

The Study and Writing of History

Professor Michael Chang

Horizon Hall 3151

Office hrs: MW 10:30 – 11 am; by appt on Zoom

Course time and location:

4:30-7:10 pm ET on Wednesdays

Innovation Hall 316

Course Description: This course differs from most other history courses in that it does *not* concentrate upon a specific geographic region or historical period, nor upon a particular social, political, or cultural topic. Instead, it focuses on historiography, or “the history of history,” and is intended to introduce graduate students to the major theories, methodologies, and problems of historical analysis and interpretation.

We will begin with a survey of key institutional and intellectual developments that have informed the practice of history as an academic discipline from the late nineteenth century to the present. Then we will closely analyze a number of recognized works (all from the twentieth-century) that exemplify important shifts in how historians (and some non-historians) have conceptualized processes of historical change, selected and interpreted the available evidence, and constructed narratives of the past. Finally, we will read and discuss a few more recently published titles that represent current trends (and perhaps future directions) in the production and presentation of historical knowledge.

Throughout the semester, we will explore some important and often overlapping themes, such as the nature and purpose of historical inquiry, the relationship between academic and popular approaches to history, the challenges of writing the history of people who left few sources of their own, and the ways in which history as a field has been implicated in the shaping and reinforcing of power relationships in the modern world. Students will also be encouraged to develop their own views about how *and why* approaches to the study and writing of history have changed over time.

Required Texts:

1. *Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983; second rev. ed. 1991; [third] rev. edition, Verso, 2006 and 2016.
2. Beckert, Sven. *The Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. New York: Knopf, 2014; paperback ed., Vintage, 2015.
3. Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume 1*. 1949; second rev. ed. 1966. Trans. by Siân Reynolds, 1972. Reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
4. Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. 1983; 20th anniversary ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
5. *Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1975. Trans. by Alan Sheridan, 1977. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 1995.
6. Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. 1976. Trans. by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, 1980. Reprint, Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
7. Maza, Sarah C. *Thinking About History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
8. *Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. 1991. New edition. London: Verso, 2007. Fourth edition. London: Verso, 2022.
9. *Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. 1988; Revised edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; 30th Anniversary edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
10. Satia, Priya. *Time's Monster: How History Makes History*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020.
11. *Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. 1995. 20th anniversary ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 2015.

Note: Book titles (above) and readings in the course schedule (below) marked by a **single blue asterisk (*)** are accessible online via Blackboard or the University Libraries catalog. <http://library.gmu.edu/>

All other titles above may be purchased at the campus bookstore. Used copies may also be found on <http://bookfinder.com>

Grading Scale:

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	59 or less	F
94-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-93	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

Requirements & Grading: You must complete (that is, demonstrate serious engagement with) every requirement in order to receive a passing grade. The instructor reserves the final right to determine what constitutes "completion" of a requirement.

Note: Calculations of cumulative course grades that appear in Blackboard are not necessarily correctly "weighted" and thus do not accurately reflect one's overall standing in the course. If you would like to know your overall course grade at any point in the semester, please contact the instructor via e-mail.

1. **Class Participation (27%):** *Active and informed participation in discussion is a major component of this seminar.* Our meetings will consist almost entirely of discussion of the assigned readings or exercises related to those readings, so it's essential that you do the reading beforehand and come to class prepared to discuss it.

Collective discussion is an important means of generating insights, raising new questions, and deepening or clarifying one's own understanding about any given historical work under consideration, especially in graduate level courses like HIST 610. Classes are more enjoyable and intellectually rewarding when as many people as possible consistently contribute to the conversation. Participating in scholarly discussions, in and of itself, is a learned skill, and working on this skill is an important part of this course. As such, regular and constructive contributions to our weekly discussions are a minimal expectation for the class.

Please see the "Tips for Reading and Discussion" section on Blackboard (left side of page) for a useful place to start the process of thinking through the reading and preparing for in-class discussions.

