“The indescribable interest with which I strained my eyes, as the first patches of American soil peeped like molehills from the green sea…can hardly be exaggerated…. Though I had had as many eyes as Argus, I should have had them all wide open, and all employed on new objects.”

-Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (1842)

Many narratives of the nineteenth-century United States present the era’s turning point as the Civil War, which casts its shadow over the preceding decades by labeling them (anachronistically) as “antebellum.” This course asks what happens to our narratives of the nineteenth century if we shift our gaze to an earlier decade. In the 1840s, the problems of slavery and sectionalism were certainly of great concern, but they preoccupied Americans alongside and in competition with a host of other issues. This was an era of religious and cultural ferment, of large-scale migration and long-distance travel, of imperial ambition and millennial anxiety, of agitation for both war and peace. As the nation’s territorial boundaries expanded and its population diversified, Americans wondered what, if anything, held them together as a nation, and they grappled to make sense of their young republic’s place in the world. In this course, we will read scholarship stressing various historiographical approaches and problems, with particular emphasis on recent efforts to situate American history in a global context. Students will develop and write a substantial research paper based on both primary and secondary sources. Possible research topics include temperance, abolitionism, women’s rights, and other social reforms; developments in transportation and communication; Mormonism and the migration to Utah; the Oregon Crisis and the Oregon Trail; Texas annexation and the Mexican-American War; the California Gold Rush; the ideology of Manifest Destiny and responses to it; Transcendentalism; Irish immigration; American engagement with European politics and culture; industrialization and labor activism; American Romanticism in art and literature; millenarian movements; and utopian communities.

As one of the history department’s junior seminars, this course focuses on cultivating skills in historical research and writing. It builds on skills you have already learned in other history courses, such as evaluating primary evidence and analyzing historians’ arguments. You will also learn how to develop a viable research problem, locate primary and secondary sources relevant to your topic, and organize your findings into a coherent paper with an original historiographical argument. Through the process of researching and writing a lengthy paper of your own devising, you will, I hope, cultivate a better sense of your own vision and voice as a historian. By the end of the course, you should be well prepared to write a senior thesis in history. More than that, I hope that this course will offer you greater confidence in formulating and executing an independent project, sharper skills as a writer and critic, and a deeper sense of why history matters to you personally and to the world we inhabit now.
Policies and expectations

Honor principle: Reed’s honor principle governs our conduct in this course in two ways:

- **Respect for others.** If you don’t agree with what someone else has to say, you are welcome (and encouraged) to express your point of view, but you must do so respectfully. This course includes frequent in-class workshops of work-in-progress; these are wonderful opportunities to practice giving and receiving constructive criticism. I expect you to be honest with one another, and I also expect you to be kind.

- **Intellectual honesty.** I expect all work you do for this course to be your own. In your written work, I expect you to cite your sources properly, using footnotes following the Chicago Manual of Style. One of the aims of this course is to teach you proper practices for using sources and avoiding plagiarism; if you have any questions about these matters, please ask.

Late work: Because written assignments for this course have been carefully sequenced, and because our classroom discussions will often center on students’ written work, late work is not acceptable in this course. Please note that at several points in the semester, you will be asked to turn in work in progress. *Neither I nor your classmates expect perfection in drafts or other works in progress.* It is imperative to turn in your work on time so that your peer reviewers and I will have time to read and respond to your work.

Disability accommodation: Students with disabilities requiring accommodation should be in touch with me and the director of disability support services (Theresa Lowrie, disability-services@reed.edu) within the first two weeks of class in order to make arrangements for suitable accommodation.

Library and technology: This course includes instruction in library research and online research. Librarian Annie Downey, the library’s liaison to the history department, will conduct two classes on research techniques early in the semester. I also encourage you to meet with Annie individually about your own research project (adowney@reed.edu). I am not requiring students to use any particular bibliographic or citation management software (such as EndNote) in this course. However, we will take some time to discuss the advantages (and disadvantages) of such software, and I will inform you of optional out-of-class workshops on these programs.

