



President Barack Obama, whose decision to wear a tan suit in 2014 provoked the United States' [greatest ever scandal](#).

American Scandal, 1700–Present

“For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” –Hamlet

Smith College, Spring 2020

Instructor: Dr. Jordan E. Taylor

Class meeting: Thursdays and Thursdays 9:25–10:40am, Seelye 101

Office: Dewey Hall 212

Office hours: Thursday 3:00–5:00pm and by appointment.

Course description

Scandals reveal anxiety. Norms are articulated, defined, and defied through scandal. Events are scandalous because they contravene expectations and because they challenge existing power relationships. Scandals also reveal who belongs and who is excluded from society. In this course, we will study events that seemed scandalous in the United States from the 18th century through the present in order to understanding evolving social behavior, expectations, and systems of power.

There are many kinds of scandals. They relate to race, gender, sexuality, violence, corruption, or often some mix of these topics. We cannot cover every scandal in American history, but instead, we will examine a sample of scandals to open up broader conversations about American history.

History is an exercise in empathy—historians try to understand a very different world from others' perspectives. One of the most effective ways that historians convey empathy is through storytelling. As we attempt to understand the scandalous American

past, we will craft narratives about particular scandals and put them into the world through a podcast.

Learning objectives

Historical thinking.

- Students will critically interpret primary sources using historical context.
- Students will assess how ideas and systems of power change over time.
- Students will analyze the development of historical change by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals in the past.

Skills of analysis.

- Students will evaluate historians' arguments by analyzing their use of evidence, their interpretative choices, and their assumptions.
- Students will identify how changing media forms shape historical contexts.
- Students will synthesize and evaluate course materials and historical evidence by creating compelling historical arguments.

Storytelling.

- Students will develop the capacity to tell complex stories concisely, balancing complexity and accessibility.
- Students will demonstrate a keen awareness of public audiences.

Ethical conduct.

- Students will compare and contrast the relationship between ethical systems and power relations in the past.
- Students will consider the relationship between history and their own ethical conduct.

Course materials

Students will be required to purchase two books, which should be available at the bookstore:

- Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor, *Property Rites: The Rhinelander Trial, Passing, and the Protection of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill, 2009). ISBN: 978-0807859391
- Barry Werth, *The Scarlet Professor: Newton Arvin: A Literary Life Shattered by Scandal* (New York, 2001). ISBN: 0-385-49468-8

Other course materials will be posted on Moodle. These will include podcasts, which you can listen to online (or, when available, read a transcript) or through a smartphone's podcast app. Finally, you will be required to purchase, or loan from the library, a book for your podcast project (see options, and more information below).

Grading

- Podcast project (50%)
- Attendance and participation (10%)

- Take-home midterm (20%)
- Take-home final (20%)

Podcast project

Your major project for this course will be to work in teams to craft a ~20–25-minute podcast episode about a largely-unknown scandal from the American past. You will read a book about the scandal as well as some supplemental readings. Working with your team, as well as the Smith Media Studios, you will produce a podcast episode about your assigned scandal. This will include:

- **Mini-episode (10% of podcast grade).** Due March 12, your mini-episode will focus on some aspect of the Newton Arvin scandal. In a ~5-minute mini-podcast, your team will contextualize and analyze a primary source from Smith College's archives.
- **Proposal (5% of podcast grade).** Your proposal, due March 26, will be your first chance to reflect on the assigned book that you've read as a team. It will also be your first chance to get specific feedback about your podcast idea. Your team will create the proposal that will:
 - Propose three to four supplementary readings. Ideally, these should relate to the context and implications that you want to bring to bear on your project. At least two of these should be academic articles or book chapters. If possible, one should be a primary source from the era. You are highly encouraged to consult with me about your readings. You may find these by looking at your book's endnotes/footnotes. (note: please only skim these sources, especially longer ones, until I've given you feedback on your proposal)
 - Propose an initial storytelling approach. How will you indicate to your audience that this is important? How can you create narrative tension? What can you do to pull your listener into your story? Will you tell the story from one individual's perspective? How can you bring in necessary context?
- **Annotated bibliography (10% of podcast grade).** Your annotated bibliography, due on April 7, will show how you are using the supplementary readings for your podcast project. Include one paragraph for each reading.
- **Podcast outline (15% of podcast grade).** The outline, due April 21, will allow your team to map out a full plan for the episode. In order to avoid having the episode sound wooden and boring, avoid writing out a full script.
 - **Presentation:** As part of the podcast outline, please be prepared to present your project to the rest of the class on April 23 and 28. These will be informal presentations, lasting around 8-10 minutes each. You don't need to prepare slides or any materials. Just tell us about your topic and how you'll tell the story.
- **Final podcast (60% of podcast grade).** Your final audio podcast is due on April 30.