2. **Short Analysis Papers (28%):** Over the course of the semester, you must submit seven (7) "short analysis" papers, each worth 4% of your overall course grade. Each paper should be about two- to three-pages long (600-900 words) and should concisely analyze the assigned reading for a particular week. You may write about any of the assigned readings for Weeks 3-13 (eleven weeks total). The specific weeks/readings for which you submit your short analysis papers are up to you and don't have to be decided upon in advance; just make sure that you submit seven short analysis papers in total. (You may not write a short analysis paper for Maza's *Thinking About History* [Week 2], which is itself a historiographical survey. Please also note that an additional week will be taken up by the extended review essay [see below] and that you may not write a short analysis paper for that week.)

The short analysis papers should focus on summarizing the reading's **method, argument, and significance**. You should not try to provide an exhaustive account of the reading's contents or specific arguments but rather (1) characterize the key points in an accurate but concise manner, (2) highlight what is interesting, distinctive, and important about the reading, focusing in particular on the methods through which the author develops analyses or advances arguments, and (3) connect the reading to larger historiographic themes. (On this last point, it may be helpful to regularly refer back to Maza's *Thinking About History*.)

Please make sure to focus these short analysis papers on **substantive intellectual and interpretive issues** rather than on more superficial matters of aesthetics, accessibility, or format (e.g., there were too many big words, it was boring, more maps or illustrations would have been useful, or footnotes would have been better than endnotes).

Remember, the purpose of writing these short papers is not to express a subjective opinion of whether you liked a book or not, nor is it to help an imagined reader decide whether she might want to read the book under consideration. Instead, your main task is to do the best that you can to concisely explain and assess the book's method and its significance in a scholarly and academic context.

These short papers are due by 2:30 pm ET on the day that we discuss the reading (2 hours before class). Please use the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard site (left side) to upload your short analysis papers.

3. **Extended Review Essay (20%):** On a week of your own choosing (between Weeks 3-13), you must submit an extended analysis of the assigned reading for that week. Please remember, as with the short analysis papers, Maza's *Thinking About History* (Week 2) is not eligible for review.

This extended analysis should be seven- to eight-pages long (2100-2400 words). It should not be a chapter-by-chapter or paragraph-by-paragraph description or summary of the reading's contents. Instead, it should be a detailed analysis of the argument and method, examining the key evidence and themes (or concepts) used to develop the main argument while also discussing the broader historiographical significance of the work. (Here it may be helpful to search for academic reviews and articles in the journal literature [on JSTOR, Project MUSE, etc.] to see how and in what contexts the work is cited and mentioned by other scholars.)

The extended review essay is due by 2:30 pm ET on the day we discuss the reading (2 hours before class). Please use the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard site (left side) to upload your extended review essay.

Note: Although this assignment is more straightforward for individual books, you are welcome to write on one of the weeks for which a collection of articles has been assigned (i.e., Week 4 or 9). The basic task of doing so, however, is more complicated because you will need to discuss the articles as a group (what important ideas, approaches, or orientations they have in common) while also providing some specific analysis of the argument and significance for each article individually.

4. **Final Paper (25%):** Your main task for the final paper is to synthesize and examine what we have done this semester by writing an 18-20 page paper (5400-6000 words) using the works that we have read to illustrate and explain the major developments in historiography (the major changes in the study and writing of history) over the course of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. (For the major developments and some of main themes of the course, see the "Course Description" above.)

Please note that the assigned readings for this course are both *examples* of these changes and (in some cases) *accounts* of those changes—that is, they explain previous modes of historical analysis and interpretation as part of their argument for why new modes might be necessary and productive. You should try to utilize and incorporate both aspects of the assigned readings when writing your final essay.

The Final Paper is due via Blackboard by 11:59 pm ET on Sat. 12/9/2023. No late work will be accepted. Please use the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard site (left side of page) to upload your Final Paper.

