

History 600: The Right to Vote
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Spring 2008
Prof. Steve Kantrowitz
Wednesdays, 9 – 11 a.m.

The Seminar

We are a community of scholars. You are not in competition with each other, and it is possible for everyone in the seminar to earn an A. Please help each other succeed.

Over the next 15 weeks you will:

- Learn how historians analyze, interpret, and write about primary sources
- Prepare for and participate in discussions of the common readings
- Turn in several short writing assignments, including revisions
- Research and write a substantial, original work of historical interpretation

The main text, Alexander Keyssar's *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, is available at Rainbow, 426 W. Gilman. Later in the semester we will make use of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (7th edition, revised by Booth, Colomb and Williams), which Rainbow has also ordered.

Research and Writing

General comments on writing

All assignments, even essays of a page or two, should begin with a clear, well-considered thesis statement and should be organized into coherent paragraphs. Make every word count: use simple, clear sentence structures and use quotation selectively.

Research Topics

For much of the semester, each of you will be working on a research paper. You will identify a topic, locate sources and the existing scholarship, and write several drafts.

You should expect to write a state- or community-level study of an aspect of American history in which questions of suffrage were central. This could mean arguments over who should vote, as well as where, when, and how; social movements in specific times and places that sought to expand or restrict suffrage rights in particular directions; or other incidents, debates, or controversies that shed light on the history of the suffrage in the United States. Comparative or transnational approaches are possible, but only if you have already mastered the historiography and are familiar with the sources for the other country or countries in question.

How does one identify a thematic area to explore? One place to start is to pay attention to Keyssar's footnotes: he has read and synthesized much of the secondary literature (historiography) on voting rights, so as you become interested in particular topics you should always look to his footnotes. Where he cites secondary literature, you should examine those works. Where he cites mainly (or only) primary sources, you may have found a topic without a substantial historiography. The choice of a research topic—

especially determining a) whether primary sources are available at UW, and b) whether another historian has already answered your question—is perhaps the most important phase of the project. Choosing a topic will be a process of working back and forth between subjects and questions that interest you, the resources available for studying that topic, and the existing literature on the subject. Some topics of interest to many students (e.g. woman suffrage) have been studied extensively, which means that before you can even design a research plan you'll have to read a good deal of secondary literature.

This is a critical phase of the project: a workable topic will help you at every step; a difficult one will frustrate you. Here are the titles of some particularly successful papers produced by students the last time this course was offered:

- "Confederate Disfranchisement and the Abuses of Arkansas Election Law: The Boles and Edwards Election of 1870"
- "'The Invisible Enemy': Brewing Interests and Woman's Suffrage in Wisconsin, 1911-1919"
- "Compelled to Rule: Why the Compulsory Voting Amendment was Added to the Massachusetts Constitution and How it Was Connected to the Initiative and Referendum."
- "A Century of Disfranchisement: Lumber workers and Minnesota residency requirements of 1893"

Your papers will be similarly specific in terms of space, time, and topic. One general rule: topics less than twenty years old are generally not suitable for historical inquiry.

Resources

For secondary literature on specific topics, check basic sources such as bibliographies (e.g. the *Harvard Guide to American History*); MADCAT and the card catalog; the stacks (shelf-reading is how historians find a lot of their sources); and the periodical literature, using electronic search tools such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, Proquest Research Library, ISI Web of Knowledge, and America: History and Life (all available through the E-Resource Gateway at UW Libraries).

The paper itself

To write an original research paper, you must:

- Identify a question that you'd like to answer.
- Confirm that it has not been asked and answered by a previous historian.
- Identify sources that may help answer it.
- Read the appropriate secondary literature.
- Write several drafts of a research paper.

The final product should be about 25 pages plus notes, approximately the length of a short article in a historical journal such as the *Journal of American History*.

Polished drafts of these research projects will be due **before** the end of the semester. You will comment on each other's drafts (and receive comments from me) before producing a final draft.

Grades

Your grade for the semester will be calculated as follows:

Preparation for and participation in seminar; early assignments	50%
Seminar paper, including topics, outlines, and drafts	50%

All assignments are due at OR BEFORE the beginning of the seminar meeting and may not be turned in late. You Are Warned.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week 1: Jan. 23 - Introductions

Week 2: Jan. 30 **summarizing a text**

READ: Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, xv-116

ASSIGNMENT: write and bring to class an essay of about 500 words answering the following question: *What were the two or three most important forces that led to the expansion of suffrage between the signing of the Constitution and about 1850?* **Make sure to include a word count at the end of the document.**

Week 3: Feb. 6 **Library Boot Camp**

READ: Keyssar, 117-221

Minor v. Happersett (1874), selection [via Learn@UW]

ASSIGNMENT:

- 1) In chapter 5 of Keyssar, footnotes 24 through 26 cite many primary and secondary works. Determine which of these sources are and are not available in UW libraries, and in what form(s) by physically locating them or noting their absence. Be aware that Madcat is not literally comprehensive: not every item on the university's library shelves has a specific entry in Madcat, especially items that are part of longer series. Note "available at xxx library/ies" or "not available" on the bibliography described in 2, below. It's possible that some items that appear to be available are in the catalog but checked out or missing, or that items not in Madcat are actually available under a more general title.
- 2) Create a bibliography of the works cited in these footnotes. Organize the works into two big categories--primary sources and secondary works—and, within those categories, into more specific sub-categories of your own devising.
- 3) Investigate **one** of these works. Determine how and why Keyssar cites it in that note; come to class with the document (or a copy of it, or notes taken on it, as appropriate) prepared to offer a one-minute explanation of how and why Keyssar uses it.

