Historiography and Historical Methods

Professor Andrew Robertson et al.

Fall 2022

Course Description

Historiography is the study of the history and theory of historical writing. Students enrolled in this Historiography and Historical Methods will journey through American history guided by Professor Andrew Robertson and seven other professors (Zara Anishanslin, Ned Blackhawk, Kristopher Burrell, Sarah King, Lauren Santangelo, Nora Slonimsky, and Wendy Wall). Students will read and discuss historical interpretations of the American past as they have changed over time in specific chronological periods—colonial/Revolutionary history, the early nineteenth century to Reconstruction, the Gilded Age to the Cold War, and the 1960s to the present. This course will also present lectures on the evolving historiographies of African American history, Native American history, and women’s history by scholars specializing in those fields. The historical methods portion of the course will teach students to interrogate primary sources and to read secondary sources with a critical eye.

Course Readings


Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page historiographical paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives
1. Students will learn about the ways historians study the past by exploring analytical, theoretical, and methodological tools that historians employ and the schools of thought that justify the use of those tools.
2. Students will assess the strengths and weaknesses of these tools of history and analyze them through written exercises.
3. Students will become acquainted with debates about the study of history and how those debates have shifted over time.

Class Schedule

Week 1: September 22: Introduction to History and Historiography

Readings

- Gaddis, Chapters 1–5

Assignments

- Discussion Board One

Week 2: September 29: Historical Methodology: Primary Sources

Readings

- Gaddis, Chapters 6–8
- W. H. McDowell, Historical Research: A Guide to Writers of Dissertations, Theses, and Books (England: Routledge, 2002), Chapters 5 and 8. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
- Short Paper One due October 5
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 3: October 6: Historical Methodology: Secondary Sources

Readings

- Cheng, Introduction, Chapters 1–2
• Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Chapter 3. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question due October 12
  - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

---

**Week 4:** October 13: The History of American Historiography

**Readings**

- Cheng, Chapters 3–6

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two due October 19
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

---

**Week 5:** October 20: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

**Readings**

- Foner & McGirr, Chapters 1–2

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Five
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due October 26
  1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor’s feedback AND
  2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
Week 6: October 27: The Nineteenth Century

Readings

- Foner & McGirr, Chapters 3–4

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due November 2
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 7: November 3: Gilded Age through the New Deal

Readings

- Foner & McGirr, Chapters 5–6

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
- Short Paper Four due November 9
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 8: November 10: The Twentieth Century: Post-WWII

Readings

- Foner & McGirr, Chapters 7–8

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due November 16
  - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
  - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
**Week 9: November 17: Historiography of Women’s History**

**Readings**

- Foner & McGirr, Chapter 15
- Cornelia Dayton and Lisa Levenstein, “The Big Tent of U.S. Women’s and Gender History,” *Journal of American History* 99, no. 3 (December 2012): 793–817. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Eight
- Short Paper Five due November 23
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

---

**Week 10: November 24: Historiography of African American History**

**Readings**

- Foner & McGirr, Chapter 18

**Assignments**

- Rough Draft due November 30
  - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
  - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

---

**Week 11: December 1: Historiography of American Indian History**

**Readings**

- Foner & McGirr, Chapter 17
- Ned Blackhawk, "Recasting the Narrative of America: The Rewards and Challenges of Teaching American Indian History,” *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March 2007): 1165–1170. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)

**Assignments**
Discussion Board Nine

**Week 12:** December 8: The Future of History

**Readings**

- Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (April 2016): 377–402. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)

**Assignments**

- Final Paper/Project due December 14
**Assignment Descriptions**

**Short Papers**

Throughout each term students will complete five short papers. Each of these assignments should be 1-2 pages in length, in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings.

**Discussion Board Posts**

Students will respond to nine virtual discussion board posts for each course. Discussion boards are led by your section professor, who will provide an analytical prompt related to course material and instructions for participation. These prompts will give you the opportunity to interact with your fellow students and share your interpretation of course themes.

**Question-and-Answer Sessions**

Throughout the semester the lead scholar of each course will lead five Q&As. Students MUST attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1-2 paragraph evaluation within 24 hours of participation. Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&A sessions, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 1-2 page review of topics covered for each missed Q&A.

**Final Paper/Project**

For the final assignment of each term, you will choose to complete either a 15-page research paper or a research project. The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts, documentary editing and transcription, podcasts, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans will not be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a paper or project, finals are broken down into smaller assignments, or scaffolded, throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows students time to incorporate instructor feedback into their assignment.
Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Paper/Project Proposal (2%):

  In roughly 1-2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information on and historical context for your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be very specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing), and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (What is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%):

  This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor’s comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan to use in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3-5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Paper or Project Preview (5%):

  This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section leader. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

  For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Final Product (21%):

  Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiographical essays.

  Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.