

Methods for Historical Social Science

Christopher Muller

Sociology 273C

Thursdays, 12pm–2pm, 402 Social Sciences Building

Office hours: <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty-office-hours>

Course website: <https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1508642>

This course is a research practicum in historical social science. It has three goals: (1) to orient you to major topics in historical social science, such as historical change, historical persistence, and synthesizing history and social science; (2) to help you to find and analyze historical data so that you can write a research paper; and (3) to introduce you to new or uncommon methods for studying the past. I chose the readings not only for their substantive contributions but also for the creativity of their research designs. I hope the course will broaden your imagination about how you might use materials from the past to shed light on people, places, and times that have been obscured by a lack of traditional data sources.

Requirements

If you are registered for this course, you will need to complete the following assignments:

1. There will be two very short research assignments: one on browsing (1,000 words) and one on refining a research question (1,000 words). These will make up 5% of your grade.
2. Every week—except for the two weeks that the above assignments are due—you will write a brief memo on the readings. These will be due at 12pm (noon) on the day before class. Please treat this as a hard deadline: I may not be able to read your memo if it is late. In these memos, you should briefly summarize the readings and evaluate what you liked and did not like about them. If you think you might use a method used in one of the readings to study a topic that interests you, please describe how. Some weeks I may ask you to answer a specific question related to the readings. You should end each memo with at least two questions you would like to discuss in class. Memos should not exceed 1,000 words. They will make up 25% of your grade. Please post your memos to the “Discussions” section of the bcourses website. We will use these memos to structure our seminar discussions.
3. At the end of the course, you will submit a research paper. I do not expect you to have collected and analyzed all of your data by the end of the course. However, you should have a research question, a hypothesis, an introduction, a brief discussion of the relevant literature, a source of data, and a plan for data collection and analysis. It is up to you to

decide how polished you would like the final product to be, but course assignments are a very good way to make progress on research you would like to be doing anyway. It will be to your advantage to treat the research paper assignment as a deadline to produce a solid draft that you can circulate to others. In the last two weeks of the course, you will give a short presentation to the class on your research project. After the presentation, you will be required to write a 10–20 page paper about the project. The paper and presentation will make up 40% of your grade.

4. You will be required to attend every class and participate actively in discussion. If for some reason you have to miss a class, please contact me about it in advance. Participation will make up the final 30% of your grade.

A note about seminar

In my experience, many seminar participants want to skip directly to evaluating a paper before summarizing it. Let's try to summarize the readings and roughly agree about our summary before evaluating them. We will stay focused on the readings assigned for the class. If you feel that it is necessary to reference a text that is not assigned in the course, please explain the argument for the benefit of your classmates rather than just referencing the author's name. Remember that we are here to help each other to learn, not to show each other how smart or well-read we are. We'll do our best to have a genuine conversation that enhances our collective understanding of the material.

I do not allow students to use laptops in the undergraduate courses I teach. In this seminar, let's keep our laptops closed and use them only if we need to look up the answer to a question.

August 26: Introductions and overview

The Memory Palace, 1,347 Birds: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-memory-palace/id299436963?i=1000432988626>

DuBay, Shane G. and Carl C. Fuldner. 2017. "Bird Specimens Track 135 Years of Atmospheric Black Carbon and Environmental Policy." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114:11321–11326.

Muller, Christopher. 2017. "Tools for Historical Sociologists." *Trajectories: Newsletter of the ASA Comparative and Historical Sociology Section* 28:32–35.

September 2: Approaches to history

Fogel, Robert William. 1982. "'Scientific' History and Traditional History." *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics* 104:15–61.

Logan, Trevon D. 2015. "A Time (Not) Apart: A Lesson in Economic History from Cotton Picking Books." *Review of Black Political Economy* 42:301–322.

Abbott, Andrew. 1991. "History and Sociology: The Lost Synthesis." *Social Science History* 15:201–238.

Memo on the readings due 9/1, 12pm

September 9: Historical persistence

Patterson, Orlando. 2004. "Culture and Continuity: Causal Structures in Sociocultural Persistence." Pp. 71–78 in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice*, edited by John Mohr and Roger Friedland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Abbott, Andrew D. 2005. "The Historicity of Individuals." *Social Science History* 29:1–13.

Nunn, Nathan. 2008. "The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123:139–176.

Wright, Erik Olin. 1994. "What is Analytical Marxism?" Pp. 178–198 in Erik Olin Wright, *Interrogating Inequality: Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism*. New York: Verso.

