

HIST 555: American Radicals
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Western Kentucky University
Spring 2012 Web Course

This course, topical rather than survey, will explore a selection of politically radical Americans, considering some through biographical studies and others through broader studies of their contexts. This semester, we will begin with a few important early radicals, then focus on the period from the late nineteenth century through World War II. We will look at a number of people and movements who sought solutions to the problems that plagued American society, with particular attention to two subject areas that have prompted innovative scholarship: the African American freedom struggle before the modern Civil Rights Movement, and labor and the Protestant Left.

This is an online class, meaning that you will work as much, if not more, than you would in an “in-class” class. You will have to master the technology of Blackboard, including Blackboard discussion boards. You will also have to manage your time and participate—extensively—in online discussions related to the readings. Each week, you will read a monograph or several articles. This means you will need to be ready to take good notes and sometimes pull together several scholars’ arguments. You will write for this class nearly every week *besides* discussion board posts. Please do not begin this course if you are not prepared for at *least* 200 pages of reading per week, regular writing assignments submitted Mondays, and weekly thoughtful participation in discussions.

Weekly assignments:

The default weekly assignment is to submit SHORT (no more than one page single-space) analysis of the week’s readings, at least eight times during the semester (required for weeks two and three, and on weeks of your choosing for the other six). This usually will be due by Tuesday at midnight. It is optional the first week of classes, and is due Wednesday 1/25 at midnight if you decide to submit one the first week. I expect this piece of writing to do the following:

- a) Summarize the argument that each author is making and discuss the evidence upon which it is based.
- b) Assess its strengths and weaknesses (what does it contribute to our understanding of the history of women and work? Does it have something new to say about questions we have discussed in the past? Does it use previously overlooked or underused evidence in new ways? Does it leave out something important?)
- c) If there is more than one reading, put the readings in dialogue with each other. That is, compare what they are saying about the subject. Some weeks, I *may* ask you to pick just one reading to write your formal assignment on, but will still expect you to reference all readings in

discussion.

I may sometimes ask you instead to fulfill a different assignment. For instance, I may ask you to interpret a primary document in light of the secondary (scholarly) readings assigned that week. On weeks when a longer written assignment is due (twice during classes, as the third longer assignment is due exams week), you do not need to hand in anything else in written format, but you do still need to participate in discussion.

Note: You must submit weekly assignments for weeks two and three. After that, you must submit six more, on weeks of your choosing. The assignment is due the Tuesday of the week that the reading is due—that is, before we discuss it in class. You can submit these assignments single-spaced; please do use Chicago style footnotes here, too.

Discussions:

Discussion is a crucial part of any graduate seminar. Discussion opens Tuesday morning, and you must post your initial post by Wednesday at 9 am, and all your posts by Saturday. Each week I will either post one or two discussion questions in the Blackboard Discussion Board forums, or ask you to formulate initial posts yourselves. Your job is to respond to the questions, generate your own questions, and respond to other posts on the board. You are required to post at least three times to the discussion board each week (more is good). At least one post must be an original post, and at least two must be a response to a student post. You may post more than twice, of course, and I will grade you on the quality of your postings. Your grade will be based not simply on posting something, but also the ways in which you help move the discussion forward. Posts that say “I agree” will not be counted, so you should try to post something substantive that utilizes the readings and documents (this can include “I agree and here’s why” with detailed reference to the readings in a way that substantively adds to the discussion).

Papers:

You will write three papers for the class. These will be based primarily on materials you are already reading for the course, with one exception. Please submit the papers double-spaced, with Chicago style footnotes. Guidance for Chicago style citations is available on the History Department website.

PARTIAL BOOK LIST

William Manning, *The Key of Liberty*, ed. Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz
(Harvard U. Press, 1993) 978-0674502888

David Walker’s *Appeal: To the Colored Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter Hinks
(Penn. State U. Press, 2000) 978-0271019949

Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and*

Integration in the United States, 1896-1935 (University Press of Florida) 978-0813034959

Beth Thompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 978-0807849293

Optional: For framing the late nineteenth through mid twentieth century you may wish to use Alan Dawley, *Stuggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State*

WEEK

1. 1/23: Introduction
 - a. Eric Foner, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sep., 1994), pp. 435-460. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2081167>
 - b. Review: Barbara Clark Smith, "The Adequate Revolution: *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* by Gordon S. Wood." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Oct., 1994), pp. 684-692. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946926>
 - c. Optional: for women's participation in the Revolution, see *WASM, How Did the Ladies Association of Philadelphia Shape New Forms of Women's Activism during the American Revolution, 1780-1781?*, by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Gregory Duffy.

2. 1/30: William Manning, *The Key of Liberty*, ed. Merrill and Wilenz

3. 2/6: David Walker's *Appeal*, ed. David Hinks

4. 2/13: Early 19th c radical women (readings on Blackboard)

Other readings will include multiple perspectives on African American protest from Reconstruction through the 1930s, and we also will likely explore Mother Jones, the ILWGWU (a multi-ethnic, multi-racial labor union of the 1930s), several figures in the religious Left, and more. A full syllabus will be up shortly.