

## The Historian's Craft

HI 200

Spring 2011, Tuesdays 3:30-6:30

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historiography | hi ▪ stôrē ▪ ägrəfē; - ▪ stār- |

noun

the study of historical writing.

- the writing of history.

## DERIVATIVES

**historiographer** | - ▪ ägrəfər | noun

**historiographic** | -ə ▪ grafik | adjective

**historiographical** | -ə ▪ grafikəl | adjective

ORIGIN mid 16th cent.: via medieval Latin from Greek *historiographia*, from *historia* 'narrative, history' + *graphia* 'writing.'

## Course Objectives

The goal of The Historian's Craft is to develop the reading, writing, analytical, and research skills necessary for a successful career as a history major (and beyond!). To that end, we will read books from a variety of fields using a variety of historical methodologies. The idea is to learn how to think critically about sources and arguments and to hone your analytical skills in our seminars and your weekly assignments. Along the way we'll read some great books and learn about a lot of different historical fields too! Below are some of the skills we will work on over the duration of the semester:

### Reading:

- evaluating evidence
- analyzing primary source documents
- distilling, assessing, and comparing secondary sources

### Research:

- research strategies
- developing research questions and topics
- using databases
- finding books and other sources in the library
- proper use of the internet
- compiling a bibliography

### Writing:

- style and clarity
- writing analytically
- quotes and notes

## Course Requirements

Weekly précis (short review essay), 50% (5% each). For each book we read in the class you will write a short 1-2 page assessment of the book's argument, methodology, and evidence used. Ask yourself what kinds of questions the book attempts to answer, why, and how? Include at least two or three interesting questions you feel the book raises. Each précis is due on the day of the book's discussion.

Presentation/seminar leadership, 10%. Each student is responsible for leading one seminar. On your day, along with preparing your précis as usual, you should also prepare a short oral presentation about the book we are to discuss. You should introduce the book to us along similar lines as the précis – argument, methodology, and evidence – and you should provide us with enough thoughtful questions to guide us through a lively discussion. You should also say something about the work's broader importance. Finding the book's historiographical significance may require some research on JStor and/or Project Muse. Was the book innovative? Controversial? Landmark? Discredited? Did the book change how you think about a topic or just bore you?

Seminar attendance, preparedness, and participation, 20%. Attendance is required, but attendance alone is not enough. Prepare for class and actively participate in discussion.

Phantom research paper, 20%. You will be required to do the research and preparation for a standard history term paper, but not to write the paper itself. You will have to choose a topic, develop a research question, compile a bibliography, and write a short description (1-2 pages) of the lines of inquiry you would pursue if you were to write this paper. The purpose is to develop a methodology for preparing research papers that you can use throughout your career as a history major. You will have to choose your topic by March 1 and present your research when the assignment is due on April 19.

## **Texts**

With a few exceptions, we will discuss a book each week. You won't always have to read the book in its entirety and I will often point you to important chapters, but the idea of the seminar is to read as much as possible.

All of the texts that I did not indicate are on blackboard are for sale at the BU bookstore. Students should additionally buy the following (also at the bookstore) as we will discuss segments in a number of classes:

William Kelleher Storey, *Writing History: A Guide for Students* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

## **Schedule**

January 18

Introduction to the course

January 25

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*

February 1

Selections from Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, and Miguel Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*  
(both on blackboard)

February 8

Research seminar

Selections from *Writing History*

February 15

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*

February 22 – no class (substitute Monday)

March 1 –research topic due

John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*

March 8

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*

March 15 – no class (spring recess)

March 22

Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*

March 29

Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*

April 5

Selections from Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (on blackboard)

April 12

Special issue on “Israeli Historiography Revisited,” in *History & Memory* vol. 7 no. 1 (1995) (on blackboard)

April 19 – phantom research paper due

Phantom research paper presentations

April 26

Timothy Garton Ash, *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches, and Dispatches from Europe in the 1990s*

May 3 – last day of class

Film and discussion: surprise!