

**HISTORY 615**  
**Fall 2015**

**Introduction to the Comparative Study of History**  
Wednesdays, 2-5pm

**Instructors:**

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**Introduction**

It has been said that the study of history offers three indispensable skills for individuals who seek to become productive members of an informed citizenry:

- the ability to evaluate competing arguments on the basis of evidence
- the ability to place new and unfamiliar information in context
- the ability to craft a rhetorically effective argument

The first of these skills requires a thoughtful approach to *reading* the works of others. The second demands a meticulous attention to the gathering and processing of new information—ie, *research*. The last skill requires learning how to *write* effectively. We take it as a given that all students are committed to developing and honing all of these skills throughout their careers.

Your other classes will provide you with opportunities to delve deeply into the historical subject matter that is closest to your areas of interest. In this class we would like to do something else: provide a place to think out loud about *how* to do this in the most satisfying and efficient way. Topics covered will include:

- How to find, read, appreciate, and respond to research articles in both familiar and unfamiliar areas of history.
- How to use review articles to quickly get a sense of on-going conversations in a given sub-field.
- How to evaluate and respond to the challenges posed by theoretical works with implications for the writing of history.
- How to assess new directions in the writing of history.

- How to read a historical monograph quickly and efficiently for its argument, and how to bring disparate works together in such a way as to make evident the on-going conversations that are taking place between them.
- How to take your historical interests and turn them into a specific and feasible topic for research.
- The final project for the course will be a “Pre-Prospectus” for your first graduate research paper. We do not expect you to decide on a your final topic, which you will be able to do next semester in 715. For this preliminary assignment you should plan to work closely with your advisor in coming up with ideas. In preparation for this, we will ask you to write short descriptions of *three* possible topics. These descriptions will contain:
  - A statement of the question(s) that your paper will address, alongside a brief assessment of the historiography related to this question or questions
  - A description of the primary sources that are available for completing this project.
- There will also be a series of short writing exercises related to the weekly topics. Please refer to the syllabus for these exercises and their due dates.

### **Part I: Writing History Today**

#### **Week I: Sept. 9. Introduction**

#### **MEET IN 1014 TISCH TODAY.**

Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (September 15, 2014) (208 pp. text).

#### **Exercise:**

The writing assignment for the Hunt readings is in two parts.

1. For the Sept 9 meeting, draft 1 or 2 paragraphs summarizing Hunt’s main arguments and your response to them as preparation for our discussion. These preliminary paragraphs will not be collected in class. Please do not omit this step! We believe it is important for you to begin developing your own response before hearing the opinions of others in the class.
2. After our Sept 9 discussion, we would like you to write a more developed response essay of c.750-1000 words. Summarize Hunt’s main arguments and offer some critical reflection on her prescriptions for historians writing today. This paper will be due on Sept 11 at 5pm.

Possibly useful website (as much for your future students as for you):

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/tburke1/reading.html>

“How to Read in College”

## Part II: On Articles – Finding, Reading, Appreciating, Responding

### Week II: Sept. 16. Historical Conversations: How Do Articles Speak to Each Other?

For many academic historians, the research article is the most fundamental form of historical writing, even if the goal is often to produce a longer work such as a dissertation, or a monograph. Graduate students in history read a wide range of articles as they prepare for their PhD exams, and research articles provide useful models for your own first attempts at producing seminar papers based on primary research.

Since mastering the art of reading a research article is an essential skill to develop before embarking on your own projects, it is worth pausing a moment to reflect on what makes a good one. One essential measure of a successful article is the extent to which it provokes further discussion. By this measure, the most successful articles do not simply pose questions and provide answers. They also do more—they provoke further questions from other scholars.

This week we are asking you to read a series of articles that are from different historical sub-disciplines but which appear to be talking to one another. They are written by historians and social scientists who work in different chronological periods and in different parts of the globe, and they are all considered to be in some way “field-defining” within their various sub-disciplines.

A careful reading of these articles will turn up common themes, shared questions, and mutually instructive research strategies. In other words, these articles are in conversation with one another. Building an awareness of such on-going conversations within the field of history is an important part of your graduate education.

#### Readings:

E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50, (Feb., 1971): 76-136.

Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter- Insurgency," in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakrovorty-Spivak, eds., *Subaltern Studies II* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983): 1-42.

James C. Scott, “Resistance without Protest and without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic Zakat and the Christian Tithe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, (Jul., 1987): 417-452.

