

# *HSTA 551: Readings in the Early American Republic*

## Fall 2015 / W 3:40-6:30pm / LA 260

**Instructor: Kyle G. Volk**

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### **Course Description, Goals, & Outcomes:**

This graduate colloquium explores classic and recent scholarship in the history of the early American republic. The chief goals of the course are to expose students to 1.) major historiographical problems that have dominated the study of the early American republic; 2.) a variety of methodological approaches; and 3.) new scholarly trends both topical and methodological. Students successfully completing this course will gain a solid foundation for further historical and historiographical investigation of the early republic. They will also cultivate fundamental professional skills, including the construction of professional book reviews; the formation of effective discussion questions; and leading class discussions.

### **Course Requirements:**

Completion of assigned readings, faithful attendance, and consistent, constructive, and courteous participation are absolutely essential to the success of our course. Failure to meet these most basic requirements will be detrimental to the quality of our discussions and to your grade in this course. More formally, students are required to do the following:

1. **Craft 1000-word professional book reviews.** Students will write 4 reviews. A book review should summarize and critically analyze the author's main historical arguments, use of evidence, methodological approach, historiographical contribution, and conclusions. Readers of your review should be able to grasp the structure and content of the book as well as its significance and most important insights. The review should also raise new questions and suggest new avenues for historical inquiry and research based on your engagement with the text. Useful models can be found in the *Journal of the Early Republic* and *Reviews in American History*.
2. **Complete Other Short Assignments** during weeks 2, 3, 5, 9.
3. **Send Discussion Questions.** Each week students are required to email **five questions** worthy of our discussion in class. These questions should raise a variety of debatable issues—analytical, interpretive, historiographical, methodological, pedagogical, etc.—that force us to wrestle with each week's readings and deepen our comprehension of the historical and historiographical issues presented to us. These questions must do more than ask us to repeat or summarize the content or approach of a particular text. Ideally, at least three of your questions should tackle what in your assessment matters most in each set of readings (the big questions; the largest stakes). Some of your questions might ask us to compare works between weeks. At least one question should engage with each week's article/essay. In preparation for our discussions, students are expected to consider their classmates' questions thoroughly. Discussion questions should be emailed to the entire class each Tuesday by noon.
4. **Lead Discussion.** Discussion leaders will read their classmates' discussion questions ahead of time and use them to structure class discussion. The goal of the discussion leader is *not* to act as the

expert or authority in a given week but rather to facilitate a lively and wide-ranging discussion that touches on the manifold issues raised in the texts and by your classmates. Our discussion should be rigorous, stimulating, and above all, enjoyable.

5. **Construct a Final Research Essay.** The last several weeks of this course will be dedicated to exploring resources for researching the history of the early republic. I will ask you to identify a research topic and primary source base. After investigating these sources, you will construct a research essay—a primary source exploration of sorts—of approximately 10 pages. More details about this assignment will be forthcoming. The goal here is to get moving on a research project that you will execute more fully in the spring.

### **Key Course Texts:**

Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Vintage, 1991)

Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Harvard, 2012)

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Johns Hopkins, 2009)

Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (Oxford, 2014)

J. Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Northwestern, 1956)

William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 1996)

Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (Nebraska, 2011)

Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard, 1999)

Catherine McNear, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Harvard, 2014)

Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (Oxford, 2014)

Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Knopf, 2007)

Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (Norton, 2006)

### **Course Schedule**

9/2 – Week 1: The Long American Revolution [Kyle leads discussion]

Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Vintage, 1991)

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**

9/9 – Week 2: American Empire [Marlin leads]

William Appleman Williams, “Empire as a Way of Life,” *Radical History Review* 50 (1991), 71-102.

Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Harvard, 2012)

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**

- **FIND & READ: 3 professional book reviews of Gould's book published in academic journals. Please consult with each other to ensure that you have found different reviews. Come to class with your reviews and ready to summarize the reviewers' appraisal of Gould's book.**
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9/16 – Week 3: Labor History and Socio-Economic Transformation [Kyle leads]

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Johns Hopkins, 2009)

Daniel Feller, "The Market Revolution Ate My Homework," *Reviews in American History* 25 (Sep. 1997), 408-415.

- **WRITE: 1-2-page analysis of Rockman's research agenda and approach**
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9/23 – Week 4: Social History, Sexuality, and Women of the Republic [Jon leads]

Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (Oxford, 2014)

Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *Journal of American History*, 88 (Jun. 2001), 129-144.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
  - **WRITE: Professional Book Review [All Review]**
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9/30 – Week 5: Legal History and the American State [Kyle leads]

J. Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Northwestern, 1956), Chapter 1

William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 1996)

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
  - **WRITE: 3-pages comparing Hurst's and Novak's historical appraisal of the role of law in nineteenth-century America. To what extent do they agree?**
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10/7 – Week 6: Families, Networks, and Western History [Marlin leads]

Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (Nebraska, 2011)

Elliot West, “Reconstructing Race,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Spring 2003), 7-26.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
  - **WRITE: Professional Book Review [All Review]**
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10/14 – Week 7: Slavery and Capitalism in Antebellum America [Jon leads]

Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard, 1999)

Stephanie M.H. Camp, “The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861,” *Journal of Southern History* 68 (Aug. 2002), 533-572.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
  - **WRITE: Professional Book Review [Marlin]**
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10/21 – Week 8: Environmental History and the Urban Republic [Kyle leads]

Catherine McNear, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Harvard, 2014)

David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-Century New York,” *Social History* 17 (May, 1992), 203-227.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
  - **WRITE: Professional Book Review [Jon]**
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10/28 – Week 9: Democracy, Reform, and Rights [Marlin leads]

Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (Oxford, 2014)

Manisha Sinha, “Revolution or Counterrevolution?: The Political Ideology of Secession in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Civil War History* 46 (September 2000), 205-226.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
- **WRITE: 1-2-page analysis of Volk’s research agenda and approach**

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11/4 – Week 10: The Civil War and Its Causes [Jon leads]

Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Knopf, 2007)

Frank Towers, “Partisans, New History, and Modernization: The Historiography of the Civil War’s Causes, 1861-2011,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (June 2011), 237-264.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
- **WRITE: Professional Book Review [Marlin]**

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11/11 – Week 11: Nineteenth-Century American Lives [Kyle leads]

Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (Norton, 2006)

William Cronon, “Storytelling,” *AHR* 118 (Feb. 2013), 1-19.

- **Email 5 Discussion Questions by Tuesday at noon**
- **WRITE: Professional Book Review [Jon]**

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11/18 – Week 12: Discussion of Research Topics and Resources

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11/25 – Week 13: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break

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12/2 – Week 14: Discussion of Preliminary Research Findings

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12/9 – Week 15: NO CLASS

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12/18 – Final Research Essay Due by Email @ 5pm