

**HI 200: The Historian's Craft**  
**Fall 2017, Professor Phillip Haberkern ([phaberke@bu.edu](mailto:phaberke@bu.edu))**  
**Wednesday 2.30-5.15, Department of History (226 Bay State Rd.) Room 304**  
**Office Hours: Tu. 10.30-12 and Wed. 10.30-12 or by appointment (Hist. Dept. rm. 509)**

*Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.*

-Karl Marx

*The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice.*

-Mark Twain

Course Description:

The goal of this course is to introduce you to the methods by which historians interpret the past. To accomplish this goal, we will focus less on a given subject in this course and more on the various methodologies, sources, and media that scholars use to construct historical arguments. In short, we will look closely at the sorts of *evidence* that historians use in order to formulate *arguments*, and we will consequently examine the ways in which scholars communicate these arguments to a wider reading and viewing public through their choice of *media*. At the heart of this course are a group of essential questions: What constitutes evidence for the historian? What are the limits of interpretation for that evidence? How can the same evidence be used to construct seemingly contradictory arguments? And how does the choice of visual or textual communication strategies affect the impact of those arguments? Through close readings and intensive discussions, we will try to answer these central questions.

More concretely, this course is structured around a series of paired meetings during which we will explore five topics and the different approaches that historians, artists, and documentarians have taken to understanding their cultural significance. The main goal in all of these modules is to highlight the contrast between modes of interpretation, both as a means of demonstrating the wide spectrum of evidence and media that can constitute history and as preparation for this course's final project, which will ask each of you to choose a topic and examine it from multiple historical perspectives and through the lens of various media.

Course Structure and Requirements:

This course is a reading intensive seminar; each of our meetings will focus on the discussion of assigned texts or viewings, with supplementary materials brought in by the instructor to complement course assignments or stimulate discussion. Within this basic structure, you will be assessed through an evaluation of three types of assignment:

**First**, attendance and participation will be essential for your success in this course. Attendance for this class is mandatory, and you will need to participate in the seminar's discussion consistently and substantively. You should prepare the readings each week, identifying the key sources used by the author and major questions of interpretation posed by the text or viewing. The instructor will send out reading questions for the assigned material each week; be sure to consider these questions thoughtfully in preparation for discussions.

**Second**, you will need to submit five *précis* (1-2 pp.) during the course of the semester. These short papers should discuss how the author for that week constructs his/her argument, analyzes the evidence that is used to support it, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the reading. You may submit a paper on any reading or viewing; therefore, you do not need to write a *précis* each week (**except for Nov. 29, when everyone will need to submit a paper**). The papers are due the day of discussion, however, so please be mindful of how many papers you need to write over the course of the semester.

**Finally**, this course requires a final project (about 10 pp.) in which you will assess a historical topic or controversy (decided upon in conversation with the instructor, with topics due \*\*\*) from multiple perspective and through that topic's representation in multiple media. You may structure your project as an analysis of the distance between popular perception and scholarly knowledge on your topic, and how that can be bridged through access to various kinds of historical evidence and scholarship. Alternately, you may wish to analyze how artistic, literary, or other representations of a topic have posed challenges to traditional scholarship and enriched it. In our last meeting of the semester, each of you will present an account of your topic and research; these 10-15 minute presentations will account for 20% of your grade on the final paper.

**The final projects will be due on: Wednesday, Dec. 20<sup>th</sup> at 3pm.**

Grading Breakdown:

Participation: 33%

Précis: 33%

Final Paper: 33%

**Please note:** late papers will be accepted, but with a penalty of one-half letter grade per day late. Précis are due at the beginning of class on the day of discussion, must be typed, and must be submitted in hard copy.

Academic Conduct Code:

Students are expected to abide by the spirit and letter of Boston University's Academic Conduct Code (please see: <https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>). Any breaches of the Code or instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the College of Arts & Sciences.

Required Texts:

As mentioned above, this is a reading intensive seminar. I have tried to include as many online readings as possible, and many of these books are available in used copies or at significant discounts online. Please purchase each of the following books, all of which are also available at the BU bookstore:

- Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s* (Smithsonian, 1999), ISBN 9781560989202.
- Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard UP, 1984), ISBN 9780674766914.
- Trevor Getz, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford UP, 2015), ISBN 0190238747.
- Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Vintage, 1997), ISBN 0679772685.
- Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (Basic, 2002). ISBN 0465028721.
- Kwasi Konadu, *Transatlantic Africa, 1440-1888* (Oxford UP, 2014), ISBN 0199764875.

### CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

**Please note:** All readings listed below that are marked [BB] are available on the course Blackboard site. You will receive specific instructions on where to find course viewings from the instructor.

**September 6** – NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN

**FICTION IN THE ARCHIVES?** – For our first two weeks we will examine a case of historical imposture, to see how a man returned from a long absence in early modern France may (or may not) have fooled his former spouse about his identity. For these weeks, we will look at both a historical monograph and the filmed version of it (which preceded the book!), as well as the historiographical debate it engendered.

