

HISTORY 705: COLLOQUIUM IN EUROPEAN HISTORY BEFORE 1800

Course Information:

History 705-01, Fall 2006 (CRN:80789)

Time: Wednesdays, 3:30-6:20 PM

Room: 310 Graham

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Description:

This course comprises the first half of the Graduate Colloquium in European History. Our imagined task is a huge, even impossible one: we are tasked with trying to make sense of the methods, techniques, and approaches used by historians who study Europe from Rome to the French Revolution. Obviously we cannot do justice to every period and/or every topic, and our approach must inevitably be somewhat fragmentary. Rather than follow a haphazard and incomplete chronology through this vast span of time, I have organized the course methodologically. In essence we are going to examine some of those methods, techniques, and approaches rather than a series of events, periods, or persons. We will accomplish this task, of course, by reading and evaluating sample works of historians who work in that given style, method, or approach. Peter Burke's edited volume, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, will provide a quasi-textbook or roadmap for our endeavor, as it comprises specially-commissioned chapters on many of the approaches and sub-disciplines that we will examine. Please note that I have tried to balance the temporal focus of the works we will read: my design is that about half of our readings will come from the medieval period and half from the early modern period.

Given these goals, it is important to remember that you will be asked in this course to evaluate, analyze, and criticize the arguments, methods, and structures of important works of history. Such a task requires that you read somewhat differently from the ways in which you might approach a research paper or a simple factual assignment. You must be concerned first and foremost with identifying the author's stated (or unstated) purpose and/or agenda in writing. Close behind this will fall the argument of the author's work. One of our tasks will be to evaluate the success of this argument, so it is worth getting used to the process of reading analytically; don't get bogged down in the minutiae of the details offered by each author, for we are really unconcerned with the specifics. Rather, pay close attention to the argument, the evidence offered to support that argument, and the assumptions around which the argument (and the choice of evidence) is based. In a word, you will be learning to "gut" or "fillet" a book; it sounds inelegant, and it is, but it is a very valuable skill. It involves reading rapidly (but carefully) a large number of pages, skimming the details but keeping your eyes open for the argument, holes in reasoning, blatant (or not-so-blatant) assumptions, and so on.

Required Books (available for purchase at the UNCG Bookstore or on amazon.com):

Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution* (Stanford UP, 1990) ISBN: 0804718377

Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd edition (Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2001)
ISBN: 0271021179

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard UP, 1984) ISBN: 0674766911

Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: an Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, 2001). ISBN: 0801485606

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Promised Land of Error* (Vintage Books, 1979). ISBN: 0394729641

Other Required Readings :

The rest of the readings will be on reserve in Jackson Library (you may access some of them electronically, through Blackboard, but most will be found at the Circulation Desk) or available electronically through Journal Finder (many readings come from journals which Jackson Library now takes in electronic format; one of the most common of these electronic forms is J-Stor). On any given week we may be reading articles, sections of books, and/or entire books. Please consult the syllabus below for that information. Knowing that some students will prefer to purchase their own copies of the other books of which we will read large chunks, I list those here that I know to be available for purchase at Amazon.com. Please note that you need not buy any of these books! They WILL be available in the reserve room, where you can either read them there or photocopy the parts you require. I merely wish to notify you concerning those that I know to be in print.

- Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Univ. of California Press, reprint 1995): ISBN: 0520089359
 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (Vintage, 1985). ISBN: 0394729277
 Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1993) ISBN: 0520082702

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Oral Presentations:

Each week one of you will open our discussion with a brief discussion of the author(s) assigned for that week. You should try to get a handle on what kind of historian the author is (marxist? Annaliste? Narrative? Political? Social? etc.) and/or what 'school' he or she belongs to. You needn't give a biography of the author(s), although some relevant details might be useful. Rather, you should give a 5 minute synopsis of whatever information about the author(s) is relevant to understanding their work. Where should you find this? Often the readings will provide some indirect clues, but you should also do a bit of bibliography work (either on-line or in the library) and perhaps a bit of web-searching (if the author is alive, he/she may have a web-page, a university affiliation, etc). You have two tasks during class: 1) to present what you've found succinctly and clearly, and in an informal way (that is, please don't read a prepared text or slavishly consult your notes); 2) prepare a one-page handout for the class listing the author(s) by name and providing whatever pertinent biographical, methodological and bibliographical information that you deem relevant (in this last category, you might well give bibliography of up to 5 important publications by each author).

