Undergraduate Research Opportunity

The Limits of Black Wealth in America, 1619-2019

Prof. Calvin Schermerhorn
History

This project attempts to explain why African Americans have one-seventh the wealth of white Americans today, on average. That fact is the result of a 400-year history of barriers to African-descended people building wealth and passing the fruits of their labor to the next generation. This Undergraduate Research Opportunity will focus on one chapter or era, e.g. The Civil Rights Era or the post-Reconstruction Era and learn best practices in the art of historical detection, uses of evidence, and basic historical writing.

Research assistant's duties:
The research assistant will help uncover primary sources (newspaper articles, census documents, speeches, or testimony) and secondary sources (books and articles on a particular topic) to assist in writing a chapter in a broader narrative. The researcher will delve into online archives and research databases, and s/he will also write occasional focused essays based on those discoveries.

Required skills or qualifications:
Excellent written and oral communications, facility with “tertiary sources” such as online databases (e.g. America: History and Life, J-Stor), online archives such as the Library of Congress’s Chronicling America, and a familiarity with major themes in African American history and United States history generally.

Skills student will acquire:
The researcher will gain an inside view on historical scholarship by delving into primary and secondary sources and learn how to put them together to make a historical argument. The researcher will have the opportunity to write brief essays based on her or his original discoveries while participating in a broader research project, for which s/he will be credited in the acknowledgments. The researcher will also gain a perspective on the practice of writing, editing, and publishing original scholarship.