

University of Wisconsin-Madison
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

History 901
Proseminar in American history

Fall, 1988
Carl Kaestle

American social and cultural history, 1860 - 1940

Some supplementary information

I. Working definition of social history

SOCIAL HISTORY: The study of daily routine behavior, crucial life course events, and shared beliefs of the various groups of nonelite people who make up the great majority of the population, with the intention of discovering systematic patterns and inferring the causes of change in these patterns over time.

Typically, this definition leads us to the study of births, marriages, deaths (fertility, health, customs related to demographic events); of socialization, childrearing and childcare, and educational patterns; work conditions, recruitment, workplace culture; geographic and occupational mobility, income, expenditures, and opportunity; cultural and religious conflict, immigration, and assimilation; the political behavior of people (as voters, as rioters); the purpose and effect of institutions that deal with nonelite people; roles and power relationships (gender roles in society, in the family); community development; ideology, values and communication at the popular level; --- to name but a few.

This definition implies that the social historian takes as a central problem and theme the relationship between behavior and belief, between structure and ideas.

Finally, trying to infer causes for changes in behavior or belief patterns leads social historians to an interest in large social transformations like the development of capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, migration, and emancipation.

II. Scope of the field: a crude outline of social and cultural history topics

- A. The family
 - 1. Sexuality, reproduction
 - a. Fertility
 - b. Birth control
 - c. Childbirth
 - d. Prostitution
 - e. Homosexuality
 - f. Sexuality: other topics
 - g. Gender
 - 2. Stages of life, transitions
 - a. Life course: theoretical, general
 - b. Childhood, childcare
 - c. Youth, adolescence
 - d. Courtship, marriage
 - e. Divorce
 - f. Old age, death
 - 3. The home, housework
 - 4. Family budgets, household economy
- B. Women
 - 1. Women's sphere, ideology
 - 2. Women's institutions
 - 3. Women's rights
- C. Education
 - 1. Elementary and secondary
 - 2. The higher learning
 - a. Higher education
 - b. Professional knowledge, science and society
- D. Work
 - 1. Corporate capitalism
 - 2. Labor, men at work, people at work
 - 3. Women at work
 - 4. Unions
- E. Communication, media
 - 1. Print media
 - a. Books
 - b. Magazines
 - c. Newspapers
 - 2. Film
 - 3. Electronic media
 - a. Radio
 - b. Television
 - 4. Computers and society

- F. Consumer culture
 - 1. Advertising
 - 2. Consumers, distribution of goods
- G. Public opinion
- H. Liesure
 - 1. General
 - 2. Sports
- I. Communities
 - 1. Works on community as an idea, as a force
 - 2. Urban history: case studies, syntheses
 - 3. Rural history: case studies, syntheses
- J. European ethnicity and immigration
 - 1. The immigrant experience
 - 2. Assimilation, nativism, pluralism
- K. Racial minorities
 - 1. Black Americans
 - 2. Hispanic Americans
 - 3. Asian Americans
 - 4. Native Americans
- L. Poverty, income
- M. Deviance
 - 1. Crime, prisons, criminal justice
 - 2. Insanity, asylums
- N. Health, medicine
- O. Other reforms
- P. Religion and society
- Q. Success, mobility
 - 1. The success ethic
 - 2. Mobility studies
- R. Countercultures, utopias

III. Some journals that deal with American social and cultural history

American Historical Review
Journal of American History
Journal of Social History
Journal of Interdisciplinary History
Social Science History
Historical Methods
Reviews in American History
William and Mary Quarterly
Journal of Family History
History of Education Quarterly
Labor History
Journal of Negro History
Signs
Feminist Studies
Urban History
American Quarterly
New England Quarterly
Radical History Review
Ethnic Studies
History and Theory

IV. Some assessments of social and cultural history

Olivier Zunz, ed., Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985, pb)
James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, eds., Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History (Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, 1983)
John Higham and Paul Conkin, New Directions in American Intellectual History (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, pb)
Michael Kammen, ed., The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, pb)
Stanley Kutler and Stanley Katz, eds., The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, also published as volume 10, number 1 (December, 1982) of Reviews in American History.
James A. Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written," American Historical Review 84 (December, 1979), 1293-1322
Bernard Bailyn, "The Challenge of Modern Historiography," American Historical Review 87 (February, 1982).
Journal of Interdisciplinary History, volume 13 (Spring, 1983), special issue on quantitative research techniques.
Theda Skocpol, "Social History and Historical Sociology: Contrasts and Complementarities," Social Science History 11 (Spring, 1987).

V. Preparation: critical reading for discussion of works in social and cultural history.

- A. What are the major arguments of the book?
- B. What sorts of evidence are used to support them?
- C. How adequate is the evidence? How conclusively does it support the argument?
- D. Are there alternative explanations for the same evidence?
- E. What overarching assumptions about human nature and society guide the author? Are implicit or explicit theories used? Appropriately, persuasively?

VI. Samples of my essay reviews:

Reviews of single works:

Michael Katz's The People of Hamilton, in Reviews in American History vol. 4 (December, 1976)

Colin Burke's, American Collegiate Populations, in Science vol. 220 (May, 1983)

Review of several works:

"Social Reform and the Urban School," History of Education Quarterly vol. 12 (Summer, 1972)