

HISTORICAL METHODS

History 5104 / CRN 88527

FALL 2014

Prof. A. Nelson

Twitter: @purling4peas #gradhistf14

main course blog: <http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/gradhistf14/>

Office Hours

Thurs. 1-3 and by appointment

History springs from the human fascination with self-discovery, from the persistent concern about the nature of existence and people's engagement with it. Men and women have learned to externalize this curiosity—even to distance themselves from its impertinent subjectivity—by directing their questions to concepts and abstractions like the growth of democracy or the ascendancy of modernity, but the renewable source of energy behind these inquiries comes from an intense craving for information about what it is to be human.

Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, pp. 306-307

This course provides an introduction to the theoretical frameworks and historiographical debates that inform the contemporary research and writing of history. It offers graduate students a solid grounding in the methodological and theoretical approaches employed by professional historians and prepares them to develop their own research projects (usually in the form of the MA thesis proposal) the following semester in History 5134: Research Methods for Historians. One of the main concerns of this course is to help new practitioners develop a sense of the "history of history" and an appreciation for the diverse intellectual heritage of the discipline. We will also invest in emerging and future historical modalities by building out our discussions on blogs, exploring the dynamic potential of Google Drive, and using other digital technologies to develop a substantial, unique, transparent and enduring learning network for historiography. The course also introduces students to the professional culture and ethical norms of the profession and the academy, focusing in particular on developing a regular practice of professional writing, developing and managing a "digital presence," reviewing thesis proposals by second-year students, assessing the roles of scholarly journals and the book review, and the development of an original historiographical essay.

Academic Integrity:

Do not cheat. Do not plagiarize. All assignments are subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code. For more information on the Graduate Honor Code, please refer to the [GHS Constitution](http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/) at <http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/>

Special Needs:

If you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.

Principles of Community:

Our class will be guided by Virginia Tech's [Principles of Community](#). We are inspired by a spirit of inclusion and mutual respect, and committed to creating a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members.

Safe Zone:

My office is a certified Safe Zone, and I am committed to creating a more inclusive and accepting environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning communities and their allies. For more information on LGBTQ services and opportunities, please visit <http://www.mps.vt.edu/lgbtq/index.html>.

Course Materials:

You should buy the books listed below. The additional readings on the syllabus are in the library or on the web.

1. Eley, Geoff. 2005. *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society*. University of Michigan Press.
2. Smail, Daniel Lord. 2008. *On Deep History and the Brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
3. Thompson, E. P. 2001. *The Essential E.P. Thompson*. New York: New Press.
4. Tosh, John, and Sean Lang. 2009. *The Pursuit of History*. 5th edition. Harlow: Longman.
5. Weinberger, David. 2011. *Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room*. New York: Basic Books.
6. Brown, Kate. *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*. Harvard University Press, 2005.
7. Steedman, Carolyn Kay. *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

NUTS AND BOLTS:

1. General:

I consider it a privilege to be a historian and am committed to helping you discover and develop your talents in our craft. Please let me know how I can help you learn! You will work very hard in this class, but you will also discover a lot about yourselves, gain valuable skill as researchers, build confidence as practitioners of history, and develop a regular practice of historical research and writing. If all goes as planned, there will even be some fun along the way.

2. Weekly Blogging (more is better):

While this syllabus provides a road map to the course, a large part of our work together will be constructed, elaborated and refined in the blogosphere. I am interested in deepening and expanding on our in-class discussions and research endeavors and hope that this networked learning environment will help us create the course together in an immediately accessible, professional, and enduring medium.

So, your first task is to set up a blog on VT's secure WordPress site. Follow the directions here: <http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/>. Once you have a blog, please send me the URL (anelson@vt.edu) and I will add it to the mother blog for the course (<http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/gradhistf14>). Please do this by Thursday, August 28, 2014.

You are required to blog at least once per week about the assigned readings, and you are required to comment on another person's blog at least three times per week. There is no assigned length or format for your blogging. I just ask that you engage the readings thoughtfully and substantively, and that you explore and play with the many nuances of the blogging modality. I anticipate that many of you will find the volume and complexity of the reading fairly challenging, especially in the first few weeks. Use your blog to help you map out (and remember) both the broad brushstrokes and the nuances of the assigned texts. Use it to make connections between this course and other conversations in your field. There is no one "right way" to do this. You might reflect on the main insights of the readings or comment on the theoretical/methodological frameworks of the texts. You should think about how the assigned texts relate to each other and to other readings for the course. You might also draw on other perspectives you have encountered elsewhere, and the thoughts, questions, and responses of your classmates on their blogs. **Individual blog posts are not graded, but will be considered holistically as evidence of your general commitment to the course and its content.**

Indeed one of the goals of the blogging project is to foster collaboration, communication and innovation within the class, across the discipline(s), and among various audiences in and beyond the academy. Leveraging the collective power of social networking makes us stronger, more diverse, and more interesting as historians and scholars.

