

George Mason University
Department of History and Art History

Spring 2024
Wednesday, 7:20-10:00 PM
Innovation Hall, 316
Office Hours: M 10:30-11:30, W 4-5:30, and by appointment

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HISTORY 610-001: THE STUDY AND WRITING OF HISTORY

This course is different from most other history courses in that it does not focus on a particular geographic region, a particular historical era, or a particular social, political, or cultural topic. Instead, its subject is what is referred to as historiography, or “the history of history.” It examines modern trends, theories, methodologies, and problems in historical analysis as a means of introducing graduate students to the academic practice of history. These rather lofty goals mean that the course operates at a higher level of abstraction and theoretical self-consciousness than most other history courses. This can take some getting used to, but the payoff is a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of what it means to do history and why it is important.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Class Participation:

Active and informed participation in discussion is **the** central element of the course. Our meetings will consist almost entirely of discussion of the assigned readings or exercises related to those readings, so it is essential that you do the reading and come prepared to discuss it. You can use the resources in the “Reference and Resources” section of the Blackboard site as a way to get started on thinking through the reading.

Discussion serves as a way of exploring and thinking about historical works and questions that gives us a more complete and complex understanding than any single point of view can provide. Classes are more enjoyable and intellectually rewarding for everyone when as many people as possible contribute. Participating in scholarly discussions of this type is a skill in and of itself, and working on this skill is part of the purpose of the course. Thus, regular, constructive contributions to discussion are a baseline expectation for the class.

“Weekly” Short Analysis:

Over the course of the semester, you must write six (6) one- to two-page papers concisely analyzing the reading for a particular week. (Page-length guidelines are based on double-spacing and a 12-point font, which means roughly 300-600 words is the goal.) The specific weeks/readings you write on are up to you and don’t need to be decided in advance; just make sure you do six. (Maza is not available for review, since her work is itself a survey of historiography. Also note that an additional week will be taken up by your extended review

essay [see below]—you may not submit a short analysis paper for that week.)

These short analysis papers should focus on summarizing the reading's **method, argument, and significance**. You should not try to exhaustively summarize the reading's contents or specific arguments but rather (1) to characterize those points accurately but concisely, (2) highlight what is interesting, distinctive, and important about the reading, and (3) connect it to larger historiographical themes.

This means that these short papers should focus on **substantive intellectual and interpretive issues** rather than matters that are primarily aesthetic or formal (e.g., there were too many big words, it was boring, you felt maps would have been useful, or you would have preferred footnotes to endnotes).

The goal of these analyses is **not** primarily to present a qualitative or subjective opinion on whether you liked a book or not, nor is it to provide a recommendation to help an imagined reader decide whether she wants to read this book, but rather to do the best job you can concisely explaining and assessing the book's method and its significance in a scholarly, academic context.

These papers are due via Blackboard by class time on the day we discuss the reading. Make sure to use the appropriate link in the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard site to upload your paper.

Extended Review Essay:

On a week of your own choosing, you must write a more extended six- to seven-page (double-spaced, 12-point font) analysis of the reading for that week. This should still not be a chapter-by-chapter or paragraph-by-paragraph description of the reading's contents, but rather a detailed analysis of the argument and method, exploring the key evidence and themes that support and develop that argument and addressing the wider historiographical significance of the work. (You may want to search reviews and the journal literature to see how and in what contexts the work is cited and engaged in other work.) This paper is due via Blackboard by class time on the day we discuss the reading.

Note that this assignment is more straightforward for individual books, but you are also welcome to write on the weeks in which we are using a collection of articles—the task is somewhat more complicated because you have to be able 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 each one individually. As with the short analyses, Maza is not eligible for review (nor is the brief reading for week one).

Final Paper:

The final paper asks you to synthesize and examine what we have done this semester by writing a 15-20 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) paper using the works we have read to illustrate and explain the major developments in historiography over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A specific prompt/question will be distributed towards the end of the semester.

Note that our readings are both examples of many of these changes and (often) accounts of those changes—they explain previous modes of interpretation as part of their argument for why new modes might be productive. You can and should draw on both dimensions in crafting your essay.

The final paper is due via Blackboard during exam week, on Monday, May 6

Grading:

Short Analysis Papers: 25%

Extended Review: 20%

Final Paper: 25%

Class Participation: 30%

REQUIRED READINGS

The books listed below are required reading for this course and have been ordered at the Mason Bookstore. Some of these books may be available electronically through the Mason Library system—I will try to include those links in the course Blackboard site, but it is worth double checking as well. Other required readings of article or chapter length are listed on the syllabus and will be available electronically via the course Blackboard site.

- Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014; Paperback ed., New York: Vintage Books, 2015.
- Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Vol. I. 1949; 2nd. rev. ed. 1966. Translated by Siân Reynolds, 1972. Reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Brown, Kathleen M. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Demuth, Bathsheba. *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1975. Translated by Alan Sheridan, 1977; Reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Translated by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi. 1980; Reprint, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- Maza, Sarah C. *Thinking about History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Satia, Priya. *Time's Monster: How History Makes History*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolfe. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. 1995. 20th Anniversary edition, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1990; Paperback ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Recommended Resources

If you do not already have these, the following books are very useful companions to graduate study in History (and other fields):

- Strunk, William, Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York, Longman Publishers, 1999. Avoid older editions or alleged “updates” as well as repackagings of the versions that do not list E.B. White as coauthor.
- Schrag, Zachary M. *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. We’re reading a couple of chapters of this, but the whole thing is a very valuable overall guide to practical as well as philosophical dimensions of the discipline.

DUE DATES AND LATE WORK

All assignments are officially due at the time specified in the assignment. Meeting these due dates is important for the pacing of the class and for maintaining a high level of informed, substantive discussion.

If you anticipate not being able to complete an assignment by its due date, I am happy to grant reasonable extensions if asked in advance.

Eligible work that is turned in late without a pre-approved extension will be accepted with a 5% grade penalty up to two days after its due date and a 10% grade penalty from three to seven days after its due date. If you need more time than that, please contact me in order to make a plan.

IMPORTANT: In order to be counted and graded, all work besides the final reflection must be turned in by the end of reading period (currently scheduled as Tuesday, April 30) unless you have contacted me and we have agreed upon another specific plan.

In general, if you have any kind of problem that interferes with your work for the class, please consult with me as soon as possible.

HONOR CODE STATEMENT

All work in this course is governed by the George Mason University [honor code](#):

*To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: **Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.***

More information can also be found at the GMU [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

AI USAGE POLICY (DON'T)

The use of ChatGPT or other “AI” language modeling programs to complete assignments for this class is forbidden and constitutes an honor code violation. There are several reasons for this.

First, for humans, writing is a central part of thinking and analysis. The writing you are asked to do in this course is not simply a product but a process—you are meant to learn something by conceptualizing, describing, and organizing information, ideas, and arguments. Historical analysis is a skill that is developed and sharpened by putting thoughts into words. Developing an analytical, evidence-based writing practice is perhaps the single most important, transferrable thing you can take away from history courses. These skills and practices are crucial to the purpose of the assignments and to your overall learning.

Second, in contrast, “AI” text production is *not* thinking or analysis. While language modeling can often (but definitely not always) produce a plausible-looking piece of text in a variety of genres, these programs do not actually “know” anything. They are not using information and facts in the way that we understand them but are simply (or not so simply, really) putting together words in combinations that they have algorithmically determined reflect the genre, topic, and style that the prompt calls for. That means that they will make stuff up if it sounds good. It also means that what they present as conclusions or arguments are not based on actual analysis of evidence or engagement with ideas but on patterns of words (and as a result, they tend to be bland, generic, and slightly off-topic). So, in a fundamental way, text produced by these programs fails to fulfill the most important aspect of the assignments.

Third, and more traditionally, this is a form of plagiarism—turning in work that you did not produce and presenting it as your own.

Crafting an effective prompt and learning how to use language models are certainly skills that involve analytical thinking and are worth developing in certain contexts... but given the goals and nature of the work you are asked to do in this course, this is not an appropriate place to do so.

OTHER POLICIES AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Important Administrative Dates (make sure to double check the Registrar’s website)

Last day to add: Tues., Jan. 23

Last day to drop without tuition penalty: Tues., Jan. 30

Final drop deadline (50% tuition refund): Tues., Feb. 6

Unrestricted Withdrawal period (no tuition refund): Wed., Feb. 7 to Tues. Feb. 20

Selective Withdrawal period: Wed., Feb. 21 to Mon., Mar. 25

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ods.gmu.edu) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

GMU Email Accounts

Students must use their Mason email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

Useful Resources

Writing Center (writingcenter.gmu.edu): (703) 993-1200.

Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.gmu.edu): SUB I, Room 3129, (703) 993-2380.
University Catalog: catalog.gmu.edu.
Other university policies: universitypolicy.gmu.edu.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

January 17: Introduction: What Do Historians Do?

[Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research* \(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021\), chs. 1-2 \(pp. 9-35\).](#)
[American Historical Association, "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct," \(updated 2023\).](#)

January 24: Surveying the Scope of Historical Interpretation and Argument

Sarah Maza, *Thinking About History*.

January 31: The Annales School and the *Longue Durée*

Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, sections listed below (*=vol. 2, available on Blackboard):

- Table of Contents for vol. 1 (pp. 5-10)
- *Table of Contents for vol. 2 (pp. 649-653) [available on Blackboard]
- Prefaces: to the English edition; to the second edition; to the first edition (pp. 13-22)
- Part I: The Role of the Environment (pp. 23-24)
- Part I, Ch. I: The Peninsulas: Mountains, Plateaux, and Plains (pp. 25-102)
- Part I, Ch. II: The Heart of the Mediterranean: Seas and Coasts (pp. 103-148)
- Part I, Ch. V: The Mediterranean as a Human Unit: Communication and Cities (pp. 276-354)
- Part II: Collective Destinies and General Trends (pp. 355-6)
- Part II, Ch. I: Economies: The Measure of the Century (pp 353-374, 387-394)
- Part II, Ch. II: Precious Metals, Money, and Prices (pp. 462-484, 517-542)
- *Vol. 2, Part II, Ch. VIII: By Way of Conclusion: Conjuncture and Conjunctures (pp. 892-900) [available on Blackboard]
- *Vol. 2, Part III: Events, Politics and People (pp. 901-903) [available on Blackboard]
- *Vol. 2, Conclusion (pp. 1238-1244) [available on Blackboard]

February 7: E.P. Thompson and the Evolution of Marxist Historiography

[Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* \(1848\).](#)

Chapter I, "Bourgeois and Proletarians."

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Chapter I, (just read the first section, beginning at the start of the chapter with "Hegel remarks somewhere" and end with "Hic Rhodus, hic salta!")

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

E.P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3, no. 2 (May 1978): 133-165.

Harvey J. Kaye, "The Collective Contribution," chapter seven of *The British Marxist Historians* (Alresford, Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2022), pp. 251-280.

Optional: Walter L. Adamson, "Marxism and Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd S. Kramer and Sarah C. Maza (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 205-222. (This is a very useful piece, but it spends a lot of time on the abstract, philosophical dimensions of Marx's early thought before explaining how that transformed into a more concrete, materialist approach. It's pretty dense, so I have made it optional but not required on top of the other readings.)

February 14: Microhistory, Culture, and Meaning

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

David A. Bell, "Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd S. Kramer and Sarah C. Maza (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 262-276.

Optional: "A Peasant vs the Inquisition: Cheese, Worms, and the Birth of Micro-History," episode of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio show *Ideas*, March 21, 2017.

February 21: Women's History as Social History

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*.

Karin Wulf, "'Mrs. Foster Has Sworn a Rape'; or, What Do We Owe? Generosity, Attribution, and the Perilous Invisibility of Research Infrastructure," blog post, *The Scholarly Kitchen*, official blog of the Society for Scholarly Publishing, January 18, 2024.

February 28: Foucault, Power/Knowledge, and Discourse: The Rise of the New Cultural History

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

[Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt \(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989\), pp. 25-46.](#)

Optional: [Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in *The New Cultural History* \(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989\), pp. 1-22.](#)

(If you do read this, you can focus on the first ten pages or so, before she transitions into specifically introducing the essays in the book.)

March 6: Spring Break

March 13: Interrogating Gender and Race

[Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 \(December 1986\): 1053-1075.](#)

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 University Press, 1982), 143-177.

[Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 \(Winter 1992\): 251-274.](#)

March 20: Constructing and Reconstructing Race, Class, and Gender

Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*.

March 27: The Emergence and Development of Environmental History

[Paul S. Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 \(June 2013\): 94-119.](#)

Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*.

April 3: Commodities and Global Capitalism

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

[Kenneth Lipartito, "Reassembling the Economic: New Departures in Historical Materialism," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 1 \(February 2016\): 101-139.](#)

April 10: Interrogating History and Historical Narratives

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

April 17: Western Historical Thought and the Colonial Project: Postcolonial Critiques

Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020).

[Prasenjit Duara, "Postcolonial History," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza \(Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002\), 417-431.](#)

April 24: TBD

We will select a final book for the semester based on the interests of the class.

University Reading Day: Tuesday, April 30

All work except the final paper must be turned in by today unless we have made a specific alternate arrangement, confirmed by email.

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 6