

Cohorting Discussion Questions

Colonization

One Barrier to Two-Spirit History: Settler Archives

- In any movement for equality or representation - whether it's for a certain racial group, LGBTQ+ communities, disabled people, or others - why does it matter equally as much where *original* language came from as much as the current language we use to describe these groups?
- When there is disagreement within communities about what language should be used to describe their community, how should scholars handle that? (should they revert to what they're comfortable with - in this case a settler narrative?)

A Puritan War on Wigs

- This article is an obsession with wigs and hair as a status symbol for white men. It also intersects the ideas we know about religion and economics (vanity and ownership of wigs). How does this also intersect with race both then and now? In what ways are fashion and hair still this way? And in what ways is this different based on your different groups of study?
- What did wigs say about masculinity and femininity in this period, and how is that different/similar to today?

Did Kongolese Catholicism Lead to Slave Revolutions?

- In centering Kongolese/African history in the history of Black Americans, how do we make more sense of contextualizing the events of the early colonial period?
- If we look at the relationship of Slave Revolutions like the ones described here as originating in Kongo as Catholic in origin, should we be looking at them as a conflict of Catholicism/Protestantism, a labor struggle, or a race struggle?

Crispus Attucks Needs No Introduction. Or Does He?

- Why does *visual* representation matter?
- Why does it matter for companies, governments, etc. to get visual representation correct the *first* time around (for all groups)?

Early Republic

A Kick for a Bite; Or, Review Upon Review Upon Ten Babies on the Floor

- What excuses can you think of that have been used to exclude people (either from your research, or another group) from a place of power? Why do you think this is?
- Is there a place for exclusionary practices like this in the United States? Are there ever reasonable or plausible exclusionary practices? If so, who gets to decide what is reasonable?

New Jersey let (Some) Women Vote from 1776 to 1807

- On the local level, states have used various means to prevent certain groups from participating in politics (can y'all think of any?). Who *specifically* does this benefit?
- What kind of hierarchy do powerful people create in order to maintain power when it comes to suffrage in the United States? What sort of language do we see employed to exclude people from suffrage?

Market Revolution

The Diverse Whaling Crews of Melville's Era

- What about the whaling industry probably made it more diverse than other industries?
- When we look at industries that are dominated primarily by one sex or gender, especially ones like whaling where people are away for years at a time, we often wonder about (and sometimes find) the likelihood of romantic relationships among workers. Why do you think this is the case? How should scholars handle this kind of work when the evidence may not necessarily be obvious?

The Angel of the Workhouse: The Body, & the Body Politic, of Victorian Women with Disabilities

- In a world where “ability” for women was measured by their marriage and responsibilities in the home, how might lesbian women or women during this period considered “sexually deviant” fall into the category of disabled?
- How were the gender roles attributed to white women as “Angels of the workhouse” (home) different for Black women and poor women? Why does this matter?

Poor Charleston

- To what extent does a deep social network make a difference in communities that experience poverty, oppression, or other difficulties?
- Do you think that government intervention (local, state, and/or federal) is more effective in meeting the needs of these communities, or their social network? Why?

When Mexico Was Flooded by Immigrants

- In what ways does this article flip the script on a narrative we’re already familiar with?

Yes, Women Participated in the Gold Rush

- Some of the women who “participated” in the Gold Rush were Native American women forced into prostitution due to their economic circumstances. How should scholars balance narratives of women’s liberation in the Gold Rush with narratives such as these?
- Given what you learned in this article, do you think women were more or less successful in the Gold Rush than the men who actually went looking for gold? Why does this matter to our representation of them?

Antebellum Era

The "Miscegenation" Troll

- How are political hoaxes or propaganda like the one described in this article used at the advantage of white people and at the disadvantage of oppressed communities?
- In what way have “certain” marriages always been seen as okay and others not? Who gets to decide what is and isn’t a proper marriage? How has this changed over time?

Olive Oatman: The Girl with the Mojave Tattoo

- In what ways is mainstream society typically willing to associate negative qualities with communities they don’t understand?
- How are these perceptions altered? How was (or wasn’t) this the case with Olive Oatman?
- Why is this particularly the case with Native American societies (especially early Native societies)?

