

David Singerman • CV

updated 2025-05-01

Assistant Professor of History and American Studies, University of Virginia
(2017–present)

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Current projects

- History of performance-enhancing drugs, especially erythropoietin (EPO) and the [Enhanced Games](#)
- Sports and advanced technology, especially automation and simulation

Education

- **PhD, Massachusetts Institute of Technology**
Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, & Society, 2014
- **MPhil, University of Cambridge**
History and Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Medicine, 2007
- **BA, Columbia University**
History, 2006

Publications

Book

- [*Unrefined: How Capitalism Reinvented Sugar*](#) (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming September 2025). Part of the [Synthesis series](#) in the history of chemistry.

Peer-reviewed articles and chapters

- "[Modern Food as Ranked Food: Who's Afraid of the Dark Sugar?](#)," in *Acquired Tastes: Stories About the Origins of Modern Food*, ed. Benjamin Cohen, Anna Zeide, and Michael Kideckel (MIT Press, 2021)
- "[The Reproducibility Crisis in the Age of Digital Medicine](#)" (with Aaron Stuppel and Leo Anthony Celi), *npj Digital Medicine* 2, no. 1 (January 29, 2019): 2.
- "[Sugar machines and the fragile infrastructure of commodities in the nineteenth century](#)," *Osiris* vol. 33 (2018), special issue on "Science and Capitalism: Entangled Histories."
- "[The Limits of Chemical Control in the Caribbean Sugar Factory](#)," *Radical History Review* no. 127, "Political Histories of Technoscience," January 2017.
- "[Keynesian Eugenics and the Goodness of the World](#)," *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 3, July 2016.
- "[Science, Commodities, and Corruption in the Gilded Age](#)," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 3, July 2016. (Awarded the 2018 Treasury Historical Association 1500 Penn Prize.)
- "[Inventing Purity in the Atlantic Sugar World, 1860–1930](#)," *Enterprise & Society* 16, no. 4, December 2015.
- "['A Doubt is At Best an Unsafe Standard': Measuring Sugar in the Early Bureau of Standards](#)," *NIST Journal of Research*, January 2007.

Public writing

- "[Public Thinker: Lara Putnam Wants You to Knock on Your Neighbor's Door](#)," *Public Books* online, July 2022.
- "[There's Something Fishy about U.S.–Canada Trade Wars](#)," *The Atlantic* online, 14 June 2018.

- "[Zones of Doubt: What we can learn about trade policy from a misbegotten 19th century effort to quantify the chemical properties of wool](#)," *Bunk*, 2 October 2018.
- "[The Sugar Tramp: One man's obsession with the ephemera of his industry](#)," *Bunk*, 10 January 2018.
- "[The Other End of the Telescope: Considering astronomy's history from the shadow of the Arecibo Observatory reveals the discipline's intimate ties to imperialism](#)," *Bunk*, 24 November 2017.
- "[When Science Was Big: This year's Nobel Prize in physics is a blast from the past of Cold War-era research investment. Is that era gone for good?](#)" *Bunk*, 19 October 2017.
- "[The Shady History of Big Sugar](#)," Op-Ed, *The New York Times*, 17 September 2016.

Reviews

- Review of Christy Spackman, *The Taste of Water: Sensory Perception and the Making of an Industrialized Beverage* (University of California Press, 2024), in *H-Environment*, forthcoming.
- Review of Theresa Levitt, *Elixir: A Parisian Perfume House and the Quest for the Secret of Life* (Harvard University Press, 2023), in *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society*, forthcoming.
- Review of Daniel B. Rood, *The Reinvention of Atlantic Slavery: Technology, Labor, Race, and Capitalism in the Greater Caribbean* (Oxford University Press, 2017), in the *World Sugar History Newsletter* 51 (March 2019).
- Review of Megan Raby, *American Tropics: The Caribbean Roots of Biodiversity Science* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), *New West Indian Guide* 93, nos. 1-2 (2019).
- Review of Adrian Leonard & D. Pretel, eds., *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), in the *World Sugar History Newsletter* 49 (March 2018).
- Review of Bruce E. Baker and Barbara Hahn, *The Cotton Kings: Capitalism and Corruption in Turn-of-the-Century New York and New Orleans* (Oxford University Press, 2016), in *American Nineteenth-Century History* 19, no. 2 (2018).
- Review of April Merleaux, *Sweetness and Civilization: American Empire and the Cultural*

Politics of Sweetness (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), in *Agricultural History* 90, no. 3 (summer 2016).

