

ESOC 4000-6000-9600  
Applied Historical Research Methods:  
Teachers and Teaching in the American South, 1861-1880

Spring Semester 2005  
Dr. Ronald E. Butchart

Tuesdays, 6:30-9:00

*Overview:* This seminar is intended to give participants experience in research in social history and the history of African American education. The participants will contribute to data collection for a large social history project on nineteenth century southern teachers through archival work in local sources and through on-line resources; will critique the effectiveness and value of various research sources and prosopographic methodologies; and will write papers with the possibility of presentation at a scholarly conference.

*Background and context of the seminar:* I have been working for many years studying the teachers who worked among the freed slaves in the American South from the beginning of the American Civil War to the end of Reconstruction. As their story has been traditionally told, they have been described as young, white, evangelical women from New England, primarily from more privileged homes. My research to date has, among many other things, challenged every generalization in the traditional interpretation. I have been able to reach new conclusions by building a very large data base that I hope will eventually include virtually every identifiable teacher who worked in the black schools between 1861 and 1876. The work also includes the most complete qualitative survey of the teachers and their work undertaken to date.

Among the more intriguing teachers at this point in the research are the many southerners, black and white, who took up the teaching challenge. Historians were aware that a few literate southern blacks taught; what we did not know is the remarkable number of them who were literate, the degree of their literacy, nor how many of them taught. Further, the histories of the white southerners who taught have been almost entirely silenced. Both groups need far more research, but most of the sources that can be tapped are local.

*Modality:* The seminar will introduce the seminar participants to issues in social history and to historical research methods. Each participant will receive a list of about one hundred southern teachers from the Freedmen's Teachers database. Each list will include teachers from particular areas of the South -- southern Georgia, for example, or the area around Huntsville, Alabama, or north-eastern South Carolina. The semester assignment will be to tap all the sources we can imagine in order to find more about these teachers. Hopefully we will find sufficient information that we can begin to understand what led them to this sort of work, particularly the white southerners whose story appears to be particularly ambiguous and conflictual. We will be looking for both qualitative and prosopographic data, and seeking to discover everything we can about each person we can find. Given the vagaries of this sort of work, participants will be fortunate if they can find significant information on a quarter of the teachers. On the other hand, if the seminar can find that much, it may be able to add significantly to our understanding of southern black education, social history, and the largely ignored history of teachers and teaching.

In addition to work in local repositories, we will discuss other resources, such as manuscript census returns, pension records, and military records, along with on-line resources, and seek our teachers through those resources.

*Assignments:* There are two primary seminar assignments. The first is to practice the skills learned in the seminar by pursuing teachers on one's list. The second is to write a seminar paper of twelve to twenty pages based on the results of the research. For those who are fortunate enough to find a good deal of material, the paper will provide a narrative history based on those individuals, put into the context of the secondary literature on the history of freedmen's education. For those whose research fails to find substantial information on the teachers, the paper may take other forms, such as a narrative description of the problems of engaging in prosopographic research such as this. Collaborative papers are encouraged.