

SOC 29001: Practicum in Historical Sociology
Spring 2020, Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50, Harper 102
John Levi Martin and Benjamin Rohr

General Information

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; we may move a few things around. But this gives you a sense of the class.

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 Work.*

All students will participate in different stages of the overall project of compiling and analyzing data on political elites in post-independence New York. There are two parts to this. Part one involves reading primary documents, coding documents, and checking codings. Part two involves different analyses. Students are 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 county.

4) *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.

Trip

Thanks to funding from the College Curricular Innovation Fund, we have funding to take 10 students on a research trip to the New York State Archives in Albany. In this trip you will:

- Meet with archivists and state historians (schedules permitting once we finalize our time);
- Examine original primary materials;

- Photograph data that you may want for your individual research project;
- Discuss your insights and questions with the group.

Our tentative plan would be to leave on a Thursday and return on a Sunday. Our preferred time is third week. This trip is not mandatory; we understand that there are many reasons why a student would be unable to go. But we think it would be an inspiring trip—to see the original data, perhaps to collect the data for your individual project, and to meet with an archivist.

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]

All other readings should be on CANVAS as selections

Schedule

Week I: THE BIG QUESTIONS

What is historical sociology? What is its relation to sociological theory? To history as a discipline?

Day 1: Introduction to Historical Sociology

Reading: Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, selections. 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. We outline some of the most important questions that drive contemporary historical sociology.

Doing: We try to sketch both the relation between historical sociology and history, and 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 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 introduce the collective coding project and show how it is connected to the existing database. 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: Selections from Skocpol, Markoff, Gould

Doing: We walk through an example from the collective coding project.

Day 2: Introduction to the New Nation

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

Doing: We discuss the organization of archives, paying special attention to the New York State Archives. For next week, students are expected to browse the catalog for material relevant to the project.

Handing In: By today, you should have identified your class project. By the start of class, turn in a one-page précis, identifying the question, the method, and the likely data.

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.

Doing: We discuss the sources students found in the NYSA catalog.

Handing In: Bring a one-page summary of what you found in the NYSA catalog.

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. Duverger 1954, selection.

Doing: We allocate effort in the archives and plan our time.

<<<< **NOTE: If all goes well, we do the trip to the Archives in Albany here.** >>>>

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 share our treasures gathered up in Albany, determining what we have and what might contribute to more than one project.

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 discuss one letter (maybe from John Williams?) or a brief account of local politics (maybe the story of Williams and his son-in-law [?] who becomes his opponent) as a portal into the past. The goal is for them to get a feel for the world we are studying.

Week V: THINKING IN TERMS OF CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

Day 1: General

Reading: Lipset and Rokkan 1967, selection; Hoffmann 2019. We expect most students to be familiar with Marx. If you think you need a refresher, read: 18th Brumaire and/or German Ideology.

Doing: We look at the occupational data in the database. The main point here will be about how to classify different occupational titles (e.g. are merchant-lawyers more merchants or more lawyers, are all farmers equal, etc).

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Beard, selection. Buel, Richard. 1972. *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789–1815*, selection.

Doing: We discuss their experience with the collective coding project. In groups of two, students compare their codings. We develop questions for the homework which consists of an analysis of the role of occupation in your county and which is due next Thursday.

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

Week VI: THINKING IN TERMS OF NETWORKS AND FAMILIES

Day 1: General

Reading: Adams, *The Familiar State*, selections; Padgett and Ansell 1993

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. We show them the kinship graph and ask them to tell us what they see.

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Bonomi, Patricia U. 1971. *A Factious People. Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. Cornell University Press. [or something less NY-specific]

Doing: We develop questions for the homework which consists of an analysis of the role of kinship in your county and which is due next Thursday.

Handing In: Homework on occupation.

Week VII: THINKING IN TERMS OF CAREERS

Day 1: General

Reading: Gorski, *Disciplinary Revolution*, selections.

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*.

Doing: We develop questions for the homework which consists of an analysis of careers in your county and is due next Thursday.

Handing In: Homework on kinship.

Week VIII: THINKING IN TERMS OF PRACTICES

Day 1: General

Reading: Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, selections OR Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2019. "Performative State-Formation in the Early American Republic." *American Sociological Review* 84(2):334-367.

Doing: How about this? We focus the task in the archives a bit more and say that everyone has to identify one person from their county whose personal correspondence is in the archives. They spend one of the days at the archives getting some of that stuff. This week they analyze it.

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.

Doing: We develop questions for the homework which consists of an analysis of the personal correspondence of your political figure and is due next Thursday.

Handing In: Homework on careers.

Week IX: THINKING IN TERMS OF PROCESS

Day 1: General

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: TBD

Day 2: Case specific

Reading: Slez, Adam, Martin, John Levi. 2007. "Political Action and Party Formation in the United States Constitutional Convention." *American Sociological Review* 72(1): 42-67.

Doing: We discuss their experience with the collective coding project. We will spend some time talking about the final projects.

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

Week X: THINKING IN TERMS OF OUR CASES

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

Day 1:

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.

Doing: We discuss the homework (weeks 5-8) and talk about similarities and differences between the counties.

Day 2:

Reading: --

Doing: We discuss the final projects.

Handing In: [Due date for final paper TBD.]