



**History 200: The Historian's Craft
Fall 2019, Boston University**

Tuesday 3:30-6:15 pm, History Dept. (226 Bay State Rd), rm. 304

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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): [all but Storey are on 24-hour reserve in Mugar]

- 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*
- Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone*
- William Kelleher Storey, *Writing History* (5th edition)

Course Requirements:

- **Attendance and Class Participation.** Course attendance is required, as are three oral presentations. (See p. 4 for specifics regarding attendance policy.) In order to be an active participant in the seminar, you will need to take notes while you complete the assigned reading and ask yourself questions. Why do you think 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 Sept. 17, and oral presentations on the finished essay (due Oct. 22) will be presented that day.
- **Précis.** On 4 designated Tuesdays, 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/critiqued at a writers’ workshop in class on December 10. 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.

Grading Breakdown:

Class participation and attendance: 10%
Précis: 40%.

Final Research Project: 30%
Oral History project: 20%

Course Schedule:

PART ONE: THE BIG PICTURE: WHY HISTORY MATTERS

September 3: Introduction

September 10: The Historian at Work

Reading due: Robert Caro, *Working*. (ebook via Mugar). Using this book to develop strategies of practical use to you as an historian, you will work in pairs on one designated chapter of this book, bringing to class insights and a pertinent exercise.

September 17 : The Uses and Abuses of History

Reading due: Margaret Macmillan, *Dangerous Games, The Uses and Abuses of History*; précis #1 due; to choose oral history subject for presentation on October 22. Bring to class evidence of what you think is an abuse of history.

During the following week (17-24 Sept.) you will visit and analyze three monuments in the center of Boston: two on Boston Common (St. Gaudens' 54th regiment, the nearby Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument), and one of your choosing on the Commonwealth Ave. mall. In addition, you will work in pairs to present in class on Sept. 24 a news article drawn from the recent, quality press on one of the following sites or incidents (OR one of your own choosing that you should vet with me): Rhodes Must Fall (Cape Town), New Orleans Liberty Monument, the renaming of Calhoun College at Yale, the Atlanta History Center and Margaret Mitchell's house, Monument Ave in Richmond VA.

September 24: Why are historical monuments significant?

Reading due: Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone*; précis #2 due; joint presentation (see above)

To see the film *Rashomon* (on reserve in Geddes the week of Sept. 24 to Oct. 1) so we can discuss it in class on Oct. 1

October 1: What is history?

Reading due: E.H. Carr, *What is History?*; précis #3 due

PART TWO: NUTS AND BOLTS: VARIETIES OF EVIDENCE**October 8: Oral sources**

Reading due: Studs Terkel, *Hard Times*, 50-page selections chosen by and reported upon by each student (To prevent duplication, claim your selection by emailing your classmates your chosen page numbers.)

October 22: Oral history presentations. Paper due.

To see the film *The Return of Martin Guerre* (on reserve in Geddes the week of 22-29 Oct.)

October 29: The Role of Imagination

Reading due: Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*; précis #4 due

Visit to Massachusetts Historical Society (1154 Boylston St.): meet there at 3:30 sharp. At 5 we'll start our discussion of NZD.

November 5: The Honesty of Memoirs

Reading due: Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels* (scanned selections) plus a selection from Vincent Carretta's *Equiano's Africa* (scanned)

Visit to Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center in Mugar Library

November 12: Material Evidence: art, architecture, etc.

Reading due: Diana Wylie, *Art + Revolution*, scanned selections (pp. 1-7, chapters 5 and 6, epilogue and afterword), plus posters and art from the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa

PART THREE: DEBATES AND SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

November 19: Drawing Opposite Conclusions from the Same Material

Reading due: selections from Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men* (scanned: preface, chapters 1 and 2), and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (scanned: introduction, chapter 16, epilogue, Appendix I)

November 26: Schools of Historical Interpretation re Class and Gender

Reading due: articles – all scanned -- 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 a video interview with Scott: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrknwNI818Y>.

PART FOUR: THE FUTURE

December 3: Evidence in the Digital Age: visit by Digital Scholarship Librarian Vika Zafrin

Plus discussion of practical insights gleaned from William Storey’s *Writing History*. Based on what you’ve learned in this course and what you think should be present in your final papers, bring to class a Checklist for Historians divided into 1. Content, 2. Technical insights (8 @).

December 10: Student presentations (c. 10 minutes @) on research projects based in a local archive. [Share and read all drafts before class so authors can benefit from your suggestions]

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.