Communication: I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course. Please be sure to check your Reed email at least once a day so that you will see these messages. You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also strongly encourage you to come talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in progress (if you can’t make my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times for an appointment). Doing history is really, really hard. If you find yourself frustrated or stuck, please don’t despair, and please don’t keep your struggles to yourself. A quick (or long) conversation can often be the best way out of a research quagmire, so please keep me informed of what you’re up to. (You are also welcome to drop by if you have made a particularly exciting discovery or lit upon an especially interesting idea that you just have to share with someone.)
“Ideas come when we do not expect them, and not when we are brooding and searching at our desks. Yet ideas would certainly not come to mind had we not brooded at our desk and searched for answers with passionate devotion.”

- Max Weber

Assignments

Conference attendance and participation: Because much of what you learn in this course will come out of the discussions you have with each other in conference, I pay careful attention to attendance. Missing more than three conferences or repeatedly coming late will put you at risk of failing the course. I expect you to come to conference on time and prepared to participate in discussion of the assigned readings. Participation includes both expressing your own ideas and questions and listening carefully to those of others. If you have concerns about speaking in conference, please come see me early in the semester so that we can discuss ways to make participating in the discussion easier and more enjoyable for you.

The junior seminar paper: The major assignment for this course is an original research paper (approximately 25-30 pages). In this paper, you will bring together primary and secondary sources to make an argument relevant to a significant historiographical problem. All of the written assignments for this course contribute in some way to the development of your final paper. Skipping any of the intermediate assignments will seriously jeopardize your grade; neglecting to turn in the final paper will cause you to fail the course. Due dates for the paper assignments are summarized on the last page of this syllabus.

Reading: The junior seminar is a 400-level course and the only course in the history department restricted to history majors. On the syllabus, I have assigned somewhat less reading than I typically assign for a 300-level history course. However, since you will be carrying out an individual research project over the course of the semester, you should expect to do substantial research, reading, and writing each week beyond what is assigned on the syllabus. Most of the assigned readings are accessible online (see links on Moodle). In addition, the following required books are on order at the bookstore and on reserve at the library:


Discussion leading: Nine of the conferences on the weekly schedule listed below are designated “historiographical focus” days, when we will focus on a particular historical subfield or a topic of particular relevance to American history in the 1840s. Together with a partner, you will be expected to lead conference on one of these historiographical focus days. Dates will be assigned early in the semester.
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1

M 1/28 Course introduction

W 1/30 Workshop: introduction to primary source research (meet in library)
a) Stillman Wagstaff and Jesse Gant, “What Are the Documents?” in Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer, by William Cronon et al.
b) The Craft of Research, 39-48, 51-81 [sections 3.2-3.4, 4.0-5.6].

Th 1/31-F 2/1 Individual meetings to discuss research topics.

Week 2

M 2/4 Thinking like a historian
b) Patrick Rael, “How to Read a Primary Source,” in Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 2004). (Look under the “Reading” section.)
c) Read four consecutive issues of a newspaper from the 1840s in the database America’s Historical Newspapers. You may choose the dates and the newspaper at random, or based on a location and/or event relevant to your research topic. Then choose a second newspaper and read four consecutive issues from approximately the same dates. Bring to class your notes on your observations. You might consider:
   1) What are the categories of information included in each paper (e.g. local news, international news, advertising, opinion, etc.)? Does the newspaper seem to have a consistent structure or layout? Based on your observations, how would you describe the nineteenth-century newspaper as a genre?
   2) What topics were of import to each paper’s writers and editors? What audiences do these writers and editors seem to be addressing? How do the two newspapers you consulted compare in the topics they address and how they address them?

W 2/6 Workshop: introduction to secondary source research (meet in library)
a) The Craft of Research, 84-101 [chapter 6].

