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History 391: Historical Skills and Methods [WI], Fall 2023

This is a lengthy syllabus. Read it for a basic orientation. Many of your current or future questions about the course will be found here. Think of it as an operating manual for doing well. Welcome!

Purpose and Philosophy:

This course is meant to sharpen your tools of historical thinking, investigation, discussion, and writing. Your progress and success depend on practicing and mastering simpler tasks early in the semester that support more complex ones later. Informal writing and exercises come early, papers come twice in the semester. Along the way, I will demonstrate key skills and invite you to practice these same skills. **Ideally, there is a big payoff here:** 1. You will get more out of all your history courses, because you will understand how historians interpret and reconstruct the past. 2. With each of you putting your best energies into the class, everyone will benefit exponentially. 3. In preparation for HIS 411, the capstone research course (391 is the prerequisite) I promise here that you will learn a lot more about research, which can be applied to any sub-field of history.

History is everything that happened in the past, right? Well, maybe, but who could know all that? History must be attached to an active verb, as in “we are doing history.” Even if we could recover and assemble all the relevant “facts” of an “event” lifted from the stream of time, we would still have to select the facts most *pertinent* to a *question*. **We need to discern, interpret, and express patterns of meaning, a story, a reconstruction of past events that satisfies our thirst for explanation.** To do so, we must assign weight and proportion to pieces of evidence, plot an engaging narrative, analyze causation, change, continuity, and context. All these are needed to explain why historical actors thought, felt, and acted as they did.

Primary Sources: Historians and history students **reconstruct** plausible and compelling interpretations from “the historical record” of **primary sources**. These constitute everything recorded or produced by past actors that has been preserved or can be recovered; they are “primary” to the events and characters themselves. These survivors—writings, artifacts, reports, images, films, memoirs, advertisements—bring past actors alive and challenge us to understand their world through their eyes. They are the flesh and blood of the recoverable past.

Secondary Sources: Almost no one visits the past without the company of prior writers, though discoveries of new sources promise fresh insights and individual distinction. To understand past actors more fully, we must turn to **scholarship and secondary sources** for *testable theses, theories, and understanding of deep contexts*. We must understand something of the world that produced these people, the world they spoke to, and the understandings they shared with people who may be utterly unlike us. Scholars and talented writers can help us understand the bigger picture, and can help us formulate sharper, more informed questions. Scholars periodize the past, argue about what caused the Civil War, piece together accounts of colonialism from the perspectives of the colonized, bring women out of the shadows of public life.

Take historical perspective. We are of a different time (not in every way better). We can never know them fully. But we have something they lacked: **the precious gift of hindsight into their uncertain future, which is our partially understood past.**

Historiography. The study of historical writing and reconstruction by scholars living in different eras is called “**historiography**.” We will spend a lot of time learning how to discern a scholar’s thesis, theories of history, main points, and evidence. You will learn to identify and appreciate alternative frames of reference and biases, helping you to pose new and better questions. I am assigning a fairly practical hands on guide that actually asks you to do history in a variety of ways.

What to tell relatives who don't think History is practical: The abilities to focus on a problem; cut away extraneous and distracting information; learn from experts and others who have looked at the problem (without totally buying into their solutions); and then find reliable kinds of evidence – these are all in great demand in an increasingly knowledge-based economy and a problem-beset globe. History ought to help you sort out real causes from fake causes to develop effective solutions. It ought to help you see and understand people first in the context of their life experience and culture. It ought to gradually have taught you that most human life is filled with conflict, that nonviolent conflict is preferred, that problems ignored or delayed don't go away, and the ability to accommodate everyone without violence is limited, but essential.

