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Seminar, Spring 2015:
Tuesdays 9:00 – 12:30
Room: HIS 304
Office Hours: Thursday, 10:00 – 12:00

HI200: The Historian's Craft

[F]acts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use – these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.

—E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (1961)

Course Description

This course explores with history majors and prospective majors the various methods by which historians interpret the past. How do professional historians find, use, and interpret evidence? How do they think about cause and effect, the role of individuals, groups, and institutions, and make arguments for other historians and the wider public alike? How does the work of professional historians differ from that of “popular” history writers?

In this discussion seminar, we will take a broad look at history of a discipline, and spend time investigating its conventions, methods, and aims. We will look at different genres of history – social history, cultural history, economic history, and intellectual history, to name but a few – and consider the limitations of those genres, while also looking at how the field has changed over time. We will consider what roles politics and memory play in the writing of history. And we will also take a look at some of the “nuts and bolts” of history research and writing.

We will not limit our explorations to one time period or region. Rather, our readings will take us to medieval Europe and eighteenth century India, to colonial America, the Caribbean, the British Empire and West Africa, and to places further afield. Through monographs and selected articles, we will seek to understand what history and history writing comprises, preparing ourselves for further work in the field.

Course Materials

The following books will be read in their entirety, and are required for the course:

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

These books will be available at the Boston University Bookstore and on reserve in Mugar. We will read major portions of several other monographs; while it is not necessary to purchase these, you may nonetheless wish to do so, particularly if they can be inexpensively acquired online or at a local bookstore:

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Lynne Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008)

All readings save for the full monographs will also be available on Blackboard Learn. You may also consider purchasing a number of reference volumes which will serve you well throughout your academic career. On good writing and history writing in particular, see William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style* (also available in a beautiful illustrated version by Maria Kalman) and William Kelleher Storey's *Writing History: A Guide for Students*. A good style and citation reference is also indispensable to academic and professional writing; *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th edition) is a standard among historians, but somewhat expensive; Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* is a more pocket-friendly alternative based upon Chicago style, though is somewhat less comprehensive.

Assignments and Evaluation

Final grades will be based on the following rubric:

Attendance and class discussion: 25%

Discussion-leading: 15%

Writing of 5 (400-500 word) précis: 25%

Book review (10-12 pages) and presentation: 35%

Class attendance is mandatory; you are expected to arrive on time and remain for the entire class period (barring a brief break in the middle of each session). There will be no unexcused absences permitted, and if you are unable to attend a class session owing to illness or emergency, you must contact the instructor in advance. Missing more than three class meetings for any reason will result in forfeiting credit for the course. As

important as attendance, however, is proactive participation in our classroom discussions, which presupposes the completion of all assigned reading prior to class.

Each student will be responsible for leading or co-leading one class session. This will involve researching some background information on the author and his or her place in the field, the popular and scholarly reception of the monograph in question, and the formulation of a number of guided discussion questions to lead our conversation.

Students will also be responsible for the submission of five short précis by the end of the semester, on any week's readings (though must be turned in the same week the reading itself is due). A good précis, in around 400 to 500 words, will review some of the main themes of a text, and raise related problems, concerns, questions or curiosities. All complete précis turned in on time will receive full credit.

Finally, a book review of eight to ten pages (approximately 2000 words) will be due at the end of the semester. This review should identify and critique the book's key interventions, discuss its argument and use of sources, and try to situate it within the field, following the conventions of academic reviews found in scholarly journals. We will discuss these conventions at several points during the course of the semester. A book selection is due on or before November 4, 2014.

Computers and cell phones are not permitted in the classroom, unless the former are required for documented accessibility needs. Plagiarism is a serious offense and, if suspected, will be referred to the Dean's Office; a copy of Boston University's code of conduct is available at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>.

I encourage you to come to office hours, either by appointment or by simply dropping in, to discuss your paper and course matters more generally. I will respond to all e-mails within twenty-four hours but not necessarily on the same day or night that you write; I also expect you to be similarly accessible via your BU e-mail address.

Weekly Reading Schedule

September 2, 2014 – Introductory Session

SECTION I: FACTS, NARRATIVE, THEORY AND SCALE

September 9, 2014 – Evidence and Narrative

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

September 16, 2014 – Professional History, Popular History

William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. xxxviii - xlvi, 1-43.

Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); p. 1-34, 69-106, 246-256.

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 1-28.

September 23, 2014 – The Question of Scale, Part I: Microhistory

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

September 30, 2014 – The Question of Scale, Part II: Global / International History

Matthew James Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. ix-xii, 1-45, 77-236, 327-384.

SECTION II: PLACES, PEOPLE, AND THINGS

October 7, 2014 – Taste, Goods, and the Past

Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

No Class October 14 (Columbus Day)

October 21, 2014 – Gender and Sexuality in History

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

October 28, 2014 – Ideas Across the World

Peter Gordon, "What is Intellectual History?: A Frankly Partisan Introduction to a Frequently Misunderstood Field."

Lynne Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), selections TBA.

November 4, 2014 – Gender and Sexuality in History

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); p. 1-63, 99-127, 131-177, 331-361.

Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986).

SECTION III: POLITICS, MEMORY, AND THE PRESENT

November 11, 2014 – History and the Present

Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), p. xi-xvi, 154-191, 354-367.

Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. ix- xxvi, 245-318,

November 18, 2014 – Killing and Culpability

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 159-189, 191-223.

Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 3-24, 181-280, 455-468.

Book review selection due at beginning of class

November 25, 2014 – Trauma, Memory, and Remembrance

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); p. 3-26, 29-65, 69-171, 175-245, 347-371.

SECTION IV: THE PRACTICE OF HISTORY

December 2 – The Practice of History

Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 3-55, 153-242.

December 9, 2014 – Presentations / Concluding Thoughts

Review Paper Due Date TBA