

History 705 Colloquium in European History before 1800

I. Topics covered in course readings

Use a general textbook, as needed, to familiarize yourselves with the following topics: early Christianity, feudalism, medieval Catholicism, the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the age of Spanish hegemony, the invention and impact of printing, European overseas empires, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution.

II. Use of reference materials

You may come upon many terms, expressions, and topics which are new to you. Here are some examples: papacy, guilds, vassal, fief, chivalry, humanism, inquisition, heresy, Black Death, dowry, Anabaptist, philosophe, tithe, Holy Roman Empire, Jacobin, misogyny, primogeniture, relic, eucharist, asceticism, and epistemology. The reference librarians at Jackson Library are prepared to assist you in finding dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference works. The Internet can be useful too; I recommend google.com as a search engine.

III. Guidelines for critical reading and writing

Learning how to read, analyze, and write about historical literature in a critical way are the main objectives of this course. Keep the following guidelines in mind as you read and write about the books and articles this semester:

a. Check the original date and place of publication. How are these important to an understanding of the book? Consider, for example, a book on medieval Germany written by an Englishman in 1943.

b. Read the author's introduction or preface and/or acknowledgments. Whom else does he/she know? To whom is he/she indebted? Whom does he/she consider as an "opponent?" Does the author state his/her purpose in writing the book? Consider, for example, an author who is a student and avowed follower of the method of Fernand Braudel, on the one hand, and someone out to counter the approach to the history of the inquisition offered by Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, on the other.

c. Pay careful attention to the author's use of sources. To ascertain this you will need to be aware of his/her footnotes and/or bibliography, even if you do not read every single

reference. (In fact, be sure you don't read every single reference!) How does the selection and use of sources inform the author's historical interpretation? Does he/she make use of literary sources? (letters, memoirs, diaries, novels, hagiography, etc.) Statistical sources? (census data, tax records, population figures, etc.) Legal documents? Police records? Contemporary chronicles or accounts? Does he/she use essentially one source, say an autobiography, or a combination of several kinds of sources? Are all sources equally reliable?

d. Does the author make clear what is (are) his/her thesis (or theses) in the book or article? Put another way, can you determine if an actual argument is being made? If not, is this a problem? If there is an argument, does it fit into some larger historiographical debate, for example, the connection between the invention of the printing press and the advent of the Reformation, or ideological stance, say, Marxism?

e. Does the author bring to his/her analysis a particular interpretive approach or method? It is particularly fascinating to consider cases in which two or more historians study the same phenomenon, such as the causes of the French Revolution, and come to very different conclusions depending upon whether their primary interest is in economic factors, political factors, ideological factors or demographic factors.

f. To what sort of audience is the book or article addressed? Other scholars? A general readership? Students? How do considerations about audience affect an author's selection and use of sources? Has the author published with a university press? A non-university scholarly press? A trade press?

g. Is this a monographic work based mainly upon original research? Or a synthesis that integrates new material with older ideas? Or some combination of both?

h. Can you think of any other considerations? Let's discuss them.

IV. Writing assignments and criteria for grades

Course grades will be based upon the following factors, in this order of priority:

a. Three written assignments relating to the historiography of the medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods. I will describe these in detail after the semester gets underway. Assignments must be word processed, double spaced, and spell-checked. See syllabus for format that citations might take; the

important thing is to be consistent.

b. Each student will make 1-2 oral presentations (of approximately 10 minutes in length) to the class on weekly reading assignments. I will make assignments and explain this in greater detail after our first meeting when I can gauge the number and preferences of students. Students must organize each oral presentation according to an outline or other written plan, which I will collect and use for comments and grades.

c. This is a colloquium, not a lecture class, so class participation is essential. The frequency, and quality of your contribution to class discussions will thus figure into your grade.