

HST 602A: Graduate Colloquium in American History to 1865

Spring 2018: Powers 135, Thursdays 6:30-9:20 p.m.

Dr. Andrew Wehrman
Office: Powers 123

Office Hours: M 10-12; T 9-10:30; Th 3:30-5 and by Appointment
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Bulletin Description:

An investigation of historical interpretations and methodologies dealing with major themes in American history from 1607 to 1865. Recommended: Admission to graduate program in history. A student may take this course twice, for 3 hours of credit each time, but must choose a second instructor for the second 3 hours.

Course Description, Goals, & Outcomes:

This graduate colloquium explores classic and recent scholarship in early American history. The chief goals of the course are to expose students to 1.) major historiographical problems that have dominated the study of early America; 2.) a variety of methodological approaches; and 3.) new scholarly trends both topical and methodological. Students successfully completing this course will gain a solid foundation for further historical and historiographical investigation of early America. They will also cultivate fundamental professional skills, including the construction of professional essays; the formation of effective discussion questions; leading class discussions; independent presentation of secondary scholarship; and the creation of a historiographical essays and reviews.

By the end of this course, each student will have:

- 1) gained in-depth exposure to one or more theme(s) of United States history to 1865;
- 2) analyzed different methodologies employed by historians with particular emphasis on the most recent interdisciplinary trends in historical methodology;
- 3) gained practice in analyzing significant historical writings and in assessing the relative merits of conflicting interpretations;
- 4) honed her or his ability to participate effectively in critical discussion and to write analytical papers;
- 5) gained familiarity with some of the major journals in American history; and
- 6) begun to formulate his or her own theoretically-informed interpretive stance on one or more main theme(s) of U.S. history to 1865

Course Requirements:

Completion of assigned readings, faithful attendance, and consistent, constructive, and courteous participation are absolutely essential to the success of our course. Failure to meet these most basic requirements will be detrimental to the quality of our discussions and to your grade in this course. More formally, students are required to do the following:

Post Discussion Questions. Each week students are required to post five questions worthy of our discussion in class. These questions should raise a variety of debatable issues—analytical, interpretive, historiographical, methodological, pedagogical, etc.—that force us to wrestle with each week’s readings and deepen our comprehension of the historical and historiographical issues presented to us. These questions must do more than ask us to repeat or summarize the content or approach of a particular text. Ideally, at least two of your questions should tackle what in your assessment matters most in each book (the big questions; the largest stakes). Some of your questions might ask us to compare works between weeks. At least one of your questions should address the scholarly reaction and criticisms to the book from scholarly book reviews, or in the case of older texts commemorative essays on how the book has held up over time or influenced scholarship. In preparation for our discussions, students are expected to consider their classmates’ questions thoroughly. Discussion questions should be posted to the course’s Blackboard site each Wednesday by noon.

Twice leading weekly discussion. This will usually be done in pairs. Discussion leaders are required to read their classmates’ discussion questions ahead of time and use them to structure class discussion. The goal of the discussion leader is not to act as the expert or authority in a given week but rather to facilitate a lively and wide-ranging discussion that touches on the manifold issues raised in the texts and by your classmates. Our discussion should be rigorous, stimulating, and above all, enjoyable.

Write short analytical papers. You will write four short (2-page) papers that make distinct arguments about our readings. In each paper you students will make a historiographical point about two (or more) of the assigned books using evidence and examples from the books to advance your argument. These papers should be tightly and elegantly written using your best prose. You will likely have much more to say than you can fit into two double-spaced pages. These papers are as much an exercise in editing as in writing. You will need to choose your best example or examples, eliminate wordiness and redundancies, and keep your essays laser-focused on your thesis to create a short, substantive, and imaginative essay. No paper longer than two pages will be accepted. Please don’t monkey with font sizes and margins. (12 inch TNR 1-inch margins) Throughout your careers will be asked to write under space constraints--“Please submit a 200 word abstract of your 400 page dissertation to be considered for this fellowship or job...” I’m asking for two page papers instead of, say, five page papers, because writing short papers is harder, not easier, but mastering them is much more valuable. How can you write five, ten, or four-hundred pages if you can’t write an effective two-pager?

Write two review essays. You will also write two longer review essays. Now that you have strained to contain your arguments into two pages, you will expand your analysis while following the same rules. A review essay is a critical review of multiple books on the same theme or topic. The purpose is to compare and contrast the works under review, to identify key themes and critical issues, and to evaluate each writer's contributions to understanding the overarching topics common to each book. The best review essays seamlessly move between books and follow a narrative style to analyze the books and critique the field. The first review essay will cover books on the American Revolution, and the second will cover books on the run-up to the US Civil War. For examples of review essays, see *Reviews in American History*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, *Early American Studies*, etc.

