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21H.931 Seminar in Historical Methods  
Spring 2004

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21H.931  
Spring, 2008

Instructor: David Ciarlo  
W 3-5

## SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL METHODS

This course is designed to engage students with the wide variety of recent approaches used to study the past. The books and essays we will read have all made significant contributions to the field of history as a whole, and will cover as wide a methodological, geographical, and chronological field as possible in the span of a mere semester. In our discussions over the next few months, we will explore how historians conceive of their object of study, how they use primary sources as a basis for their accounts, and how they structure the narrative and analytic discussion of their topic. We will also discuss and debate the advantages and drawbacks of each of these various approaches, and ultimately, the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

### Readings

The following books are available at the MIT Bookstore and on reserve in the Hayden Library:

Natalie Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983)  
Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (1991)  
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1995 ed., orig. 1977)  
Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (Hill and Wang, 1996)

All articles and book sections will be circulated via the course website.

### Requirements

This is a research seminar: for half of the semester, we will discuss books that we have all read in common; for the other half, you will work on a paper of original research.

The main written assignment for this course is a substantial research paper, on any reasonable subject of interest to you. These papers should be around 15 pages long, and should explore the given topic in substantial depth. (History majors might use this paper to explore a possible thesis topic.) The paper will be crafted in the following stages:

February 20	Statement of topic interest and research proposal
March 5	Bibliography
April 2	One Best Source Presentation
April 23	Introduction and Outline
April 30	Rough Drafts

May 7 or 14                      Class presentations

May 15                              Final Paper Due

Class participation is an essential component of this course, and therefore will comprise a significant portion of the final course grade. Make sure to bring your copy of the reading with you to class so that you can participate fully. Each week, I will circulate some questions to think about before the discussion. Read through them, and think about them thoroughly before our discussion. Also, you will be expected to bring to class each week a brief summary—no more than 50 words—of the essential aspects of the assigned reading. (I will go into more detail about this summary when I circulate the first week's questions.)

Research paper 50%

Seminar participation (including summaries) 50%

**Please note:** plagiarism of any kind—that is taking another's words or ideas from a book, another student, or from the internet without full and complete citation—will not be tolerated regardless of the circumstances, and will result in an "F" for the assignment.

### Class Schedule

February 6    Introduction & Library Tour

February 13    Narrative and history

Natalie Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*

February 20    Sources and History

Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich *A Midwife's Tale*

**\*Statement of topic interest and research proposal due**

February 27    Social history I: Materialism and Social Class

Karl Marx on historical materialism (excerpt from the *German Ideology*)

E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" *Past and Present*, No. 50. (1971), pp. 76-136.

March 5        Social History II: Quantitative History

**TBA** (probably Anne McCants, "The Not-So-Merry Widows of Amersterdam" in *Journal of Family History* 24:4 (1999), 441-467)

**\*Bibliography due**

- March 12 Culture and History  
Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre" Harold Mah, "Suppressing the Text: the Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre," History Workshop, V 31, Spring 1991.  
**\*Bibliography due**
- March 19 Environment and History  
Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (Hill and Wang, 1996)
- March 26 (NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK)
- April 2 Race and History  
Robin D. G. Kelley Introduction and Chapter 2 of *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1996), pp.1-13 and 35-53.  
Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham "the Politics of Respectability" in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1993), 185-229
- April 9 **Presentations**  
**\*One Best Source**
- April 16 Power, "Truth," and History: Post-structuralism  
Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, (esp. pp. 3-228 and 293-308)
- April 23 Film and History (*film to be announced*)  
**\*Introduction and Outline due**
- April 30 **\*Drafts due**
- May 7 Research presentations
- May 14 Research presentations

***Final Paper Due on May 16***

(May 19-23 Final Exam Week) *There is no final for this class.*