

SOC 29001: Practicum in Historical Sociology
Spring 2020, Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50, Harper 102
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Description

This research practicum course is an introduction to core theoretical problems and methodological solutions in historical sociology, and gives students an opportunity to be involved in research. Students will first be introduced to central works in historical sociology. They will then apply the theoretical perspectives and methodological tools they learned in their own research. More specifically, they will both participate in a large collective data-gathering-and-analysis project in historical sociology and work through their own independent project, which might serve as the starting point for a BA thesis. This class will allow students to see what collaborative research in the social sciences looks like.

Note that this syllabus is under construction; because of the change due to shifting online, we may move a few things around. In some cases, page numbers remain to be chosen.

The Project

Political parties are at the heart of modern politics. As citizens, we often take for granted the existence and operation of electoral parties in the contemporary United States. But where do parties come from? How did parties as a new political institution form? This is the question that this year's project will grapple with. Focusing on the State of New York, the first state to develop well-structured and competitive political parties and a lynchpin of the emerging national party system, the project will study the emergence and development of the first political parties in American history right after the American War of Independence, looking at the relation between social networks, office seeking, and political rivalry among aspiring elites.

We have already begun constructing a database integrating county-level data on election returns with data on the careers of political figures, data on their socio-demographics, and data on their kinship, professional, and civic networks. Students will be able to make use of this database while both doing their own research and adding new forms of data.

Structure of the Class

The class will combine readings/discussion, practical exercises, work on the larger project, and an independent project related to the larger effort. The readings will include (1) classic works of historical sociology to familiarize students with the foundations of the field; (2) important contemporary work in historical sociology to familiarize students with what historical sociology looks like today; (3) case-specific readings that form the background for the practical analyses; and (4) readings about historiography and other related methods (e.g. coding, reading primary documents).

The practicum part of the class consists of five types of exercises. (1) Students will read secondary literature and extract existing arguments; (2) students will learn how to find data using library and archival catalogs; (3) students will gather data as part of a larger project; (4) students will be introduced to the programming language R and will learn how to use R to manage, explore and analyze quantitative data; (5) students will analyze data from the project. The latter will include the statistical analysis of quantitative data, but also close reading of selected documents.

Requirements

1) *Reading.*

Every week there are assigned readings; they are evenly divided between pivotal works in historical sociology, examples of different methodological approaches, and substantive works on the case at hand. Students are expected to be ready to discuss the works.

2) *Class Participation.*

We will do exercises in class; these should be enjoyable, hands-on, ways of “getting our hands dirty” with both primary data and with existing (coded) databases.

3) *Collective Coding.*

All students will participate in coding historical data, thus contributing to the overall project. This involves reading primary documents, coding those documents, and checking codings.

4) *Collective Analyses.*

Students will be divided into three or four groups; each group is assigned a county in the State of New York and will conduct a series of analyses for their assigned county.

5) *Individual Paper.*

Each student will write a (small) individual research paper. This could be

- a) A case study (e.g., one place and one time) using mainly secondary sources but supplemented with the coded data and/or primary documents;
- b) A primary-document based reconstruction of some aspect of the overall dataspace. For example, you might examine the correspondence between two significant actors.
- c) A data augmentation, in which you find an underutilized source of data and try to add to the existing database. For example, you might be interested in the role of land and land speculation in politics.
- d) A formal data analysis using the already coded data. For example, this could be an analysis of the structure of political careers, the structure of social networks, or the spatial distribution of different types of political figures.

Books

Lachmann, Richard. 2013. *What is Historical Sociology?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Young, Alfred F. 1967. *The Democratic Republicans of New York. The Origins, 1763-1797.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [electronic version available]

Brooke, John L. 2010. *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson*. University of North Carolina Press.

Wood, Gordon S. 1991. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books.

All other readings, unless otherwise announced, are available through Canvas, either through library reserves, or as a special content module.

Schedule

Week I: THE BIG QUESTIONS

What is historical sociology? What is its relation to sociological theory?

