

HISTORY 510: Historiography



"I'm concerned about my legacy—kill the historians."

Course Information:

History 510-01, Fall 2014 (85663)

Time: Mondays 3:30-6:20

Room: MHRA 1207

Instructor Information:

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Office Hours

Tuesdays 11-12 AM, Thursdays 2-3 PM and by appointment

Description:

What is Historiography?

Historiography is an integral component of advanced historical thinking and writing. Unlike many non-academic definitions of 'history', which typically imagine that history is 'merely' about establishing what happened, to engage in historiographical thinking is to recognize that 'establishing what happened' entails interpretation. To a degree, this concept – that the writing of history changes as society and historians change their interests, assumptions, and biases – is, of course, unproblematic. It might seem obvious that a monk writing about the world around him in the middle of the twelfth century should present 'what happened' differently, and with different explanations of why or how those things happened, than would a putatively objective, secular academic historian of the 21st century. Fair enough. And yet even among our putatively 'objective' modern historians, a substantial range of often divergent interpretative approaches exists. Historians often differ about such things as: 1) what questions are pertinent to ask about the past; 2) what primary sources are valid and useful to use in interpreting the past; 3) what meta-scale assumptions about human nature and societal development are useful (or not) in helping explain past events; and 4) whether – or which – epistemological approaches to knowledge in general can be used to help explain the past. The ways in which historians differ and agree over these (and other) fundamental issues concerning how we approach the writing of history constitute the field of historiography.

Putting aside the famous line, 'Everyman his own historian' (the title of a lecture presented by Charles Beard to the American Historical Association, in 1931), which, if taken to its fullest might be taken to imply that the historiographer's task is infinite and therefore impossible, it is conventional for those who study the history of writing about history to lump historians uneasily together according to the 'schools' or 'methods' that they practice. In most cases 'school' is probably too rigid a word (although there are exceptions, such as the Annales school), since even those who agree on some basic methodological approaches are likely to differ in other ways, but it allows us to come to grips with some of the main trends in historical writing since the professionalization of the field in the middle years of the 19th century.

Our Approach to Historiography

As a result, our course will devote each week to a different approach, method, or school of historical writing (choose the term that you prefer!). After an initial week in which we think broadly about the philosophy of history, we will move in a basically chronological direction, examining the development of new approaches and theories as they emerged from c.1875 to the present. Among the approaches (or schools, or methods) we will examine include the Annales movement, Marxism, history from below and radical history, the influence of cultural anthropology, gender, material culture, nationalism, constructions of the other, trans-nationalism, and post-structuralism.

It hardly be noted that I have no agenda in this class, at least when it comes to preferring one methodology to another. For sure, I have a method that I employ in my own work, and my tendencies may well become evident in discussion, but the purpose of this class is make students aware of the breadth of possible theoretical and methodological approaches to the writing of history, and not to teach you that one is 'right' and the others wrong. Your goal should be to think hard about each approach, recognize its strengths and weaknesses, and (later, in your other classes) employ those approaches with which you are most comfortable when you set out to conduct your own research into the past. In a word, our course aims to open your eyes to the necessary reality that professional history requires some degree of interpretative method, and to expose you to a sampling of those methods so that you can better classify your own tendencies.

Given all these goals, it is important to remember what you will be asked to do and not do in this class. This is NOT a class about content. Our primary goal will not be to master 'what happened' in any era or region. Our goal will be to read representative examples of different historiographical approaches and ask two interlinked sets of questions: first, what is the argument of the author, and how successful was it? What sources did the author employ? What sources did he/she not employ? With what other historians or schools of historical writing does the author seem aligned? These questions are about the internal logic of

the book's argument. To do so, obviously, we must read 'about what happened', but you will not be asked to remember the details of what happened in, say, 12th-century France or Colonial America. Instead, you will be asked to identify and evaluate the argument of the author and to consider why it is successful or unsuccessful (that is, whether it is persuasive or not).