Mothers’ Natures: Sex, Love, and Degeneration in the Nineteenth-Century United States

- In what ways do things like race, class, and ableism play into the idea of the “perfect” mother and good children?
- How do ideas like women’s reproductive roles intersect during *this* time period with religious ideals (think like Eve’s sin, “virtuous” citizens, etc.)

Rural Rent Wars of the 1840s

- Who was left out of the “rent wars” and why does that matter? Whose lives were disrupted without their say?
- Why have people who rent instead of own their home historically been viewed as “lesser-than” in American history?

The Untold History of Lynching in the American West

- Lynching can have a different meaning based on which scholar you ask. But generally speaking, lynchings not involving African Americans tend to go unheard of. Why do you think that is?
- To what extent do we fail to recognize racism in the West, and why is that problematic?

Civil War

A Complicated Man: John Baylor’s Letters to His Family

- How does understanding that all people (regardless of race, gender, etc.) are multidimensional help scholars in their work?
- Is it ever accurate for historians to see any person as entirely good or bad?

Mental Health and Criminal Justice in Civil War Kentucky

- In a time when mental health was used as a weapon against certain groups as often as it was used to help people, to what extent should we see innocence by plea of insanity as a “reform” of criminal justice? Who likely benefited most from this?
- Many of these stories explain mental illness in terms of “intoxication” or effects to the same degree. And often, mental illness during this period did seem to stem from alcoholism and other forms of addiction. To what extent was this progressive?
- Is our criminal justice system more about justice, or reform? Has this always been true?

Waking the Spirits: The Diaries of John A. Clark

- Why is it interesting that in the wake of what we know to be a period of Protestant spiritual revival, these men are interested in séances?
- How does their willingness to intersect with spiritualism here contradict with their unwillingness to allow for spiritualism of other types when it comes to Native American and other minority traditions?

Reconstruction

How Black Americans Co-opted the Fourth of July

- How can (and do) oppressed groups use already existing dates as a celebration of their own victories?
- How do dominant groups seek to use symbols (ex: the American flag) to express dominant group traits, rather than flexibility and inclusivity?

Embracing Dry Land: Water-Smart Urban Design and Drought in the American West

- How did Indigenous communities envision and produce systems like those mentioned in this article hundreds of years ago?
- What can modern architects and land surveyors learn from historical research of Black and Indigenous communities who lived in harsh environments during the pre-colonial and colonial period?

Gilded Age

Go West, You Nervous Men

- What do the mentalities in this article presume about gender and race?
- Would the “nervous” cure for men have worked for men of all races and economic classes?

Training Future Wives and Mothers: Vocational Education and Assimilation at the Stewart Indian School

- What kind of assumptions do the administrators make about Indigenous women here that are similar to women of color across time?
- Why would the government pay money to train these women as mothers if they were bent on destroying Native Americans?

Denver’s One-Lung Army: Disease, Disability, and Debility in a Frontier City

- How was Denver’s response to disability shaped by things like gender and class?
- The article emphasizes that Denver’s purpose was to form people back into good “citizens” by using the environment to rejuvenate them into being productive again. How is this exclusionary?

Embroidery as Record and Resistance

- Where else have we seen craftism as a form of resistance?
- Sometimes the acts of resistance we make are ones that won’t be found until after we’re gone. Are these less impactful than those done in the moment of a movement?

An Interrupted Journey

- In this case, the Indian population of Vancouver was protected from the Canadian government by their status as British Imperial subjects. How does this differ from the status of Indigenous nations and enslaved African people under previous British rule in the United States? Why?

Progressive Era

The Black Politics of Eugenics

- We know that no group - political, racial, economic, gender, etc. - is a monolith. This article shows in a lot of ways how the Black community is not a monolith by exposing the classist assumptions of some reformers like WEB DuBois. Do you think all Black Americans agreed with him (or even Booker T. Washington)?
- If Black reformers were on-board (at least to some degree) with eugenics thinking, does that make eugenics more of a class-based issue?

When Black Celebrities Wore Blackface

- The article makes a point of mentioning that the Black men victimized by these brutal crimes were described in the media more for how they looked than the crimes inflicted upon them. How does this translate to other groups we know?
- How is performance art used to disrupt the social order, and how are the people who take part in this performance sometimes both praised and ridiculed for this?

