



History 200: The Historian's Craft
Spring 2018, Boston University
Monday 2:30-5:15 pm, History Dept. (232 Bay State Rd), rm. 505

Professor: Diana Wylie

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Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30, R 2-4, and by appointment

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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 narratives that seem opposed to each other? Do some topics inherently pose more challenges from the perspective of evidence? 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 area archives, including the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Howard Gottlieb Archives at Boston University.

Course Texts (required):

- Margaret Macmillan, *Dangerous Games, The Uses and Abuses of History*
- E.H. Carr, *What is History?*
- Studs Terkel, *Hard Times*
- Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*

Course Requirements:

- **Attendance and Class Participation.** Course attendance is required. (See p. 4 for specifics regarding attendance policy.) As this is a seminar, you will, of course, be ready to participate. Your participation in class is essential. In order to be an active participant in the seminar, you will need to 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 and to write the précis.
- **Oral history project:** you will select an event that occurred before your own lifetime and interview five individuals who were in some way affected by it (no more than two may be relatives). You will write an historical essay at least 7 pages long that uses the words of those interviewed to explore the event in its larger context and significance. You are to incorporate relevant material from two published scholarly works of history, which will be used as guides in preparing this essay. Brief descriptions of this topic will be presented in class on Feb. 5, and oral presentations on the finished essay (due Feb. 26) will be presented that day.
- **Précis.** On 3 designated Mondays, you will submit a 1-2 page (single-spaced) *précis* that outlines the argument(s) of the week's assigned reading, discusses how the author constructs his/her argument (i.e. what kinds of evidence the author uses to support his/her claims, how the argument is organized), and draws attention to potential strengths and weaknesses of the author's approach or method. In short, your précis should offer both explication (of argument) *and* analysis (of quality) in separate paragraphs. The précis will be graded according to the following criteria: 1. As an accurate and comprehensive summary of the book's content and as a fair rendering of the historian's approach, sources, and interpretation; and 2. For clarity of expression (organization, grammar, spelling, etc.)
- **Research Projects** 1. one oral presentation using oral sources (see above), 2. a final written project. In this project, you will be asked to write a 10-12 page paper based on an archival box that may be located in the Howard Gotlieb Archive at Boston University or at the Massachusetts Historical Society. You will first gain a thorough understanding of the contents of the box, learning as much as possible about the life of the author(s), and, with the use of secondary sources, you will decide how best to place the material in its historical context. The final projects will be presented in class on April 30. All papers must:
 - Be typed/word-processed.
 - 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.
- **Research Presentations.** In the final week 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: 20%

Précis: 30%

Oral history project: 10%

Final research project: 35%

Research presentation: 5%

Course Schedule:

PART ONE: THE BIG PICTURE: WHY HISTORY MATTERS

January 29: Introductory: The Uses and Abuses of History

Reading due: Margaret Macmillan, *Dangerous Games, The Uses and Abuses of History*; précis due; to choose oral history subject for presentation on Feb. 26.

February 5: Why are historical monuments significant?

Reading due: Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (on reserve in Mugar); précis due.

During the preceding week you will visit and analyze three monuments in the center of Boston: two on Boston Common (St. Gaudens' 54th regiment, the nearby Civil War Veterans), and one of your choosing on the Commonwealth Ave. mall. In addition, you will prepare to present in class a news article drawn from the recent, quality press on one of the following sites or incidents: Rhodes Must Fall (Cape Town. Alice), New Orleans Liberty Monument (David), the renaming of Calhoun College at Yale (Gabby), the Atlanta History Center and Margaret Mitchell's house (Nicholas), Monument Ave in Richmond VA (Sebastian).

February 12: What is history?

Reading due: E.H. Carr, *What is History?*; précis due

To see the film *Rashomon* at 3 pm on Friday 9 Feb. in 505

PART TWO: NUTS AND BOLTS: VARIETIES OF EVIDENCE

February 20: Oral sources

Reading due: Studs Terkel, *Hard Times*, 50-page selections chosen by and reported upon by each student

February 26: Oral history presentations

March 12: The Role of Imagination

Reading due: Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*; précis due

To see the film *The Return of Martin Guerre* in a slightly extended class period (refreshments will be served)

March 19: The Honesty of Memoirs

Reading due: Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels* (selections) and 4 articles thereon

Visit to Gotlieb Archive in Mugar Library

March 26: Material Evidence: art, architecture, etc.

Reading due: Diana Wylie, *Art + Revolution*, selections, plus posters and art from the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa

Possible visit to Massachusetts Historical Society

PART THREE: DEBATES AND SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

April 2: Drawing Opposite Conclusions from the Same Material

Reading due: selections from Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*, and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*

April 9: Schools of Historical Interpretation re Class and Gender

Reading due: articles drawn from A. Budd, *The Modern Historiography Reader* (on reserve in Mugar Library); Marx and Engels, "Premises of the Materialist Conception of History," (pp. 214-18); Editors, *Past and Present* introduction (pp. 277-80); E.P. Thompson, preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (pp. 281-84); Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Group..." (pp. 285-97); Budd, "Marxism and History from Below" (pp. 267-75); Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A useful category..." (pp. 389-97). Also, watch the following video interview with Scott:

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=MrknwNI818Y>.

PART FOUR: THE FUTURE

April 23: Evidence in the Digital Age:

Reading due: Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era," *American Historical Review* 108, (June 2003): 735-62; Lyell Davies and Ellena Razlogova, "Framing the Contested History of Digital Culture," *Radical History Review* 117 (Fall 2013), 5-31; Dominique Daniel, "Teaching Students How to Research the Past: Historians and Librarians in the Digital Age," *The History Teacher* 45, 2 (February 2012), 261-82.

April 30: Student presentations (c. 30 minutes) on research projects based in a local archive

The Rules

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 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.