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21H.931 Seminar in Historical Methods
Spring 2004

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21H.931
Spring, 2007
W 3-5

Instructor: David Ciarlo

SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL METHODS

This course is designed to engage students with the wide variety of recent approaches used to study the past. The books and essays we will read have all made significant contributions to the field of history as a whole, and will cover as wide a methodological, geographical, and chronological field as possible in the span of a mere semester. In our discussions over the next few months, we will explore how historians conceive of their object of study, how they use primary sources as a basis for their accounts, and how they structure the narrative and analytic discussion of their topic. We will also discuss and debate the advantages and drawbacks of each of these various approaches, and ultimately, the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

Readings

The following books are available at the MIT Bookstore and on reserve in the Hayden Library:

Natalie Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*(1983)
Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*(1991)
Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1999)
John Dower, *War Without Mercy*(1986)
Timothy Burke *Lifebouy Men, Lux Women* (1996)
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1995 ed., orig. 1977)

Requirements

This is a research seminar: for half of the semester, we will discuss books that we have all read in common; for the other half, you will work on a paper of original research .

The main written assignment for this course is a substantial research paper, on any reasonable subject of interest to you. These papers should be around 15 pages long, and should explore the given topic in substantial depth. (History majors might use this paper to explore a possible thesis topic.) The paper will be crafted in the following stages:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| February 21 | Statement of topic interest and research proposal |
| March 7 | Bibliography |
| April 4 | One Best Source Presentation |
| April 25 | Introduction and Outline |
| May 2 | Rough Drafts |
| May 9 or 16 | Class presentation |
| May 16 | Final Paper Due |

Class participation is an essential component of this course, and therefore will comprise a significant portion of the final course grade. Make sure to bring your copy of the reading with you to class so that you can participate fully.

Each week, I will circulate some questions to think about before the discussion. Read through them, and think about them thoroughly before our discussion. Also, you will be expected to bring to class each week a brief summary—no more than 50 words—of the essential aspects of the assigned reading. (I will go into more detail about this summary when I circulate the first week's questions.)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Research paper | 50% |
| Seminar participation (include response papers) | 50% |

Please note: plagiarism of any kind—that is taking another's words or ideas from a book, another student, or from the internet without full and complete citation—will not be tolerated regardless of the circumstances, and will result in an "F" for the assignment.

Class Schedule

February 7 Introduction & Library Tour

February 14 Narrative and history
Natalie Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*

February 21 Sources and History
Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich *A Midwife's Tale*
***Statement of topic interest and research proposal due**

February 28 Big History
Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*

March 7 Social history
Karl Marx on historical materialism (excerpt from the *German Ideology*)
E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" *Past and Present*, No. 50. (Feb., 1971), pp. 76-136.

***Bibliography due**

March 14 Culture and History
Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre"
Harold Mah, "Suppressing the Text: the Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre," *History Workshop*, V 31, Spring 1991.

- March 21 Hegemony and Identity
Timothy Burke, *Lifebow Men, Lux Women* (1996)
- March 28 (NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK)
- April 4 **Presentations: *One Best Source**
- April 11 Vision and History
John Dower, *War Without Mercy*(1986)
- April 18 Power, "Truth," and History: Post-structuralism
Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 3-228, 293-308
- April 25 Film and History (*film to be announced*)
***Introduction and Outline due**
- May 2 ***Rough Drafts due**
- May 9 Research presentations
- May 16 Research presentations

Final Paper Due on May 16

(May 21-25 Final Exam Week) *There is no final for this class.*