THE WRITING OF HISTORY
History 6350 (graduate seminar), Spring 2017, Tuesdays, 12:20-2:15, Rockefeller B15

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This graduate seminar approaches the writing of history as a problem rather than a given, as a craft or even an art rather than a standard method of presenting research. It should have the feel of an extended workshop. We’ll consider as many kinds of history writing as possible, including some that are more traditional and some that are more experimental. Most of the course will be devoted to an exploration of the diverse forms that history writing has taken over the last few decades, though we will also at times step back from such case studies and examine the history, theory, and philosophy of the writing of history. Readings will range widely through time and space and will be assessed less for the quality of their arguments or their place in a given historiography and more for their success as pieces of writing per se (and for strategies and techniques that we can apply to our own work). We’ll discuss such topics as narrative structure, voice, the role of the first person, tone, character development, and the basic use of language. And we’ll also consider poetic, fictional, visual, journalistic, and interdisciplinary perspectives on history writing. Students will be expected to do a fair amount of their own writing for this class and to share and discuss their papers openly—though no new research will be required during the semester. In addition, we’ll spend some time talking about both the teaching of history and the teaching of writing. Obviously, the course is geared toward students in the History department, but anyone doing historical writing in any discipline whatsoever—English, Anthropology, Science and Technology Studies, Sociology, etc.—is warmly invited to sign up.

There will be three short writing assignments during the semester and a final longer assignment due at the end of term.
The three short papers are all capped at 1200 words (about 4 double-spaced pages); plus, for each short paper, you’ll write an additional 1-2-page “note to readers” explaining some of the writing decisions you made. WHEN YOU HAVE A PAPER DUE FOR THIS CLASS, PLEASE BRING IN TWO COPIES.
The final assignment can be either a portfolio of SIGNIFICANTLY REVISED versions of your three shorter papers; or a new stand-alone paper 10-20 pages in length. The stand-alone paper can be a brand-new piece of writing, or it can be a new, more creative version of some other piece of writing you’ve done in the past.

I will also ask each student in the class to lead a session (or part of a session) once during the semester (perhaps with a partner). In addition, each student will have at least one half-hour conference with me during the semester to discuss his or her writing.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS:
January 31st. Introduction and Assumptions
Four short readings for next week handed out in class.
February 7th. Mystery History.

**BOOK DELIVERY!**

*Paper #1 due in class.*

FIRST WRITING WORKSHOP, based on the four handouts:
--Eli Levine (pseud.), “The Many Deaths of General Wolfe”
--Richard Farnsworth (pseud.), “Shipwreck”
--Joani Blank (pseud.), “The Taste of Ashes”
--Inigo Montoya (pseud.), “Century of the Wind”

February 14th. Current Award-Winning History.
--E.M. Rose, *The Murder of William Norwich* (entire)
--James Goodman, “For the Love of Stories” (packet)

February 28th. History by a Novelist with a Ph.D. in Anthropology.
--Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (entire)

March 7th. Art, Craft, Style.

*Paper #2 due in class.*

SECOND WRITING WORKSHOP.
--Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (first 100 pages)
--John Clive, “Why Read the Great Nineteenth-Century Historians?” (packet)
--Louis Masur, “What It Will Take to Turn Historians into Writers” (packet)
--Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” and “On Style” (packet)
--Also recommended: Christopher Lasch, *Plain Style: A Guide to Written English*

March 14th. Ahistorical History?
--Craig Harline, *Conversions* (entire)

March 21st. Personal History.
--Jonathan Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom* (entire)
--John Clive, “The Most Disgusting of Pronouns” (packet)
--John Demos, “Using Self, Using History” (packet)

March 28th. The History and Politics of Writing History.

*Paper #3 due in class.*

THIRD WRITING WORKSHOP.
--Robert Rosenstone, “Space for the Bird to Fly” (packet)
--Marjorie Garber, “Why Can’t Young Scholars Write Their Second Books First?” (packet)

April 4th. SPRING BREAK. ENJOY!!!!!
April 11th.  **History by a Journalist, Inspired by a Novel.**
--George Packer, *The Unwinding* (entire)
--John Demos, “In Search of Reasons for Historians to Read Novels….” (packet)
--Jane Kamensky, “Novelties: A Historian’s Field Notes from Fiction” (packet)

April 18th.  **Artistic History.**
--Lauren Redniss, *Radioactive* (entire)
--Joseph Conrad, “Preface” to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (packet)
--Rebecca Solnit, excerpts from *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (packet)
--Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” (packet)

April 25th.  **Eclectic History I.**
--Jani Scandura, *Down in the Dumps* (entire)

May 2nd.  **Eclectic History II.**
FOURTH WRITING WORKSHOP.  PLEASE CHOOSE ONE OF YOUR FIRST THREE PAPERS TO REVISE AND BRING IT TO CLASS.  (You do not need to do any revisions before class—just bring the original paper with you, with my comments on it.)
--Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (entire)

May 9th.  **History by an Independent Scholar/Writer.**
--Amy Reading, *The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, a Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con* (entire)

**FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE TUESDAY, MAY 23RD.**

**LIST OF BOOKS TO PURCHASE**
I've ordered all of the books at Buffalo Street Books.  Store details:
Hours: Mon–Sat 10-8, Sun 11-6.  Address: DeWitt Mall, 215 N. Cayuga (in downtown Ithaca)
Email: buffalostreetbooks@hotmail.com.  Phone: (607) 273-8246