The Problem with "Public Charge" Rules

- Who are most disadvantaged by “public charge” rules?
- When someone falls outside the bounds of citizenship, what remains to advocate for them in the case of proving they won’t become a “public charge”? Is this “objective”?

How Insurance Companies Used Bad Science to Discriminate

- If insurance companies used what they considered bias-free statistics for decades to discriminate against African Americans, what other groups might we need to consider when evaluating the way statistics are used in policy decisions?

Understanding Her Position and Place: An African American Nurse at the Stewart Indian School, 1908-1917

- Should we assume that just because someone belongs to one minority group, they will always have the needs, desires, and struggles of another minority group at heart?
- Why is it that the government was willing to try and push whiteness onto Native Americans to assimilate them into white society, but didn't seem to want African Americans who had already assimilated into white society?

Age of Empire

Boy Scouts and the Phenomenon of "Boyification"

- How do ideas of masculinity and imperialism leave out women's impact on and empowerment of imperialism?
- In what way might young gay men find empowerment in the early Boy Scouts?

"Quacks, Alternative Medicine, and the U.S. Army in the First World War

- Some of these "cures" are obviously fake and were worth turning away. But how has the government's slow willingness to adapt to things like Osteopathy actively hurt disabled veterans and other disabled people in general?

Cosmopolitanism (and Racism) at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition

- Why is it ironic that the Indigenous populations of Alaska were forced to put on a show and dress up in Indigenous "costumes" (which may or may not have reflected their actual culturally accurate dress) in order to access the AYP for free?

The Jim Crow Army in the Philippine-American War

- Why is it interesting that the letter mentioned written by Major Calloway ended in optimism about American democratic institutions ultimately winning out in the Philippines, despite his criticisms? Do you think this had anything to do with his military service, or just his general beliefs?

1920s

When Forced Sterilization was Legal in the U.S.

- How has mental illness been used to cover any number of other "undesirable" traits in American history?
- The state is the one paying for the legal fees to determine who should be sterilized in these cases, as well as carrying out the actual sterilizations. How else could that money be spent?

Pathologizing Politics: Eugenics and Political Discourse in the Modern United States

- Why is the language that we use to describe people important? Moreover, why is it important to recognize the hurtful and dangerous past of words that seem to seep into regular discourse every day?

The Latent Racism of the Better Homes in America Program

- How did catering to a very specific type of population with the BHA exclude *many* other Americans from the program (not just by race)?
- How did the federal government work with private industry to discriminate against entire groups of people?

Why White Women Tried to Ban Native American Dances

- How do we see, generally, a trend of white people - and white women in particular - trying to regulate the bodies of women of color?

- In what ways are Native American women (and societies), in particular, susceptible to abuse by the “reform” movements of white women?

Early Mexican Immigrants Blurred Color Lines in the Southern U.S.

- To what extent is it an asset to adopt the category of “whiteness,” and to what extent is it an erasure of one’s culture?
- To what extent is the “law” willing to accept and adapt to the “Other” on a permanent basis? (think Mexican repatriation that occurred immediately after this period)

The Mob Violence of the Red Summer

- What are similarities between the language of this article and language we see in headlines today concerning “riots” in urban areas?
- Do we have any examples of “attacks” on white womanhood where the result isn’t violent? Why is that?

Great Depression

How Tear Gas became a Staple of American Law Enforcement

- Why was the reaction of the government in the 30s to treat those who disagreed with them (both in action and on-paper) as criminals? What is the benefit of branding someone as a criminal? (legitimacy in treating them badly)
- In what ways have the methods of law enforcement changed in such instances to the present?

How Native Americans Came to Fight Southwestern Fires

- Why was it perhaps a bit presumptuous to assume that the men from these Native tribes would be skilled at these fire fighting jobs?
- In the Gilded Age, the government forced Native American boarding school children to fight fires as well. How does that change the narrative of this story?

The Children’s Nutrition and Dental Clinics of Mobile: Public Health, Volunteerism, and the Color Line during the Great Depression

- What role did Black women’s volunteer societies and sororities like AKA play in public health? Why is this significant?
- How might poverty affect the ability of other groups to set up clinics such as this, or have access to clinics like this to prevent more serious medical conditions?