"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle." - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Teaching Methods: Lecturing, to amplify themes, or to demonstrate search techniques. Daily exercises and writings which form the basis for some in class collaborations. Exploration of a broad range of scholarly and primary sources, including film, television, photography, oral history, autobiography, journalism, fiction, letters, legal petitions, congressional and presidential speeches and meeting transcripts, and quite a bit more. Extensive introduction to thesis identification in scholarship, the technique of "following footnotes," taking notes, selectively paraphrasing and quoting, organizing ideas and presenting findings in writing and orally. The whole idea is to expose you and train you to evaluate and learn from historical scholarship, especially with respect to thesis and evidence. Then more and more to ask you to do history, to interpret a wide range of primary sources.

Learning Goals for History Majors: Thinking in Time

Consider the recently revised History Department goals for your education. What do they mean? These generalizations encompass the many time periods, locales, questions, and methods that you find in this department and in historical writing generally. History Graduates will be able to:

1. **Analyze historical duration, succession, and change** in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of places and periods. **[Historical Comprehension]**
2. **Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources** representing different points of view. **[Historical Analysis]**
3. **Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources.** **[Historical Research]**
4. **Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing.** **[Historical Interpretation]**

This class focuses on Department goals LG2 and LG3, with a significant exercise in LG4. Since these aren't abstracted from the sense you make of the past, LG1 will be relevant to the degree that understanding context matters. Statements about causation, continuity and change, the scope of human agency and the power of systems and structures are all, of course, *analytical* actions, involving thinking with evidence.

HISTORY 391 STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to demonstrate the following knowledge, skills, and habits of mind:

1. **Information Literacy.** Search, identify, and evaluate primary and secondary sources. Secondary Sources: Historians record their best work in journals and books and encyclopedias that stand up to evaluation by other experienced historians. Primary sources are those closest to the originals, those professionally edited by people qualified to know what not to leave out and how to provide context]. **Consistently practice full and accurate citation.**
2. **Distinguishing "Genres" of Historical Consciousness, or Ways of Knowing the Past.** These include: "collective memory" in popular culture and official commemorations; the "cultural curriculum" promoted in families and community settings, including schools; individual remembrance in memoir and oral history; for-profit history in entertainment (books and films); public history in museums and other venues. Maybe the least popular but

arguably most important, (and the focus of much of this class) will be **original scholarship written by professionally trained historians.**

3. Historical Thinking. Varieties of historical investigation and explanation include quantitative and qualitative analysis, analysis of visual rhetoric, and frequently in this class, comparison of the symbols and substance of politics. In the process you will learn to define and illustrate keywords and concepts in the sub-fields of social, political, and cultural history.

As a Practice, Historical thinking also includes:

4. Primary Source Analysis. Locate and contextualize primary sources. Make **inferences** from limited or ambiguous sources when conclusive evidence is lacking. Evaluate these historical sources in terms of plausibility, trustworthiness, and accuracy. **Corroborate** facts and points of view by comparing primary sources with each other and with other sources. Draw upon contextual knowledge to situate and explain the explicit meaning (text) and implicit assumptions (subtext). **Pose research questions. Extract useful evidence** from sources through careful **note taking**, through **summary, paraphrase, selective quotation**, and commentary. Keep in mind: you will always be answering a clear question, solving a problem of interpretation.

5. Secondary Source Analysis. Locate and evaluate scholarship that poses and answers clear questions. Accurately summarize the thesis, argument, or “limited interpretive generalization” (a key concept describing the level at which historians think). Identify and analyze scholars’ concepts, methods, sources (as seen in their footnotes), conclusions, possible biases or “frames of reference.”

6. Historiography. Explain how **historical understanding has advanced through testing old interpretations against new evidence, or reinterpreting old evidence in light of new questions and theories.** Recognize valid and flawed revisionism. Explain how scholarly point of view can shape interpretations and research methods, questions and answers.

7. Posing Research Questions. As a result of all these skills, formulate, and refine questions that might lead to focused, researchable, interesting, and original writing. These will be inspired by reading primary source documents, considering historians’ interpretations, examining your own inherited assumptions, and questioning ideas and myths present in the culture.

8. Writing Up Research Findings. **Interpret the past in ways that explain change, causation, context, contingency, agency.** Synthesize evidence and communicate research findings effectively in writing and orally. Again, this rises or falls on your skills generating useful notes that are guided by clear questions, notes that provide a useful mix of summary, paraphrase, and careful quotation. *Always* cite sources in full when writing formal research papers.

Learning Resources for Students, Support, Accommodations

My Commitment: I believe in your success as a student and will adapt my instruction to ensure your success. I vary teaching methods to ensure that my courses are accessible to all students. If you need any accommodation, be sure to talk to me and go through the [Office of Accessibility Resources & Services](#). Please also communicate with me how the accommodation is going. See the Canvas syllabus module for this section, which provides descriptors and invitations to use: [The University Speaking Center](#); [The University Writing Center](#); [University Counseling Center](#)

Required Texts, Sets and Exercises, Strategic Reading Tips, and Time Commitment

Required Reading (Available for purchase in the bookstore and through UNCG First Day Complete).

Salevouris, Michael J., and Conal Furay. *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. 4 edition.

Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. This has a lot of great exercises; **Assignments come in SETS and EXERCISES, and “Set A. Exercise 1.” will be referenced in this syllabus by “A.1.” followed by page numbers.** Examples: A.1.25-30. Or selected items within a set rendered as A.1.C-D.25-27, which means Set A., Exercise 1., Items C through D., pages 25-27. **Some of you may purchase the ebook and you are allowed to download from that ebook. But you must upload page assignments like everyone. We will discuss the technology.**

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010. Campus Bookstore.

THE RED READER. (Abbreviated as RR throughout). Available only at Copy King, 611 W Gate City Blvd, Greensboro, NC 27403, just SE of campus. **Call them first, to ensure they have not run out: (336) 333-9900.** Primary sources, scholarly articles. Published “readers” abound but this one, carefully curated by your professor, is much more affordable and pertinent. Unfortunately, it is not possible to process through Barnes and Noble bookstore. Years of experience has shown me that if all students bring paper to class, eschewing electronic devices to access material, your attention to each other and the professor is what it should be.

Strategic Reading: Practice strategic reading, i.e. *preview* and *highlight* main ideas and topical transitions evident in paragraph transitions and sub-headings. **Find that paragraph early on that encapsulates the structure of the whole.** Be able to summarize the **thesis** and **supportive ideas and evidence**. Especially preview *first* the **conclusion**, which is meant often to wrap up the puzzles and contradictions and offer some resolution. If the reading is long and time is short, *skim* and *scan* for details that answer a question. **I will give you guidelines within assignments as to what you should focus on and what can be skimmed.** See also ch. 8 on reading in the Salevouris text.

Time Commitment: UNCG assumes that you will spend two hours for every one hour of class time. Your time investment will reap dividends far beyond this course or grade. Approach the week or module as a whole in advance, by surveying the readings and questions first, then making your way with whatever guidelines I provide. Then allocate hours of preparation, and dig in, with the intensity that you bring to those things you have done that you do best (sports, music, parenting, whatever)!

Assignments, Grade Weights, Grade Scale

This is a Writing Intensive Course. I made every effort to keep writing a low stress habit and build in opportunities for feedback, expansion, and revision.

I. Participation and Preparation (20%)

Preparation as demonstrated by active speaking, cooperation, and respectful debate, is essential. Though this is not a speaking intensive class, I regard regular verbal participation as a crucial skill. *You will receive points on quality more than quantity of your remarks; long-winded and off-topic comments won't gain you points.* Rather I will award points on how well you satisfy: 1. *The relevance* of remarks to the question under discussion. 2. *Historical thinking*, the application of concepts and principles to cases. 3. Your ability to *cite specific pieces of evidence* to illustrate your points. 4. Constructive responses, agreements or disagreements that show you are listening to your classmates. Get in the habit of talking to each other (while the class can hear you) not simply *at me*.

