

HISTORY 621: COLLOQUIUM IN EUROPEAN HISTORY BEFORE 1800

Course Information:

History 621-01, Fall 2000 (CRN: 82862)
Time: Mondays, 6:00-8:50 PM
Room: 226 McIver

Instructor Information:

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Office Hours:

MWF, 10:00-10:50, and by appointment

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

Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cornell UP, 1992) ISBN: 0801481007
Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard UP, 1984) ISBN: 0674766911
Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (U. Chicago Press, 1982) ISBN: 0226167720

Other Required Readings :

The rest of the readings will be on reserve in Jackson Library. 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 that we will read *in toto*, 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.

David Sabean ISBN: 0521347785
Judith Bennett ISBN:0195045610
Brian Stock: ISBN: 0691102279
Michael Camille: ISBN: 0674443624
Michael Roche: ISBN: 0195122925
Gabrielle Spiegel: ISBN: 0520089359

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Oral Presentations:

Each week I would like one of you to open our discussion with a brief resume of what you've read, what issues the works seems to pose, what conflicts they create, what methods they use, and whatever else you feel is relevant. You should come prepared with an outline of what you want to say, and be prepared to spend about 10 minutes introducing the discussion. **PLEASE DO NOT READ A PREPARED TEXT!** Don't feel that you need to cover every possible ground; rather, you should see your role as an MC: you should identify the issues, problems, arguments, and assumptions that we will then discuss together. Of course since you have the spotlight, you can get first licks (or first kudos) in as well ... I will collect your outline and grade it and your introduction on a simple check, check-minus, and check-plus system. I anticipate that each of you will probably get to introduce 2 discussions.

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. Eight Analytical Essays, typed, 3 pages in length
- b. One longer Analysis of one of Burke's Central Concepts or Problems, 8-12 pages, typed

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Oral Presentations:	10%
Eight Analytical Essays	60%
Analysis of a Central Concept or Problem	30%

EXPLANATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

a. Analytical Essays

You will write eight 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 eight have been fixed by me; that is, you must write

an essay based on the readings in Weeks 2, 3, 6, and 13. 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:

Week 2: Using Elton and Le Goff as your models, how does the new History differ from the old?

(due in week 3)

Week 3: Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the *Annales* school (due in week 4)

Week 6: How well does Bennett follow the program laid forth by Scott? (due in Week 7)

Week 13: 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?

Possible Analytical Essays (choose 4 of the following):

Week 4: How has Clifford Geertz influenced the theory and writing of history? (due in week 5)

Week 5: What are the strengths and weaknesses of a history written from below? (due in week 6)

Week 7: Why should we care about Martin Guerre? Or, perhaps, why should we care if Davis 'got it right'? (due in week 8)

Week 8: In what ways do historians of literacy and reading force us to reinterpret the nature, value, and use of written sources? (due in week 9)

Week 9: Is there a difference between the history of images and Art History? Should there be? Where do Camille and Scribner fit in? (due in week 10)

Week 10: 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 11)

Week 11: Should 'narrative' and 'events-driven history' be revived? Why or why not? [be sure to use Le Roy Ladurie in your essay, whether pro or con] (due in week 12)

Week 12: Is the history of 'power' simply another way of describing good old-fashioned political history? Why or why not? (due in week 13)

or, Week 12: What assumptions about power, violence, and the state undergird the two sides on the Feudal Revolution debate (ie., Bisson on the one hand, and Barthelemy and White on the other) (due in week 13)

b. Analysis of a Central Concept or Central Problem

Due dates: Statement of topic due December 3 in class

Final Essay due: Monday, December 17, by noon, in my office

This is to be an 8-12 page examination of one of the "Central Concepts" or "Central Problems" discussed by Burke in his *History and Social Theory* (pp. 44-129). We will all read *History and Social Theory* for the last week of the course, but you might do well to glance ahead at the concepts and problems that he outlines so as to start thinking about the topic on which you plan to write (Indeed, I will ask you to turn a brief, one-paragraph statement of what you plan to study on December 3). In essence, you need to choose one of these concepts or problems and write an analysis of the ways in which it can (and perhaps cannot) be

employed in writing history. You would do well to explore both the benefits and/or weaknesses of the concept/problem in question. This should not, however, be a pure thought-piece. I expect you to make use of the readings assigned for the course in writing this analysis as well as 2-4 additional articles or sections of books that you have located and read (I will, of course, be happy to offer assistance in this regard).

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

1. Introduction to the Course (August 20)

2. the New History and the Old (August 27)

G.R. Elton, *Political History: Principles and Practice* (New York, 1970), 3-11, 57-72,

156-180.

G.R. Elton, "King or Minister? The Man Behind the Henrician Revolution," *History* 39

(1954), 216-232.

Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: the Annales School, 1929-1989*, entire
Jacques Le Goff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages," in
Le Goff,

Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages, translated Arthur
Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 29-42

Jacques Le Goff, "Ecclesiastical Culture and Folklore in the Middle Ages: Saint
Marcellus

of Paris and the Dragon," in *ibid.*, 159-188.

Required Analytical Essay: Using Elton and Le Goff as your models, how does
the new

History differ from the old? (due in week 3)

September 3: NO CLASS (Labor Day)

3. The *Annales* 'School' (September 10)

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

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

Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*,
browse

for 10-15 minutes to get a sense of it. Just look! Don't read!

Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (U. of Chicago Press,
1982),

entire.

Required Analytical Essay: Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the
Annales

school.

4. Cultural Anthropology and its impact (September 17)

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,"
in

Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, Basic Books, 3-30.

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.

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, chapters 1-2 (ie., folktales and the Cat
massacre)

Aron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. Jana Howlett
(Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. TBA

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

5. History from Below (September 24)

Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 24-41

David Sabean. *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in
Early*

Modern Germany. Cambridge, 1987.

Possible Analytical Essay: What are the strengths and weaknesses of a history
written
from below?

6. Women's History, History of Gender (October 1)

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

Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in Scott, *Gender
and the*

Politics of History (Columbia UP, 1988), chapter 2

Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside* (Oxford, 1987)

Required Analytical Essay: How well does Bennett follow the program laid
forth by
Scott?

October 8: NO CLASS (Fall Break)

7. Microhistory (October 15)

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

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

Robert Finlay, "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre," *American Historical
Review*, Vol.

93, No. 3. (Jun., 1988), pp. 553-571. Available on-line through J-Stor. Access the UNCG Library, search for American Historical Review, then choose the J-stor option. You can download the entire article, or simply read it online. For this reason I have not placed this article on reserve.

Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Lame," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 3. (Jun., 1988), pp. 572-603. Also available through J-Stor
Film: Return of Martin Guerre [To be shown in Class]

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

8. Reading, Writing and Literacy (October 22)

Handout: Claude Levi-Strauss, "A Writing Lesson", from *Tristes Tropiques* [not on reserve]

Robert Darnton, "History of Reading," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 140-167.
Brian Stock, *The Implications of literacy* (Princeton U.P., 1983), pp. vii-240, 455-531

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

October 29: NO CLASS (Instructor away at Conference)

9. The History of Images (November 5)

Ivan Gaskell, "History of Images," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 168-192
Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: the Margins of Medieval Art* (reprint, Harvard, 1993), entire
R.W. Scribner, "The Incombustible Luther: the Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present* 110 (1986), 38-68.

Analytical Essay: Is there a difference between the history of images and Art History?
Should there be? Where do Camille and Scribner fit in?

10. History of the Body (November 12)

Roy Porter, "History of the Body," in Burke, *New Perspectives*, 206-232
Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (1985), 1-25.
Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance*

Florence (reprint, Oxford, 1998)

Possible Analytical Essay: What does it mean to argue that the ‘history of the body’ is

essentially an act of cultural construction? Use examples from the readings.

11. Revival of Narrative and Events (November 19)

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

Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative,” *Past and Present* 85 (1979), 3-24.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans* (Braziller, 1979), entire

Possible Analytical Essay: Should ‘narrative’ and ‘events-driven history’ be revived?

Why or why not? [be sure to use Le Roy Ladurie in your essay, whether pro or con]

12. From Politics to Power (November 26)

Thomas N. Bisson, “The ‘Feudal ‘Revolution’,” *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 6-42

Dominique Barthélemy and Stephen D. White, “Debate: The ‘Feudal Revolution’,” *Past and Present* 152 (1996), 196-223.

Stephen D. White, “Feuding and Peace-Making in the Touraine around the Year 1100,”

Traditio 42 (1986): 195-263.

Sharon A. Farmer, “Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives,” *Speculum* 61

(1986): 517-543. Available through J-Stor

Possible Analytical Essay: Is the history of ‘power’ simply another way of describing

good old-fashioned political history? Why or why not?

OR, Possible Analytical Essay: What assumptions about power, violence, and the state

undergird the two sides on the Feudal Revolution debate (ie., Bisson on the one hand, and Barthelemy and White on the other)

13. Texts, Language, and Construction (December 3)

Gabrielle Spiegel, “History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle

Ages,” *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 59-86. Available through J-Stor

Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in*

Thirteenth-Century France (Univ. of California Press, reprint 1995),
selected chapters
Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Telling It as you Like it: Post-Modernist History and the
Flight
from Fact," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 16, 1992, 12-15. I plan
to hand this out

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

Required Analytical Essay: 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?

14. History and Theory (December 10)

Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cornell UP, 1992), entire
Revisit one reading from the semester and rethink it according to Burke's
framework.

15. Monday, December 17, by noon: Final Paper Due

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 will 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.