



**History 200: Evidence in/as History  
Fall 2016, Boston University**

Mondays, 12-3pm, Department of History (226 Bay State Rd), rm. 304

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**Professor: Arianne Chernock**

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**Course Description:**

This course will help you learn how to think like historians. To this end, we will concentrate less on a specific subject of study than on how historians *approach* their subjects. In particular, we will focus on how historians use *evidence* to construct historical arguments. What is evidence? What is the relationship between evidence and argument? How can the same evidence be used to construct seemingly oppositional narratives? Do some topics inherently pose more challenges from an evidentiary perspective? These, and related questions, will shape our inquiry. After examining a range of historical works that have used evidence in novel, controversial, and sometimes irresponsible ways, we will gain firsthand archival experience, working with sources culled from the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University and from the Massachusetts Historical Society.

**Course Texts (required):**

- Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*
- Niall Ferguson, *Empire*
- Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*
- Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*
- James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*
- Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*
- Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*
- Booth, Colomb and Williams, *The Craft of Research*

**Course Requirements:**

- **Attendance and Class Participation.** Course attendance is required. (See below for specifics regarding attendance policy.) As this is a seminar, however, I expect you not just to show up for class, but also to be ready to participate. Your participation in class will be essential. In order to be an active participant in the seminar, you will need to prepare for class. Make sure to take notes while you complete the assigned reading, and ask yourself questions. Why do you think that a particular reading has been assigned? What are its main ideas and concepts? If you find a reading dull, why? What about it seems strange or difficult to understand? Asking yourself these kinds of questions will help you to participate more effectively in class discussion.
- **Weekly *Precis*.** On designated Mondays, you will submit a 1-2 page (double-spaced) *précis* that outlines the argument(s) of the week's assigned reading, discusses how the author constructs his/her arguments (i.e. what kinds of evidence the author uses to support his/her claims, how the arguments are organized), and draws attention to potential strengths and weaknesses of the author's approach or method. Your *précis* should offer both explication *and* analysis.
- **Research Project.** In addition to the weekly *précis*, you will also be assigned a final project. In this project, you will be asked to write an 8-10 pp. introduction to an archival collection of your choice that is located in the Howard Gotlieb Archive at Boston University or the Massachusetts Historical Society. We will devote several weeks at the end of the semester exclusively to this project.
- **Research Presentations.** In the final weeks of the semester, you will be asked to present your research to the rest of the class. These presentations will enable you to share your knowledge with the class, and to practice public speaking.

**Grading Breakdown:**

Class participation and attendance: 25%

Weekly *precis*: 35%

Final research project: 35%

Research presentation: 5%

**Grading Scale:**

A = 93-100

B- = 80-82

A- = 90-92

C+ = 77-79

B+ = 87-89

C = 73-76

B = 83-86

C- = 70-72

**Format for *précis* and research paper:**

All papers must:

- Be typed/word-processed. Handwritten work is not acceptable;
- Be double-spaced in 12 pt. font (Times New Roman preferred but not required);
- Be spell-checked – spelling errors are not acceptable;
- Be grammar-checked to the best of your ability;
- Include your name, a title, the course title, assignment title, page numbers, and the date.

**Late Assignments:**

Please contact me well in advance of an assignment's due date if you think that you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline. *All papers submitted late without my permission will automatically be marked down one half grade per day.*

**Attendance Policy:**

Class attendance is required – this is especially important as this is a seminar. Please notify me in advance (if possible) if you know that you will need to be absent from class. *After one unexcused absence, I will begin deducting 1/3 of a letter grade off your final grade for every missed class.*

**Plagiarism Policy:**

This course is designed to encourage critical thinking and writing. In order to become critical thinkers and writers, you must complete all stages of the work yourself: taking the words of others, or presenting the ideas of others as your own not only prohibits you from learning the skills of academic writing and research, it also is a violation of the University's Academic Conduct Code. It is your responsibility to understand all of the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. *The minimum penalty for such offenses is to fail the assignment; the more common penalty is to fail the course.* If you ever have questions about how to cite a source (be it a text, website or person), please contact me. I'm more than happy to help answer your questions – that's what I'm here for! We will be regularly reviewing the University's plagiarism policy throughout the semester.

**Disability:**

If you are a student requiring accommodations for a disability, please let me know as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services is available to assist you and may be contacted at 353-3658.

**Course Schedule:****September 12: Introductory: The Problem of Evidence**

Reading due: Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (Introduction, pp. 3-31, 141-164, and Conclusion); and Jill Lepore, "After the Fact," *The New York*, 21 March, 2016 at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/21/the-internet-of-us-and-the-end-of-facts>

**September 19: The Uses of the Personal\***

Reading due: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 3, Epilogue)

\* Precis due

**September 26: Evidence and Orality\***

Reading due: Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello* (pages TBA)

\* Precis due

**October 3: Accessing Experience**

Reading due: James Goodman, *Stories from Scottsboro* (Parts 1 and 2 required)

In-class screening of *The Central Park Five* (documentary)

\*Precis due

**October 11 (substitute Monday schedule): Theory and Evidence\***

Reading due: Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (all)

\* Precis due

**October 17: Evidence and the Holocaust\*/Introduction to the Research Project**

Reading due: Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Introduction, Chapters 6-9, Epilogue and Appendix 1 ["a note on method"]); and Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men* (Chapter 18 and Afterword [response to Goldhagen])

\* Precis due

**October 24: Selective Evidence and the Responsibilities of the Historian\***

Reading due: Niall Ferguson, *Empire* (Introduction, Chapter 6, and Conclusion)

\*Precis due

**October 31: Massachusetts Historical Society Orientation** (details TBA)

**November 7: Howard Gotlieb Archives Orientation** (details TBA)

**November 14: No Class** [students will meet with me independently outside of class to discuss their research projects this week]

**November 21: In-Class Research and Writing Workshop I: Interpreting Evidence**

Reading due: Booth, Colomb and Williams, *The Craft of Research* (pages TBA)

**November 28: In-Class Research and Writing Workshop II: The Uses of Secondary Sources**

Reading due: Booth, Colomb and Williams, *The Craft of Research* (pages TBA)

**December 5: Oral Presentations I**

**December 12: Oral Presentations II/ Course Conclusions**

\*Research Guides Due\*