The books are now in stock at the store, and you are welcome to shop there whenever you'd like.  **But also please note that you can have the books delivered to you at the second meeting of this class, on Tuesday, February 7th, at 12:20pm, in Rockefeller B15.**  (This will still give you a full week in which to read the first book for the course.)  All you have to do is email the store (at least a day in advance) with your order.  When you place your order, be sure to state your name, contact information (telephone or email), what class (professor and course) you're ordering for, the books being ordered, and your credit card number including expiration date.  NOTE: when you order your books using this method, you will not be charged any tax.  The store accepts MC, VISA and Discover.  (No AmEx.)  Confirmation will be sent by email.  The store's email address, as noted above, is: buffalostreetbooks@hotmail.com.  If you'd prefer not to
give out your credit card number on email (though they have never had a single problem with security issues), then simply call the store, at 607-273-8246.

For those of you interested in the importance of shopping locally, not just for books, check out <http://www.bookweb.org/advocacy/studies.html> or <http://www.staylocal.org/info/why>. These studies document the positive economic impact of locally owned businesses, and how they contribute significantly more money to the local economy than do retail chains. I also believe that small, independent bookstores can contribute a great deal to our sense of community.

The books for this class are also either available electronically or on 2-hour reserve at Uris Library. **Whenever possible, please bring the actual, physical book to class when we are scheduled to discuss it. If you read a book on reserve or electronically, then please bring paper notes with you to class, as I would rather not have any electronic devices in the classroom.**

**ALSO NOTE: THE SHORT READINGS HAVE BEEN COLLECTED INTO A COURSE PACKET AVAILABLE AT THE UPS STORE IN COLLEGETOWN. PLEASE GO TO THE STORE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND ORDER YOURSELF A PACKET. THERE SHOULD BE SOME ALREADY PRINTED AS OF JANUARY 31ST; BEYOND THOSE, PACKETS WILL BE PRINTED ON DEMAND (IT USUALLY TAKES 24 HOURS). PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE THE PACKET BY THE SECOND WEEK OF CLASS, IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE READING FOR THE THIRD WEEK.**

**Books that have been ordered at BSB:**
--Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences about Writing* (Vintage, 2013), 978-0307279415
--Christopher Lasch, *Plain Style* (U. Penn, 2002), 978-0812228145
--Craig Harline, *Conversions* (Yale, 2013), 978-0300192445
--George Packer, *The Unwinding* (FSG, 2014), 978-0374534608
--Lauren Redniss, *Radioactive* (Dey Street, 2015), 978-0062416162
--Jani Scandura, *Down in the Dumps* (Duke, 2008), 978-0822336662

And, for whatever it’s worth, here is a sampling of some other books that I considered for this syllabus, arranged by category:

**History by academic historians:**
Natalie Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*
Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*
Douglas Sackman, *Wild Men: Ishi and Kroeber in the Wilderness of Modern America*
James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro or Blackout*
Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*
Suzanne Lebsock, *A Murder in Virginia*
Robert Rosentstone, *Mirror in the Shrine*
John Demos (several books)
Louis Masur (several books)
William McFeely (several books)
Jill Lepore (several books)
Jane Kamensky (several books)
Martha Sandweiss, *Passing Strange*
Roger Levine, *A Living Man from Africa*
Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn*
Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife*
Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*
Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*
Richard Evans, *In Defense of History*
Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*
Robert Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class*
Brian Donohue, *Reclaiming the Commons*
David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History*
Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*
David Farber, *Chicago ‘68*
Peter Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan’s Obsession for an English America; and Fatal Journey: The Final Expedition of Henry Hudson*
Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagran*
Timothy Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket’s Tale*
Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*
Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*

**History by interdisciplinary scholars (in the academy):**
Saadiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*
Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t*
Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve*
Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*
Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost*
Robert Pogue Harrison (several books)
Marshall Berman, *Everything That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*

**History by Journalists:**
Christopher de Bellaigue, *Rebel Land: Unraveling the Riddle of History in a Turkish Town*
Tony Horwitz (several books)
Adam Hochschild (several books)
Samuel Freedman, *The Inheritance*
Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Laks*
Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*
Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*
Lawrence Weschler (several books)
John McPhee (several books)

**History by Independent Writers/Scholars:**
Stella Tillyard, *The Aristocrats*
Sharman Apt Russell, *Hunger: An Unnatural History*
Deborah Tall, *A Family of Strangers*
Kate Cambor, *Gilded Youth: Three Lives in France’s Belle Epoque*
Julia Blackburn, *Daisy Bates in the Desert*
E.H. Gombrich, *A Little History of the World*
Rebecca Solnit (several books)
Adam Nicolson, *Sissinghurst, An Unfinished History*
Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire*
Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America*

**Historical Fiction:**
Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose* (also note Stegner’s nonfiction histories)
John Dos Passos, *USA*
Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*
Denis Johnson, *Train Dreams*
Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower*
Hilary Mantel (several books)
Brian Hall (several books)
W.G. Sebald (several books)
Stewart O’Nan, *A Prayer for the Dying*
Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10 and a Half Chapters*
Emma Donoghue, *Astray*
E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*

**Books about Writing:**
Stephen Pyne, *Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction*
Phillip Lopate, *To Show and To Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction*
Tracy Kidder, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*
William Zinnser, *On Writing Well*
Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*
Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*
Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*
Lynda Barry, *What It Is*
Virginia Tufte, *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*
F.L. Lucas, *Style: The Art of Writing Well*
Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style*
Joseph Williams, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*