Day 1: Introduction to Historical Sociology

Reading: Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 38f, 54f, 217-233, 284-6, 289-92. We expect most but not all students to have familiarity with Marx, and many with Weber. If you have never read Weber, make sure you read this small bit for today's class. (It is on Canvas, but as a "module," not under library reserves.) We outline some of the most important questions that drive contemporary historical sociology.

Doing: We introduce the project for this quarter's class—an investigation of the formation of political parties in the United States, focusing on the case of New York. We discuss its relation to the big questions driving historical sociology. We discuss how the class will work.

Day 2: Capitalism, States, and Revolutions

Reading: Lachmann, chapters 1, 2, 3, 5. We discuss key substantive issues of historical sociology: the origin of capitalism, the formation of (nation) states, and the sources of revolutions.

Doing: We look at different sorts of data that historical sociologists will use. We walk through the existing database; how it was put together, what it can answer, what is easy to get, what is hard to get. We walk through the logic of the independent research project and talk about resources that can help students pick their project.

<<<< NOTE: There will be an optional "Introduction to R" class that we will schedule today for next week. >>>>

Week II: TRANSLATING BIG QUESTIONS INTO ANSWERABLE QUESTIONS

We often need to translate our question into terms like who, when, where, why, how, and with what.

Day 1: The Case of the French Revolution

Reading: Skocpol (selections, *States and Social Revolutions*), Markoff (Chapter 1, *The Abolition of Feudalism*), Gould (Chapter 1, *Insurgent Identities*).

Doing: We introduce the collective coding project and show how it is connected to the existing database. We walk through an example.

Day 2: Introduction to the New Nation

Reading: Wood, Gordon S. 1991. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, pages TBA; also you can take a look at this great book, Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the origins of the Constitution*, Chapter 12: “Divide et Impera”, pp. 199-212.

Doing: We discuss the organization of archives, paying special attention to the New York State Archives. We talk about local histories.

Handing In: By today, you should have identified your class project. Submit a one-page précis, identifying the question, the method, and the likely data you would like to use (you might have to change if the data turn out to be unavailable).

Week III: THE QUESTION OF STATE AND PARTY FORMATION

Now we turn to the project of this class: party formation in the context of state formation.

Day 1: Where Do States Come From?

Reading: Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D. 990-1990*, Chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 1-37, 67-95).

Doing: We discuss the sources students found in the NYSA catalog as well as the local histories.

Handing In: Assignment “NYSA catalog and local histories”: Submit a one-page summary of what you found in the NYSA catalog. Submit a list of local histories for your county.

Day 2: Where Do Parties Come From?

Reading: Mudge, Stephanie L., and Anthony S. Chen. 2014. “Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40(1): 305–30. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, Chapter 1. Remind yourself of Weber’s argument.

Doing: We discuss local histories.

Handing In: You don’t have to hand in anything, but come to class prepared to tell us about the main towns in your count, their population size, as well as some of the main characters.

Week IV: THE CASE OF NEW YORK

Day 1: The Best Book Ever

Reading: Young, Alfred F. 1967. *The Democratic Republicans of New York. The Origins, 1763-1797*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. First Half.

Doing: We look at the world of New York politics through the lens of aggregate statistics.

Handing In: Submit an excel sheet with the codings of the first part of your assigned minutes. Also, bring at least one argument that you distilled from one of the local histories of your county to class, even if you aren't yet sure if it's true.

Day 2: The Best Book Ever

Reading: Young, Alfred F. 1967. *The Democratic Republicans of New York. The Origins, 1763-1797*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Second Half.

Doing: We look at the world of New York politics through the lens of a primary document.

Week V: THINKING IN TERMS OF CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

Day 1: General

Reading: Lipset and Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alliances*, 1967, 23-56*; Hoffman, Mark A. 2019. "The Materiality of Ideology: Cultural Consumption and Political Thought after the American Revolution." *American Journal of Sociology* 125:1, 1-62.