Grading:

Final Grades will be assessed based on the following:

2-pagers	40%
Revolution Review	20%
Civil War Review	20%
Leading Discussion	10%
Participation	10%

Disability Services: CMU provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodations to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should register for services through Student Disability Services, 120 Park Library, 989-774-3018. After seeing SDS, please talk to me in office hours or after class to discuss accommodations.

Plagiarism & Academic Honesty: It should go without saying that all the work you do in this course should be your own. Plagiarism, cheating, or any other instances of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade in this course. The chair and academic dean may also be notified and offenses could result in expulsion. A full explanation of CMU's policies on academic honesty can be found at:

<https://www.cmich.edu/copyright/usage/Pages/Plagiarism.aspx>. You are responsible for reading and understanding these policies. A failure to have done so will not be an acceptable excuse for any violation. If you have questions, please ask the instructor BEFORE turning in an assignment.

General Advice for Graduate Students: Many of the classes you take in graduate school have a very narrow focus, assume a general knowledge of the field, or both. Whether you are working towards a master's degree or working towards comprehensive exams, you should 1) Get yourself a good basic college American history textbook and read some in it each week. That's especially useful in this course to help fill in gaps in the things we're studying but also I'm surprised that graduate students dismiss these useful texts. I'm partial to Divine, Breen, et. al *The American Story*, Roark et. al, *The American Promise*, and Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty*. 2) Go to the library every once in a while just to browse. Walk through the American history section and pull down books off the shelves. Check out the primary sources on the shelves. See anything interesting? Find anything that nobody really has written much about? Also go upstairs and pull down the important journals in your field. Flip through the hard copies. Look at the tables of contents to see what people are currently writing about and discussing. Pay special attention to historiographic essays. Those are gold mines for historians but especially so for students preparing for exams. 3) Use book reviews strategically. Avoid using them as shortcuts, but do use them to hone in your own feelings and interpretations and enhance your reading. Do you agree with the reviewer? Does the reviewer mention things that you missed? 4) Join a historical organization like the Organization of American Historians (OAH) and/or the American Historical Association (AHA). Both have discounted memberships for students that include subscriptions to journals and other goodies. 5) Talk with each other—especially your peers in other fields—about what you are reading and thinking. Dissertation ideas often come out of conversations with colleagues working on similar sets of problems in other fields. In short, read, read, read, and engage.

Schedule:

*Note: This schedule may be changed or amended at my discretion. If class must be canceled due to weather or illness, the reading schedule will remain even if the class does not meet, unless I inform you otherwise.

Jan. 11: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (Hill & Wang, 1983 updated 2003)

Jan. 18: Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (Norton, 1975 & 2003)

- TWO PAGE PAPER DUE

Jan. 25: Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Informed Power* (Harvard, 2016)

Feb. 1: Ann M. Little, *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright* (Yale, 2016)

- TWO PAGE PAPER DUE

Feb. 8: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (Harvard, 2000)

Feb. 15: Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces* (North Carolina, 2006)

Feb. 22: Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Vintage, 1993)

- This week we will have a short discussion of Wood before going to the Library to listen to Dr. Edward Ayers, winner of the Bancroft Prize in American history, present his lecture "Civil War and Emancipation in the Heart of America."

*Feb. 23: Blackburn Brown Bag, Dr. Edward Ayers, University of Richmond, "History Between the Lines". 12:30- 2:00pm, Powers Hall 135. This event is open to graduate students and will be catered.

Mar. 1: Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions* (Norton, 2017)

- REVIEW ESSAY (7-10 pages) DUE

Mar. 8: NO CLASS (spring break)

Mar. 15: Pauline Maier, *Ratification* (Simon & Schuster, 2011)

Mar. 22: Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father* (Penguin, 2007)

- TWO PAGE PAPER DUE

Mar. 29: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (Vintage, 1991)

Apr. 5: NO CLASS (For some reason)

*Apr. 6-7: International Graduate Historical Studies Conference, Bovee University Center.

*Apr. 6: Keynote: Dr. Alan Taylor, University of Virginia, “Transforming North America: Empires and Republics in War and Peace, 1800-1850.” 7:30pm, Park Library. Reception to follow in the Terrace Room of the Bovee Center. Please plan to attend.

Apr. 12: Seth Rockman, *Scraping By* (Johns Hopkins, 2009)

- TWO PAGE PAPER DUE

Apr. 19: Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families* (Nebraska, 2011)

April. 26: Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause* (Yale, 2016)

May 1: No Class Meeting

- REVIEW ESSAY DUE (6-8 Pages) For this review, you will write on Hyde, Sinha, and one other recent(ish) book on causes of the Civil War of your choice.