- Review of C. Allan Jones and Robert V. Osgood, *From King Cane to the Last Sugar Mill: Agricultural Technology and the Making of Hawai'i's Premier Crop* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), in *Hawaiian Journal of History* (2016).
- "Social History of Knowledge in the Slaveholding Atlantic World," review of Daniel Rood, "Plantation Technocrats: A Social History of Knowledge in the Slaveholding Atlantic World" (PhD dissertation, University of California - Irvine, 2010), at dissertationreviews.org, April 2012.

Interviews and media

- February 22, 2025: Interviewed by Srijana Mitra Das for the Times of India Evoke section: "[Mass-produced sugar came from chemicals, corruption — and environmental destruction](#)"

Talks, presentations, and conferences

Invited talks

- Four invited seminars at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, May–June 2024. [Click here for more information on the professeur invité webpage.](#)
- "Freedom From the New World: The Invention of Beet Sugar," Princeton University Davis Seminar, 31 March 2023.
- "Is history funny?" Harriet Ritvo Symposium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 30 April 2022. [Click here to watch the talk.](#)
- "Sugar!" UVA Medical Center Hour. 6 March 2019. [Click here to watch the talk.](#)
- "Stolen sugar, smuggled herring, and other lessons in corruption from the Gilded Age." United States Department of the Treasury, Treasury Historical Association 1500 Penn Prize Lecture. 6 February 2019.
- "Sugar," at Edible Environments summer school, Concordia University, Montreal. 10

July 2018.

- "Sugar, science, and the history of capitalism," Department Seminar, History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge. 1 February 2018.
- "Inventing Purity in the Atlantic Sugar World, 1860–1930," Coleman Prize Plenary Session, Association of Business Historians Annual Meeting, Exeter, UK. 3 July 2015.
- "Inventing Purity in the Atlantic Sugar World, 1860–1930," Krooss Prize Plenary Session, Business History Conference, Miami, Florida. 26 June 2015.
- "Purity and Power in the American Sugar Empire," Lafayette College, Easton, PA. 23 April 2015.

Talks and conference presentations

- Participant in roundtable on "Tracing the Chemical Across Disciplines," History of Science Society annual meeting, New Orleans, November 2025.
- "Adverse analytical findings: who knows what about drugs in sports?" Society for Social Studies of Science annual meeting, Seattle, September 2025.
- "Who gets to decide whether doping is bad?" UVA Institute for Practical Ethics salon, 14 April 2025.
- "Freedom from the New World: The Invention of Beet Sugar." Business History Collective (online). 6 April 2021. [Click here to watch the presentation.](#)
- "How Hawaiian sugar colonized the Caribbean," American Society for Environmental History Annual Meeting, Columbus, OH. 13 April 2019.
- "The Limits of Control in the Ingenio Central, 1860–1935." Association of Caribbean Historians 2016 Conference, Havana, Cuba. June 2016.
- "Sugar Work and Scientific Control in Puerto Rico and Hawaii, 1875–1920." Organization of American Historians 2016 Annual Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island. April 2016.
- "Local Laboratories and Global Standards in the Sugar Trade, 1907–1930." Business History Conference 2016 Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon. March 2016.
- "Frozen Herring and the Gilded Age State." American Society for Environmental History

2015 Annual Conference, Washington, D.C. 19 March 2015.

- "Sweetness and Control: Chemists in the Sugar Market." American Historical Association 2015 Annual Meeting, New York. 4 January 2015.
- "Sugar, Labor, and Chemical Control in the Caribbean." Small Conference on Labor and Empire (sponsored by *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*), University of California, Santa Barbara. 15 November 2014.

Conferences and panels chaired or organized

- (chair) "Hmmm.....: History of Medicine Methods and Archival Silences," Southern Association for the History of Medicine and Science annual meeting, 14 March 2025, Charlottesville, VA
- (chair) "Histories of Data and the Data of History," History of Science Society/Society for the History of Technology 2021 Joint Meeting
- (chair) "Labor Control as Management Strategy," Business History Conference 2021 Annual Meeting
- (organizer and chair) "After María: What Environmental History can Learn from the Caribbean," American Society for Environmental History Annual Meeting. Columbus, OH. 10–13 April 2019.
- (organizer) "Measuring Nature: Commodities and Standards," Business History Conference 2016 Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon. March 2016.
- (organizer) "Poisoned and Pissed: Public Scandals and Environmental Regulation," American Society for Environmental History 2015 Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C. 18–22 March 2015.
- (organizer) "The Authority of Science at the Edges of Empire." American Historical Association 2015 Annual Meeting, New York. 4 January 2015.

