

HIS-508
SAVAGE EDEN:
DUELING HISTORIES OF THE NEW WORLD AFTER 1492

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Welcome! This course explores “the history of the histories” of the New World that appeared in the aftermath of the great Columbian encounter of 1492: chronicles, accounts, and other texts purporting to tell the history of the American continent and its peoples, often in distinct and strikingly contradictory ways. In addition to the histories written by Europeans struggling to understand America and incorporate it into their pre-existing concepts of global history, we will also emphasize less familiar, recently recovered accounts produced by Native Americans and their descendants.

In doing so, we will contemplate “the politics of history”: how and why history—understood as recorded accounts of the past—is often deployed in service to contemporary political and social agendas. Far from a static and unchanging repository of facts, history is always changing, evolving, and adapting to fit the needs of new generations. Depending on the perspectives and emphases of its authors, history can be used to justify violence and to protest inequality; to denigrate others or demand inclusion; or to create divisions or inspire unity. History can rationalize present misery, but it can also be a means to imagine better futures. The many Spanish, indigenous, and mixed-heritage men and women who debated, wrote, and re-wrote the history of the New World all pursued some combination of these diverse objections, and what we today understand as “American history” reflects their efforts to a significant degree.



Two European portrayals of Native Americans, called “Indians”: children of nature, savage cannibals. From Theodore de Bry, sixteenth-century.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In History courses, we stress the students' ability to "Think in Time," which includes the following learning objectives:

- Historical Comprehension: Analyze historical duration, succession, and changes in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures.
- Historical Analysis: Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view.
- Historical Research: Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources.
- Historical Interpretation: Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is no textbook for this class. Instead, most readings will be posted on the course website in pdf format, or will be available online via the university library. The rest are listed below. **All readings are mandatory.** Students are encouraged to print out online readings for classroom discussions, or otherwise have them accessible electronically during class.

There are three texts required for purchase from the UNCG bookstore or elsewhere:

- 1) Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, translated by Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).
- 2) *The Native Conquistador: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Account of the Conquest of New Spain*, edited and translated by Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, and Pablo García Loaeza (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015).
- 3) Lisa Sousa, Stafford Poole, and James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *The Story of Guadalupe: Luis Laso de la Vega's Huei tlamahuiçoltica* of 1649 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Graded work includes class participation and attendance, one oral presentation introducing and contextualizing a primary source, and a longer formal essay addressing the texts encountered throughout the semester. Grading and responsibilities vary somewhat between undergraduate and graduate students in this course. Undergraduates will produce short weekly written assignments, while graduate students must complete additional readings, two exercises on the philosophy of history, and a slightly longer final project.

<u>Undergraduates</u>		<u>Graduates</u>	
Attendance	10%	Attendance	10%
Participation	20%	Participation	20%
Weekly position papers	20%	Two reflection papers	20%
Class presentation	10%	Class presentation	10%
Final project	40%	Final project	40%

A = fulfills assignment entirely while amply demonstrating **original insight and reflection**
B = fulfills assignment entirely and thoughtfully
C = mostly fulfills assignment, but without originality (e.g., merely echoes the instructor)
D = partially incomplete, or betrays non-comprehension of theme or issue
F = severely incomplete, irrelevant, plagiarized, or never turned in

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

As this is a small seminar meeting only once a week, full attendance and participation is essential to its success. Understanding that illnesses and life events are unavoidable, I allow students one “free” absence, but I will subtract 20 points (from 100 total) for each subsequent absence beyond that. I reserve the right to drop students who miss more than three meetings, as well as any who miss two in a row. Missing any one class does not release students from their written and oral responsibilities. In addition, since it is disrupting, I will subtract 5 points for excessive or habitual lateness.

Class participation includes attentiveness, preparation, and engagement. Students do not have to speak constantly, but they should contribute to each class meeting in some way. Each week I will evaluate student participation as either (S)atisfactory or (U)nsatisfactory. The final participation grade is calculated as S/12 (the number of Satisfactory ratings divided by the number of required class meetings).

WEEKLY POSITION PAPERS (Undergraduates)

Each week undergraduate students must submit a brief “position paper” summarizing and reflecting upon the required readings for that week. This includes precursory information about the author(s) and the content of the text, along with a preliminary analysis of the text’s rhetorical and historiographical purpose or “agenda.” What point is it making, and in what debate?

Specifically, students should answer the following questions in a paragraph or two, and submit them to me at the beginning of each class:

- *who wrote/produced the text, and when?*
- *why did s/he write the text, and for whom?*
- *what is the “overt” (explicit) argument, and how does the author/thinker arrive at it?*
- *what is the “covert,” or underlying argument, and how can we know?*
- *Ultimately, what is the portrayal of native peoples? Of Europeans? Of colonial society?*

THOUGHT EXERCISES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (Graduates)

Twice during the semester graduate students must complete a short reading—the first on “the philosophy of history” and the second on recent developments in the historiography of Latin America. Then they will produce short written reflections (2-3 pages) on the philosophy of history in response to the readings and to questions I will pose.

FINAL PROJECTS

Undergraduates: At the end of the semester, students must produce a formal essay of about 10 pages, in response to the following question, with copious examples drawn explicitly from course readings: *how do the social positions and/or agendas of subjects in colonial Latin America affect their particular representations of history?* Put another way, *how do written histories reflect the social circumstances and contemporary concerns of their authors?*

Graduates: Graduates must produce a final paper of 12-15 pages. They can choose to complete the same assignment described above, OR they may choose a single text, theme, and/or polemic from the class, in consultation with me, and explore it in greater depth.

STANDARDS AND POLICIES FOR WRITTEN WORK

As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. I expect the essays to meet basic university writing standards, especially regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check everything, as clarity and quality will affect your grade. All work should be typed in 12-pt New Times Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around. **I do not accept electronic submissions or late submissions.** All written work should adhere to Chicago-Style citation and formatting, explained here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Take special care not to plagiarize. Plagiarism – when you quote or paraphrase somebody else’s words or ideas without crediting him or her – is the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. **Every word you write in this class must be your own, not copied from any other source, whether in print or online,** unless clearly indicated. If in doubt, ask! The UNCG Academic Integrity Policy is online at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>. I will fail any student who has plagiarized, and report him or her to the dean.

CLASS WEBSITE AND EMAIL

You must have a working email address, and check it regularly, as it is the main means of communication out of class. I will send reminders, assignments, and announcements regularly.

The website on Canvas will also play a major role. I will post the mandatory readings, topics for short assignments, study questions, links, and other materials necessary to perform well. Occasionally, I will also use the website to follow up on themes covered in lectures and discussions, and respond to student questions. **You should check the website regularly for updates.**

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

In this course we will often discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, imperialism, exploitation, and immigration. We will also see and read primary materials representing archaic and (frankly) offensive perspectives. As they are part of our history

(whether we like it or not), we will not censor or ignore them, and students should be prepared to address them directly and in a mature, academic fashion.

In discussions, we will not always agree with one another, yet we welcome diverse interpretations, as a discussion where everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, unlikely to be enlightening. We aim to foster an atmosphere in which all students feel free to express their ideas, and in which we can disagree and challenge one another openly without feeling threatened or disrespected. Thus, **personal attacks and offensive language will not be tolerated**, since they obstruct honest debate. A good rule to keep in mind: **when challenging another's arguments, try to do so in a way that assumes good faith on his or her part.** Address the strongest aspects of his or her ideas, not a cartoonish, simplistic, and easily dismissed version of them. This rule has the added benefit of requiring each of us to think harder and question our own assumptions.