2. Written Work:

One of the major goals of this class is to gain experience writing critically about history. And since it is a graduate class, I will expect you to do a fair amount of writing. Although I will ask you to write two kinds of essay for me, I am going to allow you substantial leeway in how you decide to structure your written work. What this really means is that I am going to give you responsibility for choosing your own schedule, within certain guidelines.

All students must complete the following written work

- a. Six Analytical Essays, typed, 3-4 pages each
- b. One Historiographical Essay, 8-12 pages

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Oral Presentations:	10%
Six Analytical Essays	60%
Historiographical Essay	30%

EXPLANATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

a. Analytical Essays

You will write six of these essays over the course of the semester. They should be 3-4 pages in length,

typed, with standard margins, etc. Four of the six have been fixed by me; that is, you must write an essay based on the readings in Weeks 3, 4 or 5, 8, and 14. It is up to you to choose when (and on what material) you wish to write the other four. Analytical Essays are due the week following the readings with which they are concerned.

These essays will be reactions to questions I have posed to you concerning a particular set of readings. I expect you to formulate a clear, well-supported argument that answers my question one way or another. Remember to be concise. State your argument in a brief opening paragraph, and then proceed to introduce evidence and commentary that supports your position. I should hasten to say that the evidence for whatever argument you make should derive primarily for the readings assigned for that week.

Required Analytical Essays:

1. Either Week 3: Are the articles by Findlen and Sluhovsky examples of the New History or the Old? Why or why not? (due in week 4)
Or Week 4: Is the study of mentalities possible? If so, is it desirable? Why or why not? Use the assigned readings for your examples. (Due in week 5)
2. Either Week 6: How has Clifford Geertz influenced the theory and writing of history? (Due in week 7)
Or Week 9: Choose one article and examine how well it follows the program laid forth by
by
Scott's article in *New Perspectives*. (due in Week 10)
3. Either Week 5: How have historians' examinations of honor changed the way we think about politics? Is this a good thing, or not? (Due in week 6)
Or Week 12: Is it possible to write a history of emotions? If so, how and why? If not, why not? (Due in week 13)
4. Week 14: choose one of the following: (due in week 16; that is, after Thanksgiving)
 1. Compare the theory and practice of 'post-structuralist' history. That is, how does the writing of 'actual' history live up to post-structuralist theory?
 2. Himmelfarb writes angrily of a 'flight from fact' in 'post-modernist' historical writing. Putting aside her straw-man examples, is this a fair account of Spiegel's work? Why or why not?

Possible Analytical Essays (choose 2 of the following):

- Week 8: Is *Montaillou* a successful work of history? Why or why not? (due in week 9)
- Week 10: Why should we care about Martin Guerre? Or, perhaps, why should we care if Davis 'got it right'? (due in week 9)
- Week 11: In what ways do historians of literacy and reading force us to reinterpret the nature, value, and use of written sources? (due in week 12)
- Week 13: What does it mean to argue that the 'history of the body' is essentially an act of cultural construction? Use examples from the readings. (due in week 14)
- Week 16: Should 'narrative' and 'events-driven history' be revived? If so, why and how? If not, why not? (due in finals week)

b. Historiographical Essay (due Monday, December 12, by Noon)

This is to be an 8-12 page examination of a historical topic, issue, or event of interest to you. As a minimum, I expect you to consult 3 books and 3 articles relevant to the subject of your paper. I will be happy to suggest beginning bibliography to anyone who needs advice.

I am concerned to see you do several things: a) propose, develop, and support an argument; b) recognize and evaluate differing and potentially competing historical arguments (ie., wrestle with 'historiography'); c) discuss and interpret relative methodological approaches to the subject at hand. This paper SHOULD NOT BE a 'standard' historical treatment of the subject. That is, if you chose to examine the crusades, I don't want to read about when and why the crusades began, what took place during them, etc; what I want to read about is your evaluation of the methodologies that historians have used to examine the crusades, as well as your assessment of the relative merits of several historians' opinions (ie., historiography).

You have three options in choosing the topic for your essay

- I. You may elect a specific topic. Examples might include the following:
the Fall of the Roman Empire
'feudalism'

The Norman Conquest
 the crusades (or, simply, The First Crusade)
 Inquisition and/or Heresy
 Civic Ritual and Identity
 Literacy and Literate Culture
 Violence
 Absolutism or Constitutionalism
 The Role of the State (in whichever period)
 Religion and Politics (in whichever period)
 The French Revolution
 the German Reformation
 the Wars of Religion
 etc., etc., etc.

