**History 272A Research Seminar in U.S. History**

**Winter 2016 Tues, 3:00-5:50, HSSB 4041**

**Professor Alice O’Connor**

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**Office Hours: M 2:00-3:00 W 1:15-3:15 and by appointment**

**Course Description and Objectives**

History 272A is the first half of a two-quarter research seminar designed to give graduate students an opportunity to explore a significant, originally-conceived topic in U.S. history in an article-length research paper using primary and secondary sources. The course aims to provide a structured setting within which students can define, justify, and map out an approach to investigating a significant research topic; identify primary source materials and appropriate methods for accessing and analyzing them; develop an argument with reference to the existing secondary literature; prepare and receive comment on drafts; and participate in a workshop-like process of oral presentation and peer review of work in progress. Given the diversity of topics, approaches, and time periods this course aims to accommodate, assigned readings and discussion are meant to illustrate and explore the pragmatics of approach, method, organization, use of evidence and the like as much as to emphasize important developments and themes in U.S. history broadly conceived. Students will also have the opportunity to learn about the topics others are pursuing in the course, in discussions of background readings assigned by their peers. And throughout we will talk about history as a way of writing as well as thinking and conducting research.

During the first quarter, students will concentrate on selecting and refining a viable research topic, preparing bibliographies of secondary and primary sources, identifying appropriate research strategies and methods and, by the end of the quarter, producing a 10-12 page prospectus that describes the substance and significance of the topic as a contribution to historical knowledge, presents the central research questions, identifies the key primary and secondary sources, reviews the relevant historiography, and lays out a coherent, feasible strategy for getting the project done (some of which will serve as draft material for the paper itself). As seminar participants, students will also be asked to educate one another in the essentials of their topics through presentation as well as readings, so that we might work together as a class to help work through the arguments—and the dilemmas—that emerge during the course of the research.

**Course Format and Requirements:**

The course will rely on a combination of common readings/discussion, oral presentations, peer review, and workshop activities to help students through the stages of research. We will meet regularly (notify me in advance if you need to miss a session), and in between you should plan to check in with me independently. Additional requirements include:

Reading assignments:

* Journal articles that explore important topics and themes in U.S. history, while also offering one or more object lesson in approach, method, conceptualization, historiography, sourcing (etc.). All readings will be posted on Gauchospace.

1. Each student will be required to put together a **brief** compilation of readings (100 pages tops, one or more articles, book excerpts, possibly a primary source document or two) on his or her topic, for posting for the rest of the class, that will provide the basic background information we need to comment intelligently on your presentations (see assigned weeks below, and plan on getting me the readings at least 5 days in advance of class).
2. Writing Assignments: In addition to assignments noted below, the major writing assignment for this quarter is a 10-12 page prospectus, DRAFT due February 23 (for peer comment); Final due March 15.
3. Oral presentations: Students will also be required to make regular oral presentations of work in progress, and to prepare comments on one another’s work, as assigned in class.

Jan 5: Course Introduction

Readings: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “An American Album, 1857” (AHA presidential address, 2009)

Alice Kessler-Harris, “Capitalism, Democracy, and the Emancipation of Belief,” (OAH presidential address, 2012)

William Cronon, “Storytelling” (AHA presidential address, 2013)

\*\*Assignment for next week: Prepare a one-page abstract identifying your topic, central research questions, major secondary sources (and any primary sources you’ve identified) and significance of your topic. (\*\*note, this abstract, a concise statement of your topic **and its significance**, will be a useful draft for the first part of your prospectus).

Jan 12: Presentation/discussion of abstracts, articles, and about writing history.

Readings: John Majewski, “U.S. History in a Statistical Age,” (*The American Historian* November 2014)

Michael B. Katz, Mark Stern, Jamie J. Fader, “The New African American Inequality,” (JAH June 2005)

Robert S. Lynd, “Knowledge for What?” (excerpt)

George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

Mary Furner’s excellent guide to writing a prospectus!

Jan. 19: Library Session with Sherri Barnes and Shari Laster (in the NEW!!!! Library Classroom)

Jan. 26: Presentation/discussion of dissertation prospectus: Caitlin Rathe

Readings: Prospectus and background readings from Caitlin Rathe

Articles: Gail Radford, “From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities: Institutional Factors in the Shaping of American Public Enterprise” (JAH 2003)

Meg Jacobs, “How About Some Meat? The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State-Building from the Bottom-Up,” (JAH December, 1997)

\*\*Assignment for next week: Write a brief (5-7 page) historiographical review of the most important secondary sources related to your topic and identify the contribution your research will make in light of the existing literature (part 2 of your prospectus).

Feb 2: Reports/discussion of situating your work in the literature

Readings: Constance Areson Clark, “Evolution for John Doe: Pictures, the Public, and the Scopes Trial Debate,” (JAH March 2001)

Mae Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924” (JAH June, 1999)

Background readings from Kashia Arnold, Jonathan Lee

\*\*Assignment for next week: Write a draft discussion of your research strategy, including a discussion of the primary sources and how you will get to them, the methods/approach you will use, the theoretical underpinnings that inform your approach and the questions you will be asking of the documents, and the arguments/hypotheses you expect to explore (this will be preliminary at this point).

Feb 9: Report/discussion on primary sources and the strategies you are developing

Readings: A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, “Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America,” (JAH, June 2014)

#### Background readings from Doug Genens, James Williams

Feb. 16: Background readings from Will Murphey, Rana Razek, Elyse Finkel

\*\*Next week: draft of full prospectus due

#### Feb. 23: Background readings from Andrew Elrod, Addie Jensen, Nicole DeSilva

#### \*\*Draft prospectus due (2 copies: one for me, one for peer critic)

#### March 1: Oral presentation/peer critique of prospectus

#### March 8: Oral presentation/peer critique of prospectus

#### Final draft of prospectus due March 15

Assignment: By the beginning of next quarter, you should plan to have in hand:

1. A draft introduction
2. A detailed outline of your paper.

Remember: All this should prepare you to spend as much time as possible on what will be our central concern for next quarter: pulling it all together into a coherent narrative!!!