HIS 701 Colloquium in American History before 1865
Fall 2021: Thursdays, 2:00-4:50, MHRA 3204

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“The past itself is not a narrative. In its entirety, it is as chaotic, uncoordinated, and complex as life. History is about making sense of that mess, finding or creating patterns and meanings and stories from the maelstrom.”
— John H. Arnold, History: A Very Short Introduction

“History is always written because history is always made. Historiography is always revised because history is constantly remade.”
—Bert James Loewenberg, American History in American Thought

Interpretations of events, ideas, forces, and persons in history change all the time. Historiography is the study of those differing interpretations and the changing approaches to historical understanding by professional historians and their development over time. In this class you will be exposed to various schools of thought on major themes in American history through the Civil War. You must read a large amount of material to begin to master the literature on our selected topics. You will read the equivalent of roughly a book and a half each week, a normal load for history graduate students. I strongly urge you to take notes on your readings and familiarize yourself with the notes. As a matter of course, you will be exposed to “facts” and “content knowledge” in this course, but we are more interested in historical interpretations and approaches and how and why those have changed over time.

When doing history, it helps to keep in mind that there are many ways of determining how history happens. One of the key things to remember is that historians can disagree very much over why almost any event happened. You will not agree with all interpretations that you encounter in this course. However, you must know the major differing interpretations and the most recent interpretations to understand historians and to become one yourself.

Grading: I expect that you will attend every class meeting, complete all readings, and participate in discussions. Your grade will be reduced for non-participation or unexcused absences.
You will complete **seven (7) analysis papers** throughout the semester. For each paper, analyze the book’s arguments and interpretations and compare the book with the article/historiographical readings included with that week’s readings (if applicable that week). Some weeks we will read a collection of essays that reflect the latest scholarship on a particular topic. For essay collections, focus on the overall thrust of the entire book rather than summarizing every essay. What do the essays collectively tell us about the state of that historical field? For all papers, tell me how this field has developed over time, how and why interpretations have changed. In addition, you should briefly tell me about each of the authors of the readings for each week that you write about (for essay collections you only need to do this for the editors of the book, not for every chapter author). You choose the seven topics/weeks to complete your papers – they are due by class time the day we discuss that topic, uploaded to Canvas.

At one meeting you will **lead the discussion** of that week’s readings. Prepare a one-page, single-spaced outline of key ideas and questions you will use to guide the discussion and upload to Canvas before class starts. Also prepare to tell me and the class about each author for that week’s reading: who are they, where do/did they teach, what are they known for, etc.?

**Grading summary:**
- 7 Analysis Papers 10% each or 70% of your overall grade
- Class Discussion Participation 20%
- Discussion Leadership 10%
- 100%

**Required Books** (listed in the order that we will read them):
- Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (2015)
- Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (2020)
Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (2008)

**SCHEDULE:**
Nearly all the journal articles listed in the schedule are available on the J-STOR, Project MUSE, or other databases through the UNCG Library webpages or via the general internet. Others will be made available as a pdf on the Canvas site for this course.

**Aug. 19: Introduction**

**Aug. 26: American Indians/Ethnohistory**
Article:

**Sept. 2: Early North American Colonization and Indian Enslavement**
Articles:

**Sept. 9: African Enslavement in the early Atlantic World**
Article:

**Sept. 16: New Directions in the History of the American Revolution**
Article:

**Sept. 23: Women’s and Gender History in early America**
Article:

**Sept. 30: Historical Memory of the American Revolution**
Article:

**Oct. 7: Jacksonian America & Market Revolutions**
Articles:

**Oct. 14: Indian Removals**
Book: Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (2020)
Article:

**Oct. 21: Slavery in the United States: New Understandings**
Article:
Canvas

Oct. 28: The West before the Civil War
Article:

Nov. 4: The U.S. Invasion of Mexico
Article:

November 11: No Class: Ethnohistory Conference

Nov. 18: Causes of the Civil War (Last Class!)
Book: Elizabeth R. Varon, Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859 (2008)