American social and cultural history: 1860-1940

Scope of the course:

In this course we will examine historical works about the lives of ordinary people from about 1860 to 1940. Our effort will be to explore the behavior and beliefs of non-elite people, their daily activities, crucial life-course decisions, and their reactions to major social transformations that affected their lives.

The common readings fall under three themes: emancipation, industrialization, and cultural production. Students will have an opportunity to explore a topic of their choice during a three-week independent reading unit in the middle of the semester.

Methodological emphasis:

Although this is not a course in methodology, there will be continual attention to methodological problems encountered in studying ordinary people in the past. Despite an outpouring of interesting recent work on social and cultural history, our knowledge on many matters is rudimentary and precarious. Thus, methodology will be one of our central concerns.

Assignments:

In addition to reading the assigned works carefully and contributing to the general discussion, each student will prepare three papers. One of these papers will report on work done and insights gained during the independent reading period.

Paperback books to purchase:

Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long* (Vintage)
Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford)
Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Sorrow, Labor of Love* (Basic)
Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family* (North Carolina)
John Bodnar, *The Transplanted* (Indiana)
David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas* (Texas)
Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (Cambridge)
Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Temple)
Roland Marchand, *Advertising and the American Dream* (California)
Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (North Carolina)
Carl Kaestle, et al., *Literacy in the United States* (Yale)
Class meetings:

The seminar meets on Wednesday mornings, from 10:00 until 12:00, except in the second and third week, which must be rescheduled. Please inform me in advance if you must miss any session.

Office hours:

My office hours are from 1:30 to 3:00 PM on Wednesdays in Room 215 Education Building, or by appointment. My phone numbers are: 263-2394 (History), 262-2812 (Education), or 263-3452 (Ed Research). My home phones are 238-5910 (in Madison) or 312-373-6780 (in Chicago).

Reading assignments:

Week 1  Introduction to the course
September 7

UNIT ONE: EMANCIPATION

Week 2  The short-run, grassroots impact
Date to be arranged  READ: Leon Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1979).

Supplementary reading:

William Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1979, pb).
Week 3
Date to be arranged

Cultural evolution

READ: Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pb).

Supplementary reading:

Gene Bluestein, The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1972, pb).

Week 4
September 28

Black women and work


Supplementary reading:

Jacqueline Jones, The Dispossessed: America's Underclass from the Civil War to the Present (N.Y.: Basic, 1992)
William H. Harris, The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, pb).
UNIT TWO: CAPITALISM AND CULTURE IN THE INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION

Week 5
October 5
Ethnic clash: the Chicano experience


Supplementary reading:


Week 6
October 12
Immigration


Supplementary reading:

David M. Reimers, Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pb)

The industrialization of the countryside


Supplementary reading:

Don S. Kirschner, City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s (Westport, CN, Greenwood, 1970)
UNIT THREE: INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

Week 8
October 26

Week 9
November 2

Week 10
November 9

UNIT FOUR: THE PRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE

Week 11
November 16

Week 12
November 23

Individual conferences

Social gathering, no seminar meeting

Oral reports (double session).

Individual conferences

Social gathering, no seminar meeting

Oral reports (double session).

Working-class culture


Supplementary reading:


Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929, pb)


Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions & American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1973, pb)

Advertising

Supplementary reading:


Week 13
November 30


Supplementary reading:

Cathy N. Davidson, ed., Reading in America: Literature & Social History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)
Christopher P. Wilson, The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985)
Ramon Gutierrez and Genaro Padilla, eds., Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993)

Week 14
December 7

Supplementary reading:


*Popularizing high culture*


Supplementary reading:


