

**HIST 305-001: The Renaissance**  
**George Mason University, Spring 2023**  
**M W 10:30-11:45 am in Innovation Hall 132**

**Instructor: Rob Pierce**

**Office: Enterprise 125**

**Office Hours: MW 9:00-10:15 am, 12:00pm – 1:00pm, and by appointment**

**Telephone: 703-993-1574 (my office)**

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**Required reading:**

Kenneth Bartlett, ed., *The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

ISBN 978-1-4426-0485-8

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

ISBN: 988-0-14-044915-0

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy*

ISBN: 978-0-19-955555-0

Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*

ISBN: 0-8371-5821-4

And other readings as assigned.

**Schedule of assignments** (reading to be completed before class):

Week 1 (Jan. 23): Bartlett, chapter 1

Week 2 (Jan. 30): Bartlett, chapter 2

Week 3 (Feb. 6): Bartlett, chapter 3, **1<sup>st</sup> in-class essay (Feb. 8)**

Week 4 (Feb. 13): Bartlett, chapter 4

Week 5 (Feb. 20): **1<sup>st</sup> paper due (Feb. 22)**

Week 6 (Feb. 27): Bartlett, chapter 5

Week 7 (Mar. 6): Bartlett, chapter 6, **2<sup>nd</sup> in-class essay (Mar. 8)**

Week 8 **March 13-19: SPRING BREAK**

Week 9 (Mar. 20); Bartlett, chapter 7

Week 10 (Mar. 27): Bartlett, chapter 8

Week 11 (Apr. 3): **2<sup>nd</sup> paper due (Apr. 5)**

Week 12 (Apr. 10): Bartlett, chapter 9, **3<sup>rd</sup> in-class essay (Apr. 12)**

Week 13 (Apr. 17): Bartlett, chapter 10

Week 14 (Apr. 24): Bartlett, chapter 11

Week 15 (May 1): Bartlett, chapter 12, **Crosby quiz, May 1; 4<sup>th</sup> in-class essay (May 3)**

**FINAL EXAM: May 10 10:30am-1:00pm**

### **Goals of the course:**

1. To introduce students to the most recent research on the European Renaissance of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries and to help them understand the major issues and debates among contemporary historians.
2. To help students understand that historical reconstructions of the past—which are what we call history—are not necessarily the same thing as everything that happened in the past. History, which has to be constructed and put in a narrative form, is thus an interpretation of the past.
3. To help students also understand that historical truth is neither absolute nor arbitrary. Though no single fixed historical truth exists, all historical interpretations vary in validity.

### **Writing assignments and exams:**

The course has a final exam, four in-class essays, two papers (5-8 pp. typed and double-spaced, to be written outside class) and one quiz. The exam will be largely essay type, but I will say more about the exams in class. Topics for the two papers are outlined below, and the papers will be due at the beginning of class on February 22 and April 12. The assignments for these papers will be thoroughly discussed in class, and they should be handed in on time in hard copy and electronically. Late papers will be accepted, but they will be penalized, usually one full letter grade for each calendar day late unless I approve an extension, which I will do for valid and documented excuses (such as an extended illness). **Both papers must be completed to get credit for the course.** And finally, I may have some unannounced in-class reading quizzes to ensure that students are keeping up with the reading, if necessary. These quizzes will be averaged in with the class participation portion of the final grade.

### **Attendance:**

All students are expected to attend every class meeting, as you are responsible for everything covered in class. If you must miss class, you do not need to inform me. You should, however, find out from someone who was there what was covered in the class you missed. Class participation is important, and you cannot participate if you are absent. Participation is especially important on days of class discussion, all of which will be announced well in advance. The roll will be called promptly at 10:30 am, so if you are not present when the roll is called, you will be marked absent, even if you come in late.

Weekly readings are due prior to class on Mondays. You must read all of the introductory material to the chapters as well as the primary sources. You must know them well and be prepared to discuss them. As noted above, I may have some unannounced in-class reading quizzes to ensure that students are keeping up with the reading, if necessary.

The four-in-class essays you must write in a blue book (that you provide). The essay time period will be the opening 45 minutes of the class period on the day that the essay will be written.

**Grading:**

Crosby quiz:	5%
Class participation	20%
Two papers	30%
Four in-class essays	30%
Final exam	15%

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A	93.00 – 100%
A-	89.50 – 92.99%
B+	87.00 – 89.49%
B	83.00 – 86.99%
B-	80.00 – 82.99%
C+	77.00 – 79.99%
C	73.00 – 76.99%
C-	70.00 – 72.99%
D	60.00 – 69.99%
F	0 – 59.99%

**Class rules:**

- \* Come to class on time and come prepared.
- \* Eating is not allowed in the classroom.
- \* Use of the Internet and cell phones is not allowed during class (no email, texting, etc.). So, please keep your desks clear of all cell phones. Laptops and tablets may only be used if I permit you. You may not use computers to take notes.
- \* I must report any form of plagiarism or cheating to the university Honor Committee.
- \* Unless I make an exception in advance, the only acceptable reason for missing a scheduled, in-class assessment is for medical reasons, and you must show me a note from a medical professional indicating that you were medically unfit to attend class (the note should NOT provide any details about your medical condition but merely indicate that you should be medically excused on the day in question).