Memo on the readings due 9/8, 12pm

September 16: Historical persistence—slavery

Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. 2016. "The Political Legacy of American Slavery." *The Journal of Politics* 78:621–641.

Einhorn, Robin L. 2008. "Slavery." *Enterprise & Society* 9:491–506.

Miller, Melinda C. 2011. "Land and Racial Wealth Inequality." *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 101:371–376.

Hill, Shirley A. 2006. "Marriage among African American Women: A Gender Perspective." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 37:421–440.

Memo on the readings due 9/15, 12pm

September 23: Browsing

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 110–128.

First assignment due 9/22, 12pm: Go to the HA section of the Gardner Stacks. (It is a very short walk from the Social Sciences Building.) Browse. This means walk up and down every aisle of the HA section, stopping to look at anything that looks interesting to you. The HA section is the section for statistics. You'll find volumes on all kinds of statistics for many countries. I have used statistics I found in the HA section to write about incarceration, sharecropping, infectious disease, and other topics. The volume of information in just this one section of the library can be overwhelming. Pick a volume or a series of volumes and write no more than 1,000 words about a question you could answer with it. What data did you find in this volume? What is the unit of analysis (cities, counties, states, countries, etc.)? What kinds of data could you combine it with? How? Don't worry that someone else might already have answered this question. This week in class, in addition to discussing the Abbott chapter, we'll go around the room and tell each other about what we have found.

September 30: Finding a topic and a question

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. ix–35; 64–90.

Second assignment due 9/29, 12pm: Describe the “newspaper reporter’s ‘who, what, when, where, and how’” of your course paper, as discussed by Abbott on pages 66–68, then try using the examples on pages 68 and 69 of Abbott to refine the research question you want to ask.

October 7: Visit to the Bancroft Library

Krippner, Greta. 2013. “Interview with Article Award Recipient.” *States, Power, and Societies: Political Sociology Section, American Sociological Association* 18:15–17.

Go, Julian. 2020. “The Imperial Origins of American Policing: Militarization and Imperial Feedback in the Early 20th Century.” *American Journal of Sociology* 125:1193–1254.

October 14: Historical census and survey data

Ruggles, Steven, Catherine A. Fitch, and Evan Roberts. 2018. “Historical Census Record Linkage.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 44:19–37.

Grigoryeva, Angelina and Martin Ruef. 2015. “The Historical Demography of Racial Segregation.” *American Sociological Review* 80:814–842.

Farber, Henry S., Daniel Herbst, Ilyana Kuziemko, and Suresh Naidu. 2021. “Unions and Inequality over the Twentieth Century: New Evidence from Survey Data.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 136:1325–1385.

Memo on the readings due 10/13, 12pm

October 21: Text analysis

Nelson, Laura K. 2017. “Computational Methods, Meaning, and Comparative Historical Sociology.” *Trajectories: Newsletter of the ASA Comparative and Historical Sociology Section* 28:35–37.

Nelson, Laura K. 2017. “Computational Grounded Theory: A Methodological Framework.” *Sociological Methods & Research*.

Rule, Alix, Jean-Philippe Cointet, and Peter S. Bearman. 2015. “Lexical Shifts, Substantive Changes, and Continuity in State of the Union Discourse, 1790–2014.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112:10837–10844.

Ash, Elliot, Daniel L. Chen, and Suresh Naidu. 2020. “Ideas Have Consequences: The Impact of Law and Economics on American Justice.” Working Paper.

Memo on the readings due 10/20, 12pm

October 28: Using Maps

Dell, Melissa. 2010. “The Persistent Effects of Peru’s Mining *Mita*.” *Econometrica* 78:1863–1903.

Muller, Christopher and Daniel Schrage. 2021. “The Political Economy of Incarceration in the Cotton South, 1910–1925.” *American Journal of Sociology* 127.

Muller, Christopher. 2021. “Exclusion and Exploitation: The Incarceration of Black Americans from Slavery to the Present.” Working paper.

Aaronson, Daniel, Jacob Faber, Daniel Hartley, Bhashkar Mazumder, and Patrick Sharkey. 2021. “The Long-Run Effects of the 1930s HOLC ‘Redlining’ Maps on Place-Based Measures of Economic Opportunity and Socioeconomic Success.” *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 86:1–15.

Memo on the readings due 10/27, 12pm

November 4: Oral History

Fields, Karen. 1989. “What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly.” *Oral History* 17:44–53.

Brown, Karida. 2018. *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Pp. 75–99; 131–158; 191–205.

Memo on the readings due 11/3, 12pm

November 18: Presentations

December 2: Presentations