- **Blog post:** As a team, you will be responsible for writing a 400–500-word blog post for our class WordPress site explaining where you got your information from and suggesting further reading for listeners. Think of this as an annotated bibliography for the public.
- **Transcript:** Your team will also produce a transcript of the final podcast, posted with the blog post.

Everything should be submitted on Moodle by the end of the day that it is due.

Grading: Each of these components will be graded for the team as a whole. As appropriate, they will be graded on the following basis:

- Creativity: narrate the story of the scandal in a compelling way. (don't be boring)
- Context: you will carefully place the scandal into a meaningful historical context. (what's distinctive about this time and place?)
- Implications: consider the significance or implications of your story. (why is it important?)
- Audience: take into account the expectations of a popular audience. (it shouldn't sound like a book report)

Effort: I will be occasionally checking in with groups about how things are going and the internal dynamics of your group. At the end of the project, I will be distributing forms to your team mates that asks each member of your team to describe in depth their contribution to the project, as well as those of teammates. Students who do not demonstrate a meaningful contribution to their team will receive a significant penalty to their podcast grade.

Accommodations: Some students may not be able to perform all of the tasks involved in creating a podcast. When you meet your team, please discuss what roles each person may be comfortable/ uncomfortable with. Some specialization is inevitable, but ensure that there is a fairly even distribution of labor within the team.

Attendance and participation

Please attend class, come prepared, and participate in discussions. We must respect everyone's ideas and opinions. More precise rules will be decided in our class discussions about our community standards. Your participation grade will partly reflect your thoughtful engagement and collaboration with the other students in your podcast project team. I reserve the right to lower participation grades for those who are not contributing meaningfully to their team's output.

Participation is measured holistically, not just based on the number of times that you answer a question in class. Attending office hours, asking questions, listening to others, emailing me, participating in groupwork, and otherwise demonstrating engagement with the course are all potential ways of participating. It's also possible to receive a poor participation grade while engaging in class discussion if you contravene our course's community standards.

Note: If you're not familiar with the concept of "office hours," they are a set period of time when your professors will be in their offices waiting for students to come talk with them. You might discuss the course, your work, get to know your instructor, raise concerns, or ask questions. Anything, really. Your professors are eager to talk to students in office hours. Attending office hours is a good way to ensure that your instructors know you. If you can't make office hours, just send an email letting your instructor know this, and offer some other possible times to meet.

Exams

You will complete two take-home exams that will assess your engagement with the course topics, themes, and materials. These exams will ask you to respond to a few questions with evidence from the assigned readings and podcasts. They will be assigned at least one week in advance of their due date. These are take-home exams, so you should use notes and readings. However, please develop your answers independently. You will be evaluated on your ability to synthesize discussions, readings, and lectures into a coherent explanation that takes into account change over time.

Course Policies

I believe you: When you share something with me, my default position will be to trust you. I understand that life can be very difficult. If you find yourself sacrificing your mental or physical health for this class, please get in touch with me so that we can work together to avoid that.

Identity: This class respects students' rights to determine their own name(s), pronouns, and identities. If you feel that these rights are not being respected, *please* speak with me.

Religious holidays: This course respects students' observance of religious holidays. Email me.

Email communication: I expect all students to regularly check email. For simple queries, please consult the syllabus before emailing me. I expect you to communicate professionally over email.

Plagiarism: Using someone else's words or ideas as your own, without clearly quoting and citing them, is plagiarism. It is a violation of the Honor Code. I will follow the college's procedures about plagiarism, which means bringing the matter to your Class Dean and the Honor Board.

Racist language: Some of our readings use racist language, including the n-word. It's important to study the history of race in America, which means occasionally reading racist language. However, we will not repeat this word, or other racial epithets, aloud in class.

