

Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Americas (HI981)

Course Convenor: Benjamin Smith

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this core module is to introduce key approaches and methods for the comparative and transnational study of the history and culture of the Americas. The content of individual sessions will vary to allow the module to reflect historiographic developments and the interests of the various members of the School of Comparative American Studies. In all cases, however, the seminars will be oriented around discussing central themes in the region's history and culture. These include the nature of indigenous societies, the impact of colonialism and slavery, post-colonial and post-imperial revolutions, the development of national identities and other ideological movements, and the impact of mass culture. Each session will examine a theme through discussion of either foundational texts or an important historiographical debate.

Seminar Programme

- Week 1. Introduction (Benjamin Smith, H3.38) – Tuesday 12-2
- Week 2. Indigenous Worlds (Manuel Covo) – Wednesday, 10-12
- Week 3. Historiographies, Themes, Debates - Wednesday 10-12 (Jennifer Smyth, H3.28)
- Week 4. Colonial Societies (David Lambert,) – Thursday, 11-1
- Week 5. Slavery and Abolition (David Lambert,) – Thursday, 11-1
- Week 6. Reading Week (No Seminar)
- Week 7. Revolutions (Benjamin Smith,, H3 38) Tuesday 12-2
- Week 8. Nationalisms (Rosie Doyle) – Wednesday, 10-12
- Week 9. 20th Century Ideologies (Rebecca Isaacs) – Wednesday, 10-12
- Week 10. Democracy and Violent Pluralisms (Benjamin Smith H3.38) – Tuesday 12-2

The module will be team taught.

Short Essay Titles

These are sample essay titles. You are welcome to use other titles suggested by members of staff or a title of your own devising, provided, in the latter case, that you first confirm its suitability with the relevant staff member.

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of approaching the Americas as a world region?
- In what ways is the comparative study of the Americas important in the present day?
- Describe the trends in U.S. historiography from the 19th century to the present.
- What is relativism?
- How did women's history and African American studies impact the profession?

- How did American Studies evolve within the ongoing debates about historiography in America?
- Is it possible to use European and/or colonial sources to write indigenous history?
- How important was the British open immigration policy for the development of colonial society?
- Did Catholicism lead to better treatment for Native Peoples in Latin America?
- Where was the worst place in the Americas to be enslaved in 1790? Why?
- Were there alternatives to racial slavery in the economic development of the Americas?
- Assess the extent to which the abolition of slavery in the Americas stemmed from external causes.
- Use an 'Andersonian' approach to analyse a printed primary source such as a novel or newspaper, or a film, or an item of material culture such as a bottle of Coca-cola.
- To what extent were the politics and ideology of post 1945 US exceptional in the Americas?
- What impact did the rightward shift in US politics have on Latin America?
- How has the left in the Americas responded to globalization?
- What are the origins of American mass culture?
- How have class and ethnicity shaped the history and ideology of mass culture?
- Define highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow in cultural context.
- Discuss the importance of motion pictures in the history of American mass culture.
- American mass culture promotes a predominantly white, middleclass, male experience. Discuss.

Assessment and Optional Non-Assessed Work

This module is assessed through 1 essay of up to 5,000 words. In addition, all students have the option of submitting 1 non-assessed essay of up to 2,500 words. Should students decide to do so, these essays are handed in directly to the module convenor in week 7 and feedback will be received in week 10. This non-assessed essay can be a short version of the final assessed essay or be on an entirely different topic.

Week 1: Introduction (Benjamin Smith)

This session serves as an introduction to many of the themes that follow in the course and particularly addresses the theme of how we can talk about 'the Americas' as an historical object.

Questions

1. What are the central themes in the comparative study of the Americas?
2. What chronologies are most appropriate for the study of the region (e.g. time-frames, periodisations, key moments)?
3. Does it make sense to approach the Americas as a single region?

Readings

Core texts:

Elliott, John H., *Do the Americas have a common history? An address* (Providence, R.I.: Published for the Associates of the John Carter Brown Library, 1998)

Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe, *The Americas: The history of a hemisphere* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), Chapter 1 [note: the title of this book is incorrectly listed as 'The Americans' in the Warwick Library catalogue]

Further reading:

Diamond, Jared, *Guns, germs, and steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years* (Vintage, 1998), especially Chapter 18

Elliot, John. H., 'A Pan-American flight' [review of Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Americas*], *The New York Review of Books*, 26 February 2004

Lewis, Martin W. and Kären E. Wigen, *The myth of continents: A critique of metageography* (University of California Press, 1997), especially Introduction and Chapter 1

Week 2: Indigenous Worlds (Manuel Covo)

Dan Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001) [section]

Neal Salisbury, "The Indians' Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of the Europeans," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996), 435-58.

