

Spring 2023

HIST SEMINAR 3711-301: THE USES AND ABUSES OF HISTORY  
(Provisional Syllabus)

Wednesdays, 3:30-6:30

Instructor: Lee Cassanelli (300.8 St Leonard's Court)  
Office Hours: Wed 12-3, and by appointment (including Zoom)

**Aims and Format**

This course is designed for junior and senior history majors in any and all regional or thematic concentrations, but also welcomes other majors who have done substantial coursework in history. Using case studies from around the world, our class will explore the roles of history and historians in a wide range of contexts and circumstances: e.g., in promoting nationalism or cultivating patriotism; shaping cultural and ethnic identities; making (or justifying) policies in a variety of diplomatic, political, and social contexts; commemorating historical personalities or events; preserving artifacts, sacred sites, or legacies from the past; and producing popular histories in print and film. Our seminar is primarily discussion based, with occasional mini-lectures by the instructor or visiting colleagues from the history department.

Because nations, governments, and interest groups invariably want to have 'history on their side,' their advocates tend to produce partisan narratives which use historical evidence selectively. We intend to question how effective historians have been—or can be—in countering popular 'myths' about the past, in uncovering 'silences' in the historical record, and in acknowledging that the same 'objective' events can leave different memories and carry different meanings for the various parties involved. Does fuller knowledge of the past constrain or empower our capacities to deal with challenges in the present and future?

In examining these and other 'meta-questions' through a series of specific case studies, you will almost certainly learn something about contested histories in parts of the world you may not be familiar with, but which should help you situate your own regional interests in a wider comparative framework. During the last few weeks of the course, students will have an opportunity to present and discuss research on a topic of their choice with the class.

**Requirements and Assignments**

All students are expected to 1) attend class and participate actively in discussion and via our Discussion Board (25%); 2) maintain an informal on-line journal with responses/reflections/takeaways from the weekly readings (25%); 3) prepare and circulate two short reports/commentaries on books related to one of the weekly topics (20%); and 4) produce a 10-12 pp. final paper—either historiographical or based on primary sources—on a topic of your choice which has some relation to one of the course's many themes (30%). Guidelines for the short reports and final paper will be provided well in advance.

## **Books**

The following books will be read in whole or in large part and you should order your own copies from the University Book Store or on-line. (Kindle or e-book versions may be available)

Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games* (2010)  
Edward T. Linenthal *History Wars* (1996)  
Hal Brands & Jeremi Suri, eds. *The Power of the Past* (2016)  
Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (2021)

Other titles we will draw from in the course include:

Friedrich Nietzsche “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life”, from *Untimely Meditations*  
Richard E. Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*  
Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The invention of tradition*  
Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*  
P. Kenney and M. Friedman *Partisan Histories: The Past in Contemporary Global Politics*

Just as important as the books are the weekly assigned readings, many of them chapters or excerpts from the large corpus of literature on the subject of history’s uses and abuses. These selections will be posted on our course Canvas site (CV) either as links or as downloadable articles, and should be read prior to the class for the week in which they are assigned.

### **Provisional Outline of Weekly Topics and Readings**

#### **Wk 1. (Jan 18) Intro and Logistics**

#### **Wk 2. (Jan 25) The Uses (and Misuses) of the Past**

- \*Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, intro and 1-49
- \*F. Nietzsche, ‘On the Use and Abuse of History for Life’ (CV)
- \* CV Docs, Week 2

#### **\*\*SHORT ESSAYS & CLASS REPORTS ON BOOKS THAT INFLUENCED YOU\*\***

#### **Wk 3. (Feb 1) Histories of the ‘Nation’**

- \*MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, 50-170
- \*Ernest Renan, ‘What is a nation?’ (CV)
- \*Coakley, ‘Mobilizing the Past’ (CV)
- \*Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, ch. 3 (CV)
- \* [OPTIONAL]: M.P. Friedman & P. Kenney, *Partisan Histories*, excerpts

#### **Wk 4. (Feb 8) Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in History**

- \*Prooijen & Douglas, ‘Conspiracy theories as part of history’ (CV)
- \*Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, excerpts (e-book)
- \*Additional CV Readings, Wk 4

**Wk 5. (Feb 15) Defining, Documenting, Denying Genocide: What role for historians?**

\*Samantha Power, 'Bystanders to Genocide' (CV)

\*CV Wk 5 Readings on Armenian and Rwanda genocides, and on Memory Laws

**Wk 6. (Feb 23) Public history: monuments, memorials, and museums**

\*CV Wk 6: Monuments and memorials in the recent news

\*Linenthal & Engelhardt, *History Wars*, or Wk 6 readings on Enola Gay exhibit (CV)

\*CV Wk 6: South African museums after apartheid

\*T.O. Ranger & Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, intro (e-book)

**Wk 7. (Mar 1) South Africa's TRC: Truth, reconciliation, reparations**

\*CV Wk 7: Readings on So Africa's TRC

---

**Wk 8. SPRING BREAK**

---

**Wk 9. (Mar 15) Promise and Perils of Oral History**

\*CV Readings, Wk 9: Selected cases

**Wk 10. (Mar 22) 'Lessons' of the past: history and policy making**

\*CV Readings, Wk 10

\*Brands & Suri, *Power of the Past*, intro and Ch. 12 (everyone) and two other chapters (to be assigned)

**\*\*STUDENT ORAL REPORTS ON CHAPTERS IN BRANDS & SURI\*\***

**Wk 11. (Mar 29) The 1619 Project**

\*Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*

\*CV Readings, Week 11

**\*\*SHORT ESSAY 2 DUE BY 10 A.M. MAR 29 (See 'Assignments' for details)\*\***

**Wk 12. (Apr 5) History on film: documentaries and epics**

\*R. V. Francaviglia et al (eds). *Lights, Camera, History*, excerpts TBD (e-book)

\*CV Readings, Week 12

**\*\*PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE THURS APR 6\*\***

**Wk 13. (Apr 12) History and Biography, biography as history**

\*CV Readings, Week 13

**Wk 14. (Apr 19) Topics selected by the class**

**Wk 15 (Apr 26) Topics selected by the class**

**\*\*PRESENTATIONS ON FINAL PAPER TOPICS\*\***

**FINAL PAPERS DUE NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, MAY 5, 2023**