

**History 299: Introduction to Historical Theories and Methods**  
**Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50, King 121**  
**Fall 2018**

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Office Hours:  
Mondays, 1:30pm-3:30pm  
Wednesdays, 10:00am-12:00pm  
Thursdays, 1:30-3:30pm

What is history and what makes it a distinctive discipline from other fields in social studies and the humanities? How have historians understood the nature of their discipline and how has historical practice changed over time? In this class, history majors will explore the nature and methods of the discipline of history. To that end, we will explore some fundamental questions throughout the semester: Is there such a thing as historical truth and what is the role of “truth” in doing and writing history? Is there an objective history outside of the historian’s subjectivity and biases? What is the relationship of the historian to his/her subject and to the society in which they live? In what ways is the study of history relevant to the present? And what is the difference between history and memory? Besides grappling with big questions about the nature and ethics of the discipline of history, this class will introduce students to the different kinds of raw materials that historians draw on as they aim to reconstruct the lives and events of the past. We will consider the constructed nature of archives, the range of materials available to study the past—from textual sources to material objects to numerical data, among many others—and the challenges of undertaking different kinds of historical research.

This course does not focus on any specific time period or geographic location and students should not expect to gain deep knowledge about the history of any particular place or time. We will, however, explore the ways in which different historical methodologies and research practices have been developed to study diverse parts of the world and historical epochs.

**COURSE LEARNING GOALS**

- Recognize and understand the differences between approaches that historians have used to study the past including macro and microhistory, Marxist analysis, social history, national and transnational analyses, postcolonialism, and identity-based studies
- Become familiar with the many different kinds of primary sources for the study of history, including letters and diaries, visual representations, material objects, quantitative data, government records, and oral sources and of the problems and potentials of using different kinds of evidence
- Gain knowledge about the different kinds of methodologies and sources used for the study of different eras and geographical locations
- Understand the difference between history and memory and engage in debates about objectivity, truth, and the construction of historical knowledge
- Explore the field of public history and gain awareness of how and why history is frequently the subject of political debate
- Demonstrate competency in the conventions of historical writing and be able to produce written work according to those conventions
- Communicate effectively and advance compelling arguments in both written and oral form

## **COURSE READINGS:**

The following books are available at the bookstore and are on print reserve at Mudd Library.

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (John Hopkins University Press, c. 1992) [REQUIRED]

Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History* (University of Chicago Press, 2017) [REQUIRED]

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2018) [OPTIONAL]

All other readings are available on the course blackboard site under the “Course Readings” heading.

## **COURSE GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

There will be three primary components to your grade in History 299. All work is graded on a 100-point scale, but different assignments count for varying percentages of your final grade.

### 1) Attendance and active participation in class discussions (20%)

This course will operate as a seminar rather than a lecture course so your participation and engagement with the course readings are vital to its success. There are approximately 60-80 pages of reading for each class session. Students are expected to arrive at class prepared to engage in a thoughtful and respectful discussion of the assigned material with classmates. If you are having trouble keeping up with the readings or are uncomfortable speaking in class, please come to see me at the beginning of the semester to talk about strategies for becoming an active reader and participant. Attendance at History 299 is mandatory. Absences for illness, family emergencies, or other extenuating circumstances may be approved if you tell me about them in advance of class. Absences that are not excused will affect your final grade in the course.

### 2) Completion and quality of work on 6 historical exercises (30% total, 5% each)

Each student is required to complete **six** historical exercises (out of the 13 outlined on the syllabus) over the course of the semester. Three of these exercises must be completed before fall break; the other three must be done after fall break. Historical exercises typically take one of two forms: for a class where there is a reading labeled as “In Practice,” you will often have the opportunity to consider how the reading in question draws on, uses, and illustrates the more theoretical readings for that class session. Alternatively, for classes that consider different kinds of sources or research methods, exercises may ask you to explore how you could draw on the insights of the readings to better analyze materials for your own research project. Exercises should be considered short, formal papers that include citations as necessary. All exercises should be between 450-600 words long and should include a word count. Exercises must be turned in by the time of the class meeting for which they are assigned in order to receive credit. Please upload exercises to the Assignments section of the blackboard site before the class session for the day that they are due. Be prepared to talk about your historical exercise during class.