Robin Kelly, “We are not what we seem: Rethinking Black Working-class opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History*, 1993: 75-112.

#### Exercise:

**Before you come to class on Wednesday, complete points 1 & 2.**

1. Do some quick internet research on these authors. Who are they? What are their major published works? Where did they teach? Where did they conduct their research? What fields are they in? What kinds of questions appear to have motivated their work?
2. Read the articles. Note that they are listed in chronological order.

3. Write an essay of c. 1000 words that assesses the conversation that appears to be taking place between these works. What questions do they seem to have in common? How do they go about answering them? What materials do they bring to bear on the material? Try to avoid simplistic statements about agreement or disagreement, though of course it is appropriate to acknowledge convergences or divergences of argument when they are present and significant. The primary goal, however, should be trying to understand what issues are at stake in the conversation. *This paper is due Sept. 18 at 5pm.*

### **Week III: Sept. 23. The Research Article: Getting Serious About Somebody Else's Work**

#### **Readings:**

Rachel Neis, "Their Backs Toward the Temple and Their Faces Toward the East: The Temple and Toilet Practices in Rabbinic Palestine and Babylonia," *The Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 1-41.

Paolo Squatriti, "The Floods of 589 and Climate Change at the Beginning of the Middle Ages: An Italian Microhistory," *Speculum* 85 (2010), 799-826.

#### **Exercise:**

a) Read the two articles listed above. Then go to a recent issue of a leading journal in your own field and find a research article that interests you. Choose one article from the common readings above and write a short summary of its arguments. Do the same for the research article from your own field.

b) Then, for each of the two articles you have chosen, consider why they got published. What is their original research contribution, what evidence are they based on, how do they position themselves relative to the relevant historiography, how do they craft their arguments? What historical conversations do they appear to be contributing to? (If you wish, you may consider this assignment to be two separate essays). *Paper due in class this week, c. 750-1000 words total (Sept. 23).*

The point of this exercise is to give you some practice in thinking hard both about work that is in your field, and work that is outside your immediate area of interest and experience. Both skills are necessary.

### **Week IV: Sept. 30. The Review Article (Finding and Writing)**

#### **Readings:**

Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37:1 (2003):113-124.

Rebecca Spang, "Paradigms and Paranoia: How Modern is the French Revolution?" (Review Essay), *American Historical Review* 108:1 (2003):119-147.

Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:4 (2012):721-745.

Ronald G. Suny, "Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics," *The Russian Review*, 53:2 (1994):165-182.

**Exercise:**

Identify the leading journals in your chosen sub-field of history. Choose one. Go to the stacks in the library and page through the table of contents over several decades. Make a list of the various topics that seem to have attracted the attention of scholars. How has the field developed during the period you have examined?

Note that journals often include review articles that explore recent trends in historical writing. A review article is not based on primary research. Rather, a review article builds an argument about the field based on recent directions or tendencies within the secondary literature. Reading review articles is a good way to familiarize yourself with trends over time. They also provide broad-brush depictions of the kinds of questions that people are asking a particular moments, and they are very useful in helping you to organize your lists for your prelim exams.

Find a selection of such review articles in your own field. Make a list of the topics that they address. Do the questions they ask interest you? Why or why not? Choose one that seems to speak to your own interests and write a paragraph about how the review article might help you focus your own research. *Bring your list and paragraph to class for discussion. It will not be collected or graded.*

Once you have familiarized yourself with review articles in your own field, read the four sample review articles above that we will discuss in class. Why did these historians write these essays? What made them timely? What were they trying to accomplish? How is the review of the literature organized? What questions do they pose? What kinds of critical assessment do they provide?

**Possibly useful:**

virginia tech: [http://www.history.vt.edu/undergraduate/article\\_review.htm](http://www.history.vt.edu/undergraduate/article_review.htm)

### Part III: Theories of History

#### Week V: Oct. 7. What is Theory? Why Theory?

##### Readings:

Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the 1960s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26:1 (1984):126-166.

Gabrielle Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text," *Speculum* 65:1 (1990):59-86.

Michel Foucault, "Lecture 2: 14 January 1976," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Geoff Eley, Sherry B. Ortner, Nicholas Dirks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 210-221.

Jan Goldstein, "Foucault among the Sociologists: The "Disciplines" and the History of the Professions," *History and Theory* 23, No. 2. (1984):170-92.