World War II

Love in the Comics: The Star-Crossed Story of “Negro Romance”

- Why is it important that this comic didn’t *idealize* the lifestyle of the African Americans it portrayed, but also included all of the “normal” comic book features of drama, scandal, etc.?
- The article says that these comics were meant to hook young adult *female* readers. Why is that interesting?

The Brooklyn College Farm Labor Project of the 1940s

- How were these laboring college students extremely privileged in their farm laboring service?
- Do you think these students went on to identify with minority farm workers later and help them, or no?

How Migrant Labor Policies Shaped a Latino Identity

- How does this article help us understand that there isn't a singular "Latino" identity in the United States?
- How are the situation of the Puerto Rican and Indigenous populations similar in terms of citizenship and discrimination?

Early Cold War

ONE: The First Gay Magazine in the United States

- In what ways was ONE both liberating and a product of the period it was written in?
- How did the media censorship experienced by ONE mirror that of previous time periods?

Why Paul Robeson was Labelled a Psychopath

- How has the label of "psychopath" been used to damage minorities and those who have less means to defend themselves due to gender, race, or economic status? How does the label of "psychopath" - once conferred - make it almost impossible to refute?
- Why is it important for us to be careful about ableist language in official discourse?

How Local Newspapers Helped Emmett Till's Murderers Go Free

- Native Americans have an extremely high unsolved murder rate on reservations. How is this similar to the Black community?
- How does the framing of white outsiders influence the day-to-day lives of minority groups in seeking justice for their communities?

In the McCarthy Era, to Be Black Was to Be Red

- Why is it that throughout American history (and into the present), being seen as against racism is the same as being seen as against Democracy/

The Red Scare and Women in the Government

- We know that women tend to be the organizers of social movements and practical reform change in society. If these women hadn't been shut out of government for the period that they were, do you think that Johnson's Great Society would have had to work as hard as it did? Why or why not? Would it have been successful?

1960s

What was Women's Liberation?

- The article mentions that one of the key aspects of the women's liberation movement of the 60s was "the personal is political." What does this mean? What does this mean for your group?

Is Childcare a Right?

- Why is the issue of marriage and gender equality central to the issue of children and childcare?
- Is childcare a social, political, or economic issue?

Carrying Community: The Black Midwife's Bag in the American South

- How is the policing of midwives bags an extension of the policing of Black bodies?
- In what ways does putting women (especially women of color) in hospitals to give birth affect their birthing experience? Is this positive or negative?

1970s

Deconstructing the Stonewall Myth (Brick by Brick)

- When it comes to social movements, why do origin stories matter so much to us?

The Little-Known History of the Forced Sterilization of Native American Women

- How is this similar and different to previous forced sterilizations we've seen in U.S. History?
- How does this story fit into the larger narrative during the period of decisions over women's bodily autonomy and gendered/racial discussions of family and reproduction?

Psychiatry and Homosexuality Draft Exemptions during the Vietnam War

- How have mental illness and homosexuality continuously been intertwined throughout U.S. History? How does the Vietnam War's special circumstances play a unique role in this?
- In this article, the army refused to disallow military service due to homosexuality without a doctor's note proving that this was the case. How is this different than what we saw in WWII with Section 8 "blue" discharges - and how does the government choose to change their policies toward the LGBTQ+ community to meet their needs?

The Work of Getting Clean

- The article argues that, "Historically, the connection between work and recovery has been counterproductive when its primary focus is the demands of the market, not the needs of the person." So the idea that recovering addicts should find work to find "purpose" is not historically sound. In addition to its historical unsoundness, how is this also ableist?
- How are the needs of recovering substance abusers and disabled communities similar and different? Should employers have substantial say in their recovery process, or should that be the sole dominion of doctors?

The How and Why of Indigenous Nurse History

- How is this story of Indigenous nurses similar to our story of Black midwives?
- Why is it critical for the medical field to reflect the communities that it serves?

The Detroit Rebellion

- Are riots/rebellions ever really about just one thing (whether it be work, race, gender, etc.)? Why is this?
- What about Detroit made it unique to this large of a rebellion?