### 3) Preparing a historical research prospectus in a series of scaffolded assignments (50%)

For the final project for this class, you will prepare a research proposal in a series of stages. All work is due by the date indicated and should be uploaded via blackboard as word documents, except for the first draft of the proposal, which should be both brought to our last class session on December 11 and emailed to me. The final draft is due by 11:00am on Wednesday, December 19. Short assignments are due on following dates: September 23, October 14, and November 19. These include:

- A preliminary discussion of your topic in individual meeting with me: By Friday, Sept. 14  
*Each student is required to meet with me individually within the first two weeks of class to talk about your ideas for your research topic. Sign up for an appointment with me via blackboard.*

- **Statement of Research Question and Potential Significance (5%):** Due Sept. 23 by 5:00pm  
*In no more than three paragraphs, describe 1) Your research question; 2) What you believe the significance of this particular question is; and 3) your preliminary thoughts about how to approach answering your question. Upload to blackboard by 5:00pm on Sunday, September 23rd.*
- **Annotated Secondary Source Bibliography (10%):** Due October 14 by 5:00pm  
*Create an annotated bibliography of the most important secondary literature about your research topic. In a brief introductory section, characterize the state of the existing historiography on your topic and explain in which historiographies you are locating and contextualizing your research topic. Annotations should be at least a few sentences per source and should offer an overview of the work's argument and approach. You should consider the state of the field as reflected in journal articles, monographs, edited collections, and review essays as appropriate. Upload your bibliography to blackboard by 5:00pm on October 14.*
- **Annotated Primary Source Bibliography (10%):** Due November 19 by 5:00pm  
*Develop an annotated bibliography of primary sources that you could use in your research. Think creatively about the range of primary sources that might speak to your topic; annotations should offer both your assessment of how the particular source might be useful and discussion of a source's location and accessibility to student researchers. Upload your bibliography to blackboard by 5:00pm on November 19.*
- **Complete Research Proposal (25%):** Draft due in class on December 11 for peer review; Final due by 11:00am on Wednesday, December 19  
*Draw on your methodological statement and your annotated bibliographies to develop a compelling and concisely written research prospectus of no more than 10-12 pages. Your prospectus should include an explanation of your topic and its significance, a review of the historiography, a discussion of your sources, a research plan, and a bibliography. A first draft of your proposal is due in class on December 11<sup>th</sup> and must be at least six pages long [full drafts are preferable]. First drafts should be emailed to me. Please also bring a printed copy to our last day of class. Each student will be assigned a peer reviewer who will provide feedback by December 14<sup>th</sup>; each student will also meet with me individually about your draft during reading period (sign up for an appointment via blackboard). Revised proposals are due by 11am on Wednesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>.*

## **COURSE POLICIES**

**Late and Incomplete Policy:** Late historical exercises will not be accepted. All other assignments will be marked down 3 points for every day handed in past the deadline. Requests for extensions must take place before the assignment is due. As a general rule, I will approve extensions in the case of illness or emergencies, but not because you have other work due at the same time, so please plan accordingly. All assignments must be completed in order for students to receive credit for the class.

**Classroom Conduct:** Please come to class on time. Once you are in class, please do not leave to go get a drink or use the restroom. Since I want everyone to be focused on the classroom conversation, no electronic devices will be allowed in the classroom except to reference readings.

**Oberlin Honor Code:** All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code, which means that it must be your own. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with according to the letter of college policy. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, books, the media, etc.). If you have questions about citations, academic honesty, or the acceptability of collaborations, please see me. You should include the honor code on all the written work you hand in for this class. The Honor Code reads: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment."

**Educational Access:** I am committed to creating inclusive learning environments. If any aspects of the

instruction or design of the course result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation, please let me know. If you receive any specific accommodations, please provide documentation from the Disability Service Office.

