Introduction to the Comparative Study of History

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This course is designed to introduce first-year graduate students to a few key historical concepts that have helped shaped the discipline as it is practiced today. It is not intended to prepare students for study in any particular geographical area, but rather to provide a forum for the collective examination of various theories and methods that have been at the center of historical debate for much of the last half century. Obviously, the reading list makes no attempt at completeness, which would be a useless exercise given the constraints placed on a one-semester class.

During the first six weeks we will set the agenda for the rest of the semester by reading a few classic works of social theory (or works of history critically informed by social theory) that have become essential references for historians working in many fields. If there is anything that unifies these authors, it is their common concern with identifying—and interrogating—the essence of modernity, and the stakes inherent in its advent, both for human society and for the historians who write about it. During the last eight weeks of the semester we will read the works of various scholars whose work carries resonances of these interrogations, and examine the ways in which their projects both carry on and challenge the assumptions of their theoretical precursors. In the course of these discussions we will use the opportunities presented by these works to discuss some of the key issues of contemporary historical writing: the relationship of social and economic change to class and status group formation; the relationship between politics and culture; the role of gender in the articulation of power relationships; the historical relationship between European nations and their colonies abroad, and the significance of this colonial past for the post-colonial world.

Requirements  
Students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively in discussion. There will be two writing assignments of 8-10 pages. The first, due on Oct. 12, will be on a question related to the readings of weeks 1-6. The second, due on Dec. 11, will be a response to one or more of the readings after week 7.
Readings
The following titles are available for purchase at Shaman Drum Bookstore on State St.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1 (Sept 4-7) Introduction

I. Political Economy and Social Revolt

Week 2 (Sept 10-14)
Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* and *The Communist Manifesto* (with Friedrich Engels).
Peter Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat,” *Representations* 31 (Summer, 1990), pp. 69-95. (JSTOR)

Week 3 (Sept 17-21)
Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*.

II. Power and Culture: Theoretical Approaches

Week 4 (Sept 24-28)

Week 5 (Oct 1-5, Fall Break on Mon-Tues)
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

Week 6 (Oct 8-12)
Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

First paper due on October 12 at 5 pm. Late papers will be downgraded.

III.

Week 7 (Oct 15-19)
Natalie Davis, *Trickster Travels*.

Week 8 (Oct 22-26)
Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*. 

**Week 9 (Oct 29-Nov 2)**
Catherine Hall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*.

**Week 10 (Nov 5-9)**
Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

**Week 11 (Nov 12-16)**
Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*.

**Week 12 (Nov 19-23, Thanksgiving Thu-Fri)**
Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire*.

**Week 13 (Nov 26-30)**
Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*.

**Week 14 (Dec 3-7)**
Esra Ozyurek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*.

**Week 15 (Dec 10-11) Classes end Tues.**
Second paper due on Dec 11. Late papers not accepted.