This week we focus on the question of social and cultural theory. In the second half of the twentieth century, historians grappled with the significance of several different kinds of theory. Some interest in theoretical questions came from within the field of history itself, as historians began to question their own assumptions about how the history of politics, social conflict, and cultural change had been previously written. Other historians looked outside the discipline of history to adjacent fields of knowledge, especially to anthropology, sociology, and literary studies.

Our goal this week is to introduce some of the concerns and preoccupations that drove this search for new vocabularies and new conceptual frameworks for the practice of history. The goal is to ask what "theory" is or does, and to reflect on the ways that historians have used different social and cultural theories in shaping questions, approaching sources, and thinking about the nature of historical work at the most fundamental level.

Before beginning this week's reading, pause to re-consider the description that Lynn Hunt gave in *Writing History in the Global Era* of the "four paradigms" that dominated historical writing in American universities in the twentieth century: Marxism, modernization theory, the Annales school, and what she referred to as "identity studies." Hunt argues that all four of these paradigms were challenged and to some degree discredited by the theoretical turn taken by many historians after the 1970s, but that no similarly ambitious paradigms have taken their place.

With Hunt's discussion in mind, read the essays above in the order given. The first, by Sherry Ortner, is a useful summary of debates about social and cultural history in the field of anthropology in a period between the 1960s and the 1980s, a period that was crucial for the development of a new emphasis on "cultural studies" in history and literature departments in American universities. After reading Ortner's essay, read the article by Gabrielle Spiegel, which explores the shifts in attitudes towards language that accompanied the theoretical turn in historical writing. Finally, read the brief lecture by Michel Foucault, in which he summarizes his

primary goals as a historian and social theorist, and then read Jan Goldstein's assessment of Foucault's significance for historians and sociologists.

**Exercise:** In c. 1000 words, consider in the most general terms what we are talking about when we discuss the place of "theory" in the study of history? What does this mean, in a discipline based on archives and sources? What significance, if any, should we attribute to debates about the meanings of key terms like "culture," "society," "power," "discourse"? Do historians need to pay attention to linguistic theories that question the ability of language to transparently convey reliable meanings about the world? *Paper due in class.*

## **Week VI: Oct. 14. Theory, History, Gender**

**Readings** (We recommend that you read them in chronological order, as listed):

Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986):1053-75.

Evelyn Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in *Signs* 17 (1992): 251-74.

Saba Mahmood, "Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16:2 (2001):202-36.

Jeanne Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis' *Gender & History* 20:3 (2008):558-83.

Last week we examined examples of social and cultural theory from anthropologists, textual studies, and the work of Michel Foucault as examples of the kinds of theories that seemed important for historians in the last decades of the twentieth century. This week, we take another important nexus of historical-theoretical thinking to examine the ways that theory can be productive of new historical questions and frames. Since Joan Scott's provocative essay of 1986, the idea of gender as a useful category of historical analysis has generated lively discussion, debate, and response.

**Exercise:** In the book that kicked off our semester, Lynn Hunt describes the collapse of identity-based history in the face of culturalist/constructionist theory. With these arguments in mind, read the articles listed above. In an essay of c. 750-1000 words, reflect on the differences of opinion that have emerged among historians about the importance of gender for the writing of history. What approaches and what particular contexts might help us understand these sharply differing assessments? Where does this discussion leave us, and how might this debate prove useful to you in mapping your own approach to related historical questions? *Paper due in class.*

## Part IV: The Monograph

### Week VII: Oct. 21. Reading Big Monographs

Reading: Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (NY: Knopf, 2014).

For the next two weeks, we will be reading monographs, paying particular attention to the interplay of argument, evidence, interpretation and narrative in academic historical writing. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the monograph for conveying historical argument and knowledge? Can monographs speak to multiple audiences and, if so, what strategies and techniques can and do historians can use to meet the demands of different audiences?

Next week, we will consider the specific genre of the “tenure” book, the revised dissertation written by an untenured academic historian and published by a university press. But this week, we will start with a different genre, the so-called “big book”, meta-historical narratives that tend to combine original research with historiographical synthesis in order to offer new or revised ways of understanding broad sweeps of the past. Specifically, we will consider questions both of reading—how do academic historians read and interrogate these kinds of monographs?—and of craft—what is the role of argument, evidence, theory, narrative, and historiography in the fashioning of book-length historical writing.

