HIST200A: COLLOQUIUM IN EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY

Professor Rachel Knecht | rknecht@brandeis.edu
Course Meeting: Thursdays 2-4:50pm in Rabb 335, Spring 2019
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11am-1pm in Olin-Sang 217

COURSE OVERVIEW

This state-of-the-field course is designed to introduce students to the major themes and debates in Early American historiography and present some of the new directions in the field. Course readings will pay particular attention to how historians treat the social differences of race and gender, geographical boundaries (or lack thereof), socioeconomic freedom and unfreedom, sexuality and intimacy, and intellectual currents in both religion and science. Assignments will help students develop graduate-level written and analytical skills, as well as practice in presenting information to a variety of audiences.

The course is intended to support all interested students, regardless of their intended career path. It will offer core texts to doctoral students who are thinking about how to prepare their examination fields, essential content to those thinking about teaching or presenting early American history to non-academic audiences, and critical thinking and writing skills to all. Accordingly, assignments will offer students flexibility in choosing how to engage with the material, and discussions will encourage a variety of approaches to historical literacy.

Learning Goals: By the end of this course, students will be able to:
• Identify major historiographical debates and shifts in Early American History;
• Discuss, analyze, and compare historical scholarship at a graduate level; and
• Write clearly and analytically about contemporary historical research.
COURSE POLICIES

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:
The following books will be available at the bookstore and on hold at the Goldfarb Library. They can also be purchased at the online retailer of your choice, or requested through Inter-Library Loan. Assigned articles and chapters will be available through LATTE.

Kathryn Gin Lum, *Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2014)
Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008)
Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS
Students in this class will be evaluated on three written assignments, a presentation, and weekly class participation. Please note that for any of the written assignments, students are free to propose alternative products that meet the same learning goals as the assignments listed below. Such proposals must be submitted to me for approval.

Presentation: Each week, two students from the class will be responsible for leading the group discussion. They will be responsible for reading all the assigned materials carefully, furthering researching the historiographical context for the reading, and collaborating on discussion questions for their classmates that will expand everyone’s understanding of the assigned texts. Students will sign up for slots on the first day of class. Discussion leaders will be evaluated on their preparation, questions, and facilitation of the conversation.

Book Reviews: Students will be asked to write reviews of two texts assigned for the course. These reviews are intended to provide professional training for those students who intend to
pursue, or are considering pursuing, careers in professional history. These are intended to be long-form reviews modeled on those in Reviews in American History. Students should consult that journal (available on JSTOR) as well as other books reviews to get a feel for tone and style. Reviews can be written about any assigned monograph, so long as one is turned in on or before the midway point of the class (March 19).

**Final Paper:** For the final assignment, students will have a choice as to how they want to analyze the content and themes of the course. They will have the option to write a paper responding to one of a few different prompts that I will develop; a historiographical research paper on a topic of their choosing; a lesson plan for the grade of their choosing; a museum exhibit with images, object descriptions, and a floor plan; or a long-form journalistic essay, as might appear in The New Yorker or The Atlantic. Students may also propose an alternate product. Whatever the form, the final assignment must contain at least 3,000 words worth of analytical writing, develop an original argument, and engage with both the history and historiography of early America. Students should declare their intentions for the final assignment, in writing, on or before our April 9 class meeting.

**Class Participation:** Participation will be a key component of the course. Keep in mind that attendance in class is mental as well as physical. I ask that you do all the assigned readings and come to class prepared to listen and respond to your peers. If you agree with something stated, build off it with your own analysis. If you disagree, pose a constructive challenge. If you are shy or otherwise have trouble speaking up in groups, please come talk to me and we will find a way for you to participate fully, so you can get the most out of the class.

Grades will be distributed as follows:

- **Presentation:** 15%
  - Due: TBD
- **Book Reviews:** 30%
  - By March 19 / April 30
- **Final Paper:** 30%
  - Friday, May 10
- **Class Participation:** 25%
  - Weekly

**ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES**

- To pass the course, students must consistently come prepared for discussion and turn in every assignment. Three absences will be excused; more than that will result in a half letter grade being docked from the final grade.

- If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me in my office right away so that we can set up the appropriate accommodations.

- Barring special accommodation, **students will keep laptops closed and phones off during class meetings.** Studies consistently show that note-taking by hand prompts students to listen more deeply and learn more effectively. The temptations of the internet are irrepressible, and distracts not only you, but everyone sitting around you. Additionally, please do not record class meetings without first getting permission from me.

- You are expected to be honest in all your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Allegations of alleged dishonesty can include a failing grade for the course.
and/or suspension from the university. Course assignments will include citation guidelines, but you may also consult me or the LTS Library Guides.

- Course communication will occur in class and via email. Should there be any changes to the schedule (such as in the case of school cancellation), I will send out a revised syllabus via email. The syllabus and assignments will be handed out in class as well as posted on the LATTE course website. Students are always welcome to come talk to me during my office hours; no appointment is necessary.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**January 17: What is “Early America”?**
*Please note that today’s meeting will be held from 1-3:50pm*


**January 24: Contact & Conquest**
*Please note that today’s meeting will be held from 1-3:50pm*


**January 31: Atlantic Slavery**
*Please note that today’s meeting will be held from 1-3:50pm*


**February 7: Difference-Making**


**February 14: Faith & Transgression**


**February 28: Revolutionaries & Republicans**


**March 7: State-Building**

*First Book Review Due in Class*


**March 14: No Class Meeting**

*(Professor Knecht will be at a conference)*

**March 21: Antebellum Slavery**

Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom* (2004), all.


**March 28: Religion & Radicalism**

Kathryn Gin Lum, *Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), all.


**April 4: Markets & Capitalism**


**April 11: Imperial Environments**

Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008), all.


**April 18: The Civil War**

Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Harvard University Press, 2010)


**May 2: Reconstruction & Redemption**

  **Second Book Review Due in Class**


**Final Paper Due Friday, May 10 by 5pm**