Shirley Chisholm: Sisterhood is Complicated

- Why is it critical for historians to understand that just dropping the names of "diverse" people into their historical narratives isn't enough if they don't also acknowledge the words and perspectives of those people and their context?

1980s

Just Being There: The AIDS Crisis and the Shanti Project's Hospital Counselor Program

- What is the role of people who are simply present in chronic and terminal illness wards, and how has this changed over time?
- How do counselors differ in their treatment of the disabled than other medical professionals?

"Keepers of the Light": A Musical History of the Boston Gay Men's Chorus

- How has music always been a form of activism?
- How does this Gay men's chorus overlap with the needs of the disabled community? How does the AIDS crisis display a unique form of intersectionality?

Addicted Mothers: Substance Abusers or Child Abusers?

- How is the racial portrayal of Black and Brown women as bad mothers a historical continuity?

- If this portrayal of “bad motherhood” is also based on race, how does this also intersect with our article on recovering addicts?

Of Strip Mines and Coal Slurry

- This is a story of a historian and his work. What was surprising to you about it - about his process?
- This historian wants to ensure that Indigenous histories are carefully told and contextualized in his work, but says that “there is a lot to see on the reservations, and a lot of kept knowledge, that’s not mine to share.” What does this mean and why is it important?

Stranger Danger: Rhetoric and Strategies of the "Missing Children" Movement

- We know as a fact that the vast majority of “missing children” are runaways and/or children who have been taken by a close family member (typically a parent who doesn’t have custody). Should our society create a distinct or separate category for these children than those in a “stranger danger” scenario, which is far less common?
- Who benefits from the politicization of the “stranger danger missing children” movement?

1990s

The Same Red Blood?: AIDS, Homophobia, and an American Tradition of Hate

- How did the intersection of religion and democratic ideals come together to produce hate against the LGBTQ+ community in this time period?
- Where have we seen this same confluence of factors produce hate against another group of people (in much the same way) in the past?

The Midterms that Changed America

- The rise of Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House created an increasingly polarized Congress (and party system) in the United States. How has this impacted American politics today?
- In 1998, Gingrich didn’t return as Speaker of the House after he was exposed for his own extramarital affairs. Why did the “Contract with America” not die with his resignation after being so constantly tied to him publicly?

The Many Meanings of Yellow Ribbons

- Why does it matter that we know the real origin stories of our symbols?
- After we know and acknowledge the historical origins of our national symbols, is it okay for those symbols to change? Is this true of all symbols?

The Ongoing Legal Plight of LGBTQ Refugees

- Why is it important for US laws to understand and respect the differences that the acronym LGBTQ+ stands for?
- How are issues of LGBTQ+ rights complicated when overlapped with countries and communities that also have strong ties to racism and specific gender or religious norms?

Modern Era

Eugenic Sperm

- In what ways are sperm banks beneficial and in what ways can they promote discriminatory practices?
- How do sperm banks (and egg banks) inherently support eugenic ideas?

Who Gets a Bathroom Pass? The History of School Bathrooms

- When it comes to school bathrooms (and public bathrooms in general) what are factors that play into discrimination that white, cis-gender, able-bodied people do not take into account?
- In schools in particular, how are different people treated when they ask to go to the bathroom? Do all of your teachers require you to ask? Do you find it odd that you are required to ask to use the bathroom as an almost adult person?

Weaponizing Weakness, Diagnosing by GIF

- Why is it never acceptable for scholars (anyone other than a person's actual physician) to "diagnose" someone else?
- Why do we perceive certain illnesses or disabilities as impairing one's ability for leadership and not others? If leadership requires a flexible set of skills, who makes the judgement about which things will impair it?

The Politics of Reproductive Rights Legislation in the "Modern" South

- For politicians who proudly accept the label of "pro-life," how should they balance reproductive rights legislation with legislation that fails to provide for mothers of small children?
- How have Southern laws shifted from eugenics to reproductive rights?

The Pitfalls of Fandom for Women of Color

- Why do some fandoms seem to do a better job of representation than others when it comes to women of color?
- Which women of color do you think are most underrepresented in fandoms and why? Why is this important?
- When women of color *are* represented in fandoms, do they tend to play into certain stereotypes?