#### Exercises:

1) Please keep a record of your reading strategies. How do you identify and keep track of the threads of the author’s argument? How do you assess his evidence, particularly the mix of primary and secondary sources? How do you approach reading the introduction, chapters, the conclusion, the notes? What is your strategy for retraining key elements of the text? Once you have finished the text, write a one-page assessment of your reading strategy and how you might approach the next “big” book you read differently.

2) Select a key theme from the book and write a c 1000 word assessment of how Beckert introduces that theme in his introduction, how he develops that theme in one particularly key chapter and what he does to elaborate on that theme in the conclusion or elsewhere in the latter stages of the book. *Paper due in class.*

### Week VIII: Oct. 28. How does a research question become a dissertation and then a first book?

#### Readings:

Geraldo Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of the Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)

“Geraldo Cadava: Standing on Common Ground,” posted on *Process: A Blog for American History*, April 30, 2015; <http://www.processhistory.org/?p=291>

We all know what it means, presumably, to “have an interest.” But once one has announced such an interest, what constructive steps should one take to turn this into original research?



What does it mean to “have a topic?” Students are often intimidated by the necessity of committing themselves to a specific research agenda, because by definition, the need to announce this commitment appears to come *before* one has established a comfortable level of expertise with the subject. The reading this week gives us an opportunity to talk about this mysterious process in the context of one historian’s trajectory from doctoral student to published (and prize-winning) author.

Geraldo Cadava, the author of *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of the Sunbelt Borderland*, received the 2014 Frederick Jackson Turner award for best first scholarly book from the Organization of American Historians. It is a classic example of a “tenure” book that began as a dissertation project and was published while Prof. Cadava was an assistant professor at Northwestern. Please read *Standing on Common Ground* with an eye to understanding the author’s specific contribution to his chosen historical subfield. How does the text build from a particular case study to a broader set of historical arguments that might be of interest to a wider audience?

Please also read the assigned interview with Prof. Cadava from the Organization of American Historians’ blog in which he discusses the book’s development from his initial idea for a dissertation research project through the dissertation and manuscript revision processes.

**Exercise:**

Write a 750-1000 word paper on any aspect of Cadava’s monograph and a 1-2 paragraph reflection on the interview and any insights you gained on the arc from dissertation research to tenure book. *Paper due in class.*

## Part V: Topics, Trends, and Directions

### Week IX: Nov. 4. Where Is History Going? Identifying New Directions

**NOTE: Meet in 1014 Tisch for Panel Discussion with Invited Guests.**

#### Readings:

##### *Science and Technology Studies (STS):*

Paul Edwards and Gabrielle Hecht, "History and the Technopolitics of Identity: The Case of Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of South African Studies* 36:3(2010):619-639.

Perrin Selcer, "Beyond the Cephalic Index: Negotiating Politics to Produce UNESCO's Scientific Statements on Race," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 53, Supplement 5 (2012):173-184.

##### *Deep Time:*

Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail "History and the 'Pre,'" *American Historical Review* 118 (2013): 1-29.

Julia Adeney Thomas, "History and Biology in the Anthropocene: Problems of Scale, Problems of Value," *American Historical Review* 119:5 (2014): 1587-1607.

##### *Environmental History:*

Dario Gaggio, "Before the Exodus: The Landscape of Social Struggle in Rural Tuscany, 1944-1960," *Journal of Modern History* 83:2 (2011): 319-345.

Paul Sutter, "The World With Us: The State of American Environmental History," *The Journal of American History* 100:1 (2013): 94-119.

Read the above for a taste of a few of the recent historical "turns." There are lots of others; these are excellent articles but represent only a few of the "new directions" in history. We have chosen these both because of their significance and because they allow us to introduce you to the work of some of our faculty here at the University of Michigan.

#### Guest Participants:

Perrin Selcer, University of Michigan

Daniel Williford, University of Michigan

Daniel Smail, Harvard University

### Week X: Nov. 11. "Pre-Prospectus" Workshop

We are calling the final project for this class a "pre-prospectus" for the research paper that you will write in the Winter semester of 2016. It is not a "prospectus" because we do not expect you to commit yourself to a single research topic by the end of the semester. Instead, we expect you to prepare preliminary project descriptions for *three* possible topics.

