

HIS 701 Colloquium in American History before 1865

Fall 2023: Thursdays, 5:30-8:20, MHRA 2204

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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 approaches and the most recent interpretations to understand historians and to become one yourself.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

In this course students will develop significant skills in:

1. analyzing historical monographs for their conceptual framework, methodological approach, use of sources, and historiographic perspective
2. identifying different approaches to the study of early American history
3. writing academic prose that is clear, pointed, and analytically rigorous
4. engaging in persuasive, thoughtful, and courteous discussion with academic peers

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.

Analysis Papers

(SLOs 1, 2, 3)

You will complete **seven (7) analysis papers of around 5 pages each** 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). Even when there is not an additional historiographical essay to read, each book author will tell you the new interpretations and historiographical interventions they are making. Sometimes such arguments are found concentrated in the Introduction and Conclusion, but more often historians discuss changing interpretations throughout their work.

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.

Class Discussion

(SLOs 2, 4)

I expect you to participate in every class discussion of the readings and issues presented each week. Professional disagreement about the readings or issues is fine and encouraged, though I insist that you be respectful and allow everyone to state their interpretations.

Discussion Leader

(SLO 2)

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(s): who are they, where do/did they teach, what are they known for, etc.?

You will turn in your list of questions to me, one page is usually sufficient, at the Discussion Leader section under Assignments. We will select discussion leaders at the first class meeting on August 17.

Take Home Exam

(SLOs 1, 2, 3)

I will hand out/email you the take home exam at the last class meeting on November 16. You will then have two weeks to complete it and submit it via Canvas by November 30. The question(s) will ask you to think about how early American history has changed over time. So, pay attention to what our readings have to say about how research questions and approaches to understanding early American history have changed over time. The precise question(s) will be in the exam hand out on November 16 and will be based entirely on the materials you read for this course, no additional research required.

Grading Summary:

Analysis Papers: 10% each = 70%

Discussion Leader 10%

Discussion Participation 10%

Take-home exam 10%

Discussion Leader List

Required Books Live links are to free e-book versions via the UNCG Library catalog. All the books are on order at the UNCG Bookstore, but you can purchase them wherever is most convenient for you.

Ned Blackhawk, [*The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History*](#) (2023)

Sam White, [*A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America*](#) (2017)

David Hackett Fischer, [*African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals*](#) (2022)

Thomas A. Foster, ed., [*Women in Early America*](#) (2015)

Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (2016)

Michael A. McDonnell et. al. eds., [*Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War*](#) (2013)

John Lauritz Larson, [*The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good*](#) (2010)

Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (2020)

Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds. [*Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*](#) (2016)

Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800- 1860* (2011)

Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (2012)

Chandra Manning, [*What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*](#) (2007)

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. 17: Introduction

Aug. 24: Re-envisioning early American History, part 1: Native America

Book: Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (2023)

Aug. 31: Environmental Impacts on European Settlement

Book: Sam White, *A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America* (2017)

Article: Sutter, Paul S. "[The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History.](#)" *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013): 94–119.

Sept. 7: Re-envisioning early American History, part 2: Africans in early America

Book: David Hackett Fischer, *African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals* (2022), Introduction-chapter 4 (pp. 1-385)

Sept. 14: Re-envisioning early American History, part 2.5: Africans in early America

Book: David Hackett Fischer, *African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals* (2022), chapter 5-end (pp. 386-749)

Sept. 21: Women's and Gender History in early America

Book: Thomas A. Foster, ed., *Women in Early America* (2015)

Article: Rebecca Edwards, "[Women's and Gender History.](#)" in *American History Now* Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., (Temple University Press, 2011). *E-book or on Canvas*

Sept. 28: The American Revolution, broadly conceived

Book: Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (2016)

Article: Woody Holton, "[American Revolution and Early Republic.](#)" in *American History Now* Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., (Temple University Press, 2011). *E-book or on Canvas*

Oct. 5: Historical Memory of the American Revolution

Book: Michael A. McDonnell, et. al. eds., *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War* (2013)

Article: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "[How Betsy Ross Became Famous: Oral tradition, nationalism, and the invention of history.](#)" *Common-Place* vol. 8, no. 1, (October 2007)

Oct. 12: Jacksonian America & Market Revolutions

Book: John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (2010)

Article: Seth Rockman, "[Jacksonian America.](#)" in *American History Now* Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., (Temple University Press, 2011). *E-book or on Canvas*

Oct. 19: Indian Removals

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

Article: Donna L. Akers, "[Removing the Heart of the Choctaw People: Indian Removal from a Native Perspective.](#)" *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999): 63-76 (pdf on Canvas).

Oct. 26: Slavery in the United States: New Understandings

Book: Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds. *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Pennsylvania, 2016)

Article: Adam Rothman, "[Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" in *American History Now* Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds. (Temple University Press, 2011) *E-book and on Canvas*

Nov. 2: The West before the Civil War

Book: Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (2011)

Article: Stephen Aron, "[Frontiers, Borderlands, Wests.](#)" in *American History Now* Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., (Temple University Press, 2011). *E-book and on Canvas*

Nov. 9: The U.S. Invasion of Mexico

Book: Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (2012)

Article: Brian Delay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War." *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 35-68.

Nov. 16: The Civil War and what it meant to those fighting it (Last Class Meeting!)

Book: Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (2007)

Nov. 30 (or earlier): Take-home exam due

Resources:

A downloadable version of the syllabus is here:

Additional UNCG Resources can be found here: [Resources-1.pdf](#)

Citations:

If you need to provide a citation (quotations etc.), use footnotes or endnotes (your choice) but follow the [Chicago Manual of Style Humanities format \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Additional information about how to use Humanities footnote/endnote citations is found here: [Using Humanities citations \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[When to cite a source](#), also known as how do I know when to insert a footnote #?

[How to create footnotes in MS Word](#)

Paper grading rubric:

[HIS 701 Analysis Paper Grading Rubric 2023](#)