Participation extends outside of class when I post optional discussion boards, you attend a history department event relevant to the class, or when you comment on another person's post.

At times, you will be asked to pose an ***informed and researchable question*** and justify its significance in terms of what you have learned and what remains a mystery that week. **Guidelines for “informed” questioning:** What problems of explanation capture your imagination? 1. Does your question grapple with some of the core puzzles and mysteries we consider each week? 2. Is it an *informed* question about specific people or events or decisions or alternative interpretations? 3. Does it imagine or identify actual sources to start such an inquiry?

II. "Exercises" from the Textbook and related materials (25%) – (Due before class).

These can be very “chunky” or “granular,” so pay attention closely to my explicit instructions, and when I ask for parts, don't do the whole exercises. **You have flexibility in how you record your responses.** Sometimes there will just be a **text box** in Canvas, sometimes an opportunity to upload digital pages or screenshots or photos from the textbook, other times a request to upload a Word or rtf document for direct commentary. Please don't email me any assignments.

Crucial! Learn my coding system for assigning specific exercises (often only the best parts):

Salevouris and Furay, *Methods and Skills* assignments are organized in **SETS and EXERCISES**. **Learn this:** “Set A. Exercise 1. Examples 2,5,7 only, on pages 25-30” will be abbreviated “A.1:2,5,7;25-30.” Sometimes selected

items within a set rendered as A.1.C-D.25-27, which means Set A., Exercise 1., Items C through D., pages 25-27 (use the page numbers for quick access).

III. Writings – Discussion Responses, Blog Posts, Annotations to Collaborative Bibliographies—Analysis of Scholarship or Primary Sources in the Case Studies– sometimes only paragraphs, or 200 words, sometimes 300-500 words, weighted according to difficulty (25%). (Categorized in Canvas as “Writings”)

Writings will be worth between 10 and 20 points, depending on complexity and length. Canvas text box, discussion post, or file upload assignments, or One Drive Collaborative contributions. They will usually ask you to synthesize insights from the case studies in *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*. Other times they will ask you to show the results of your own literature searches, or your analysis of photos, novels, journalism, oral history, letters, and the like.

NOTE: For II and III, there will be about 11-12 opportunities to post for Exercises and Writings. I will count the best 8 of these. Don't skip them, but if you miss one or two, just move on and keep up with the rest. You will see in Canvas make up or extra credit opportunities from time to time.

IV. Midterm Paper (15%), 5-6 pp. 1250-1500 words, with endnotes.

Revisit and deepen and revise something you have written about in the first half of the course. A formal paper, with properly formatted endnotes, not footnotes, and not bibliography. Based on 25% assigned readings, 75% "optional," "suggested," discovered sources (**favor primary sources**). These should not be the result of Google searches or thirdhand educational sites, like some UK high school. You want scholarship or original primary sources. The class will see many mini-tutorials on source discovery. I am very happy to brainstorm with you in advance! Actually this is one of the funnest parts of the job. See Canvas soon for some suggestions. Under no circumstances, will I accept papers tangentially related to the issues of any given day, i.e. no recycling work previously done.

VI. Final Paper: (15%), 5-6 pp. 1250-1500 words, with endnotes. Due Dec 7 at 6:30 PM, on Canvas. A thoroughly researched, clearly narrated, well explained examination of a focused problem from second half of the course. NB: If you are taking 411A next semester, know that the period roughly corresponding to the 1960s (Black freedom, Vietnam, gender and feminism) will be covered.

The Formal Writing Assignments: These midterm and final papers will reflect your practice with core concepts and themes of the course: political symbolism and political reality; the cultural curriculum, memory, and history, change and continuity, multiple causality, context. They will draw on at least two scholarly sources and as much as 100 pages of primary sources. **“How Many Primary Sources Do I Need?” is the most frequent legitimate question. Answer:** as many as needed to make your case but at least several, depending on depth. If you are looking at journalism, you may look at 20 shorter news articles, use and cite 15; if you are looking at memoirs or Congressional Debates, then the number of sources will be fewer (4-6) but the richness will be greater.