There is also a Twitter feed on the main course blog. Tweets with the hashtag #gradhistf14 will appear here. When I come across things I think will be of interest to our work I will Tweet them to that hashtag

and encourage you to do the same. Setting up a Twitter account is easy. If you use Instagram, Facebook or SnapChat, you can definitely Tweet!

Your blog posts are due by midnight on Saturday. This gives us two days to read and comment on each other's posts before class on Tuesday.

3. Class Sessions:

Everyone will complete all of the readings, attend every class session and participate in every discussion.

Each week one or two volunteers will be in charge of moderating the seminar. Discussion leaders should be especially familiar with the assigned readings, and will post a list of themes for discussion on their blogs on Saturday before midnight. They will be "in charge" of leading discussion during class, and are welcome to consult relevant book reviews or other texts on the assigned topic if they wish. They are not required to make a formal presentation to the class, but might want to provide a short (5 minute) introduction to the material to get things started. I will be available to answer questions and move the discussion forward if necessary. Everyone will serve as a discussion leader at least twice during the semester.

4. Google Driving Discussion

We will be using a document on Google drive to record and reflect on our class sessions. I see this as an additional modality for participating in, deepening, and extending the discussion taking place during the seminar and have high hopes for its utility in this setting. Each week we will generate a collectively authored, annotated transcript of our class session. These notes will remain "live" on the shared drive. After class I will also post a PDF of document on the motherblog for everyone's future reference. The mechanics of this will be discussed at the first class session.

5. Mid-Term Reflection, Analysis and Planning

A short (3-5pp.) paper you will turn in on Friday September 26 based on your blog entries and those of your classmates. Details to come in class.

6. Thesis Proposal Reviews

During October, the second-year MA students present their thesis proposals as part of our class. You will read and write a short review of these proposals and share them with me and with the proposal authors. Details to come in class.

7. Article Dissection and Historiography Workshop

Hands-on mark-up and analysis of articles selected from the bibliographies you are developing for your final paper. In-class workshop on November 4. Details to come in class.

8. Historiographical Essay

The capstone assignment for the course is an original historiographical essay on a topic of interest to you but chosen in consultation with me. Many details to come in class.

GRADING

Content Creation / Participation (blogging, commenting, tweeting, discussing, etc.)	50%
Mid-Term RAP	10%
Thesis proposal reviews	10%
Article Dissection & Historiography Workshop	10%
Historiographical Essay	20%
Total:	100%

CLASS SCHEDULE

This is a preliminary and somewhat conditional schedule. Assignments and materials may be modified or amplified as the semester progresses.

Week 1: Course Introduction

Aug. 26

Part 1: Flyover

Week 2: History Past: Historical Thinking / Historiography

Sep. 2

Reading:

Tosh, *Pursuit of History* chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-87)

George G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (2005 [1997]), Chs. 1-4 (pp. 1-47)

Novak, William J. "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State." *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (June 1, 2008): 752–72. doi: 10.1086/ahr.113.3.752

Ward, Kyle. *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling Over the Last 200 Years*. (2007), excerpts on Columbus, Salem Witchtrials, and Women's Suffrage (Scholar)

Week 3: History Present: Networked Knowledge

Sep. 9

reading:

Weinberger, *Too Big to Know*, Chs. 1-4

Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, Chs. 4-6

William Cronon, "Storytelling," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 1–19. doi:10.1093/ahr/118.1.1.

Week 4: History Future

Sep. 16

reading:

Weinberger, *Too Big to Know*, Chs. 5-6, 9

Writing History in the Digital Age

Introduction

Sherman Dorn, "Is (Digital) History More Than an Argument about the Past?"

Stephan Tanaka, "Pasts in a Digital Age"

Leslie Madsen-Brooks, "'I nevertheless am a historian': Digital Historical Practice and Malpractice around Black Confederate Soldiers"

Robert S. Wolff, "The Historian's Craft, Popular Memory, and Wikipedia"

Alex Sayf Cummings and Jonathan Jarrett, "Only Typing? Informal Writing, Blogging and the Academy"

Schmidt, Ben. "Sapping Attention: Reading Digital Sources: A Case Study in Ship's Logs." Sapping Attention, November 15, 2012.

<http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2012/11/reading-digital-sources-case-study-in.html>.

