HIST 275: Culture and Society in 19th-Century America

Culture: "[denotes] those works and practices that have to do with the assigning or attribution of meaning and significance to the things, persons, and happenings of the material world."

"Culture is formed by perceptions, intentions, and acts. It is a form of production or work requiring energy and time, involving human choices and social consequences, engaging materials and labor, and connecting the producer with the network of relationships--social, political, economic--that constitute his society."


This course will introduce students to the history of the United States in the nineteenth century. Course topics include the economic and social significance of slave and wage labor; the effects of industrialization and subsequent changes in work and leisure; the social, economic, and cultural changes wrought by civil war; urbanization and the problems of nineteenth century cities; the rise of the labor movement and agrarian populism; and the beginnings of urban reform in the 1890s.

We will try to understand both culture (defined here as the ideals, values, and structures of meaning shared by Americans) and society (the social, economic and political institutions and frameworks which organized life) in this period. Culture and society are not static entities; they change and evolve. Our goal is to try to understand and interpret evidence of how culture and society have changed over time.

We will pay particular attention to analyzing events and ideas in the nineteenth century, and trying to understand the meanings attributed to them by nineteenth-century observers. Where were the boundaries of "the frontier" in nineteenth century North America? What did enslaved people and wage earners mean when they invoked the term "freedom"? We will then ask how historians and students of history at the beginning of this twentieth-first century understand and make use of those same nineteenth-century events. The culture of nineteenth-century America was very different from our own, yet consider how many representations of it pervade the present, from popular movies to the PBS documentaries.

Our study and writing of history explores and interprets the past, yet we cannot escape the perspective of the present. The purpose of this course is to provide you with the intellectual tools with which to assess and understand the work historians do, and begin to develop your own perspective on the American past.

The following books are required reading. They are available at the Reed College Bookstore and on Book Reserve for HIST 275 in the Reed Library:

Copies of assigned articles will be available on library reserve. Pay attention to how these are described in the syllabus—if articles are contained in books, then you will need the name of the book in order to locate the reading under "Book Reserve."

Course requirements: Regular attendance at conferences, timely completion of assigned readings and papers, and active and informed participation in class discussions.

Written work: Each student will write two short papers and one longer research paper. The first short paper (8 pages) is due Thursday, September 22 in class. For this paper students will read and analyze Frederick Douglass' Narrative (1845) in light of questions raised by James Oakes' secondary historical work on slavery. Since the fourth week grade reports are due that week, there can be no extensions for this assignment.

The second paper (10 pages) is due Friday, October 14. This paper will reflect your analysis of selected articles (your choice) from The Nation published from 1865 through 1871. Reed owns the digital archive of this magazine, which is available at http://www.archive.thenation.com/index_login.asp

The third paper (10-12 pages) is due Friday, November 18 by 5:00 p.m. at Eliot 214A. For this paper you may choose your own topic, but the paper must use at least two secondary sources on a topic from the period after the Civil War. We will discuss possible topics and sources in class.

I hold office hours most Friday mornings. Please sign up for an appointment on the sheet outside my office door, Eliot Hall 214A.

COURSE READING

Week One
Tuesday, August 30
Introduction to Course: Politics and Culture

Required reading:
(Use book reserve--there's no need to buy this very thick book!)
Thursday, Sept. 1
Required reading:
[Book reserve]

Week Two
Expansion and Evangelicalism
September 6, 8

Required reading:
[Book reserve]

[Article, e-reserve and on JSTOR]

[Article and e-reserve]

Suggested for further study:
Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class* (1981)  

See also the brief biography of Charles Grandison Finney at http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/finney.html

Week Three
Market Revolution: Lowell, Massachusetts
September 13

Required reading:
Thomas Dublin, *Farm to Factory* (Book reserve)  
(Please read selected letters first, then read the historian's Introduction, then the remaining letters. Selections will be announced in class.)

September 15
Required reading:
[Article and e-reserve]
Suggested for further study:

Please check out the Web site of the Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell, MA: http://www.nps.gov/lowe/

**Week 4**

**The Economics and Experience of Slavery**

**September 20, 22**

**Required reading:**
James Oakes, *Slavery & Freedom*, Intro., Ch. 1 "Outsiders," & Ch. 2 "Slavery & Liberal Capitalism" p. 3-79 [Book reserve]

Assigned reading for 7-8 page paper:
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) in Gates, *Classic Slave Narratives* p. 245-331 (Book reserve)

*The first short paper (8 pages) is due Thursday, September 22*

IN CLASS. We will discuss your papers in class; no extensions will be granted.

Further reading on the history of slavery:

**Week 5**

**“Free” Wage Labor**

**September 27**

**Required reading:**
[Article and e-reserve]

[Article, e-reserve and JSTOR]

**September 29**

**Required reading:**
Richard Oestricher, "Terence Powderly, the Knights of Labor and Artisanal Republicanism," p. 30-61 in Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, eds., Labor Leaders in America (University of Illinois Press, 1987) [article and e-reserve]

Suggested for further study:
David Montgomery, "The Working Class of the Pre-Industrial City," Labor History 9 (1968) 3-22
Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (1986)
Lori Ginzburg, Women and the Work of Benevolence (1990)

REQUIRED LECTURE:
You are to attend the historian Richard White’s presentation on environmental history and the American West.

Week 6
Declaring The Rights of Woman
October 4
Required reading:
[Article and e-reserve]

October 6
Required reading:
[Article and e-reserve]

Week 7
October 11, 13
The Antebellum West: "Freedom" on the "Frontier"
Required reading:
Richard White, 'It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own" Chapters 3-9, pages 55-211. [Book reserve]

The second paper (10 pages) is due Friday, October 14. This paper will reflect your analysis of selected articles (your choice) from The Nation published from 1865 through 1871. Reed owns the digital archive of this magazine, which is available at http://www.archive.thenation.com/index_login.asp

FALL BREAK OCTOBER 15-23
Week 8
Slavery and the Coming of War
October 25, 27

Required reading:
James Oakes, Slavery and Freedom, Ch. 3, "Slaveholders and Nonslaveholders" and Ch. 4, "Slaves and Masters" in *Slavery and Freedom*, 80-194 and Epilogue

Required reading:

And for debate:

PLEASE BE PREPARED TO DEFEND A POSITION IN CLASS!!

Suggested for further study:

Week 9
The Aftermath of Civil War: Reconstruction and the Meanings of Freedom
November 1, 3


Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* [Book reserve]

Week 10
Postwar Politics
November 8, 10

Required reading:
Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil to the Progressive Era* [Book reserve]

Week 11
November 15, 17
Required reading:
Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* Introduction; Chapters 1-5
[Book reserve]

Suggested for further study:
Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (University of Kansas Press, 1995)
Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populists: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892* (University of Kansas Press, 1992)

The third paper (10-12 pages) is due **Friday, November 18** by 5:00 p.m. at Eliot 214A. For this paper you may choose your own topic, but the paper must use at least two secondary sources on a topic from the period after the Civil War. We will discuss possible topics and sources in class.

**Week 12**
**Labor in the New Century**
**November 22**
**Required** reading:
[Article, e-reserve and Academic Search Premier]

Suggested for further study:

**November 24-27** THANKSGIVING VACATION

**Week 13**
**Mapping Ethnic New York in the 1890s**
**November 29, December 1**

**Required** reading:
Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), selections
(Book reserve)

Note: Students should take a look at the hypertext edition of Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* at
http://www.cis.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/title.html

Suggested for further study:
New Frontiers: U.S. Imperialism
Final Class
Tuesday, December 6
Required reading:
   Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the
   Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (Selections) [Book reserve]