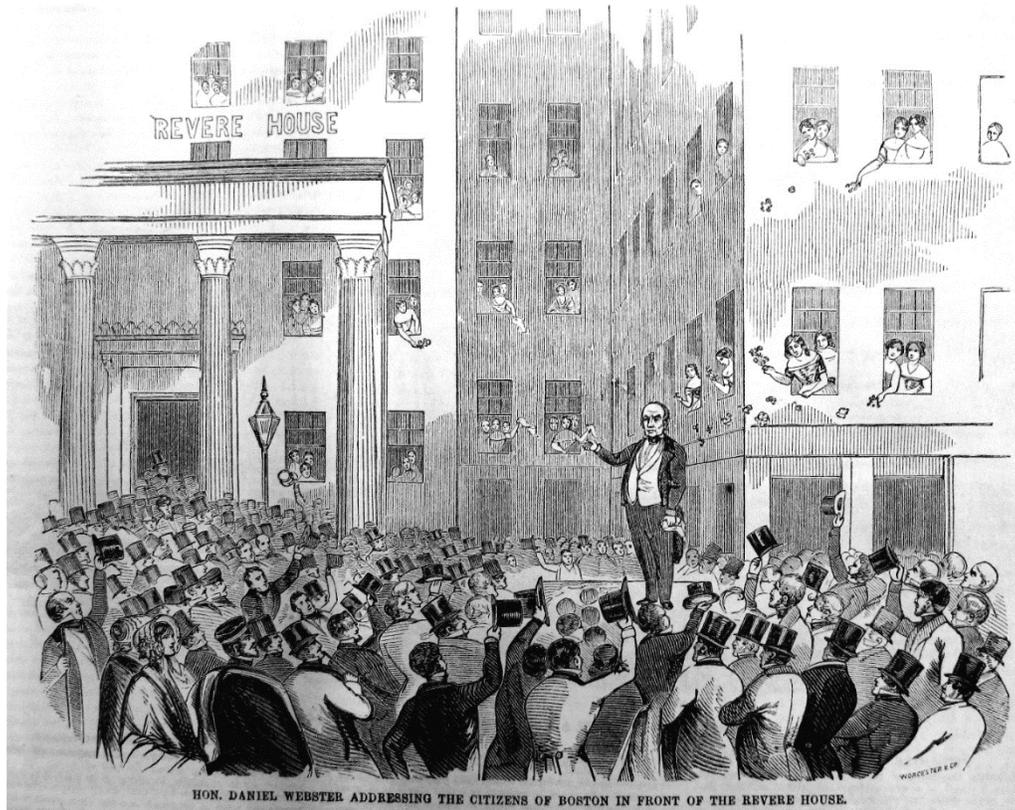


Lawyers in American Society

HONORS 1510 – Special Topics; TuTh 11:00-12:15

3504 Cathedral of Learning

Professor Bernard Hibbitts, University of Pittsburgh School of Law



Course Description

This Honors College course examines the role of lawyers in American society from colonization to the present day. It explores not only the trajectory and implications of lawyers' increasing dominance of the domestic legal system over some four centuries, but also their huge and sometimes problematic influence over the basic constructs and shifting patterns of American politics, business, letters, education, communication and war, an influence that has allowed lawyers (not businessmen, not doctors, not professors, not clergy, not engineers...) to largely define what it means to be an American. It considers how ordinary citizens and members of other professional groups have reacted to lawyers in their many social incarnations, and it assesses how embracing and occasionally rejecting their self-appointed role as "essential Americans" has affected lawyers themselves. It concludes with an investigation of where lawyers stand in American society today, assessing whether they have succeeded or failed in their larger ambitions to lead, and how they might better serve both society and themselves in uncertain times.

Although the course will interest those contemplating a legal career, it is equally designed to engage students in history, political science, sociology and the general humanities who would like to develop a deeper understanding of the role and power of the legal profession and the dynamics of American society as a whole.

Methods and Evaluation

Class meetings will focus on analysis and discussion of assigned primary source readings, most of them by or about lawyers. Student evaluation will be based 20% on class participation and 80% on four short papers (no more than 10 pages each) on central questions related to the course materials and themes. The questions will be set by the instructor. Students will have two weeks to write each paper.

About the Instructor

Bernard Hibbitts is a legal historian based at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law who specializes in the history of lawyering and the historical impact of technologies on legal thought, education and practice. A Rhodes Scholar and a graduate of Oxford University and Harvard Law School, he is also the Publisher & Editor-in-Chief of JURIST (jurist.org), the Webby Award-winning legal news service powered by Pitt law students that he created in 1996 in the early days of the Internet. He is currently writing a book for the University of Chicago Press on the history of the correspondence law schools that briefly flourished in the United States between 1890 and 1925.