Late Work: All assignments are due before class. I will indicate when you can make up work or how you may still get some credit if something happens to delay your assignment submission.

Grading Scale:

A (93 and above), A- (90-92); B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82); C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72); D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62); F (less than 60, unacceptable work).

Writing Guidelines, Citations and Plagiarism and AI Conduct

Writing Assignments: Formal papers and some “writings” will be submitted on Canvas using either.rtf, .docx. or .pdf format, so I may download, comment, and upload your writings. Use full citations in endnote style when writing the formal papers. Learn these rules. See Rampolla’s *Student Guide*, chs. 6-7, which will remain at the top of Canvas syllabus page. Papers should be double spaced unless otherwise indicated, **1” or .75” margins** and no

more either 11 or 12 pt. font, **Times New Roman or equivalent**. (Block quotes, used sparingly, should be single spaced). This yields an average of 250-300 words per page.

Citations: In formal writing that reflects your discoveries, you will be using full citations in Chicago Style endnotes (same thing as Turabian). You should learn them as you go along or try to memorize as much as you can from any of provided citation guides.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious offense of the academic code and is treated as such by faculty. Do your own work and clearly cite any sources you rely upon for your information. Familiarize yourself with the responsibilities of the instructor and the options we have under the university's academic integrity policy:

<http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integritypolicy/> I will report violations of the honor code to the Dean of Students through one of the two paths explained on the website. Both involve initial conferences with me for which you will have time to prepare, then move to agreed penalties, or mediation of the Academic Integrity Board. Watch: Plagiarism 2.0: Information Ethics in the Digital Age [Plagiarism 2.0 Video](#) (Beware specifically "Patch Writing" a form of plagiarism that plagues undergraduates, starting at 4:30 in the video). See also chapter from Rampolla at top of Canvas page. Turnitin is a software program attached to Canvas to clue you and your professor into possible plagiarism.

AI writing code of conduct: reproduction of any machine generated text using artificial intelligence is also plagiarism. AI engines like ChatGPT might in fact put a few textbook publishers out of business, but they simply will not help you develop and assess your own interpretations of history. They will not help you discover historical sources and synthesize them into meaningful interpretations. They apparently scoop every possible idea and explanation out of the metaverse's intellectual stew, and serve up a literal mishmash, readily identifiable as such. They might help you identify factors you hadn't considered. (Wikipedia used to be taboo, but we now consider it useful to identify sources and ideas in a wikified world). **But AI will not and cannot help you with the irreplaceable cognitive task of evidence-based reasoning.** Maybe I am wrong, and AI may force me to retire early. Canvas has ways of detecting AI-generated plagiarism. *More importantly, if you do not learn to think more creatively than a machine, you might just be replaced by one in a future job that you settled for, because no one asked you to think for yourself.*

Etiquette, Feedback, Electronic Devices, Netiquette 101 for History 391-2

Email Etiquette and Efficiency – Required Subject Line “HIS 391 Question” Please address questions to me via email regarding assignments, appointments, mishaps. **Subject line: “HIS 391 question.” If you don't hear back from me in 24 hours (weekends excepted), please try me again.** Reach me: tjackson@uncg.edu is my University email. You must use your UNCG email account and have an active account to gain access to Canvas and the Library databases. Please do not ask for permission through a @gmail.com or other account.

Feedback and assessment: I use voice dictation software to comment directly on student papers, in addition to any comments or rubrics that you find on Canvas. All assignments that I ask to be submitted electronically *must* be named as I need to download, comment, and upload these: **Your Last Name_HIS391_Date_Subject (like “Slave Narratives”).** Don't just title them “History Paper.”