Further reading:

Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, Mass, 2001).

Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance. Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012)

Questions

What changes when one adopts the perspective of indigenous people to think about the "New World"?

What kinds of sources can historians employ to study indigenous worlds? Does the active use of the historical imagination in interpreting and contextualizing these sources challenge or deepen the practice of history as a social science?

To what extent were Native Americans major actors in the formation of a global economy?

Week 3: Historiographies, Themes, Debates (Jennifer Smyth)

The seminar will discuss the history of American historical writing at both a 'professional' and 'popular' level from the nineteenth century to the present. Topics will include the professionalization of history, the exclusion of women, the rise of relativism, and the resurgence of women's history, African American and Native American historiography, and cultural history.

Readings

Core text:

Novick, Peter, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Further reading:

Becker, Carl, 'Everyman His Own Historian', *AHR*, 37 (1932) 221-36

Brown, Dee, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York, 1970)

Des Jardins, Julie, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2003)

Ernest, John, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill, 1993)

Gluck, Sherna Berger, 'What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, 2 (1977)

Knight, Alan, 'Patterns and Prescriptions in Mexican Historiography', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25, 3 (July 2006): 340-66

Mallon, Florencia, ed., *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, Knowledge, and Language in the Americas* (Duke, 2011)

Schmidt-Nowara, Christopher, *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburg, 2008)

Turner, Frederick Jackson, 'The Frontier in American History' (1893), in Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921): 1-38

Tyrell, Ian, *Historians in Public* (Chicago, 2005)

Week 4: Colonial societies (David Lambert)

This session compares the various European societies established in the Americas, focusing particularly on those established by the English/British and Spanish.

Questions

1. Why were the English/British and Spanish Atlantic empires different?
2. How important was religion in colonial American societies?
3. How different were the economies of British and Spanish America?

Readings

Core texts:

Elliott, John H., *Empires of the Atlantic world: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press: 2007 [read the Introduction and at least Parts One and Two])

Further reading:

Greene, Jack P., *Pursuits of happiness: The social development of early modern British colonies and the formation of American culture* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, c1988)

Gibson, Charles, *Spain in America* (Harper & Row, 1967)

See also large reading lists online for...

[AM204 Early American Social History](#)

(<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/cas/undergraduate/modules/am204>)

[AM209 Pre-Columbian and Spanish America](#)

(<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/cas/undergraduate/modules/am209>)

Week 5: Slavery and Race (David Lambert)

This session considers the expansion and contraction of slavery across the Americas and the relationship to the development of ideas about race.

Questions

1. Why did racial slavery come to dominate some parts of the Americas but not others? What sort of social forms characterised these areas?
2. How important were culture and ideology in the development of racial slavery in the Americas?
3. How did the patterns of resistance to slavery vary over time and space?

Readings

Please read one of the following:

Blackburn, Robin, *The making of New World slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800* (Verso, 1997) [read the Introduction and as much of Part One as possible including at least chapters 3, 6 and 8]

Davis, David Brion, *Inhuman bondage: The rise and fall of slavery in the New World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Further reading:

Blackburn, Robin, *The American crucible: Slavery, emancipation and human rights* (New York: Verso, 2011)

Drescher, Seymour, *Abolition: A history of slavery and antislavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Eltis, David, Frank D. Lewis, and Kenneth L. Sokoloff (eds), *Slavery in the development of the Americas* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Eltis, David, *The rise of African slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Gould, Stephen Jay, 'American polygeny and craniometry before Darwin' in *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward A Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding, Indiana University Press (Bloomington, 1993), 84-115

Hoetink, H., *Slavery and race relations in the Americas: Comparative notes on their nature and nexus* (New York; London: Harper and Row, 1973)

Hudson, Nicholas, 'From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origins of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29: 3 (1996), pp 247-64

Malvasi, Mark G., *Slavery in the Western hemisphere, circa 1500-1888* (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2003)

Marshall, Gloria A., 'Racial classifications: Popular and scientific' in *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward A Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding, Indiana University Press (Bloomington, 1993), 116-127

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, *White on black: Images of Africa and blacks in western popular culture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992)

Smith, Mark and Robert Paquette (eds), *The Oxford handbook of slavery in the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Walvin, James, *Atlas of slavery* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006)

Williams, Eric, *Capitalism and slavery*; with a new introduction by Colin A. Palmer (University of North Carolina Press, 1994, new edition)

Week 7: Revolutions (Benjamin Smith)

Questions

1. How useful are theories for understanding revolutions?
2. How does one judge the success or failure of a revolution?
3. Why do revolutions fail?
4. To what extent was the Mexican Revolution a 'genuine peasant revolution'?