- ii. You could write an essay about a particular historian. For instance, if you enjoyed Le Goff's articles, you might elect to write a historiography essay on Le Goff. I would certainly not expect you to read all of Le Goff's work, but I would expect you to compose a bibliography of his work, to see what his intellectual and academic interests were, to learn a little about him as a person (there's an excellent collection of essays on Le Goff's impact), etc. Your challenge here would be to come up with an analytical category within which to discuss and criticize Le Goff's work as a historian. Here, too, you must learn to 'gut' books; skim for approach, method, and sources.
- iii. You could choose a more general methodology or approach to the study of history. Here this could be narrowed by period (ie., gender in the scholarship of the Middle Ages; or even gender in the scholarship of the Later Middle Ages.). Some possibilities include:

gender
 Marxism
 Social History
 the Annales paradigm
 mentalities
 quantitative history
 military history
 periodization issues, such as "the Middle Ages" vs. "the Renaissance"
 Popular Culture vs. High Culture (in whichever period you choose)
 The New Cultural History
 structuralism
 post-structuralism
 'Thick description'
 Gift-giving

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

1. August 16: Introduction to the Course

2. August 23: Historians and Methodology

Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: an Introduction to Historical Methods*, entire (150 pp)

Reserve Room: G.R. Elton, "King or Minister? The Man Behind the Henrician Revolution," *History* 39 (1954), 216-232.

Reserve Room or Handout: Jacques Le Goff, "Ecclesiastical Culture and Folklore in the Middle Ages: Saint Marcellus of Paris and the Dragon," in Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1982), 159-188.

3. August 30: the New History and the Old

Burke, "Overture. The New History: its Past and Future," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, pp.

1-24.

J-Stor: Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Some Reflections on the New History," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 661-670

J-Stor Joan W. Scott, "History in Crisis? The Others' Side of the Story," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 680-692.

J-Stor: John E. Toews, "Perspectives on 'The Old History and the New': a Comment," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 693-698.

J-Stor: Paula Findlen, "Possessing the Past: the Material World of the Italian Renaissance," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 83-114.

J-Stor, Moshe Sluhovsky, "The Devil in the Convent," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 1379-1411.

Analytical Essay Topic: Are the articles by Findlen and Sluhovsky examples of the New History or the Old? Why or why not? (due in week 4)

4. September 6: The *Annales* 'School'

Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: the Annales School, 1929-1989*, 1-116

Reserve Room: Fernand Braudel on the *longue durée*, in Braudel, *On History*, pp. 25-54

Reserve Room: Jacques Le Goff, "Mentalities: a History of Ambiguities," tr. David Denby, in Le Goff and Nora, eds., *Constructing the Past* (Cambridge, 1984), 166-180.

Journal Finder: Peter Burke, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986): 439-451 [a revised version exists in Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, 1997), 162-182].

Handout: Susan Reynolds, "Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), 21-41.

Reserve Room: Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, 59-137.

Analytical Essay Topic: Is the study of mentalities possible? If so, is it desirable?

Why or why not? Use the assigned readings for your examples.

5. September 13: Hot Topic #1: Honor

J-Stor: Elvin Hatch, "Theories of Social Honor," *American Anthropologist*, 91 (1989): 341-353.

J-Stor: Carlin Barton, "Savage Miracles, the Redemption of Lost Honor in Roman Society and the Sacrament of the Gladiator and the Martyr," *Representations* 45 (1994): 41-71

Blackboard: Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, "De-gendering female violence: Merovingian female honour as an 'exchange of violence'," *Early medieval Europe*, 11 (2002): 1-18

Reserve Room: Patricia Hogan, "The slight of honor: slander and wrongful prosecution in

five English medieval villages," *Studies in medieval and Renaissance history*, New series, vol. 12 (1991) (= Old series 22): 3-42

Reserve Room: Mervyn James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485-1642," 308-415 in James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1986).

Reserve Room: Kristen B. Neuschel, *Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Introduction

Journal Finder: Robert Shoemaker, "The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660-1800," *The Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002): 525-545

Analytical Essay Topic: How have historians' examinations of honor changed the way we think about politics? Is this a good thing, or not?

