

Hist 231: Life Stories in America, 1730-1830

Fall 2019

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Office hours: Wed. 10:00- 12:00

This seminar explores the social and cultural history of America by focusing on the lives of specific individuals, ranging from Jesuit priests in early Quebec to Philadelphia politicians to Saramaka slaves to Maine midwives. One of the people in Philadelphia who we will discuss is Benjamin Franklin, Penn's founding father. As we examine biography and autobiography as two of history's most powerful narrative frames, we will concentrate on the spaces and places in the social landscape that shaped individual understandings of work, sense of self, gender, beliefs, and political power.

The requirements of the seminar include: active class participation, and after completing the required reads, coming to class with two or three focus questions that will contribute to the discussions at hand; and two short papers (3-5 pp.).

Because this is a seminar, critical reading and writing occupy the center of our concerns. Reading demands close attention and preparing useful questions that might serve to open conversation rather than restrict it. Hence, your three focus questions demand forethought and are not to be quickly formulated shortly before class begins; instead, they are to be posted to the class Canvas site by 12 midnight the night before. Please note: anything posted to Canvas can and probably will be seen by all members of the class, so if you only want to email me, or a particular member(s) of the class on private business, use stgeorge@sas.upenn.edu or their other email address(es).

The two papers will require first and final drafts with some peer review along the way. The first of these is a personal essay about your relation (in some way) to the past, in which your own life story will challenge you to deal with the typical historical issues of evidence, selection, outlining, narration, editing, re-outlining, re-narration. This will be due in draft on Sept. 17 and in revised form on Sept. 24. The second paper will be an interpretive book review, of any of the books that are either required or recommended readings on the syllabus. In this exercise you may want to begin to articulate a specific historical interest or direction of thought. Do not let this worry you; I will meet with each of you over the first few weeks of the semester to learn your interests and make any

necessary suggestions to get you started on a review. The second assignment is due in draft form on Oct. 15 and revised form on Oct. 22.

Over the semester, as we work on writing we will also read the following books. They are intended both as substantive studies of particular lives as microhistorical openings into wider worlds, and as models of how writing history can bring particular issues into sharp focus.

Coughlin, Michelle Marchetti. *One Colonial Woman's World: The Life and Writings of Mabethable Chandler Coit*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. RB

Dening, Greg. *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. RB

Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Dover Thrift Books. This is online in many ways: deGruyter eBooks Complete, EBook Central Academic Complete, and others, including a sight for downloading the complete book.

Moore, Brian. *Black Robe*. New York: Plume Press, 1997. RB

Pagan, John Ruston. *Anne Orthwood's Bastard: Sex and Law in Early Virginia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. On EBook Central Academic Complete.

Price, Richard. *Alabi's World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990 on ACLS Humanities E-Book. URL: <http://www.humanitiesebook.org/>.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage, 1991 RB

1. (Aug. 27) Introduction to course: history as social science and art
2. (Sept. 3) Writing life stories and colonization: Quebec
 Req.: "Captivity of Father Isaac Jogues, of the Society of Jesus, Among the Mohawks," in *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives 1642-1836*, ed. Richard VanDerBeets (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), pp. 3-40.
 Jeff Todd Titon, "The Life Story," *Journal of American Folklore* 93:369 (July-September 1980): 276-92.
3. (Sept. 10) History, fiction, and problems of evidence
 Req.: Moore, *Black Robe* (entire)

 Note: we will also see parts of the film version of Blackrobe.
4. (Sept. 17) Life Stories and Colonization: Surinam

Req.: Price, *Alabi's World*, pp. xi-xx, 3-166.

Rec.: Gert Ostindie, ed. *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism, and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

NB: Your *draft* of first writing assignment due in class today.

5. (Sept. 24) Multivoiced prose and fictive style

Req.: *Alabi's World*, pp. 166-278, and look over the extensive "Notes and Commentary", pp. 279-432.

NB: The final edition of your first paper is due; print them out, bring to class, we will discuss them in class.

6. (Oct. 1) One life in British expansion in the Pacific

Req.: Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (entire)

Rec.: Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marqueses 1770-1880* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980).
Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Marius, *Short Guide to Writing About History*, pp. 86-108.

7. (Oct. 8) Virginia and its unsettled past

Req.: John Ruston Pagan, *Anne Orthwood's Bastard* (entire).

Rec.: Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power In Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996); Marius, *Short Guide to Writing About History*, pp. 86-108

We will discuss the interpretive book review second project this afternoon, concentrating on thesis or argument; evidence (both primary and secondary), comparison with other books in field.

8. (Oct. 15) Mr. Franklin, 1788. Whither Philadelphia?

Req.: Franklin, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (entire).

Rec.: Billy Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), pp. 233-60.

Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York: Knopf).

NB: Your *draft* second writing assignment is due in class today.

9. (Oct. 22) Coughlin, *One Colonial Woman's World*, pp. xvii-126.

NB Your final book review due in class .

10. (Oct. 29) Coughlin, *One Colonial Woman's World*, pp. 127-217.

In this last section, be sure to read pp. 193-217 closely, since it is the full (and unusual) full text of the Coit diary.

11. (Nov. 5) Gender and labor on the Maine frontier

Req.: Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812*, pp. 3-203.

Rec.: Jerald E. Brown, *The Years of the Life of Samuel Lane, 1718-1806: A New Hampshire Man and His World* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000).

12. (Nov. 12) Gender and aging.

Req.: Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, pp. pp. 204-358.

13. (Nov. 19): Oral summaries of interpretive book review projects .

NB: The first half of the class (alphabetically, unless we work out a better method?) will present 12-15 minute presentations of their second paper: your choice of book, models used, its argument, the evidence and documentation you marshalled, difficulties,

Note: I may use reports as means of summarizing some readings.

14. (Nov. 26: THANKSGIVING BEGINS

15. (Dec. 3) Second group of oral presentations of book review projects continued-course conclusion.
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