Readings

Everyone read:

Knight, Alan, 'Revisionism and Revolution: Mexico Compared to England and France', *Past and Present* (1992): 159-199

Knight, Alan, 'The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois, nationalist or just a Great Rebellion', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (1985): 1-37

Wickham-Crowley, Timothy, 'Structural Theories of Revolution' in John Foran (ed), *Theorizing revolutions* (London: Routledge, 1997)

Womack, John, 'The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Mexico Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Week 8: Nationalisms (Rosie Doyle)

What do we gain from considering nationalism as a historically contingent and constructed phenomenon?

Questions

1. Explain Anderson's interpretation of nationalism. What are its strengths and weaknesses? How else might one study nationalist sentiment?
2. What role does the legacy of conquest and/or colonialism play in new world nationalisms?
3. What place does the pre-colonial past occupy in official nationalist sentiment?

Key Readings

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen (eds.) *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. Baltimore/ London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Further Reading

Please read one of the following:

Brading, David. *The origins of Mexican nationalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Earle, Rebecca, 'Sobre Héroes y Tumbas: National Symbols in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85:3 (2005), 375-416.

Fleming, E. McClung, 'The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765 -1783', and 'From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess. *The American Image, 1783-1815*, *Winterthur Portfolio* 2-3 (1965-66)

Lomnitz, Claudio. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Week 9: 20th-Century Ideologies (Rebecca Isaacs)

How did mid-century rights movements impact historiographical understandings of 'America' and what it is to be 'American'? This session will focus on the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Rights Movement and discuss the ways in which each group is represented in history, and how each group similarly altered their representation in history.

- How unified was either the Second Wave Feminist Movement or the Civil Rights Movement? Did this contribute to its success/ failure?
- Assess the importance of Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Martin Luther King or Malcolm X as figureheads for their respective movements
- Where do black women fit in to each movement respectively? Why were there so few prominent female leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, or prominent black leaders of the Second Wave Feminist Movement? Do you agree with this interpretation?
- How have these movements altered the study of American History and historians' understanding of the American experience?
- Is intersectionality a useful framework through which to study American History?

Please read:

Either

- Sara M. Evans, "Women's Liberation: Seeing the Revolution Clearly", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (2015), pp. 138-149.
- Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 1, (Jun., 1988), pp. 9-39.

Or

- Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4, (Mar., 2005), pp. 1233-1263.
- Martha Biondi, "Controversial Blackness: The Historical Development & Future Trajectory of African American Studies", *Daedalus*, Vol. 140, No. 2, (Spring, 2011), 226-237.

And then everyone please read

- Joan C. Williams, "Dissolving the Sameness/Difference Debate: A Post-Modern Path beyond Essentialism in Feminist and Critical Race Theory", *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 1991, No. 2, (Apr., 1991), pp. 296-323.

Further reading:

Jo Freeman, "The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 4, Changing Women in a Changing Society, (Jan., 1973), pp. 792-811.

Peniel E. Joseph, "Rethinking the Black Power Era", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 75, No. 3, (Aug. 2009), pp. 707-716;

Marilyn J. Boxer, "Women's Studies as Women's History", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3/4, Women's Studies Then and Now, (Fall - Winter, 2002), pp. 42-51.

Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism", *The American Scholar*, Vol. 40, No. 2, (Spring, 1971), pp. 235-248.

Rhett S. Jones, Alexander W. Astin, Doris Y. Wilkinson and J. Blaine Hudson, "The Lasting Contributions of African-American Studies", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 6, (Winter, 1994-1995), pp. 91-94.

Fabio Rojas, "Social Movement Tactics, Organizational Change and the Spread of African-American Studies", *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4, (Jun., 2006), pp. 2147-2166.

Jennifer C. Nash, "re-thinking intersectionality", *Feminist Review*, No. 89, (2008), pp. 1-15.

Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Second Wave Feminism in the United States, (Summer, 2002), pp. 336-360.

Bernice McNair Barnett, "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class", *Gender and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (Jun., 1993), pp. 162-182.

Week 10: Democracy and Violent Pluralisms in the Americas

Why has democratization not brought a decrease in violence in Latin America?

Film: Cartel land

Arias and Goldstein, Introduction in Enrique Arias and Daniel Goldstein, *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, **(CORE READING)**

Janice Pearlman, *Favela*

Robert Gay, *Lucia: Testimonies of a Brazilian Drug Dealer's Woman*

Enrique Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro*

Rotker, *Citizens of Fear*

Robert Gay, *Bruno: Conversations with a Brazilian Drug Dealer*

Misha Glenny, *Nemesis: One Man and the Battle for Rio*