In this course we’ll sample a variety of topics in the field of American legal history, ranging from colonial laws against fornication to our regime of immigration law today. Our chief aim will be to develop a critical appreciation of how scholars use history to make arguments about American legal culture. We’ll consider essays by historians whose respective values/politics/methodologies vary greatly, one from the other. Typically we'll focus on the author’s strategy of argumentation itself, argumentation as to how, and how much, law has mattered in American history. The course will require routine engaged participation in classroom discussion. There will be a closed-book midterm exam. And there will be a final writing assignment, in the nature of an essay relating some of the course readings to matters of legal/political controversy today. A tentative syllabus is available upon request; send an email to conrads@indiana.edu.