The second set of questions involves classifying the book or reading according to its historiographical, or methodological, approach: again, does the author favor a certain category or class of sources? Does the choice of type of sources simultaneously reveal information about what the author finds important in the past? Would other sources have produced different histories? That is, what does the author find to be important about the past – politics? Progress? Explaining the origins of what we believe in the present? Social Justice? Exposing bias? Finally, with which other historians, past or concurrent, does the author seem to agree and/or disagree? What does the answer to that question tell us about his/her alignment in the cosmos of historiographical approaches to the writing of history?

Since this is not a 'content' course in the normal undergraduate sense, our course may require that you read our books somewhat differently. You must be concerned first and foremost with identifying the author's stated (or unstated) purpose and/or agenda in writing. Close behind this will fall the argument of the author's work. One of our tasks will be to evaluate the success of this argument, so it is worth getting used to the process of reading analytically; don't get bogged down in the minutiae of the details offered by each author, for we are really unconcerned with the specifics. Rather, pay close attention to the argument, the evidence offered to support that argument, and the assumptions around which the argument (and the choice of evidence) is based. In a word, you will be learning to "gut" or "fillet" a book; it sounds inelegant, and it is, but it is a very valuable skill. It involves reading rapidly (but carefully) a large number of pages, skimming the details but keeping your eyes open for the argument, holes in reasoning, blatant (or not-so-blatant) assumptions, historiographical alignments, and so on.

Required Books

1. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (Harper, 2005) 9780060838652
2. Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: the Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (2013) 9780307948830
3. Robin Fleming, *Britain After Rome: the Fall and Rise, 400-700* (Penguin, 2011). ISBN: 9780140148237. \$14.
4. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Promised Land of Error* (Vintage Books, 1979. Reprint Georges Braziller, 2008). ISBN: 9780807615980. \$19.
5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; rev. edition, Verso, 2006) 9781844670864
6. Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (Hill and Wang, 2006). 9780809072354
7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, 2nd edition (Vintage, 1995). ISBN: 9780679752554. \$16

Other Required Readings :

The required books represent only a portion of the reading we will do this semester. Other readings found on the syllabus will be prefaced by one of the following designations:

Journal A-Z List: this designation indicates a journal for which UNCG receives electronic versions (pdfs). That is, you can click on the "Journal A-Z List" button on the Library's homepage and it will bring up a specialized journal search engine. Type the journal title into the field and navigate to the correct volume number and article; if UNCG has electronic access to the journal, you can get a pdf of an article this way.

Blackboard: these are articles that I have already placed in pdf form on our blackboard site. They should be found in the Course Readings folder.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

1. Critically evaluate important works of modern scholarship both orally and in writing
2. Conduct evidence-based discussions of scholarship in a professional, collegial manner
3. Locate, assess, and communicate reviews and other subjective analyses of the assigned readings
4. Identify and analyze a range of methodological approaches to historical writing

Graduate Students: Teaching Methods and Course Requirements

A. Teaching Methods:

The course is taught as a seminar in which all participants critically analyze joint readings. The instructor takes a semi-socratic approach, suggesting (when needed) topics and questions for discussion, and filling in historiographical background when necessary. The point of discussion is to assess the arguments of the assigned readings and to evaluate them as representatives of one or more of the methodologies employed by historians since 1900.

B. Requirements

1. Oral Presentations: (20% total, 10% each) (Student Learning Outcomes 1, 3)

Each week at least two of you will open our discussion with a brief (5-10 minute) presentation. One of the two presenters will speak about the argument of the book, while the other will speak about the methodological and/or historiographical alignments of the author.

If you are tasked with describing the argument, you should:

1. Offer your (informed) opinion about what you found the argument of the book to be, whether or not you found it to be persuasive, and why or why not you found it persuasive
2. Guide the rest of us in examination of 1-3 passages that you find particularly instructive in elucidating the author's argument
3. Suggest three lines of inquiry (or questions) to be pursued in the subsequent discussion

If you are tasked with the historiographical presentation, you should:

1. Offer a very brief mini-biography of the author (as much as can be gleaned from the text, from reputable sources on the web, etc..)
2. Explain the scholarly reception of the main work for the week. You may wish to consult reviews in scholarly journals to aid you.
3. Explain how the book fits into the category of historiography (as indicated by the title for the week on the syllabus). You should quickly outline the features of that type of historiography and indicate how (or if?) the work in question epitomizes that category.
4. Suggest three lines of inquiry or questions for the subsequent discussion

Along with your presentation you should distribute a 1-page handout summarizing your presentation, with whatever relevant points about the book and/or author you wish to share with us (some biographical details, relevant quotations, your questions for the class, etc.).