6. September 20: Cultural Anthropology and its impact

J-Stor: Sherri Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984): 126-166.

Reserve Room: Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 1-37, reprinted in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (NY: Basic Books), 412-454.

Reserve Room: Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, chapters 1-3, pp. 3-144

Analytical Essay Topic: How has Clifford Geertz influenced the theory and writing of history?

7. September 27: Class cancelled - instructor at conference

8. October 4: History from Below

Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 25-42.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Promised Land of Error* (Vintage, 1979), Entire.

Reserve Room: Leonard E. Boyle, "Montaillou Revisited: *Mentalité* and Methodology," *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. Raftis (Toronto: PIMS, 1981), 119-40.

Analytical Essay Topic: Is *Montaillou* a successful work of history? Why or why not?

9. October 11: Women's History, History of Gender

Joan Scott, "Women's History," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 42-66

Reserve Room: Joan Kelly, "Did women have a Renaissance?," in Renata Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977 and 1987), 137-164.

Reserve Room: Retha Warnicke, "Private and Public: the boundaries of Women's Lives in Early Stuart England," in Jean R. Brink, ed., *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993), 123-140.

J-Stor: Elizabeth Cohen, "Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early-Modern Rome," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1992), 597-625

Reserve Room: Lyndal Roper, "Blood and Codpieces: Masculinity in the Early Modern German Town," in Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Routledge, 1994), 107-124.

Reserve Room: Hughes, Diane Owen, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy," in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 69-99.

Highly Recommended: Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?," in *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053-1075, revised in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (Columbia UP, 1988), chapter 2

Analytical Essay Topic: Choose one article and examine how well it follows the program laid forth by Scott's article in *New Perspectives*.

10. October 18: Microhistory

Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 93-113

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, entire

J-Stor: Robert Finlay, "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre," *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 553-571.

J-Stor: Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Lame," *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 572-603.

Film: Return of Martin Guerre [To be shown in Class]

Analytical Essay Topic: Why should we care about Martin Guerre? Or, perhaps, why should we care if Davis 'got it right'?

11. October 25: Reading, Writing and Literacy

Reserve Room: Claude Levi-Strauss, "A Writing Lesson", from *Tristes Tropiques* (Penguin, 1973), 294-305

Robert Darnton, "History of Reading," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 140-167.

J-Stor: Franz Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55 (1980), 237-265.

Journal-Finder: Paul Saenger, "From Oral Reading to Silent Reading," *Viator* 13 (1982): 367-414.

Reserve Room: Margaret Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy: the Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Autobiographers," *Social History* 4 (1979), 407-435.

Reserve Room: Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst, 1999). See Chap 5 (Saenger: Reading in the Later MA), Chap 7 (Grafton: The Humanist as Reader), Chap 8 (Gilmont: Prot Reformations and reading), Chap 9 (Julia: Reading and the Counter Ref), Chap 10 (Chartier: Reading Matter and 'Popular' Reading)

Analytical Essay Topic: In what ways do historians of literacy and reading force us to reinterpret the nature, value, and use of written sources?

12. November 1: Hot Topic #2: Emotions

Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying About Emotions in History," *American Historical Review*

107 (2002): 821-845.

Blackboard: Rosenwein, "Emotional Space" in C. Stephen Jaeger, ed., *Codierung von Emotionen im Mittelalter/Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages* (2003): 287-303

Handout: R. E. Barton, "Gendering Anger: *Ira, Furor*, and Discourses of Power and Masculinity in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in Richard Newhauser, ed., *In the Garden of Evil: the Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto, 2005), 371-392.

Reserve Room: Paul Hyams, "What did Henry III of England Think in Bed and In French about Kingship and Anger?" in Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: the Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1998), 92-124.

J-Stor: Daniel Lord Smail, "Hatred as a Social Institution in Late Medieval Society," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 90-126.

Journal Finder: William Reddy, "Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution" *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000): 109-152.

Statement of Intent for Final Essay due in my mailbox (1 paragraph, plus 1-2 citations to articles or sections of books).

Analytical Essay Topic: Is it possible to write a history of emotions? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

NOTE: November 2-5: Instructor at Conference

13. November 8: History of the Body

Roy Porter, "History of the Body," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 206-232

J-Stor: Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (1985), 1-25.