Extra Help: My door is open if you need help or just want to discuss the reading or other topics of interest to you. Drop in to my office hours anytime or email to schedule a specific appointment. I am happy to provide feedback on drafts if get draft writings (partial or full) to me at least **four days** before the assignment is due so that I have time to give you feedback.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **I. WHAT IS HISTORY?**

#### **September 4: Introduction [22 pages]**

Before the first class meeting, please read:

Maza, *Thinking about History*, Introduction, pp. 1-9.

Sam Wineburg, "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts," *Phi Delta Kappan* 80:7 (March 1999): 488-499.

#### **September 6: The Discipline of History [70 pages]**

Edward Hallet Carr, "The Historian and His Facts," excerpt from Carr, *What is History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961 [12 pages]

John Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapters 1, 3-4, pp. 1-16; 35-70.

Elliott Gorn, "Professing History: Distinguishing Between Memory and the Past," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 28, 2000 [5 pages]

### **II. HISTORY IN THE WIDER WORLD**

#### **September 11: The Many Forms of History: Popular Culture [71 pages]**

Maza, *Thinking about History*, pp. 118-137.

Robert Rosenstone, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age" in Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in the Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001): 50-66.

Molly Ossberg, "The Assassin's Creed Curriculum: Can Video Games Teach us History?," *The Verge.com*, September 18, 2014 [11 pages]

Joseph Adelman, "Who Tells Your Story? *Hamilton* as a People's History," in Renee Romano and Claire Potter, ed., *Historians on Hamilton* (Rutgers University Press, 2018), 277-296.

*Historical Exercise #1: Draw on the readings to consider both the positive and negative points of popular cultural representations of history. If possible, find a popular representation of history that relates to the topic you are considering working on in your research proposal and assess how it represents the past.*

### **September 13: History in the Public Realm [86 pages]**

Margaret MacMillan, “Presenting History’s Bill” and “History Wars” in *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 93-138.

Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (Duke University Press, 1998), 3-31.

Gerda Lerner, “Why History Matters?” from *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 199-211.

*Historical Exercise #2: Find a contemporary example in the media of history being referenced or deployed in the realm of politics and use the readings for today to explain and analyze how history is operating and to what ends.*

### **September 18: Doing History in Public [24 pages]**

National Council on Public History, “About the Field,” ncp.org, <http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/> [3 pages]

James B. Gardner, “Contested Terrain: History, Museums, and the Public,” *The Public Historian* 26:4 (Fall 2004): 11-21.

Ruth Graham, “The Great Historic House Museum Debate,” *The Guardian*, August 10, 2014 [11 pgs]

*Visit to Oberlin Heritage Center*

## **III. THE EVOLVING DISCIPLINE OF HISTORY**

### **September 20: The Who of History: Agency, Resistance, and the Shifting Subjects of Historical Inquiry [43 pages]**

Maza, *Thinking about History*, Chapter 1, pp. 10-44

James Scott, excerpt from *Weapons of the Weak*, in *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, 89-96.

*Start reading The Cheese and the Worms*

### **September 25: The Scale of History: Case Study in Microhistory [121 pages]**

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (entire) [121 pages]

*Exercise #3: Explore the strengths and limitations of Ginzburg’s approach and situate his work drawing on the readings for the previous class of September 20<sup>th</sup> as useful.*

### **September 27: The Where of History: The Nation and Beyond [58 pages]**

Maza, *Thinking about History*, Chapter 2, pp. 45-82.

Benedict Anderson, excerpt from *Imagined Communities* in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, ed., *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 48-58.

Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 93-98 [read first 5 pages of article; the rest is optional].

*Historical Exercise #4: Drawing on these readings, consider the strengths and limitations of using “the nation” as a category of historical analysis.*

## October 2: The What of History: Ideas, Science, and the Environment [75 pages]

Maza, *Thinking about History*, Chapter 3, pp. 83-117.

Tom Griffiths, "Ecology and Empire: Towards an Australian History of the World," in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, ed., *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, 1-13.

**In Practice:** Sam White, "From Globalized Pig Breeds to Capitalist Pigs: A Study in Animal Cultures and Evolutionary History," *Environmental History*, 16: 1 (January 2011): 94-120.