The actual oral part of the presentation should not feature you reading your handout. Summarize your points succinctly and clearly, and do so in a confident, professional way (eye-contact, spontaneous speech [i.e., not reading notes], etc.).

Each student will make one of each type of presentation. If there are multiple readings assigned on a given week, students should consult with the instructor about which is most suitable for presentations.

I encourage the pairs of students to consult with each other as they prepare their presentations. After all, argument and methodology are not foreign to each other.

2. Classroom Discussion (20%) (Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 4)

As a seminar, the course demands participation from all students. I recognize that much of the material may be unfamiliar to some of you; despite this reasonable point, I still expect students to take an active and frequent part in the discussion. If you find that you are not saying almost anything (one interjection per meeting, say), you are likely to receive a C for this part of the course grade. Grades in the A and B range are only awarded to students who speak regularly and participate in discussion by considering and responding to the comments of others (professor and students). I am less concerned with *what* you say than in seeing you make a decent effort to orally analyze the reading and offer some sort of reasoned explanation for your analysis.

3. Four Analytical Essays (40%, 10% each) (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 4)

These are short (3-5 pages in length; minimum 1000 words) essays that invite you to analyze the argument and/or methodology of one of the core readings assigned for the class. You don't need to do outside reading for these essays, but you should use citations (footnotes) to the work(s) you are analyzing.

All students must write one of their four essays in response to one of the questions posed for the readings for August 26; essays will be due at the next class meeting (September 8). After that, I allow students leeway to choose when and for which readings they write the other three essays. The prompts/questions for each subsequent week will be posted in a document on blackboard. Essays are due the week after discussion of the readings in question (for example, essays on Marxism are due on September 29, the week after we discuss Marxism). It is your responsibility to schedule your writing in a responsible way. In the past students have made their decisions partly on the questions I ask (although I try to make them all equally 'doable'), partly on their reactions to the readings, and partly based on due-dates for other classes. Note: even if you don't intend to write about a given week's reading, you are still expected to fully participate in the oral discussion of that reading.

4. Final Exam (20%) (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 4)

I plan a final exam for this course. I have not yet decided whether it will be a take-home final, or an in-class exam (and we will discuss this as a group). In either case, it will involve several short essays (2-4) that respond to some of the themes of the course.

Undergraduate Students: Teaching Methods and Course Requirements

A. Teaching Methods:

The course is taught as a seminar in which all participants critically analyze joint readings. The instructor takes a semi-socratic approach, suggesting (when needed) topics and questions for discussion, and filling in historiographical background when necessary. The point of discussion is to assess the arguments of the assigned readings and to evaluate them as representatives of one or more of the methodologies employed by historians since 1900. You should not feel intimidated by the M.A. students; you are just as valuable a member of the class, and your participation will be vital to its success.

B. Requirements

1. Oral Presentations: (20% total, 10% each) (Student Learning Outcomes 1, 3)

Undergraduates will make two 5-10 minute oral presentations to the class, and will produce a 1-page handout for each presentation (bring copies for the class!). My expectations for undergraduates are comparable to those for graduate students; see the section on graduate student requirements (above) for the mechanics of how oral presentations will work. In assessing your presentations, however, I take into account the fact that you are an undergraduate.

2. Classroom Discussion (20%) (Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 4)

As a seminar, the course demands participation from all students. I recognize that philosophy of history and historiography may be unfamiliar to some of you; despite this, I still expect undergraduate students to

take an active and frequent part in the discussion. If you find that you are not saying almost anything (one interjection per meeting, say), you are likely to receive a C for this part of the course grade. Grades in the A and B range are only awarded to students who speak regularly and participate in discussion by considering and responding to the comments of others (professor and students). I am less concerned with *what* you say than in seeing you make a decent effort to orally analyze the reading and offer some sort of reasoned explanation for your analysis.