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## HIST 305: Spring 2023

### FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: Due Tuesday, February 22, 2023

#### Digital Research on the Internet: Florence *Catasto* of 1427-29

Thoroughly explore the following web site, which is a digital version of the *Catasto*, or census, taken in the Renaissance city of Florence in 1427-29. The *Catasto* lists every head of household by name, trade, neighborhood, real property holdings, amount of tax assessment, age, number of children, animals owned, etc. In other words, this document provides a very detailed overview of the socio-economic make-up of Renaissance Florence, from the rich and famous such as the Medici family, right down to the poorest beggar. First, thoroughly explore the web site making sure you examine all the links. Yes, the web site looks old-fashioned. It is one of the first web sites ever designed, and its look has not been updated. However, all the information you need for your essay is on this site:

<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/catasto/overview.html>

After exploring the site, you will want to print out the *Catasto*' Codebook, which you will need to decipher your data (it is located on the “**Search the Catasto**” link). Now you are ready to get started:

1. Go to the link listing all the family names (last names) in the city. Select one family with at least 15 different households listed on the *Catasto*, which includes several dozen such family names to choose from on the list.
2. Then go to the link “**Search the Catasto with a form-based interface to the SQL server.**” Now type in the family name you have chosen in the top right-hand field. Leave all the other fields blank.
3. Now select (highlight) *all* the variables listed under “Return the following fields.” Make sure that “name” appears in the “Sort by” box, and that “patronymic” (father’s name) appears in the “Sub-sort by” box. Limit the result set to 60 records (very few families have more than 60 households anyway). Then click on “**Submit.**” You should get a huge table, listing each head of household on a separate line. You’ll need the Codebook to decode many of the variables.
4. You should also go to the “**On-line Tratte of Officeholders**” link (found among “Related Resources”). Find out as much as you can about your family members from this large database (types and numbers of offices they held, when they held them, etc.). If your family held any civic offices in Florence, you might be able to put together a basic family tree by combining the information in the two databases.

Analyze carefully the data you have retrieved from the *Catasto* and the *Tratte*. You are to write a 5-8 pp. essay (typed and double-spaced with normal margins and 12-point font) that gives as detailed a picture of your chosen family as possible. Make sure you answer all the following questions in your essay, integrating them into one coherent essay. The questions can be answered in any order, as long as you answer all of them, and *you should try to organize your essay around the most important or most interesting aspect of your chosen family*:

1. Where did your family live in the city?
2. How many owned rather than rented their property? Did they own any animals?
3. What trades or occupations did they practice?
4. How large were the households in this family?
5. Were they wealthy or poor? How can you tell? How did their wealth compare to the rest of the city? To the rest of their neighborhood (Location)?
6. Were they young or old?
7. How many households were headed by women? How were their households different from those headed by men in the family?
8. How many were officeholders and how long had they held these offices?
9. How important was this family, do you think, to the city in terms of wealth and status?
10. What did you learn from this web site that you could not get from just reading a book or article about Renaissance Florence, or just by Googling “Renaissance Florence”?

*You are to use no sources for this essay other than the Catasto and Tratte on the web site. And since all this information is on the web site, you will not need any footnotes or references of any kind.*

Hard copies of all essays will be due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, February 22. They should be written in correct and elegant English. Remember that no difference exists between style and content: how you say something is part of the message you are sending. Late papers without a documented excuse approved by me in advance will be penalized one full letter grade for each calendar day late.

**PLEASE NOTE:** You must turn in this essay in order to get credit for the course.

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**HIST 305: Spring 2023**

**SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: Due Wednesday, April 5, 2023**

**The Political Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli**

After a careful reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and selections from *The Discourses on Livy* (Book 1, ch. 1-60; Book 2, ch. 1-15 and 19-23; Book 3, ch. 1-9, 24-35, and 40-49), please answer the following questions in a 5-8 pp. essay (typed and double-spaced with normal margins and 12-point font). You may organize your essay in any form you wish and answer the questions in any order you like. But all the answers must be integrated into one essay.

1. Many scholars have suggested that Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy* provide contrary advice to their respective readers, offering one set of principles for princes and another for republics. He clearly favored republics as a better form of government, even if most Italian city-states in his day were in fact governed by princes. Nevertheless, he stressed a number of common themes in the two works. Discuss and analyze each of the themes below *in both works*, with relevant citations to each in the form of references or footnotes. In other words, discuss what the two works shared in common in terms of political ideas.

- a. *virtù* vs. *fortuna*
- b. a citizen army
- c. *Salus populi suprema lex esto.*

2. Why has Machiavelli been so misunderstood historically as a champion of deceit and deception, being typically depicted as arguing that the ends always justified the means in any political calculation? And how does a reading of *The Discourses on Livy* undermine this view?

***You are to use no outside sources whatsoever. Use only the readings noted above.*** Most of what is on the internet concerning Machiavelli is historically inaccurate. Moreover, you should document your essays with ***numerous*** references to the two texts in order to support your conclusions. Although you can use formal footnotes or endnotes if you wish, you can simply put page numbers in parentheses if you are using the class editions. Hard copies of all essays will be due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, April 5. They should be written in correct and elegant English. Remember that no difference exists between style and content: how you say something is part of the message you are sending. Late papers without a documented excuse approved by me in advance will be penalized one full letter grade for each calendar day late.

**PLEASE NOTE:** You must turn in this essay in order to get credit for the course.

Week 1: Introduction to the Renaissance  
Week 2: Dante  
Week 3: Petrarch  
Week 4: Florence  
Week 5: Other major states  
Week 6: Humanism  
Week 7: Neoplatonism and mysticism  
Week 8: Spring Break  
Week 9: Marriage, family, and women  
Week 10: Art and architecture  
Week 11: The Renaissance and Science  
Week 12: Learning and Education  
Week 13: Church and papacy  
Week 14: Life in Renaissance Italy  
Week 15: The Late Italian Renaissance