Week 3

M 2/11 Anatomy of an article
b) Write a précis and outline of Delay’s article (no more than one page, single-spaced, for each). The précis should be a paragraph or two that summarizes Delay’s argument and describes how he defends that argument (consider sources and methodology). The outline should list the major points that Delay makes, in order. The aim here is to pay attention to how a historical argument is structured and to think about why the author might have chosen to structure the argument that way. You do not have to list the main topic of every single paragraph; instead, try to break the paper down into loosely coherent chunks and identify the main point of each. Please bring a hard copy of your précis and outline to class.

c) Think back to a scholarly article that you enjoyed reading in another history course. (It is preferable to choose an article from a scholarly journal, rather than a chapter from a book.) Skim the article again, paying attention to its argument and structure. What makes this article interesting to you? What makes it work especially well as a piece of historical scholarship? What makes it a good read? Be prepared to share your reflections in class.

W 2/13 Historiographical focus: slavery and resistance

F 2/15 Preliminary topic statement due. Email it to me by 5:00 p.m.

Week 4

M 2/18 Defining an age

In class: strategies and software for taking notes and organizing data.

W 2/20 How to (not) read a book
a) Henkin, The Postal Age, 93-176 (part II, epilogue).
b) After you have finished reading the book, use the database America: History and Life to locate scholarly reviews of The Postal Age. Read the reviews from Reviews in American History and at least 2 other journals. How do the various reviews compare? How do they compare with your own assessment of the book? What do you glean about what a scholarly review is? Be prepared to share your observations in class.

Week 5

M 2/25 Capturing a moment

W 2/27 The big story in the little story
a) Clark, The Communitarian Moment, 135-224 (chapters 5-8).
F 3/1 Research proposal with working bibliography due. Email it to me by 5:00 p.m.

Week 6

M 3/4 Historiographical focus: transcontinental migration

W 3/6 Historiographical focus: nation and empire

Week 7

M 3/11 Historiographical focus: religion

Primary source analysis due (5 pages). Email it to me and your peer reviewers by 3:00 p.m.

W 3/13 Workshop: primary source analysis
a) Read primary source analysis papers of others in your peer review group. Come to class prepared to discuss how each author can develop his/her analysis into a historical argument.

Th 3/14 Public lecture: Judy Kertész, title TBA, 4:15 p.m., Psych 105.

3/16-3/24 SPRING BREAK

Week 8

M 3/25 Historiographical focus: politics
c) “Integrating Sources” from The Harvard Guide to Using Sources. Focus on sections on “Choosing Relevant Parts of a Source,” “Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting,” and “The Nuts and Bolts of Integrating.”

**M 3/25** Film screening: “Murder at Harvard,” 7:00 p.m., Vollum 120.

**W 3/27** Historical imagination
a) Film: “Murder at Harvard.” View at Monday screening or on your own in the IMC. *Note:* I recommend watching the film before you do the readings below.

**Week 9**

**M 4/1** Historiographical focus: class, labor, and social mobility

**W 4/3** Historiographical focus: internationalizing American history
b) Timothy Mason Roberts, introduction and “The Ambivalence of Americans Abroad,” in Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 1-41. [e-reserves]

**Week 10**

**M 4/8** Historiographical focus: culture

*Preliminary draft due (10 pages).* Email it to me and your peer reviewers by 3:00 p.m.
W 4/10 Workshop: preliminary drafts
a) Read preliminary drafts of others in your peer review group. Come to class prepared to discuss how each author can develop his/her preliminary draft into a full paper.