Week 4: Feb. 13

READ: Keyssar, 223-end

ASSIGNMENT: Locate a contemporary newspaper or magazine story about voting rights in the United States. Write a 250-300 word argument connecting it to the history of voting rights as represented in Keyssar.

Week 5: Feb. 20 **assessing a primary source**

ASSIGNMENT: Using MADCAT and your wits, find the proceedings of a state constitutional convention (NOT simply a state constitution) from the period between 1789 and 1945; these proceedings should include extended summaries or near-verbatim reports of what delegates said during debates. The SHSW has (among many, many others) Wisconsin's two conventions from the 1840s; South Carolina's from 1790, 1868, and 1895; and Massachusetts, 1853 and 1917-1919. Some proceedings are also available via the e-resource gateway at the website entitled "Making of America," but the user interface is extremely clunky.

Read one of these proceedings quickly, taking note of all debates and provisions regarding the suffrage. (There is often an index, which you will find very helpful.) Come to class prepared to make a 3-minute presentation on the major arguments you found in these proceedings. (Three minutes is approximately the time it takes to read aloud about one and a half pages of double-spaced 12-point text.)

Week 6: Feb. 27 **reading for argument**

READ: - Sven Beckert, "Democracy and its Discontents: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York," *Past & Present* 174 (Feb. 2002): 116-157.

- Tracy Campbell, "Machine Politics, Police Corruption, and the Persistence of Vote Fraud: The Case of the Louisville, Kentucky, Election of 1905," *The Journal of Policy History* 15:3 (2003): 269-300.

ASSIGNMENT: Read each of these essays carefully, and write a one-paragraph summary (no more than 75 words) of each. Then also produce a one-sentence version of each summary that captures the argument of each essay.

Week 7: March 5 **bibliography**

READ: *A Manual for Writers* (selections TBA)

ASSIGNMENT:

- 1) Identify 3 possible areas of research (including but not necessarily limited to the suffrage provisions discussed in the convention you studied.) This means identifying a particular conflict over voting rights or other specific event or transformation in a specific place and time.
- 2) Identify the most important primary sources available at UW for research in these areas.
- 3) Using keyword searches, shelf-reading, and all the other clever research strategies at your disposal, produce a bibliography of at least three scholarly works on each area of research.
- 4) Come to class prepared to present your three ideas and answer questions about them.

Week 8: March 12 **closing in on a topic**

READ: *A Manual for Writers* (selections TBA)

ASSIGNMENT:

- 1) Read the materials you assembled for the bibliography on 2 of the 3 possible topics last week.
- 2) Brainstorm a list of possible questions and arguments that could shape this topic into a paper, as well as any potential problems you can foresee for each of them.

3) Produce a revised bibliography for both possible topics.

Spring break – March 15 - 23

Week 9: March 26 **final topic selection and research**

ASSIGNMENT:

- 1) Pick one of your potential topics and spend AT LEAST four more hours reading through the primary sources and scholarly bibliography.
- 2) Produce a one-paragraph summary of the *contents* and relevance of each primary source and of the *argument* and relevance of each book or article.
- 3) Write a one-paragraph summary of your research topic; bring it to class.

Week 10: April 2 **research – NO CLASS MEETING**

ASSIGNMENT: read independently in your sources and bibliography.

Week 11: April 9 **research**

WRITE: A revised topic statement that reflects what you have learned so far.

BRING: Three copies of your latest topic statement, including a tentative outline of the research paper.

Week 12: April 16 **research and writing**

WRITE: a partial draft of the research paper; at a minimum, this should include a new revision of your first paragraphs and an outline or summary of the major points you plan to make, with references to the primary sources you will be analyzing and the secondary literature you are using.

BRING: 3 copies of that draft with you to seminar

Week 13: April 23 **individual meetings – NO CLASS MEETING**

I will schedule extended office hours on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings and meet with each student to discuss your progress.

This week you will be turning in polished drafts to me. You will also exchange drafts with your writing partners (to be determined), comment on those drafts, and bring the marked-up drafts with you to class on April 27. Details and commenting worksheets to follow.

Week 14: April 30 **revision**

BRING:

- 1) Your comments on the polished drafts submitted by classmates last week.
- 2) Your own most vexing writing problem.

Week 15: May 7 – **LAST CLASS**

PAPERS DUE IN CLASS, 9 AM SHARP.