

History 180
Proseminar: What is History?

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Humanities 214
Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-4:30; Thursdays 11-12

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Rationale

This course provides an introduction to historical writing and interpretation. Through the analysis and discussion of a sampling of recent and important books by historians, class participants will engage with the following questions: How do historians choose their topics of study? What is the relationship between evidence and interpretation? To what extent does a historian's perspective shape the way in which evidence is treated, or even determine what might be legitimately taken as historical fact? Is there more than one way to look at an event or experience in the past, or to decide what is recognized as "history?" How might such questions complicate commonly held assumptions about the objectivity of history?

Learning Objectives

- to appreciate the aims and varieties of historical interpretation
- to understand and critique historical arguments
- to articulate clearly the arguments of works of historical interpretation in a group discussion setting
- to articulate clearly the arguments of works of historical interpretation in written assignments

Assessment of Objectives/Course Requirements

Appreciate aims of historical interpretation/understand and critique historical arguments/articulate arguments in a group discussion setting: The course will be conducted as a seminar. Students will be expected to obtain the books listed below; to read them carefully before the class meeting devoted to their discussion; and to participate consistently and constructively in discussion.

Understand and critique historical arguments/articulate arguments of works in written assignments: 1) Students will be required to submit at each seminar session a two-page summary of the week's reading. While assessment of the reading is welcome—and, indeed, cannot be separated from summarization—it should be understood that the primary purpose of the weekly writing assignments is to demonstrate control of the argument and structure of the readings. Instructors will provide comments and evaluations, but no letter grades, for these assignments.

2) In consultation with the instructors, students will write a 15-page review essay focusing on four to five books related to a common theme, historical perspective, or historical debate. Concluding class sessions will be devoted to student presentations of their papers. Papers are due Wednesday, May 13.

Quantitative assessment: 30% seminar participation; 30% weekly written summaries; 40% final paper.

Books

The following books are required reading and available for purchase at Huntley Bookstore. Feel free to make other arrangements to obtain these books, but make sure to verify that your editions match those noted below. Full citations of assigned books can be found at the online 5-C's Course Schedule.

- 1) John Demos, Entertaining Satan, Oxford University Press
- 2) Martha Hodes, White Women, Black Men, Yale
- 3) Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards, California
- 4) David Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, Princeton
- 5) Joan Scott, Politics of the Veil, Princeton
- 6) Daniel Smail, On Deep History and the Brain, California
- 7) Neil Smith, American Empire, California
- 8) Jonathan Spence, The Question of Hu, Vintage
- 9) Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past, Beacon
- 10) Andrew Zimmerman, Alabama in Africa, Princeton

Schedule of Classes

Jan 19: Interviews with Natalie Davis and Joan Scott (on Sakai)

Jan 26: Trouillot

Feb 2: Najmabadi

Feb 9: Demos

Feb16: Hodes

Feb 23: Zimmerman: Professor Zimmerman will come to class today

Feb. 24, 4:15 p.m., Vita Nova Lecture Hall: "Primitive Art, Primitive Accumulation, and the Origin of the Work of Art in German New Guinea"

Mar 2: Nirenberg

Mar 9: Smail

Mar 16: Spring Break—No class

Mar 23: Final paper topic proposals due: individual conferences TBA

Mar 30: Smith

Apr 6: Spence

April 13: Scott

April 20: Paper presentations

April 27: Paper presentations

May 4: Capstone Day—No class