Research grants, fellowships, and awards

Major awards

- [Visiting professor](#), Centre d'Études Nord-Américaines, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2024
- Krooss Prize for Best Dissertation in Business History, Business History Conference, 2015
- Coleman Prize for Best Dissertation in Business History, Association of Business Historians (UK), 2015
- Visiting Fellowship, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2014–15 (declined)

Other awards

- UVA Library Research Sprint, 2024
- Treasury Historical Association 1500 Penn Prize, 2018
- New York Public Library Short-Term Research Fellowship, 2017
- Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry Research Award, 2014
- Massachusetts Historical Society Short-Term Fellowship, 2014–15

Teaching

Teaching awards and grants

- UVA Alumni Board of Trustees Teaching Award (2025), given to an assistant professor at the university for outstanding teaching
- Science and Society Co-Design Grant (2025–26), \$10,500 to co-develop "Bread: A Human History" with Ali Guler (UVA Biology)

Courses in History

- HIST 9559, "Global History of Science, Technology, and Medicine" (Spring 2025)
- HIUS 2101, "Technologies of American Life" (Spring 2021, Spring 2022, Spring 2024)
- HIST 3501, "Introductory History Workshop: Sugar and Global History" (Spring 2023)
- HIST 1501, "The Global Financial Crisis of 2008" (Fall 2018, Fall 2020, Fall 2022)
- HIST 1501, "Corruption and Fraud" (Fall 2017)

Courses in American Studies

- AMST 3001, "Theories and Methods of American Studies" (Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2022, Fall 2022, Spring 2023, Spring 2024)
- AMST 3559, "Science and Democracy in America" (Spring 2018)

Courses in Arts & Sciences programs

- EGMT 1520: "Empirical and Scientific Engagement: Sourdough" (Spring 2026)
- EGMT 1520: "Empirical and Scientific Engagement: Information and Democracy" (Fall 2024, Spring 2025, Fall 2025)
- FORU 1500, "The World Gone Wrong: Introduction to the Forum" (Fall 2019)
- FORU 2500, "The World Gone Wrong: Forum Capstone" (Spring 2021)

External courses

- Four seminars at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, May-June 2024 ([link](#))
- "Sugar," at Edible Environments summer school, Concordia University, Montreal, July 2018

Teaching Development

- Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Course Design Institute & IGNITE (2018), and various workshops
- Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing (2019)
- UVA Library Course Enrichment Grant (2020)
- Casteen Faculty Fellowship in the Teaching of Ethics (2021)

Departmental teaching-related service

- Director of Undergraduate Program, American Studies (Fall 2024 – present)
- Assessment Director, American Studies (2019–present)

- Faculty co-organizer, MADCAP history of capitalism workshop (2017–2023)
- Faculty advisor, graduate-student-led department colloquium (2021–2023)

University/College teaching-related service

- Advisor to 2nd-year transfer students from UVA College at Wise (AY25–26)
- Faculty AI Guide Program (2024–present)
- College Fellows Program (Fall 2024–Spring 2026)
- Dean's Science and Society Advisory Committee (2025)
- Dean's Wayfinding Advisory Committee (2025)
- Reader, Harrison Undergraduate Research Award (2024, 2025)
- Organized and funded Corruption Lab (Democracy Initiative) graduate fellowship program (2020–2021)

Civic engagement

- Organized voter registration drive for all Engagements classes (Fall 2024)
- Visited 10–15 classes per year to register hundreds of students to vote (2017–2023)

Advising

- USOAR Research Mentorship Program students: 2
- PhD Mentoring Institute students: 2
- Dissertation committees
 - History: Abeer Saha, Ali Kelley, Chris Maternowski, Hank Lanphier
 - English: Annie Persons
 - Landscape architecture: William Shivers
 - Sociology: Joris Gjata
 - Physics: John Boyd
- DMP theses supervised: 3 American Studies, 3 History
- Harrison Undergraduate Research Awards supervised: 1

- Departmental advisees: 15 per year
- 1st and 2nd year advisees: 10 (2019–2021)

Previous positions

Research Associate, Harvard Business School (2015–2016)

Postdoctoral Associate, Rutgers University Center for Historical Analysis (2014–2015)