AMERICAN SOCIAL HISTORY
(History 6687-01 for Graduate Students)

Instructor: Cita Cook Spring Semester, 2006
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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11:00-11:50 in 202 Pafford; Monday, 2:00-4:30; Wednesday, 2:00-5:30; other times, by appointment
Class Meetings: Monday, 5:30-8:00, History Seminar Room, 3205 TLC

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Students will learn about how historians have researched and analyzed social activities in American history, particularly the changing definitions and roles of “families” and “communities,” for different groups of Americans in different historical contexts; the similarities and differences between individual families and communities; how geography, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, economics, and other historical influences have affected and been affected by people in different circumstances as they built their families and communities; and other concerns and aspects of social history.

Through class discussions and various written assignments about common readings, individual readings, and research tasks on particular families and communities, students will demonstrate their understanding of how different historical resources (public records, statistics, genealogy, oral history, personal letters and diaries, newspapers, and other materials) can clarify the ways in which Americans in particular communities and contexts have come together and sometimes split apart as they tried to solve the personal and social problems they faced. Each student will write a research paper on a focused subject in social history, as adapted to fit individual interests, experience, and thesis or thesis/project topics.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS
Required essays by professional historians will be available through electronic reserve or handed out in class. The directions and password for the online reserve will be explained in the first class. Everyone should have the latest editions of Skrunk and White’s The Elements of Style and Turabian’s A Manual for Writers, as well as both volumes of any edition of any U. S. History textbook. You should also have access to a basic text on the state and region of your special interest. Those planning to do relatively local history should find a survey of southern history such as those by Cooper and Terrill or John B. Boles and, if working on Georgia, a basic survey of the history of Georgia (probably the one by Coleman).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Classes will involve discussion of readings, the process of reading and writing about social history, and individual research; occasional lectures by the instructor; one or more videos; field trips to special archives; and any other activities that we decide would be useful. Assignments will include essays on the common readings, written and oral reports on individual research tasks, and a final essay (both an early and a final draft) applying the techniques learned in class to an individual research topic.
I. Class Attendance and Participation - 5% of the semester grade

Seminars, by definition, involve mostly group discussions, so regular attendance and participation are especially important. I shall try to see to it that everyone has a chance to participate and that no individuals dominate the discussion, but I need your cooperation to do this. The class discussions will be conducted on the assumption that everyone has read all of the reading assigned for that day and has been doing the assigned research work. Ask any questions you have and say what you had trouble understanding, but always be prepared to present some kind of reaction to the reading. Any extra thoughts or questions that you do not have a chance to bring up in class can be written on the weekly reports.

If you have to miss a class, you are responsible for discussing with me whether it is excused and for arranging to get any handouts, to find out what was covered in class, and to make up any missed assignments. New assignment sheets, including what essays are available on electronic reserve, will be available on my website, at least by Monday afternoon each week. Please do not submit any written material by email attachments unless given special permission to do so. You are responsible for knowing if, when, and where we shall meet each week since a few classes will be held in our library, in a computer lab, (on a day and time decided by the class) at an archive off campus, or not at all (to allow individual meetings with me). You are required to meet with me outside of class at least three times during the semester, as well as whenever else you feel the need. Too often instructors find out too late about problems that could have been solved with earlier notification, so please let me know when you need help.

II. Weekly Reports and Short Assignments - 10%

Each student shall keep the various assignments and research work in a loose-leaf notebook that I can see when we meet individually, including report sheets handed in each week and returned to you during the next class. You may use note cards for your research, but you should include summations of what they include in the notebook and you will sometimes need to show me the note cards for feedback.

Each week that the class meets, you will hand in a report with the following information:

1. What you read during the week and any thoughts or questions inspired by this reading. For each essay assigned for everyone, summarize briefly (only in your own words) the main points and thesis, as well as your reactions to and questions about it.
2. What research activities you did where and a brief summation of what you learned from this work.
3. Any new thoughts you have about your research project.
4. Any questions or problems you have concerning your project or the class.
5. Any suggestions you have for the class and/or any information about your life that you think I should know.

The amount of material connected to each of these issues will probably vary from week to week, but always consider whether you have anything to say in each category. The individual reports will not be graded, but the overall evaluation of them will be based on the thought and originality they show, not for the degree of historical information they reflect or for the extent to which they indicate that you do or do not agree with me. They are journal-style comments rather than essays and do not have to be typed unless you have absolutely illegible handwriting. There will be occasional short homework assignments designed to help you develop the knowledge and skills necessary to do a successful research project.
Part of the grade for this segment will be based on the punctuality of your work. If you have a special reason why any of it needs to be late, be sure to discuss with me whether the lateness will be excused.

