

History 251

The U.S. in the 19th Century

Bowdoin College, Spring 2009

Meets: MW1-2:30
Prof. Patrick Rael
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This course examines a range of topics regarding life in the nineteenth-century United States. There is no way we can hope to be comprehensive, so we will pick and choose moments to explore. These moments will relate to important historical phenomena, but they will also present good opportunities to examine how historical arguments and the historian's process work. To the extent that the topics cohere into a theme, that theme concerns this: the 19th century was the great period of American transition — from a largely disunited agrarian nation, to a modern centralized industrial state. The transformation did not happen quickly or consistently over time and space, and the conflicts wrought by this uneven transformation created some of the critical issues 19th-century Americans confronted. We will pay particular attention to the cultural manifestation of these conflicts.

I have designed the course with two objectives in mind. First, it will not replicate many of the topics and materials covered in my courses on the Civil War and African-American history. Second, it is designed as a practicum. Instead of working through a timeline of American history, the course is more concerned with exploring ways of actually doing history — from research historical sources to

Level: The course is an intermediate seminar in the History Department. Intermediate seminars are designed to help majors develop the skills they will need in their research seminars. But they are also designed to expose advanced non-majors to the methods and modes of analysis of the discipline of history. As small courses with an enrollment limit of sixteen, intermediate seminars place a premium on student participation and interaction. You must keep atop of a sometimes heavy reading load so that you can contribute to class conversations. In general, I expect you to spend 2-3 hours outside of class (reading, writing, and researching) for every hour spent in class.

Course websites: The material for this course may be found online through the Blackboard system. You will find a copy of this syllabus, as well as all the reading and paper assignments. You may easily refer to the website for the most recent course assignments and requirements. You will also find my website <<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/faculty/P/prael/>> useful. It links to guides on writing, plagiarism, and other matters crucial to your success in history courses.

BOOKS

The vast majority of our material will be drawn from scholarly essays and primary historical sources available via the web. The following books are required writing guides and manuals.

- Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. 3rd edition. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 2001. ISBN 0312274664. \$7.99. A short, concise, and complete guide for history undergraduates.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. ISBN 0226816273. \$13.00. The ultimate student guide to citations and paper writing.
- Hacker, Diana. *Rules for Writers: A Brief Handbook*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. ISBN: 0312241429. \$26.30. A handy reference for tackling writing problems.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments for the course will consist of a series of short exercises and longer papers or presentations. The short exercises are “low-stakes” endeavors designed to help you master specific skills, such as footnoting properly. Two group presentations are assigned. The first will guide the class through the challenges of using a major primary historical source collection to explore a historical problem. The second will guide the class through the challenges of understanding the same problem through secondary historical essays. The final paper will ask you to put together your experience with the problem in formal paper of 8 pages.

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|-------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------|
| Exercises | %30 | |
| 1 st group presentation: | %20 | (10% group component; %10 individual component) |
| 2 nd group presentation: | %20 | (10% group component; %10 individual component) |
| Final paper | %20 | |
| Attendance and participation: | %10 | |

COURSE CONTRACT

Attendance: No absences are “excused” -- you are responsible for all material covered during missed class days. Those who may miss class to attend extra-curricular events are requested to inform me, as a courtesy, of planned absences. If special considerations (such as illness) prevent you from fulfilling course obligations, please provide me with documentation so we may consider an exception.

Late or missed assignments: Unless stated otherwise, assignments are due at the beginning of class; assignments handed in later in the day (during or after class) will be considered one day late. I will accept late assignments with no penalty only for documented health or other emergencies. In general, assignments which receive letter grades will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., from B+ to B), for each day late. A final but crucial point: *All work must be completed in order to pass this course.*

A note on academic honesty: Each author owns his or her own ideas, words, and research. You *must* give appropriate credit — generally in the form of quotations and proper footnotes — when using the work of another scholar. I expect you to be familiar both with Bowdoin's honor code, and with the guidelines for proper citation and attribution of sources provided for this course. If you have any questions, ask rather than take risks. *Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, is a serious violation of academic standards and Bowdoin's honor code.* I will enforce violations of the honor code by bringing immediate, uncontested action before the Judicial Board. Minimum penalties for plagiarism will be to fail the course.

Offensive materials disclaimer: Students occasionally find some course materials offensive. My intent is not to offend, but to educate. Views expressed in the material we will cover do not necessarily reflect my own personal opinions. The academic enterprise invites vibrant class discussion, which balances critical thinking with mutual respect. Students are expected to take responsibility for their experience in this course by examining their own reactions to material they consider offensive. At all times, our priority will be critical engagement with scholarly material. By continuing with this course, you are agreeing to be held academically accountable for all required materials in the syllabus, regardless of your own personal reactions to it. Students who are unwilling either to hear or think critically about such material are encouraged to drop this course at their discretion.

SYLLABUS

Consult the Blackboard website for the syllabus.