Privacy: I consider most written work turned in for the class to be fair game for class discussion or activities, unless it clearly discusses sensitive personal matters. If you

would prefer that I refrain from using a part, or all, of your written work in class discussion, please indicate that when you turn it in. Additionally, we will respect your right to privacy with regard to your podcast work.

Reading for this class: Readings for this course are primarily argument-driven essays and books. As you read, think about the following: what is the author's argument? Why is she making that claim? What evidence is she using to support it? How do you evaluate the argument?

Simply passing your eyes over every word on the page, without thinking about it, is "lazy reading." Instead, we will practice active reading. That means reading with a purpose: annotate, pause to take notes, look up words, or ask questions, skim through repetitive sections, spend more time on meaningful sections. Reading is a conversation between you and the author. Ask them questions, challenge them, and don't take everything they say for granted.

You are not expected to read every word on every page of every reading. Your goal is to understand the reading's argument as well as the nuance and complexity that surrounds that argument. You should take some time, even if it's just two minutes, after each reading to think about what you've just worked through, and why it might be important.

Community standards: Near the beginning of our course, we will have a class-wide discussion about several topics, including: late work and extensions, discussions and respect, electronics and attention, and trauma and content warnings. Together, we will craft a list of "community standards" that will consist of our values and expectations for this class, which I will circulate once it's finished.

Resources

Sexual Misconduct: I am a responsible reporter regarding incidents of sexual violence and misconduct. That means that I am required to report incidents of sexual violence to our campus's Title IX Coordinator. In that event, the Title IX Office will work with a small number of others on campus to ensure that appropriate measures are taken, and resources are made available to the student. Protecting a student's privacy is of utmost concern, and all involved will only share information with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. See <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/title-ix>

Accessibility: It is important to me that everyone is able to succeed in this course. I will work with all students to accommodate any disabilities. We are lucky to have an excellent Office of Disability Services (ODS) at Smith. Note that they will work with you even if you don't have a formal doctor's note. Please submit requests for accommodations to ODS as soon as possible. They will generate a confidential letter that indicates the specific kinds of support that you need in the classroom. Please know that you don't need to disclose your specific disability to me, and ODS will not unless you ask them to. <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services>

I try to make this course as accessible as possible. My understanding of what accessibility means is always evolving. Please help me by letting me know if I can do anything, even if it seems small, to make the class more accessible at any point in the semester. You can do this through email, in person, or through [this anonymous Google form](#). When you submit to the Google form, I will get an email with your request but with no personal information.

Writing center: The Jacobson Center for Writing is an incredible resource that offers appointments and walk-in peer tutors to help you to develop your writing abilities. They are prepared to help students with public writing.
<https://www.smith.edu/jacobsoncenter/>

Technology Help: For podcasting issues, please contact Dan Bennett (dbennett@smith.edu). For WordPress, contact Travis Grandy (tgrandy@smith.edu).

Topics for Podcast Project

1. Lord Cornbury
 - Patricia Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal*.
 - A colonial governor in New York was accused of crossdressing. Was this true?
2. The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle
 - Chamberlain, *The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle*.
 - Jonathan Edwards' "crazy grandmother" Elizabeth Tuttle defied some of her era's norms. What were the consequences?
3. Randolph Scandal
 - Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*.
 - In revolutionary Virginia, the wealthy Randolph family underwent a violent shock when one of its members, Nancy, was accused of infanticide, infidelity, and incest.
4. Eaton Affair
 - Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*.
 - As President, Andrew Jackson involved himself in a scandal involving sex, gender performance, and a woman named Peggy Eaton who married Jackson's Secretary of War.
5. Ann Carson
 - Branson, *Dangerous to Know*.
 - A "dangerous woman," Ann Carson was an early nineteenth-century criminal who once tried to kidnap the governor of Pennsylvania. She wrote a shocking memoir about her exploits.
6. Mary Rogers
 - Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*.
 - The unsolved murder of a young woman named Mary Rogers in 1840s New York City electrified the city and helped to create the genre of detective fiction.
7. Hannah Mary Tabbs
 - Gross, *Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Disembodied Torso*.
 - After a headless, disembodied torso was discovered on the street outside of 1880s Philadelphia, authorities blamed a black woman named Hannah Mary Tabbs.
8. New York City police scandal of 1890s
 - Czistrom, *New York Exposed*.
 - An investigation into the New York City police department in the 1890s revealed an extraordinary amount of corruption, which had important results for Gilded Age politics.
9. Goat Castle murder
 - Cox, *Goat Castle*.
 - The mysterious murder of a wealthy woman named Jennie Merrill in 1930s Natchez received national attention.
10. PTL Scandal
 - Wigger, *PTL*.
 - In the 1970s and 1980s, the famous televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker were household names in much of America. But their evangelical empire came