Electronic Devices: Because we will want access to web sites and online information, including assigned pdfs, bring your laptops and tablets. **You may use devices to access online readings, but use them only for class purposes. Always bring your paper texts.** I see a tendency among some students to bury their heads in their laptops or phones. Too much screen time can suck the attention and energy right out of a class. Right?

Attendance

Regular and punctual attendance is required. More than four absences for any reason will adversely affect your grade. Accommodations: Prolonged illness or personal and family emergencies and setbacks – let me know and I'll work with you. Don't even request an excuse for conflicting work schedules or early vacation plans. Appropriate accommodations should be registered with SOAR, and Covid illness or quarantine will surely be accommodated. Sports team players have their own process. I make reasonable accommodations for students who have conflicts

due to religious obligations. Please make arrangements with me in advance of any conflict. For more information on UNCG's Religious Obligations policy, visit: [UNCG's Religious Obligations Policy](#).

CLASS SCHEDULE

ALL directions and links and questions found in Canvas! Canvas, the Learning Management System: This syllabus just lists topics, readings and some questions, so you can get a good overview. **Canvas assignment pages** are the authoritative guides to the course. They will also have clear links to **One Drive folders**. **Always check Canvas for the *authoritative and complete* assignments.**

8/16: Introductions

8/17: Why Study History?

8/22: History, Historiography, and "The Disciplines"

8/24: Historical Thinking: Continuity, Change, Contexts, Often Strange Ones

8/29: Multiple Causation in History

8/31: Some More on Historiography--Frames of Reference, Interpretation and Generalization--Organizing Ideas and Factors of Change

9/5: Information Literacy and the Literature: Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Library and Internet

9/7: Reading for the Thesis, Identifying Bias, Taking Accurate Notes

9/12: Recovering Enslavement and Emancipation from Below, Through Oral History--Interviews, Their Social Context, and "Splits" in Collective Memory

9/14: Enslavement in the Court and Legislative Records--The UNCG Race and Slavery Petitions Project

9/19: Evidence and Inference: Kent State 1970

9/21: Write a Little History (From a Frame of Reference) -- German Soldiers in WWI -- Thesis and Evidence, Paraphrase and Quotation

9/26: The Immigrant City and the Middle-Class Conscience--Jacob Riis and His Audiences

9/28: Between Victorian and Progressive: Jacob Riis' Immigrant Nativism

10/3: Progressive Symbolism and the Political Process--Upton Sinclair, TR, and Congress Take on the Meat Trusts

10/5: Upton Sinclair: Socialism and Reform in Meat Packing

10/11: Fall Break

10/13: Mid-term paper is due. No class.

- 10/17: Sacco and Vanzetti: Americanization and Nativism in the "Tribal Twenties"**
- 10/19: Corridos & Tragedias De La Frontera: Mexican American Migration and Popular Culture in the 1920s and 1930s**
- 10/24: The Dust Bowl and the Great California Migrations**
- 10/26: Dorothea Lange and John Steinbeck: Artists and Documentarians**
- 10/31: Presidential Authority and Military Bureaucracy: The Atomic Bomb Debate**
- 11/2: Did Father Know Best? Women and Popular Culture: TV, Magazines, The Power of the Media**
- 11/7: The Greensboro Sit Ins: Change and Continuity -- Why Greensboro? Why 1960?**
- 11/9: Black Revolution and the March on Washington Coalition—Recovering Suppressed Voices**
- 11/14: Vietnam and American Memory -- Exploring Film and Oral History**
- 11/16: Incident at Son My: The Load of Responsibility**
- 11/22: Final Paper Commitment and Preliminary Bibliography, No Class**
- 11/24: Thanksgiving break**
- 11/21: Strategizing Final Research Papers Due December 7– Class Discussion and Individual Paper Conferences**
- 11/29: Last day— Student Reports on Findings, or What the Rest of Us Don't Know Yet!**
- 12/7: 6:30 PM, Final Paper is due on Canvas**