

History Workshop—DRAFT SYLLABUS

Prof. Sophia Rosenfeld (srosenf@upenn.edu)

Spring 2023

Class meeting:

Office hours: Th, 3:00-5:00 in College Hall 307--or by appointment on Zoom

This course is an introduction to the practice of history. In Part I, we will read and analyze some major and very different examples of history writing, exploring not just the arguments they make but also how they were researched, constructed, and written and why. We will do so in conjunction with visits to the Rare Book Collection in Van Pelt Library and the Penn Museum. In Part II, we will move to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Center City and do some archival research of our own. In Part III, we will build on this research and present the material we've uncovered both in oral presentations and in short-form writing. The focus will be on the mechanics of doing history, from the creation of a bibliography to the crafting of a narrative. Finally, in Part IV, we will talk about why history is always subject to debate and both explore some contemporary arguments about history and analyze the public presentation of history in city museums. Philadelphia itself will be a big feature of the course.

Note on readings: You are not obligated to buy any books for this course; all texts will be available either on reserve in hard copy at the reserve desk in Van Pelt Library or as e-books or both. However, if you decide to buy the main books for this class, you should have no trouble locating them in used and inexpensive editions online:

*Natalie Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre (Harvard, 1983)

*Camilla Townsend, Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs (Oxford, 2019)

*Emma Rothschild, The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History (Princeton, 2013)

*Margot Canaday, The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, 2009)

*Tiya Miles, All that She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake (Random House, 2021)

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Beacon Press, 1997)

*Arlette Farge, The Allure of the Archives (Yale, 2013)

*Pankaj Mishra, The Age of Anger: The History of the Present (FSG, 2017)

Schedule:

Week One: **Introductions** [meet in Kislak Center]

PART I: READING HISTORY

Issues to consider when reading works of history: what question is the historian/author asking? what sources and what method or approach is the historian using to answer that question? what and whose story is the historian telling? what is the scale of that story? what is the historian's relationship to that story? what is the historian's argument? what kind of history writing is this?

Week Two: **A Detective Story** [meet in Kislak Center]

*E. H. Carr, "The Historian and His [sic] Facts," in What is History? (Vintage, 1961), 7-30
ONLY

http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/E.H._Carr,_What_is_History,_1961.pdf

*Natalie Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre (Harvard, 1983)

Issue to consider in week two: what is the job of the historian?

Week Three: **A Lost People** [meet in Kislak Center]

*Camilla Townsend, Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs (Oxford, 2019), pp. 1-128, 209-15

Visit to Penn Museum to look at Aztec objects and manuscripts, plus Kislak Center holdings

Issue to consider in week three: how does a historian know things?

Week Four: **A Family on the Move** [meet in Kislak Center]

*Emma Rothschild, The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History (Princeton, 2013), pp. 1-96, 121-209, 263-28, plus maps

Introduction to archives in Kislak Center to look at letters, diaries, and intimate sources, as well as early books

Issue to consider in week four: how does a historian know things? (continued)

Week Five: **State Power and A New Category of Persons** [meet in Kislak Center]

*Margot Canaday, The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, 2009), 1-68, 91-173

Issue to consider in week five: what is a historical subject?

Week Six: **One Object and Its Owners** [meet in Kislak Center]

*Tiya Miles, All that She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake (Random House, 2021), 1-192, 235-248 and look at images

Issue to consider in week six: do objects have histories themselves? what can they tell us about people?

Note: in weeks 3-6, pick two weeks in which you will write a very brief (2-3 pages max.) book review of a work we are discussing (due by noon on the day of discussion)

PART II: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Week Seven: **What's in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania?** [meet at HSP]

*Arlette Farge, The Allure of the Archives (Yale, 2013)

Week Eight: **Looking for Traces of Philadelphians** [meet at HSP]

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Beacon Press, 1997)

In-class exercise on analyzing a single primary source

SPRING BREAK

PART III: WRITING HISTORY

Week Nine: **Building A Bibliography** [meet in Kislak Center]

In-class exercise on bibliography construction, based on HSP visit

Librarian will come to class to work with us

Week Ten: **Getting to Know “Our” People** [meet at HSP]

Working session in the HSP

Week Eleven: **Presenting “Our” People: The Art of Narrative Construction** [meet in Kislak Center]

In-class oral presentations

Week Twelve: NO CLASS MEETING but short papers due at time of class

PART IV: DEBATING HISTORY

Week Thirteen: **Can We Write the History of the Present?** [meet at Kislak Center]

*read Pankaj Mishra, The Age of Anger: The History of the Present (FSG, 2017), 1-81, 275-346 and debates about it H-Diplo: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/4247154/roundtable-xx-44-age-anger-history-present>

Week Fourteen: **What do We Need to Know about the Past?** [meet at MAR]

Visit to the Museum of the American Revolution in Old City

Paper due by xxx

Assignments:

--two short book reviews (due in weeks 3-6)

--two short class presentations (one on a primary source: what can you learn? what can't you learn? in week 8 and one on a person of your choice in week 11)

--a 6-page paper on your chosen person (due in week 12)

--a 5-page descriptive review of the presentation of history at any site of interest in the city, including Eastern State Penitentiary, a section of the Philadelphia Museum of Art that has an historical orientation, the National Museum of American Jewish History, National Constitution Center, Independence Seaport Museum, or the African American Museum of Philadelphia (due at the end of week 14)

Grading:

- participation in class discussions and short presentations, 25%
- two book reviews, 25%
- paper on archival research, 25%
- paper on museum critique, 25%

All work must be completed by the end of the course in order to receive a passing grade. Attendance is also mandatory. Unexcused late work will lose a grade per day it is late.