crashing down when revelations of a sex scandal and financial corruption spun out of control in 1987.

Schedule

Jan. 30: Sex and Scandal / Community standards

- Summers, "What Happened to Sex Scandals?" *Journal of American History* (2000).
- Listen: "[Deal or No Deal](#)," and "[Move On](#)," *Slow Burn* podcast. [transcripts at link]

Feb. 4: Sex in Early America

- Skim: Increase Mather, "[An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing](#)," (1678).
- Read: Dayton, "Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village," *William and Mary Quarterly* (1991).
- Listen/read: Backstory, "[Man and Beast](#)." [[transcript](#)]

Feb. 6: Seduction or Fallen Women?

- Read: *The Contrast* (1787). [Content note: this has some racist material in it.]
- Read: DeWolfe, "More Than a Congressman's Mistress" (2017).

Feb. 11: Obscenity and Publicity

- Read: "The Abolition of Privacy," *New York Times* editorial, Aug. 4, 1874.
- Read: Horowitz, "Victoria Woodhull, Anthony Comstock, and Conflict over Sex in the United States in the 1870s," *Journal of American History* (2000).
- Read: Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, prologue, ch. 1–6.

Feb. 13: Podcast conversation / Dan Bennett

- Continue reading Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, prologue, ch. 1–6.

Feb. 18: Scandal at Smith College

- Read: Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, prologue, ch. 7–15, epilogue.

Feb. 20: Barry Werth (author visit)

- Begin to read for your podcast project

Feb. 25 / 27: Media lab visit / Smith College special collections visit

- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project

Mar. 3: Elections and Politics

- Assigned: Take-home midterm exam
- Read: Summers, "Party Games," (2001).
- Read: Lee, "Party's Over," (2018).
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project

Mar. 5: Corruption

- Read: Various authors, "Interchange: Corruption Has a History," *JAH* (2019).

- Listen: Final three segments of BackStory, "[On the Take](#)," (25:20–48:50). [transcript at link]
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project

Mar. 10: Watergate

- Listen: "[Martha](#)," and "[Saturday Night](#)," *Slow Burn* podcast. [transcripts at links]
- Due: Take-home midterm exam.
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project

Mar. 12: Celebrity and Personality

- Read: Petersen, "Gossip Goes Mainstream," (2014).
- Explore: [Confidential Magazine, July 1954](#).
- Due: Newton Arvin mini-podcast.

Mar. 24: Podcast workshop

- Listen: "[Coronation](#)," *The Queen* podcast. [no transcript available; read article]
- Read: Halperin, "[Who Was the Original 'Welfare Queen'?](#)" (2019).
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project.

Mar. 26: Humiliation

- Read: Greenberg, "Masks and Slavery."
- Due: Podcast proposal.
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project.

Mar. 31: Masculinity and Honor

- Read: Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor."
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project.

Apr. 2: Gender Boundaries

- Read: Norton, "Communal Definitions of Gendered Identity in Seventeenth-Century English America."
- Read: Your reading(s) for your podcast project.

Apr. 7 and 9: The Rhineland Trial, I

- Due Apr. 7: Annotated bibliography.
- Read: Smith-Pryor, *Property Rites* (2009), introduction, ch. 1–5. (due Tuesday)

Apr. 14 and 16: The Rhineland Trial, II

- Read: Smith-Pryor, *Property Rites* (2009), ch. 6–9, conclusion. (due Tuesday)

Apr. 21: True Crime

- Read: Halttunen, "The Pornography of Violence," (1998).
- Due April 21: Podcast outline.

Apr. 23 and 28: Presentations

- Assigned April 28: Final exam (due May 5)

Apr. 30: Conclusions

- Due: Your final podcast.