We expect most students to be familiar with Marx. If you think you need a refresher, read: *18th Brumaire* and/or *German Ideology*, the "Feuerbach" section reprinted in, e.g., the *Marx-Engels Reader*.

Doing: We discuss students' experience with the collective coding project. In groups of two, students compare their codings. This involves the "breakout" function on Zoom and we will see how good it works!

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, Chapter 2 (19-51). Buel, Richard. 1972. *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815*, Chapter 1 (p. 8-27).

Doing: We look at information on occupation in our database. We develop questions for the "occupation and wealth" assignment which is due next Thursday.

Week VI: THINKING IN TERMS OF NETWORKS AND FAMILIES

Day 1: General

Reading: Julia Adams, "The Familial State: Elite Family Practices and State-Making in the Early Modern Netherlands," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Aug., 1994), pp. 505-539; John Padgett and Christopher Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici," *American Journal of Sociology*, 1993. Note: these are two long articles! It is okay if you don't read the notes, and focus on the (awesome) arguments.

Doing: We provide a short introduction to network data structures (edge lists, node lists, contingency tables) and programs for visualization. We introduce the kinship network database.

Handing In: Submit an excel sheet with the codings of the second part of your assigned minutes before class.

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Bonomi, Patricia U. 1971. *A Factious People. Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. Cornell University Press, Chapters 2 and 3. Note that while we are reading the portion on “interests,” it is key that Bonomi follows families that have different constellations of interests. She had great genealogical diagrams in the back.

Doing: We discuss the “occupation and wealth” assignment. We develop questions for the “kinship” assignment which is due next Thursday.

Handing In: Assignment “occupation and wealth”

Week VII: THINKING IN TERMS OF CAREERS

Day 1: General

Reading: Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, Chapter 3.

Doing: We introduce the career database. We walk through different visualizations of the data and talk about what they show, their strengths and weaknesses.

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: McBain, Howard Lee. 1907. *De Witt Clinton and the Origin of the Spoils System in New York*, Ch 1 (pp. 11-15 and 26-42), Ch 2 (43-68) recommended.

Doing: We discuss the “kinship” assignment. We develop questions for the “careers” assignment which is due next Thursday.

Handing In: Assignment “kinship”

Week VIII: THINKING IN TERMS OF PRACTICES

Day 1: General

Reading: Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2019. “Performative State-Formation in the Early American Republic.” *American Sociological Review* 84(2):334-367.

Doing: We discuss students’ experience with the collective coding project.

Handing In: Submit an excel sheet with the codings of the third part of your assigned minutes before class.

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Brooke, John L. 2010. *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapter 2 (only pp. 47-72 and 90-94 required); Chapter 5.

Doing: We discuss all three county assignments (occupation and wealth, kinship, careers) and talk about similarities and differences between the counties.

Handing In: Assignment “careers”

Week IX [LAST WEEK!]: THINKING IN TERMS OF PROCESS

We talk about the independent research projects and tie our case back to the big questions of historical sociology.

Day 1:

Reading: Markoff, John. 1997. “Peasants Help Destroy an Old Regime and Defy a New One: Some Lessons from (and for) the Study of Social Movements.” *American Journal of Sociology* 102(4):1113-1142.

Doing: We expect that you will be working on your paper!

Day 2:

Reading: None. There’s a lot we’d like you to read, but we want to prepare this final talk.

Doing: Students will do a lightning talk on the main theme of their paper. We know that you will not be done, but you can share with others what you are doing and what you think is interesting.

Overview of Assignments

Week 2, Day 2: précis

Week 3, Day 1: assignment “NYSA catalog and local histories”

Week 4, Day 1: codings, first part

Week 6, Day 1: codings, second part

Week 6, Day 2: assignment “occupation and wealth”

Week 7, Day 2: assignment “kinship”

Week 8, Day 1: codings, third part

Week 8, Day 2: assignment “careers”

Week 10: final paper