favor of culture in their accounts of the American past. These three books examine education, communications, and rhetoric in turn. Write a reply to Wilentz using evidence in these accounts to argue that cultural topics are about the exercise of power, albeit not partisan political power. Your object is to convince Professor Wilentz he is wrong (a highly unlikely occurrence).

No. 5: Compare the accounts of American slavery in Gordon-Reed, Berlin, and Baptist/Camp. Where do they agree? Where do they disagree? Can they be reconciled?