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HIST 200-01, The Historian's Craft: Methods and Approaches in the Study of History, Spring 2009

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HIST 200 The Historian's Craft: Methods and Approaches in the Study of History

Saxe - Section 29309, Clough 304, 9-9:50 MWF

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Office Hours: 11-12, MF or by appointment, 307 Clough

Required Texts:

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*

Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial*

Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page, *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, 6th ed.

Course Requirements:

Annotation – All students will select one primary source pre-1900. It should be a written source of at least 250 words, but it can be anything from an obituary to an editorial to an advertisement. You may also select a piece of a longer document, such as a memoir, but choices must be cleared with the professor. After selecting a source, students will then have to annotate that source. This will involve writing explanatory notes for modern audiences that help explain the historical context of your source. Students will need at least 5 notations for their source. An annotated copy of the source will be submitted to the professor. Due in class January 23 – 10% of grade.

Online Archive

Historians today have the benefit of large groups of primary documents available to them on the internet. History students must have the ability to utilize these resources to aid them in research projects that are required in most history undergraduate programs. For this assignment, students will develop a topic in history that encompasses a variety of source material and time periods (at least some of your findings must be from pre-1900 sources). Possible topics could include women's history, the history of Christianity, or labor history, but students are greatly encouraged to have their own ideas. After a broader theme has been established, students will then locate at least 5 internet sites that contain primary documents relating to that topic. Students will write a review of approximately 300 words for each site, detailing each site's resources. The student will turn in all 5 reviews (approximately 1500 words). Also, students will select one source from each site to print and include with the hard copy of their site reviews. Due in class January 30 – 10% of final grade.

Class Participation

Active participation in class discussion – 10% of final grade. Students may also improve their participation grade by meeting with the professor during office hours or by appointment.

Essays

All essays should be typed, double-spaced, and should contain the following at the top of the first page: name, word count, date, and a meaningful title. Essays should have page numbers and be affixed with either a clip or staple. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in a penalty on the essay's grade.

In addition, any use of sources must be cited using Chicago-style footnotes

(see http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html for help or you may ask the instructor).

A title page and works cited page are not necessary. At the end of each essay, the Rhodes pledge should be printed and signed.

Short essays: There will be several short essays throughout the semester – 10% of final grade.

Book Review:

A 1500-word book review of Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Due in class February 16 – 20% of grade.

A good book review written by a historian does several things. First, it gives the reader an overall sense of what the book is about and what he or she might find out if he or she chooses to read it. You should pretend that you are writing this essay as a book review to be published in a magazine where it will be read by people who have never read the book before. Therefore, you will have to describe briefly what the book says, including a summary of its overall arguments. However, the amount of “plot summary” in a good review is *minimal* -- after all, you don't want to give the whole story away! You should limit the amount of your summary to *no more than 20% of your essay* -- that's one page of the approximately five pages you will write.

The second thing that a historian's book review does is to tell the reader whether the book in question succeeds or fails as a work of history. In other words, how well do you think Davis told her story, proved her case, and used her evidence? For this part of the exercise, you should think about the criteria that Marius lays out for us about what constitutes a good work of history. How does Davis's book measure up to the guidelines and principles that Marius puts forward?

Third, historians try to make sense of the book in their own way. In other words, what did you -- as a careful and critical reader -- come away from this book with? Did it help you think about history in a new way? What meaning did you see in the story that the author told? Why do you think this book might be worth someone else taking the time to read? This is the hardest part of the essay because it requires you to come up with your own interpretation of the book -- to make sense of the book on your own terms independent of what the author thought that he was doing. This is also the most important part of the essay because it is where you articulate your own particular thesis -- your interpretation. This element is what distinguishes this assignment from merely being a book *report* like the kind you wrote in the eighth grade. Book *reviews* are the product of an active mind -- that of the reviewer -- engaging with, taking apart, and reassembling the ideas of the book in a way that shows what it meant to him or her.

For the purposes of this essay, pretend that you are writing for a general, educated audience such as the readership of a major national newsmagazine. The best example of such a magazine is *The New Yorker*, but other magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek* may also provide good models. You may want to consult issues of these magazines to get a sense of how they are written.

Although these magazines may help you to get a sense of the style and voice, remember that a historian's book review is a serious intellectual exercise. You should also use Appendix B of Marius' book as a set of guidelines for how to write an analytical book review essay.

Film Review:

Due March 13 – 10% of final grade

Please watch a film about a historical topic that interests you. In 1500 words, please discuss the choices made by the film's creators in order to portray the historical events. Is the film an “accurate” portrayal of historical events? Is it important that this film be “accurate”? What are the implications of the filmmakers' decisions in portraying this story?

Research Paper:

Due Tuesday, May 8, by 1PM – 25% of final grade.

Our shared holidays have helped to create a national identity for Americans of all social strata. Certain days are set aside by a society to commemorate or to celebrate particular moments or themes in our common life -- they create what is “holy,” or special, to a particular group of people (hence the origins of the word: “holy day” = “holiday”).

Holidays are particularly interesting for the historian because they are intended to remind us of important moments in history. And they always involve interpretation.

National holidays are created to emphasize the importance of certain historical issues over others. For instance, there is a Veterans Day (November 11, the day of the Armistice ending World War I) but no day commemorating dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (although the Japanese do have a day to remember these events). Holidays are also constructed by leaders in order to place a certain historical interpretation on events in the past: Thanksgiving is supposed to remind Americans of the arrival of settlers in colonial New England, not the destruction of Native American lands, societies, and cultures (although some would argue that such an interpretation may have some validity too).