Week 11

M 4/15 Workshop: arguments and introductions
a) Look at the opening pages of some scholarly articles in historical journals (such as the Journal of American History, Journal of the Early Republic, American Historical Review). By 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, please post to Moodle the link to an article that you feel has an especially effective introduction. Take notes on your observations about the following:
   1) Focusing only on the first few sentences of the articles, what are different strategies that authors use for capturing a reader’s attention? Which strategies strike you as especially effective or ineffective?
   2) Looking across multiple articles, what are the components that most introductions share? How do authors set up their arguments? How do they establish their arguments’ significance?

c) The Craft of Research, 232-248 [chapter 16].
d) Come to class prepared to explain the argument of your research paper in one minute or less. Be sure to cover all the components of an academic argument, as described by Williams. Think of this as your paper’s “elevator speech.”

W 4/17 Historiographical focus: environmental history
Note: Prof. William Cronon, 2012 Greenberg Scholar, will attend our class.


Week 12

M 4/22 The road ahead
a) Will Anderson, “Refined Christians, Rugged Aspirations: Jason Lee, the Oregon Mission, and American Methodism, 1833-1847” (B.A. thesis, Reed College, 2008). [e-reserves] Read the introduction and skim the chapters, noting your observations on the following:
   1) What are the range and quantity of sources used? How does the author integrate primary and secondary sources?
2) How does the author break the thesis into chapters and the chapters into sections? What is the scope of the individual chapters and of the thesis as a whole?

3) What makes this thesis effective? What might you have done differently had it been yours?

W 4/24 Workshop: the art of revision
a) The Craft of Research, 203-210, 249-269 [chapters 14 and 17].
d) Bring to class two paragraphs from your draft-in-progress: one that you think is really successful, and one in which you think the writing needs work. Please print three copies of each paragraph, double-spaced, on separate pieces of paper.
e) Optional but helpful: “Revising Drafts,” University of North Carolina Writing Center.

F 4/26 Full drafts due. Email your draft to me and your peer reviewers by 5:00 p.m.

Week 13

M 4/29 Workshop: full drafts
a) Read full drafts of others in your peer review group. Come to class prepared to discuss how each author can revise prose and ideas into a final paper.

W 5/1 Workshop: full drafts and/or end-of-semester celebration
In class: continue to discuss drafts, as needed.

F 5/10 Final papers due. Turn in hard copy to my office, Vollum 124, by 5:00 p.m.
SUMMARY OF DUE DATES

F 2/15 Preliminary topic statement due. Email it to me by 5:00 p.m.
In a few sentences, update me on your preliminary research: what is your topic? What primary sources will you use? What questions might your paper address?

F 3/1 Research proposal with working bibliography due. Email it to me by 5:00 p.m.
In a proposal of about 2 pages, describe your research problem and questions. Indicate the primary sources you will use and the bodies of historiography with which you will engage. Explain the historical and historiographical significance of your research. Your proposal should come with a working bibliography (3-5) pages that lists the primary and secondary sources you plan to consult. You may annotate the items individually, or you may group them into categories and provide annotations for each category.

M 3/11 Primary source analysis due (5 pages). Email to me and peer reviewers by 3:00 p.m.
Choose a single (long) primary source or a set of closely related (shorter) primary sources that you expect to be central to your paper. In a 5-page analysis, provide a close reading of the source, detailing the questions or problems that the source raises for you. (You might draw on Patrick Rael’s “How to Read a Primary Source” for guidelines.) This assignment is intended to focus your attention on primary evidence as you begin to shift from research to writing; you might even be able to incorporate parts of your primary source analysis into your paper draft.

M 4/8 Preliminary draft due (10 pages). Email it to me and your peer reviewers by 3:00 p.m.
Write 10 pages of your paper—not necessarily the first 10 pages. The aim is to produce a substantial piece of writing and get some feedback on it before you draft the entire paper.

F 4/26 Full drafts due. Email your draft to me and your peer reviewers by 5:00 p.m.
Complete a draft of all parts of your paper, including introduction, evidence, conclusion, and footnotes.

F 5/10 Final papers due. Turn in hard copy to my office, Vollum 124, by 5:00 p.m.
Congratulations! You’re ready to write a senior thesis!