Reserve Room: Katharine Park, "Was there a Renaissance Body?," in Allen Grieco,

Michael Rocke and Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi, eds., *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century: Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 9-11 1999* (Florence 2002), 321-336

Reserve Room: Caroline Bynum, "Why all the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, 1999), 241-280

Reserve Room: Vanessa Harding, "Whose Body? A study of Attitudes Towards the Dead Body in Early Modern Paris," in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 170-187

Reserve Room: Carlin Barton, "The Roman Blush: the Delicate Matter of Self-Control," in *Constructions of the Classical Body*, ed. James Porter (Ann Arbor: Univ of Michigan Press, 1999)

Analytical Essay Topic: What does it mean to argue that the 'history of the body' is essentially an act of cultural construction? Use examples from the readings.

14. November 15: Texts, Language, and Construction

J-Stor: Gabrielle Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 59-86.

Reserve Room: Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Univ. of California Press, reprint 1995), selected chapters

Reserve Room: Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Telling It as you Like it: Post-Modernist History and the Flight from Fact," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 16, 1992, 12-15. Also available as Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Telling It as You Like It: History and the Flight from Fact," in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1997), 158-74.

Analytical Essay Topics: Choose one of the following:

1. Compare the theory and practice of 'post-structuralist' history. That is, how does the writing of 'actual' history live up to post-structuralist theory?
2. Himmelfarb writes angrily of a 'flight from fact' in 'post-modernist' historical writing. Putting aside her straw-man examples, is this a fair account of Spiegel's work? Why or why not?

15. November 22: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

16. November 29: Revival of Narrative and Events

Peter Burke, "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 233-248

Sarah Maza, "Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History," *American Historical Review* 101:4 (December 1996), 1493-1515.

Karen Halttunen, "Cultural History and the Challenge of Narrativity," in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, 1999), 165-

181.

Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1993),
1-123, 193-204

Analytical Essay Topic: Should 'narrative' and 'events-driven history' be revived? If so, why and how? If not, why not? (Due in Finals week - see me for date)

Monday, December 12 - Final Historiography papers due by noon in my office

OTHER COURSE INFORMATION

I. Use of Reference Materials

You may come across many terms, expressions, and topics with which you are unfamiliar. Don't just let them slide by; rather, use a dictionary and/or encyclopedia to identify whatever it is you are having trouble with. Some examples, which we may encounter in our readings: epistemology, hermeneutics, papacy, guilds, vassal, fief, chivalry, humanism, inquisition, heresy, dowry, philosophe, tithe, Holy Roman Empire, misogyny, primogeniture, relic, eucharist, asceticism, etc. The reference librarians in Jackson Library will be able to assist you in finding reference works.

II. Guidelines for Critical Reading and Writing

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

- a. Check the date and place of publication (don't be fooled by reprints or later editions). How are these important to an understanding of the book? Consider 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, or with whom and with what types of historical writing does he/she choose to associate his/her work? 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? No author is an island, and very few are truly original; most authors are indebted either personally to someone else or methodologically to a school or approach.
- 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 (indeed, you probably shouldn't read every reference). How does the selection and use of sources inform the author's historical interpretation? Does the author use a single source [a treatise, a chronicle, an inquest]? A single category of sources [parish records, letters, memoirs, legal sources, etc.]? Many different types of sources? Does he/she make use of literary sources? Statistical sources? Police records? Are all sources equally reliable? Would use of another kind of source altered his/her conclusions?

d. Does the author make clear what is (are) his/her thesis (or theses) in the book or article? That is to say, can you discern if an argument is being made? Or, is the book pure narrative? [be careful!, for even narratives can have agendas and/or theses] If there is no apparent argument, is this a problem? If there is an argument, does it fit into some larger historiographical debate? Or, does it fit into or alongside some major historical or ideological theory [such as Marxism]?

e. Does the author bring to his/her analysis a particular method or approach? In some weeks, you may well read works on the same subject from diametrically opposing methodological perspectives. While the tendency may be to believe that one is “right” and the other “wrong”, we will find that it is more useful to simply try to uncover, analyze, and criticize the methods being used, and to express an opinion about which method seems to offer a better, or more important, understanding of the topic in question.

f. To what sort of audience is the book or article addressed? Other scholars? A general readership? Students? How do considerations of audience affect an author’s selection and use of sources?

g. Is the work in question a monograph, based primarily on original research? Or is it a synthesis that integrates new material with older ideas? Or some combination of the two?

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