The final Pre-Prospectus is due the last week of class. **Each** of the three project descriptions should contain two parts: 1) 750-1000 word description of the project, including its essential questions, and a summary of the historical conversation to which your work will contribute 2) an

annotated bibliography, divided into primary and secondary sources that are available to you here at the University of Michigan. (It is also worth noting possible sources that are not available to you here, but remember, you can't write a good research paper unless at least some of the sources are accessible at UM).

We expect you to discuss all three of these possibilities with both your 615 instructor and your principal advisor(s) during the fall semester. You may of course choose to write your research paper in the winter semester on a different topic from those that figure in this assignment, but we nevertheless encourage you to take this assignment seriously as a preliminary engagement with your research field.

Please come to class today having thought seriously about your three possible topics. You will be asked to present your ideas about all of them to the class, in a brief talk of 10-12 minutes.

**Week XI: Nov. 18. Panel: Public History/Historians in the Public Realm**

**NOTE: Meet in 1014 Tisch for Panel Discussion with Invited Guests**

In recent years, the dividing line between academic and public history has blurred as professional historians increasingly have come to see the museum, the historical site and the digital as realms for historical analysis, presentation and publication. This week we will hear from a panel of Michigan Historians who have worked on a variety of "public" and/or "digital" history projects and will explore a number of public history sites to examine how historical research and teaching are and can be carried out as public work.

**Panelists:**

Jacki Antonovich, University of Michigan  
 Matthew Lassiter, University of Michigan  
 Martha Jones, University of Michigan

**Assignment:** Please review the following three websites in advance of the panel presentation and then write a 250-500 word reflection on public history's potential as a mechanism for creating historical scholarship.

- 1) [michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu](http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu)--a public history project coordinated by Prof. Matthew Lassiter on the history of student activism at the University of Michigan;
- 2) [arabellachapman.history.lsa.umich.edu](http://arabellachapman.history.lsa.umich.edu)--public history project coordinated by Prof. Martha Jones on the photo albums of Arabella Chapman, an African-American resident of 19th century Albany, NY;
- 3) <http://nursingclio.org/> --an open access, peer-reviewed, collaborative blog project co-created by history graduate student [Jacqueline Antonovich](#).

**Week XII: Nov. 25. No Class (Thanksgiving Week)**

### Week XIII: Dec. 2. Panel: Historians as Teachers

**NOTE: Meet in 1014 Tisch for Panel Discussion with Invited Guests**

#### Readings:

Marsha Barrett, "My First Year on the Tenure Track," AHA Today: A Blog of the American Historical Association, Aug. 31, 2015, <http://blog.historians.org/2015/08/my-first-year-tenure-track/>

Anne Hyde, "Tuning and Teaching History as an Ethical Way of Being in the World," [blog.historians.org/2004/07/tuning-teaching-history-ethical-way-world](http://blog.historians.org/2004/07/tuning-teaching-history-ethical-way-world)

Peter N. Stearns, "Why Study History," (1998), [historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](http://historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-(1998))

Emily Sohmer Tai, "Teaching History at a Community College," (2004), [historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/February-2004/teaching-history-at-a-community-college](http://historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/February-2004/teaching-history-at-a-community-college)

Ane Lindvent, "Teaching Students to Interpret Documents," (2004), [historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/December-2004/teaching-students-to-interpret-documents](http://historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/December-2004/teaching-students-to-interpret-documents)

While research is the central focus of graduate training in history, most every academic historian is also a teacher and many work at institutions that prioritize teaching over research. In this session, we will hear from a panel of historians from a range of institutions about the place of teaching in their careers as historians.

#### Panelists:

Rayne Allinson, University of Michigan, Dearborn

Jacqueline Larios, University of Michigan

Russell Olwell, Eastern Michigan University

Brian Porter-Szucs, University of Michigan

### Week XIV: Dec. 9. Pre-Prospectus Presentations

During our last class meeting, all students will formally present their "Pre-Prospectus" in-class. It is up to you to organize your presentation as you wish, but it should demonstrate thoughtful preparation with each possible topic clearly differentiated from the others. 12-15 minutes should be sufficient—we will have to cut you off at 15 minutes to stay on schedule!

*Your Pre-Prospectus is due Friday, Dec. 18 at 5 pm.* It should consist of **three** possible research project descriptions. **Each** of the three project descriptions should contain two parts: 1) 750-1000 word description of the project, including its essential questions, and a summary of the historical conversation to which your work will contribute 2) an annotated bibliography, divided into primary and secondary sources that are available to you here at the University of Michigan.