III. Short Essays - 25%

You will write two book reviews on works connected to your research topic (chosen with my approval), the first one 3-5 pages on a book by a non-professional historian (counting 10%) and the second one 4-7 pages on a book by a professional historian written relatively recently (counting 15%). In each essay, you should discuss what you learned from the book about your particular topic, about social history, and about the task of researching it, as well as any positive or negative criticisms you have of the book, including the author’s use and interpretation of sources. Be sure to discuss enough of the different sections of each book to convince me that you have read the entire book. You do not need to include endnotes for these essays but should indicate page numbers in parentheses for any specific quotes or segments of information. These essays should be typed (or printed off a computer) but should not be in any kind of folder.

IV. Individual Research Projects - 60%

Each student will choose a community and a family within that community (with some variation possible to fit your research interests) to research throughout the semester. 5% of the semester grade will be based on the preliminary work done for this project (specially assigned research exercises, progress reports, the amount and quality of work done each week, the preliminary outline and bibliography, short oral reports on what you have learned, etc.); 5% on the final annotated and supplementary bibliographies; 10% on the preliminary draft; and 40% on the final paper (ca.20-30 pages) on a focused question connected to what you have learned about your topic and its connection to the other material you have studied during the semester. Students who already have a thesis topic may adapt this assignment to fit their thesis. We shall discuss how to turn the essays into conference papers and articles to submit to journals. More detailed instructions will be handed out about all of this.

Starting the first week, you should develop a casually annotated bibliography for your research, divided into primary and secondary sources, that you update regularly and show me when we meet individually or whenever you need assistance. Be aware that you may be using this information for many years, so be as accurate and complete as possible. Each entry should include the basic bibliographic information in the format required by Turabian and then a casual annotation including usually information about where the source is available; what it covers, particularly concerning information relevant to your research topic; and how much of it, if any, you have read. Whenever possible, summarize briefly the work’s main thesis, the kinds of sources the author used, and your sense of its strengths and weaknesses.

V. Academic Honesty

All work handed in at the State University of West Georgia should reflect only the work of an individual student. This does not mean that students should not study together, only that they need to work alone when doing the final version of an assignment. Any use of the ideas, information, or words of anyone else, including paraphrasing of the words and ideas, without crediting them is plagiarism and is a crime. A direct quote of the words (even only a few words) of someone else must be in quotation marks as well as have a note of its source. Any clear
evidence of plagiarism or any other kind of cheating on a test or any other graded assignment will result in a permanent zero for that assignment (after consultation with the student). See the section on the Honor Code in the Catalog or Uncatalog.

SCHEDULE
Both the dates and the topics on this schedule are tentative. We shall determine as a class when to meet at nearby archives. Both the content and the schedule may change somewhat according to the needs and interests of the members of the class, but the major deadlines will not be any earlier. Pay attention to new information on handouts or in class announcements.

January 9 - Introductory Class
    KING HOLIDAY on January 16 - No class, but plan to talk to me sometime that week.
1. January 23 - Approaches to Social History
2. January 30 - Researching and Analyzing Family History
3. February 6 - Researching and Analyzing Community History
    REVIEW OF BOOK BY NON-PROFESSIONAL HISTORIAN
4. February 13 - Researching and Analyzing Antebellum Social History
5. February 20 - Families, Communities, and the Civil War
    REVIEW OF BOOK BY PROFESSIONAL HISTORIAN
6. February 27 - Researching and Analyzing the Social History of the Late Nineteenth Century
7. March 6 - Developing a Focused Topic
    PRELIMINARY OUTLINE AND BIBLIOGRAPHY
8. March 13 - Researching and Analyzing the Social History of the Early Twentieth Century
    SPRING VACATION STARTS March 20
9. March 27 - Researching and Analyzing the Social History of the Mid-Twentieth Century
10. April 3 - PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE
11. April 10 - Researching and Analyzing the Social History of the Late Twentieth Century
12. April 17 - Discussion about rewriting papers
13. April 24 - Conclusions about American social history
14. May 1 - Discussion of individual essay topics
May 8 - FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE; dinner together