## IV. THEORIES AND SCHOOLS OF HISTORICAL THOUGHT

### October 4: Truth, Objectivity, and Narrative in History [76 pages]

Maza, *Thinking about History*, pp. 199-225

Hayden White, "Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81-100.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Power in the Story" in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995), 1-30.

*Historical Exercise #5: Compare the positions of White and Trouillot. What ideas do they share? Where do they differ? What kinds of theories of the historical narrative do they advance? To what extent can any narrative be "true"?*

### October 9: Marxist Analysis and Class in History [52 pages]

Karl Marx with Friedrich Engels, "Premises of the Materialist Conception of History" from *The German Ideology* (1845) in Adam Budd, ed. *The Modern Historiography Reader* (Routledge, 2009), 214-218.

Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, "Marxist Historians," in *The Houses of History*, 47-58.

E.P. Thompson, "Preface," *Making of the English Working Class*, 9-13.

**In Practice:** Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Severin" in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Basic Books, 2009), 75-104.

*Historical Exercise #6: Explore and explain the different approaches to class analysis in these readings and make a case for how the Darnton reading draws on, uses, illustrates or complicates the other readings for this session.*

### October 11: Identity: Gender and Race in History [62 pages]

Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91:5 (December 1986): 1053-1075.

Thomas Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (1995): 1-20.

**In Practice:** Clifton Crais and Patricia Scully, "Race and Erasure: Sara Baartman and Hendrik Cesars in Cape Town and London," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 2 (April 2008): 301-323.

*Historical Exercise #7: Explore how the Crais and Scully reading is informed (or not) by ideas developed in the Scott and Holt readings. How are Crais and Scully using race and gender as categories of historical analysis?*

#### **October 16: Postcolonial Critiques of the Practice of History [43 pages]**

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978), Chapter 1, pp. 31-49.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 3-16.

Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1998), abridged version from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, pp. 28-37.

#### **IV. THE CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETATION**

#### **October 18: Debating Periodization and Classification [71 pages]**

Elizabeth Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 79, no. 4 (October 1974): 1063-1088.

Carol Gluck, "The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 676-687.

**In Practice:** Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in Kelly, *Women, History and Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19-51\*

#### **FALL BREAK: NO CLASS WEEK ON OCTOBER 23 or 25**

#### **October 30: Change, Continuity, and Causality in Historical Writing [93 pages]**

Maza, *Thinking about History*, pp. 137-146, 157-198.

John Lewis Gaddis, "Causation, Contingency, and Counterfactuals" in *The Landscape of History*, 91-109.

**Method In Practice:** Richard Overy, "Unpredictable Victory: Explaining World War II" in *Why the Allies Won?* (W.W. Norton, 1997), 1-24.

#### **November 1: The Challenge of the Archive [68 pages]**

Maza, *Thinking about History*, pp. 146-156.

David Anderson, "Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's Migrated Archive," *History Workshop Journal* 80 (October 2015): 142-160.

Kathryn Burns, "Notaries, Truth and Consequences," *American Historical Review* 110:2 (April 2005): 350-379 [you can skim pp. 367-373].

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1-14.

*Historical Exercise 8: Kathryn Burns argues that historians need to look "at our archives, not just through them." What does looking "at" rather than through archives entail? And why is it important for historians to do so? Make a case based on the insights provided in the readings for today's class.*

## **PART IV: VARIETIES OF EVIDENCE**

### **November 6: The Written Record [55 pages]**

Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, "Source Criticism: The Great Tradition" from *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, 60-68.

Steven Stowe, "Making Sense of Letters and Diaries" from *The Making Sense of Evidence Series*, History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web, pp. 1-18.

**In Practice:** Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, Introduction, pp. 3-13, 20-35.

*Historical Exercise #9: Choose a short textual primary source related to your research project and discuss how you might analyze and use it based on the readings for today's class.*

### **November 8: Library Visit**

### **November 13: Visual Sources [79 pages]**

Julia Adeney Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight," *History and Theory* 48:4 (Dec. 2009): 151-168.

J.B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power" in *The New Nature of Maps*, pp. 51-81.

**In Practice:** Paul Barclay, "Peddling Postcards and Selling Empire: Image-Making in Taiwan Under Japanese Colonial Rule," *Japanese Studies* 30:1 (May 2010): 83-112.