3. Two Analytical Essays (30%, 15% each) (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 4)

Unlike graduate students, who write four of these essays, undergraduates write only two. The analytical essays should be 3-5 pages in length (minimum of 1000 words), typed, with standard fonts, margins, etc. For each you will respond to one of several questions I have written about the readings for a given week. You don't need to do outside reading for these essays, but you should use citations (footnotes in Chicago Style) to the work(s) you are analyzing.

All students (undergraduate and graduate) must write one of their four essays in response to one of the questions posed for the readings for August 26; essays will be due at the next class meeting (September 8). For undergraduates, the second essay must respond EITHER to the readings for October 6 (Anthropology), to be due in class on October 20, OR to the readings for October 20 (Gender), to be due in class on November 3. You should make your selection based on your intellectual interests.

4. Final Exam (30%) (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 4)

I plan a final exam for this course. I have not yet decided whether it will be a take-home final, or an in-class exam (and we will discuss this as a group). In either case, it will involve several short essays (2-4) that respond to some of the themes of the course. Note that for undergraduates, the final exam carries more weight than it does for graduate students (because undergraduates write fewer analytical essays).

Grade Breakdown:

A. Graduate Students

Two Oral Presentations	20% (10% each)
General Participation	20%
Four Analytical Essays	40% (10% each)
Final Exam	20%

B. Undergraduate Students

Two Oral Presentations	20% (10% each)
General Participation	20%
Two Analytical Essays	30% (15% each)
Final Exam	30%

The “Legal” stuff:

1. All students should be familiar (or make themselves familiar) with the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/>
2. All work should be your own.
3. Attendance is critical in this course. If you miss more than 1 class without explanation, I will take some sort of disciplinary measures.
4. All course materials must be completed to receive a grade. I am giving you substantial leeway in scheduling your own due-dates. Don't make me mad by piling them all up at the end of the semester!

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

1. August 18: Introduction to the Course
2. August 25: What is History? Carr and Elton
 Blackboard: E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Knopf, 1961): chapters 1 (pp 1-35), 2 (pp. 36-69), 4 (pp. 112-143), and 5 (pp. 144-176)
 Blackboard: G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Fontana, 1969; 2nd edition, Blackwell, 2002), 1-80.
3. September 1: Labor Day – **No Class**
4. September 8: Traditional Approaches, from the Greeks to the 18th Century
 Blackboard: Donald Kelley, ed., *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Yale UP, 1991), pp. 18-20, 23-46, 62-68, 69-70, 76-79, 117-118, 125-131, 140-154, 156-163, 254-257, 302-310, 370-376, 413-417, 439-440, 442-446, 487-496
Due: First Analytical Essay
5. September 15: Social History and the Annales Movement
 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Promised Land of Error* (Vintage, 1979), pp. vii-xvii, 3-52, 103-135, 139-203, 308-326.
 Blackboard: Selections from Fournier's register: Beatrice de Planisoles (read pp. 1-12) and the priest Barthelemy Amilhac (read all).
 Blackboard: Leonard E. Boyle, "Montaillou Revisited: *Mentalité* and Methodology," in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. Raftis (Toronto: PIMS, 1981), 119-40.
6. September 22: Marxism and Culture
 Blackboard: Matt Perry, *Marxism and History* (Palgrave, 2002), 1-46, plus 160-170 for reference
 Blackboard: E.P. Thompson, preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), in *The Essential E.P. Thompson* (New York: the New Press, 2001) pp. 3-8
 Blackboard: E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century," in *The Essential E.P. Thompson* (New York: the New Press, 2001), 316-378.
 Blackboard: Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (Vintage Books, 1976), 3-49, 285-324, 585-621, plus notes
7. September 29: History from Below and the problem of Agency
 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, table of contents, Chapters 7 (125-146), 10 (211-251), 12-13 (297-357), 16 (407-442), 20 (542-562), and 23 (631-641)
 Blackboard: Howard Zinn, several essays from *The Politics of History* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1970; 2nd edition, 1990), 5-55
 Online: Sam Wineburg, "Undue Certainty: Where Howard Zinn's *People's History* Falls Short," *American Educator*, 36:4 p27-34 Winter 2012-2013
 [http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ995904.pdf]
 Journals A-Z: Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003), 113-124
8. October 6: Anthropology and History
 Blackboard: Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 3-30
 Blackboard: Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), pp. 3-104, 257-263
 Journals A-Z: Roger Chartier, "Texts, Symbols and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57