Part 2: A Short History of History

week 5: Social History

sep. 23

reading:

Eley, *A Crooked Line* chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-60)

Tosh, *Pursuit of History* Chs. 7-8

Thompson, *The Essential E. P. Thompson*, pp. 3-183

Reviews of *Making of The Making of the English Working Class*

Friday, Sept. 26 Mid-Term RAP due

week 6: Historical Anthropology

sept. 30

reading:

Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre," *History Today* 34, no. 8 (August 1984)

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973), 3-30 (Scholar)

Roger Chartier, "Texts, Symbols, and Frenchness," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Dec. 1985); 682-695

Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond," in Lynn Hunt, ed. *The New Cultural History* (1989), 72-96

[Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, Ch. 9]

week 7: Post-structuralism

oct. 7

reading:

Michel Foucault, "This is not a Pipe," "What is Enlightenment?" "Discipline and Punish, Panopticism" and "History of Sexuality vol. 2, Introduction." All available here: <http://foucault.info/>

Spiegel, Gabrielle M. "The Task of the Historian." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 1–15. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.1.1.

Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in Lynn Hunt, ed. *The New Cultural History* (1989), 25-46

Key Foucauldian Concepts: <http://www.michel-foucault.com/concepts/>

week 8: Space, Place and Biography I

oct. 14

reading:

Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives* (2010 [1986])

Eley, *A Crooked Line*, Chs. 3-4

PROPOSAL DEFENSES

week 9: Useful Categories of Analysis

oct. 21

reading:

Joan W. Scott, "Gender a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053-1075

Joan W. Scott, "Symptomatic Politics. The Banning of Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23, no. 3 (2005): 106–127.

doi:10.3167/153763705780793531.

"AHR Forum: Revisiting 'Gender, A Useful Category for Historical Analysis.'" *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 1, 2008)

1. "Introduction," 1344-1345

2. Joanne Meyerowitz, "A History of Gender," 1346-1356

3. Joan W. Scott, "Unanswered Questions," 1422-430

[Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, Ch. 10]

"AHR Forum: Geoff Eley's *A Crooked Line*," *The American Historical Review* vol. 113, no. 2 (April 2008), pp. 391-437

Eley, Ch. 5

PROPOSAL DEFENSES

Part 3: Nuts and Bolts

week 10: Ethics and Professional Standards

oct. 28

reading:

Jon Wiener, *Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower* (New York : New York: New Press ; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2005), chs. 7 and 11

"Roundtable" *Journal of American History* 90 (March 2004): 1325-1356

(articles by Meyerowitz, Gorn, Grossberg, Fox, Seltzer and Lapansky)

"Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct - American Historical Association," accessed August 25, 2013, <http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm>.

"How to Detect and Demonstrate Plagiarism," American Historical Association, accessed August 25, 2013, <http://www.historians.org/governance/pd/plagiarism.htm>.

PROPOSAL DEFENSES

***Final Paper Topic Selection**

week 11 Article Dissection and Historiography Workshop

nov. 4

week 12: Research Week

nov. 11

***Synopsis and annotated bibliography for final paper due**

Part 4: Current Approaches and Methods

week 13: History Meets Natural History / Science

nov. 18

reading:

Smail, *Deep History and The Brain*

"AHR Forum: Investigating the History in Prehistories," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (June 1, 2013)

1. "Introduction," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 708–708, doi:10.1093/ahr/118.3.708.
2. Daniel Lord Smail and Shryock Andrew, "History and the 'Pre'," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 709–737, doi:10.1093/ahr/118.3.709.
3. James F. Brooks, "Women, Men, and Cycles of Evangelism in the Southwest Borderlands, A.d. 750 to 1750," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 738–764, doi:10.1093/ahr/118.3.738.
4. Akinwumi Ogundiran, "The End of Prehistory? An Africanist Comment," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 788–801, doi:10.1093/ahr/118.3.788.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

week 14: Does History Need Animals?

dec. 2

reading:

Shaw, David Gary. "A Way with Animals." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 1–12. doi:10.1111/hith.10685.

Fudge, Erica. "Milking Other Men's Beasts." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 13–28. doi:10.1111/hith.10682.

Walker, Brett L. "Animals and the Intimacy of History." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 45–67. doi:10.1111/hith.10687.

Pearson, Susan. "Speaking Bodies, Speaking Minds: Animals, Language, History." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 91–108. doi:10.1111/hith.10689.

Pearson, Chris. "Dogs, History, and Agency." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 128–45. doi:10.1111/hith.10683.

Shaw, David Gary. "The Torturer's Horse: Agency and Animals in History." *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 146–67. doi:10.1111/hith.10691.

week 15: Space, Place and Biography - II

dec. 9

reading:

Brown, Kate. *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*. Harvard University Press, 2005.

AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography (June 2009)

Nasaw, David. "Introduction." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 573–78. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.573.

Banner, Lois W. "Biography as History." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 579–86. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.579.

Brown, Kate. "A Place in Biography for Oneself." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 596–605. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.596.

Fleming, Robin. "Writing Biography at the Edge of History." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 606–14. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.606.

Kessler-Harris, Alice. "Why Biography?" *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 625–30. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.625.

Taylor, Barbara. "Separations of Soul: Solitude, Biography, History." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 640–51. doi:10.1086/ahr.114.3.640.

December 13: Final Papers Due