

HIS 301.01
American Biographies: Life Stories in Historical Context

Satisfies: ESI

M/W, 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

Professor Jennifer Anderson

Biographies—books that focus on the lives of real people, past and present—are among the most popular forms of non-fiction today. In this class, we'll read the biographies of a diverse array of Americans. Some achieved fame, fortune, or notoriety; others were more ordinary or socially marginalized and never became public figures. Yet in the hands of a skilled historian, as this course demonstrates, anyone's story can be illuminating, providing insights into the times and places where they lived, their concerns and values, and the critical issues and events that shaped their everyday realities. Students will learn about the origins and development of biographical writing as a genre. Delving into primary and secondary sources, they will then research and write their own biographical profile of a person. As preparation for the History Senior Seminar (His 401), this course is designed to introduce majors and minors to the fundamentals of History as an academic discipline—including analyzing and critiquing a wide variety of sources, developing convincing arguments and evidence-based interpretations, and honing their written and oral communication skills.