Course Policies, Reminders, and Helpful Tips

a) Basic technology requirements: This is face-to-face course. However, asynchronous work will take place primarily on Blackboard, while live (in-person) classes will meet weekly on Wednesdays (and, if necessary, on the Zoom platform). For more details please see “What Technologies Do I Need?” on the “Start Here: Welcome” page of the Blackboard course site.

b) Class absences: Students are expected to attend all meetings of the course. In the event that you must miss class, you are responsible for the contents of the lecture or discussion. **Students are expected to come to class on time.** Late arrivals are disruptive, and late-comers may miss important information.

c) Cell phones and laptop computers: During class all phones must be switched off and put away. Neither students nor instructors should compose, read, or respond to text messages during class. Students who wish to use a laptop computer for note-taking are welcome to do so. However, students who use laptops for purposes other than taking notes (i.e., email, instant messaging, internet browsing unrelated to the course) will be asked to leave and will no longer be permitted to use a computer in class. Violation of these policies will result in a significant reduction in your course participation grade.

d) Submission of written work: All written work is due at the time(s) and on the day(s) indicated on the syllabus. All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and in a 12-point font. Your name should be on the paper, and all pages should be numbered. You should retain electronic copies of all written work, and your instructor may ask for an electronic copy of your paper in order to use it as an example in teaching or to submit to a plagiarism detection site like Turnitin.com.

e) Late policy: All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the deadlines for course assignments. Late work will be penalized **HALF A LETTER GRADE (5 pts.) per day (including weekends & holidays)**. The only exceptions will be when you have explicit, advance permission from your instructor. If you anticipate a problem in completing or submitting your work on time, you must contact the instructor in a timely manner. If you do not hear back from your instructor, you should assume that your work is due on the original date. Regardless of whether or not you have been granted an extension, you must contact your instructor for how to submit late work. Late assignments will not be considered as “received” until a copy is in the instructor’s hands. **No late work will be accepted for the final assignment.**

f) Plagiarism: Don’t do it. It’s easy to spot & can result in expulsion from the University and loss of degree. **What is plagiarism?** As noted by the American Historical Association (AHA), “Writers plagiarize... when they fail to use quotation marks around borrowed material and to cite the source, use an inadequate paraphrase that makes only superficial changes to a text, or neglect to cite the source of a paraphrase.” For details see pgs. 3-4 of this document: [http://www.historians.org/Documents/Plagiarism/Curriculum Plagiarism.pdf](http://www.historians.org/Documents/Plagiarism/Curriculum%20Plagiarism.pdf) If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or about when or how to properly cite a source, talk to your instructor before you write!

g) Academic accommodations. If you are a student with a documented condition that warrants academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. **All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS** (<http://ods.gmu.edu/>). Additional support may be obtained through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <http://caps.gmu.edu>

h) Recording and distribution of class materials: Any audio or visual recording by students of class meetings or other class activities is allowed only under terms and conditions as approved by the University’s Office of Disability Services (ODS). If you are entitled to audio or visual recording through ODS, please communicate with me before any recording occurs. Such a recordings may only be used for personal use, unless I authorize use by other students in the course. Recordings and course material may not be reproduced or exchanged or distributed. At the end of the semester, you are required to destroy any recordings made in this course.

i) Electronic communication. It is best to contact me at mchang5[at]gmu[dot]edu. I usually check email during normal business hours, namely M-F, 9 am-5 pm. Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply to an email request or inquiry (excluding weekends). Please sure to indicate your course number in your email subject line and include both your first and last name in your signature. For general advice on the best way to communicate via email, see: <http://web.wellesley.edu/SocialComputing/Netiquette/netiquetteprofessor.html>

j) Academic integrity: All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code (<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>) All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review.

k) Administrative deadlines

Last day to add classes: M 8/28/2023

Last day to drop (50% tuition refund): T 9/12/2023

Last day to drop w/out tuition penalty: T 9/5/2023

Unrestricted withdraw period (no tuition refund): W 9/13/2023 – T 9/26/2023

l) Final disclaimer: This syllabus is subject to revision as the semester proceeds. Announcements of changes will be made online and during class meetings. Students are responsible for being aware of any changes.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 00 (Fri. 8/18/2023 – Tue. 8/22/2023): Course Orientation

Do: Check basic tech set-up, activate your Mason Zoom Basic account, and verify access to required books

Read: “Assignments,” “Discussion Board,” and “Tips for Reading and Discussion” sections of Blackboard site (left side).

Week 01 (Wed. 8/23/2023): Course Introduction—What Do Historians Do?

Post a brief self-introduction by 11:59 pm ET on Tue. 8/22/2023

*[American Historical Association, “Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct” \(updated January 2023\).](#)

Week 02 (Wed. 8/30/2023): Reviewing the Range of Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Sarah C. Maza, *Thinking About History*.