In approximately 3000 words, research and write the history of a holiday -- in particular how it was created -- in order to answer the questions: (1) Why was this holiday created? (2) How did it contribute to a particular understanding of American national identity at the moment of its inception?

Possible choices could include Martin Luther King Day, Labor Day, President’s Day, Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Veteran’s Day, Columbus Day, Juneteenth, Pulaski Day, Kwanzaa, Coming Out Day, Earth Day, etc. Look for a holiday that you will have enough to write about for the essay. You must clear your choice with the professor.

This assignment challenges you to go to the library, to find out information about a general topic, and then to tell a coherent story using what you’ve learned. Based on the research you have done in the library, provide a narrative account of your subject. What was the order of events? What were the issues at stake? What were the consequences? You should also frame your narrative around a central, unifying argument that suggests why the issue you have researched was important in a larger historical context. In other words, what did it matter to anyone that these events happened?

This paper emphasizes research using primary sources. You will need to cite at least 10 primary sources in your essay in order to receive credit.

Oral Presentation

Each student will prepare and deliver an oral presentation of their holiday research essay – 5% of final grade.

Course Policies:

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed three absences without penalty. Students are required to find out what they missed in class on the day of their absence. If students miss more than three classes, they are required to meet with the professor to discuss their absences. Failure to do so will result in the lowering of a student’s final grade by one third grade point for every absence over three. Please consider this policy when planning for extracurricular activities (sports, mock trial, etc.)

Due dates and times for writing assignments are fixed. All assignments are due in class, not in the professor's mailbox. Late assignments will receive a failing grade. All assignments must be turned in to the professor. Failure to complete an assignment will result in a failing grade for the class. If you have questions about plagiarism, please talk to me directly.

The professor supports the Rhodes College Honor Code. To demonstrate commitment to the Code, each student must write "pledged" and sign his/her name on every assignment.

Course Calendar:

January 14

Introduction

January 16

Doing Historical Research

(Marius, Ch.1, 4)

January 19 (MLK Day; no class)

January 21

Doing Research at Rhodes

(Marius, Ch. 6)

January 23

A Question of Sources I

(Marius, Ch. 2; Daniel Boorstin, "A Wrestler with the Angel")

Annotation due

January 26

Discuss annotation and research

(Marius, 5, 8)

January 28

Creating an Essay – The Introduction and The Conclusion

(Marius, Ch. 3, 7)

January 30

A Question of Sources II

(E.H. Carr, "The Historian and His Facts")

Online Archive Assignment Due

February 2

The Changing Face of "The Facts": American Slavery as a Case Study in Historiography

(U.B. Phillips, selections from *American Negro Slavery*)

February 4

Historiography Continued

(Kenneth Stampp, selections from *The Peculiar Institution* and Stanley Elkins, selections from *Slavery: a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*)

February 6

Creating an Essay – the Argument

February 9

Historiography Continued

(Winthrop Jordan, “Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery” and Carl Degler, “Why do Historians Change their Minds?”)

February 11

A Question of Sources IV

(Davis, Ch. 7-12, Epilogue)

February 13

A Question of Sources III

(Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Ch. 1-6)

February 16

A Question of Sources IV

Book Review Due

February 18

Approaches to History I: Social History

(Gautam Bhadra, “Four Rebels of 1857”)

February 20

Social History Continued

Finish discussing Bhadra

February 23

Social History Continued

Quantifying History

(Allan Kulikoff, selections from *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*)

February 25

Ethics and Inquiry – Historians Behaving Badly

(Paul Charles Hoffer, “Falsification: The Case of Michael Bellesiles”)

February 27

Ethics and Inquiry II

(Paul Charles Hoffer, “Plagiarism: The Case of Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin”)

March 2

History in Art and Literature

(Donald Stevens, “Never Read History Again? The Possibilities and Perils of Cinema as Historical Depiction” and James Schofield Saeger, “*The Mission* and Historical Missions: Film and Writing of History” from Donald Stevens, ed., *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*)

March 4

Approaches to History II: Cultural History

(Timothy Burke, selections from *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*)

March 6

Creating an Essay – How to Edit/Peer Review

March 9

Approaches to History III: Political History

(William E. Leuchtenburg, “The Pertinence of Political History: Reflections on the Significance of the State in America”)

March 11

Political History Continued

(Robin D.G. Kelley, selections from *Race Rebels*)

March 13

History in Art and Literature II

Film Review Due

March 16, 18, 20 (Spring Break)

March 23

The Historian as History

(Joel Williamson, “Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, The National Conscience, and the American Historian”)

March 25

The Historian and the Profession

(Referees Reports for Williamson from Edward L. Ayers, David W. Blight, George M. Fredrickson, Robin D.G. Kelley, David Levering Lewis, Steven Stowe, and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall)

March 27

The Politics of History

(Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial*, Ch. 1-3)

March 30

The Politics of History Continued

(Evans, Ch. 4-6)

April 1

The Politics of History Continued

(Evans, Ch. 7)

April 3

Whose History Is It Anyway?

(Paul Boyer, "Whose History is it Anyway?: Memory, Politics, and Historical Scholarship")

April 6

Watch *The Nasty Girl*

April 8

Finish Watching *The Nasty Girl*

April 10 (Easter Break)

April 13

Discuss film

April 15

Whose History Is It Anyway? Continued

History Standards

(read handouts)

April 17

Whose History Is It Anyway? Continued And/Or History in Art and Literature III

(William Styron, selections from *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and selections from *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*)

April 20

Effective Presentations Workshop

April 22, 24, 27, 29

Presentations of Research Projects

May 1 (URCAS)

May 8 - **Research Paper due; 1PM**