

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
Department of History

History 901  
Proseminar in American History

Carl Kaestle  
Fall, 1983

VARIETIES OF SOCIAL HISTORY: AMERICA IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

Introduction

Scope of the course: This proseminar is designed as an introduction to nineteenth-century American social history. Within that broad topic, the emphasis is on recent works dealing with the daily lives and careers of non-elite whites in the Northeast. No previous reading in social history is assumed, so some earlier innovative works, such as Rothman's Discovery of the Asylum, are included, along with recent books like Dublin's Women at Work and Johnson's Shopkeeper's Millennium. Students who have read some of these works may broaden their reading from the supplementary list.

Methodological emphasis: Although this is not a course in methodology, there will be continual attention to methodological problems encountered in studying ordinary people in the past. Current knowledge about American social history is so rudimentary and so precarious that methodological problems are central. No previous knowledge of statistics is required or expected, and most of the statistical techniques used in the quantitative studies assigned are elementary.

Assignments: In addition to reading the assigned works and contributing to the general discussion, each student will prepare three papers. One of these papers will report on work done and insights gained during an independent reading period in the middle of the semester.

Paperback books to purchase:

Alan Dawley, Class and Community  
Thomas Dublin, Women at Work  
Paul Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium  
Joseph Kett, Rites of Passage  
Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness  
Leon Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long  
David Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum  
Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity

Two books assigned as required reading are available only in hard-bound editions. Copies will be placed on reserve, so purchase is optional:

Kathleen Conzen, Immigrant Milwaukee  
Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class

WEEK 1  
August 30

Introduction to the Course

WEEK 2  
September 7

Introduction, continued

A. What is social history?

Read:

James Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written," American Historical Review 84 (December, 1979), 1293-1333.

Peter Stearns, "Trends in Social History," in Michael Kammen, ed., The Past Before Us (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 205-230.

Robert Berkhofer, "The Difficulty of Studying Man in Past Time," in his Behavioral Approach to History (New York, Free Press, 1969), Chapter 1.

B. Eighteenth-Century Background

Read:

James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America," William and Mary Quarterly (January, 1978), 3-32.

Christopher Clark, "The Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," Journal of Social History 13 (Winter, 1979), 169-189.

Gary B. Nash, "The Disordered Urban Economies," in his The Urban Crucible (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979), Chapter 12, pp. 312-338.

UNIT ONE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE, SOCIAL CHANGE, SOCIAL GROUPS

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WEEK 3  
September 14

Industrialization and the Male Worker

Read:

Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976, pb.).

WEEK 4  
September 21

Industrialization and the Female Worker

Read:

Thomas Dublin, Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1850 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1979, pb.).

WEEK 5 - Immigration

September 28

Read:

Kathleen Neils Conzen, Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976).

WEEK 6 Emmancipation

October 5

Read:

Leon F. Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (New York, Random House, 1974, Vintage pb.).

WEEK 7 Emancipation, continued

October 12

Read:

Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pb.).

UNIT TWO: THE FAMILY AND SOCIALIZATIONWEEK 8 Domesticity

October 19

Read:

Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973, pb.).

WEEK 9 Adolescence

October 26

Read:

Joseph Kett, Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present (New York, Basic Books, 1977, pb.).

UNIT THREE: INDEPENDENT PROJECTS ON 19-CENTURY SOCIAL HISTORY

There will be individual conferences with me during Week 10, a social gathering at my home during Week 11, and double seminar sessions during Week 12 to report on independent reading projects.

UNIT FOUR: REFORM AND INSTITUTIONS

WEEK 13  
November 23

Religion and Class Formation

Read:

Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York, Hill & Wang, 1978, pb.).

WEEK 14  
November 30

Religion and Class Formation, continued

Read:

Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981).

WEEK 15  
December 7

Institutions for Deviants

Read:

David Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1971, pb.).