

The Historian's Craft

HI 200

Fall 2014, Thursdays 12:00-3:00

Prof. Simon Rabinovitch

srabinov@bu.edu

<http://blogs.bu.edu/srabinov>

Office hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1:00-2:30 and by appointment
226 Bay State Road, Room 209, tel. 353-9915

historiography | hɪˌstôrēˈägrəfē; -ˌstär- |

noun

the study of historical writing.

- **the writing of history.**

DERIVATIVES

historiographer | -ˈägrəfər | **noun**

historiographic | -əˈgrafɪk | **adjective**

historiographical | -əˈgrafɪkəl | **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

You can learn more about the purpose of HI 200 here:

<http://www.bu.edu/history/undergraduate-program/resources/hi200/>

Course Requirements

Weekly précis (short review essay), 50% (10% each). You will write a précis for five assigned readings. If you are unhappy with any of your grades you are free to write more than five and I will use your best five essays. Each essay should be a short two-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.

Seminar attendance, preparedness, and participation, 25%. Attendance is required, but attendance alone is not enough. Prepare for class and actively participate in discussion. Each student is also responsible for leading or co-leading one seminar. On your day you should 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, and if so, how?

Phantom research paper and online research guide, 25%. 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 write and publish a corresponding online research guide (essentially a multimedia annotated bibliography). I will provide more detailed instructions and help you get started. Research guides will be published on the website <http://blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory>. You will have to choose your topic by October 9 and a draft bibliography is due October 30. The Phantom research paper and online research guide are due on the last day of class, December 4.

All assignments should be completed independently and plagiarism from any source is unacceptable. In all written assignments be sure to properly credit (using proper citations) all ideas, phrases, statements, arguments, and ideas taken from your sources. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean's Office. If they have not already, students should familiarize themselves with the BU Academic Conduct Code:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

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:

- Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard University Press, 1984)
- Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Basic Books, 2009)
- Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (W. W. Norton, 2003)
- Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (Schocken, 2011)
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso; New edition, 2006)
- Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Smithsonian Books, 2001)

It is optional, but I also recommend that students purchase the book by William Kelleher Storey, *Writing History: A Guide for Students* 3rd ed. (can be ordered online). Reading this book may help your writing in many classes.

Schedule

September 4: Introduction – Reading and writing history

September 11: The art of (mis)interpretation

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*

Recommended: Shaul Stampfer, “Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2013): 1-72.

(all on blackboard)

September 18: Evidence and the problem of unreality

Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

September 25: Class cancelled

October 2: Fiction in the archives?

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard University Press, 1984)

October 9: Folklore and history

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Basic Books, 2009)

Research topics due

October 16: Evidence and the problem of missing pieces

Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher’s Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (W. W. Norton, 2003)

October 23: History through trials (and the trials of history)

Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (Schocken, 2011)

October 30: What is national history?

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso; New edition, 2006)

Draft bibliography due

November 6: Memory and oral history

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

November 13: History through material culture

Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Smithsonian Books, 2001)

November 20: Group research and writing session

November 27: Thanksgiving

December 4: Fantasy and fiction

Film and discussion: surprise!

Phantom research paper and online research guide due