(1985): 682-695
 Journals A-Z: Darnton, "The Symbolic Element in History," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 218-234.

9. October 13: Fall Break – No Class

10. October 20: Gender

Blackboard: Joan Scott, "Women's History" and "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," pp. 15-51 in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (Columbia UP, 1999).

Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: the Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York: Knopf, 2013), selections TBA

11. October 27: Constructing the Other

Blackboard: R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 2nd edition (Wiley, 2007), excerpts TBA

Blackboard: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), excerpts TBA

12. November 3: Material Culture

Blackboard: Austin Mason, "Buried Buckets: Rethinking Ritual Behavior before England's Conversion," *Haskins Society Journal* 20 (2008), 1-18.

Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome* (2011), selections TBA

13. November 10: Constructing Nationalism

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; rev. edition 2006), entire

14. November 17: Transnationalism

Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), selections TBA

15. November 24: Post-structuralism and Power

Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: the birth of the Prison*, tr. Alan Sheridan (original French edition 1975; 2nd Vintage Books edition, New York, 1995), excerpts TBA

Film Clips: Foucault vs. Chomsky (to be shown in class)

16. December 1: Wrap-up: What is History?

Some Suggestions for Critical Reading and Writing

Learning how to read, analyze, and write about historical writing in a critical way is the main objective of this course. Keep the following in mind as you read and write about the books and articles this semester:

a. Check the date and place of publication (don't be fooled by reprints or later editions). How are these important to an understanding of the book? Consider a book on medieval Germany written by an Englishman in 1943.

b. Read the author's introduction or preface and/or acknowledgments. Whom else does he/she know, or with whom and with what types of historical writing does he/she choose to associate his/her work? To whom is he/she indebted? Whom does he/she consider as an opponent? Does the author state his/her purpose in writing the book? No author is an island, and very few are truly original; most authors are indebted either personally to someone else or methodologically to a school or approach.

c. Pay careful attention to the author's use of sources. To ascertain this, you will need to be aware of his/her footnotes and/or bibliography, even if you do not read every single reference (indeed, you

probably shouldn't read every reference). How does the selection and use of sources inform the author's historical interpretation? Does the author use a single source [a treatise, a chronicle, an inquest]? A single category of sources [parish records, letters, memoirs, legal sources, etc.]? Many different types of sources? Does he/she make use of literary sources? Statistical sources? Police records? Are all sources equally reliable? Would use of another kind of source altered his/her conclusions?

d. Does the author make clear what is (are) his/her thesis (or theses) in the book or article? That is to say, can you discern if an argument is being made? Or, is the book pure narrative? [be careful!, for even narratives can have agendas and/or theses] If there is no apparent argument, is this a problem? If there is an argument, does it fit into some larger historiographical debate? Or, does it fit into or alongside some major historical or ideological theory?

e. Does the author bring to his/her analysis a particular method or approach? In some weeks, you may well read works on the same subject from diametrically opposing methodological perspectives. While the tendency may be to believe that one is "right" and the other "wrong", we will find that it is more useful to simply try to uncover, analyze, and criticize the methods being used, and to express an opinion about which method seems to offer a better, or more important, understanding of the topic in question.

f. To what sort of audience is the book or article addressed? Other scholars? A general readership? Students? How do considerations of audience affect an author's selection and use of sources?

g. Is the work in question a monograph, based primarily on original research? Or is it a synthesis that integrates new material with older ideas? Or some combination of the two?