**September 13** – The Lives of Martin Guerre

Reading: NZ Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*

**September 20** – The Afterlives of Martin Guerre

Reading and Viewing: Robert Finlay, “The Refashioning of Martin Guerre;” and NZ Davis, “On the Lame” [both on BB]. Film: *The Return of Martin Guerre*, directed by Daniel Vigne (1982)

TELLING THE TALES OF SLAVERY – For our next sessions, we will examine the variety of ways in which contemporary scholars have tried to recover the voices of those involved in the African slave trade. Far from settling for quantitative analyses of the slave trade, we will focus on how Africans who were captured and enslaved made sense of their experiences and sought to carve out spaces for themselves in the world that they were forced to encounter, and contrast these to the experiences of a slave trader.

**September 27** – Patching Together African Slave Narratives

Readings: Kwasi Konadu, *Transatlantic Africa, 1440-1888*; and selections from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* [BB].

**October 4** – The Slave Trade: An Insider’s View

Reading: Robert Harms, *The Diligent*.

**October 11** – African Agency in the Slave System

Reading: Trevor Getz, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History*.

HAGIOGRAPHY, HISTORY, DOCUMENTARY – At this point in the semester, we will turn our attention to America’s pastime and the desegregation of American society in the twentieth century. By examining Jackie Robinson’s story and his place in the American consciousness, we will explore the difficulties that scholars, filmmakers, and cultural critics in disentangling Robinson’s history from his legend.

**October 18** – Integrating Baseball

Readings: Thomas Zieler, “Introduction” in *Jackie Robinson*; and selections from *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream* [both on BB].

**October 25** – Robinson beyond Baseball

Reading and Viewing: Gerald Early, “American Integration, Black Heroism, and the Meaning of Jackie Robinson” and “Where Have We Gone, Mr. Robinson” [BB]. Film: *Jackie Robinson*, directed by Ken Burns (2016)

HISTORY BETWEEN THE SOCIAL AND MATERIAL – Over the next two weeks, we will examine the development of suburbia in the United States and the unexpected consequences of this massive transition in where and how people live. Beginning with utopian desires to escape the city and ending with utopian visions of the freedom and convenience of modern living, we will detour in between to the environmental, economic, and political engines that drove suburban development across the United States, as well as the products that characterized new American homes.

**November 1** – The Suburbanization of the United States

Readings: Kenneth Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier*, chs. 9-11; Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*; and Barbara Kelley, *Expanding the American Dream* [all on BB].

**November 8** – Gender and Economy in the ‘Burbs

Reading: Alison Clarke, *Tupperware*.

WHEN HISTORIES COLLIDE – In our final module, we will look at two historians who used the exact same sources to come to diametrically opposed conclusions about why people participated in the Holocaust. We will then contrast both of these scholars’ conclusions with those of a Holocaust survivor whose first-person account sheds different light on the personal motivations of those involved in the mass murder of Europe’s Jews.

**November 15**: The Challenge of Explaining the Holocaust, pt. 1

Reading: Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (Introduction; chs. 1 and 6-9; Epilogue)

**November 22: NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING**

**November 29**: The Challenge of Explaining the Holocaust, pt. 2

Readings: Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men* (chs. 1, 2, 8, and 18; Afterword); and Primo Levi, “The Gray Zone” [both on BB].

\*\*\**Précis must be submitted at the beginning of this class.*\*\*\*

**December 6**: LAST CLASS - STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

**\*\*\*DECEMBER 20: FINAL PROJECTS DUE IN PROF. HABERKERN’S BOX IN THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT OFFICE (ROOM 308, 226 BAY STATE RD.)\*\*\***

Précis Guidelines  
Fall 2017

All of you will be responsible for submitting **five précis** over the course of this semester. They should be 1-2 pp. (single spaced), and should comprise equal parts summary, interpretation, and evaluation. Basically, your précis should answer three central, related questions about the book or article(s) you write on:

- 1) What are the central arguments the author is trying to make?
- 2) What evidence/interpretive lenses does the author adduce to support those arguments, and how is the text structured to strengthen them?
- 3) Is the author successful in making his/her arguments, and why (not)?

The heart of the précis should be question #2. Because this class focuses on becoming familiar with historical methods and the major interpretive frameworks in contemporary historiography, I will expect you to think carefully about the evidential foundation that allows historians to make (hopefully) convincing arguments about the past. But if you find their logic, analysis, or evidence unsatisfactory, however, you should base your critiques on a consideration of why their evidence was limited, biased, or (in some cases) simply too bizarre to allow for expansive arguments or generalizations.

Your précis will be evaluated on a scale of 1-15, with three distinct elements being evaluated separately. The first area of evaluation will concern the clarity of your assessment (i.e. do you answer the three questions above satisfactorily?). The second area will concern the thoroughness of your analysis (i.e. did you read the book fully and carefully in order to form a sound basis for evaluation?). The final area for grading will concern the technical proficiency of your writing (i.e. did you prepare your précis carefully, and does the writing effectively communicate your central ideas?). Each of these areas will be graded on a scale of 1-5.

I firmly believe that all of you can get 15's on every précis. The goal of these exercises is for you to reflect thoughtfully on assigned readings so you can participate effectively in class. There is no trick to these assignments, and my honest expectation is that you will do well with them. Therefore, please be mindful of your semester schedules and obligations, so you can plan to write your précis with adequate time.

If you have any questions about my expectations for these précis, please stop by office hours, schedule an appointment, or just ask me. I will be happy to clarify any concerns you might have. PLEASE NOTE: Précis must be typed, and should be submitted at the beginning of the class in which we will discuss the work you wrote on!!!