*Exercise #10: Pick a visual source related to the topic of your research prospectus and explore how you might analyze and use it in your project based on the ideas raised by the readings for today's class. Alternatively, you can analyze how the Barclay reading illuminates or draws on insights from the other readings.*

### **November 15: Material Culture as Historical Evidence [60 pages]**

Karen Harvey, "Introduction: Practical Matters" in Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (Routledge, 2009), 1-23.

Joseph Scarpaci, "Material Culture and the Meaning of Objects," *Material Culture* 48:1 (2016): 1-9.

**In Practice:** Bridget Heneghan, "The Pot Calling the Kettle: White Goods and the Construction of Race in Antebellum America," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 17 (2003): 107-132.

*Exercise #11: Pick a material object related to the topic of your research prospectus and explore how you might analyze and use it in your project based on the ideas raised by the readings for today's class. Alternatively, you can analyze how the Heneghan reading illuminates or draws on methodological insights from the other readings.*

### **November 20: Visit to Allen Art Museum**

*In class today we will practice asking historical questions of and analyzing visual and material sources.*

### **November 22: No Class-Thanksgiving Break**



## November 27: Oral History [67 pages]

Allessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different" in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 32-41.

Barbara Cooper, "Oral Sources and the Challenge of African History," in John Edward Phillips, ed., *Writing African History* (Rochester, 2005), 191-215.

Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 5-28.

Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory, "Oral History Techniques," <http://www.indiana.edu/%7Ecshh/techniques.html> [8 pages].

*Historical Exercise #12: Find an online oral history that relates to your research project (if possible) and use the readings for class to explore how you could use the oral history as evidence in your project. What insights do these readings provide about the use of oral sources? Alternatively, identify someone whom you would like to interview as part of the research for your proposed project if it were possible to do so and, drawing on the readings, explain how you would approach the interview, what the goals would be, and what kinds of questions you would ask of your interviewee.*

## November 29: Quantitative Analysis [73 pages]

Pat Hudson and Mina Ishizu, "Origin and Nature of Quantitative Thinking" in *History by Numbers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 23-44.

Gary Kornblith, "Making Sense of Quantitative Evidence" from the Making Sense of Evidence Series on *History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu>, 1-23.

**In Practice:** Anne E. C. McCants, "The Not-So-Merry Widows of Amsterdam, 1740-1782," *Journal of Family History* 24:4 (October 1999): 441-467.

*Historical Exercise #13: Find a set of quantitative data that might be useful in your own proposed research project and draw on the readings for today to explain its potential strengths and limitations as a historical source and how you might analyze the data as part of your own research. Alternatively, you can analyze how the McCants reading illuminates or draws on methodological approaches/insights discussed in the other readings.*

## December 4: Digital History and History in the Age of the Internet [68 pages]

Douglass Seefeldt and William G. Thomas III, "What Is Digital History? A Look at Some Exemplar Projects," *DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, 2009 [8 pages].

Anne Kelly Knowles, "GIS and History" in *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS are Changing Historical Scholarship* (Redlands, CA: Esri Press, 2008), pp. 1-25.

Carl Smith, "Can You Do Serious History on the Web?" *Perspectives on History*, Feb. 1998 [5 pages].

**In Practice:** Joanna Guldi, "The History of Walking and the Digital Turn: Stride and Lounge in London, 1808-1851," *Journal of Modern History*, 84:1(March 2012): 116-144.

## **PART V: CONCLUSION**

### **December 6: The Obligation of the Historian (37 pages)**

Justin Champion, "What are Historians For?" *Historical Research* 81:211 (February 2008): 167-188.

Juan Cole, "Blogging Current Affairs History," *The Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (July 2011): 658-670.

David Armitage, "Why politicians need historians," *The Guardian*, Oct. 7, 2014 [2 pages].

### **December 11: Presentations and Conclusion (*draft of research proposal due in class*)**

*In class today, we will break into small groups and each student will give a 5-minute presentation on their research proposal to a group. We will hold a mock competition, where one proposal from each group will be recommended for further "funding."*

### **Wednesday, December 19: Final Research Proposal due by 11:00am**