Week 03 (Wed. 9/6/2023): The *Annales* School and the *Longue Durée*

Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.

Please read: Table of Contents for Vol. 1 (5-10)

*Table of Contents for Vol. 2 (649-653) [available on Blackboard]

Preface to the English edition; Preface to the second edition; Preface to the first edition (13-22)

Part I:I The Peninsulas: Mountains, Plateaux, and Plains (23-102)

Part I:II The Heart of the Mediterranean: Seas and Coasts (103-167)

Part II:I.1 Economies: The Measure of the Century—Distance, the First Enemy (353-374 and 387-394)

Part II:II Precious Metals, Money, and Prices (462-542)

*v. 2 Part II: VIII By Way of Conclusion: Conjuncture and Conjunctures (892-900) [available on Blackboard]

*v. 2 Part III: Events, Politics and People (901-903) [available on Blackboard]

*v. 2 Conclusion (1238-1244) [available on Blackboard]

Week 04 (Wed. 9/13/2023): E.P. [Edward Palmer] Thompson and the Development of Marxist Approaches

*E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56-97.

*E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century,” *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 76-136.

*Geoff Eley, “Chapter 2: Optimism,” in *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005): 13-60.

Optional reading:

*Walter L. Adamson, “Chapter 10: Marxism and Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, eds. Lloyd S. Cramer and Sarah C. Maza (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002): 205-222.

Week 05 (Wed. 9/20/2023): (Italian) Microhistory, Culture, and Meaning(s)

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*.

Week 06 (Wed. 9/27/2023): The Emergence of Environmental and Ecological History

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*.

-start by first reading the “Afterword” (171-185) of the 20th Anniversary edition (2003),

-then read the “Forward” by John Demos (xi-xiii) as well as the “Bibliographic Essay” (223-251).

Week 07 (Wed. 10/4/2023): Nationalism(s), a Global Perspective—Circulation of a Cultural Idea

*Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

Please also read “Travel and Traffic: On the Geo-biography of *Imagined Communities*” (207-229) in the new edition (Verso, 2006).

Week 08 (Wed. 10/11/2023): Foucault, Power/Knowledge and Discourse—Rise of the New Cultural History

*Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

Optional reading:

*Jeffrey Weeks, “Foucault for Historians.” *History Workshop* No. 14 (Autumn 1982): 106-119.

Week 09 (Wed. 10/18/2023): Interrogating Gender and Race

*Joan W. Scott. *Gender and the Politics of History*. Revised edition (1999).

-*Preface to the Thirtieth Anniversary Edition (ix-xvi), Columbia UP, 2018 [[available on Blackboard](#)]

-Introduction (1-11)

-Chapter 2, Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis (28-50)

*Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 143-177. [[available on Blackboard](#)]

Week 10 (Wed. 10/25/2023): Historicizing the Intersection of Race and Class Formation

*David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*.

Week 11 (Wed. 11/1/2023): Knowledge Production and Historical Narratives

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

Week 12 (Wed. 11/8/2023): Commodity History, Labor Regimes, and Global Capitalism

Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*.

Week 13 (Wed. 11/15/2023): Postcolonialism—Critiques of (Western) Master Narratives and the Colonial Project

*Prasenjit Duara, "Chapter 21: Postcolonial History," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, eds. Lloyd S. Cramer and Sarah C. Maza (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002): 417-431.

Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History*.

Week 14 (Wed. 11/22/2023): THANKSGIVING BREAK (Wed. 11/22/2023 – Sun. 11/26/2023) – NO CLASS

-Catch up on reading, sleep, etc. and review the guidelines for the Final Paper (see page 3 above).

Week 15 (Wed. 11/29/2023): TBD

During the semester, we will discuss options for this final meeting and select a topic and readings in accordance with the class's collective preferences and needs.

Exam Period: Wed. 12/6/2023 – Wed. 12/13/2023

FINAL PAPER DUE (via Blackboard) by 11:59 p.m. ET on Sat. 12/9/2023. *No late work will be accepted.*

Please use the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard site (left side of page) to upload your Final Paper.