

Fall 2017

HISTORY 612  
**HISTORICAL METHODS AND WRITING**

Professor Marsha Weisiger

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**Office hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:30

**Class Schedule:** Tuesday 2:00-5:00 p.m., 375 McKenzie Hall

***Introduction***

This course provides an introduction to graduate study in history, with an emphasis on the latest trends in historical scholarship, along with some key theoretical frameworks. The syllabus is not exhaustive but instead is organized around a series of critical historical episodes and historiographical debates, with an emphasis on transnational history and issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and environment. The goals of History 612 include 1) the development and honing of critical analytical skills in the assessment of historiographical and methodological trends, 2) the acquisition of a basic familiarity with and fluency for discussing historical themes and scholarly debates that have shaped this profession, 3) a collective experience for the incoming cohort that fosters intellectual community.

After the first week, we will read a handful of acclaimed recent books—most of them prize-winners and many of them derived from dissertations—as a vehicle for discussing the kinds of approaches and projects that seem to capture the attention of historians today. Each is paired with a relevant theoretical or methodological reading. For the books, our purpose will be to identify the authors' arguments, discuss their sources of evidence, analyze how they structured and narrated their argument, and consider how they deployed their evidence, narrative structure, and rhetoric to persuade us of their argument (or not). For the theoretical pieces, we will discuss the authors' arguments, how these works are evident (or not) in the books they're paired, and how they might be useful in our own work.

Students should leave the course with:

- An understanding of some of the major themes and questions of historical scholarship, both generally and in relationship to your own field of interest, over the last thirty years and at the current moment
- An understanding of the ways historians think about, interrogate, and deploy primary sources
- The relationship of interdisciplinary theories to historical scholarship
- An understanding of the methodologies and narrative strategies employed by the authors
- An ability to critically analyze, discuss, and write about a text

### **Readings**

- Jeremy D. Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net: The Story of Historiography* (232 pp.)  
Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (382 pp.)  
Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash : The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (322 pp.)  
Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russia's and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (241 pp.)  
Brian deLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexico War* (310 pp.)  
Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (314 pp.)  
Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier : California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (235 pp.)  
Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie* (224 pp.)  
Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (338 pp.)  
Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature : The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (251 pp.)

In addition, journal articles will be posted on Canvas or available through J-Stor, as indicated in the weekly schedule below.

### **Grading**

Below are the course requirements and their relative weights in determining your final grade.

Discussion Participation	20%
Book Précis/Reviews	20%
Historiographical Review	20%
Final Paper	40%

Since graduate students tend to be very good students and a much higher standard of work is expected, the grading scale is foreshortened.

A = Especially impressive work that exceeds my expectations at the graduate level

A- = Solid performance, clearly satisfactory for the graduate level

B+ or B = Your performance has fallen somewhat short of expectations in terms of intellectual sophistication or thoroughness

Any grade below a B should be taken as a warning that you have fallen seriously below expectations for graduate work.

### **REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

#### ***Discussion Participation*** (20%)

This is a discussion-based course, and its success depends on your involvement and that of your fellow classmates. Think of our discussions as lively conversations about issues of mutual interest to all of us. Our purpose is to explore, analyze, and reflect on the arguments made in the readings, the evidence they use to support those arguments, and the wisdom the authors impart (or the lack thereof). Our other purpose is to explore your own ideas about the issues raised in the readings. Come prepared to express your ideas and have them challenged by others.

I have four ground rules for discussion: (1) Come prepared for each class by critically (that is, analytically) reading all the assigned materials. Always bring each week's readings to class. (2) You

must *participate* in our weekly conversations with thoughtful discussion. I value quality over quantity. (3) Don't try to lead the conversation astray in an effort to cover your lack of preparedness. (4) Show respect for your classmates' ideas, even (or especially) when they're different from your own.

■ Each week, two of you will be asked to help lead the discussion by collectively developing two or three questions (total) to help launch the conversation; one of those questions should address the week's theoretical or methodological article(s). These should be broad questions that will help us explore the readings' main themes, arguments, and methods. (Of course, I will also come with discussion questions.)

### ***Book Précis and Book Reviews*** (20%)

■ You will write a **précis** for 5 of the 10 books. Each précis should have four sections, clearly marked: (1) a statement of the author's thesis; (2) a concise description of how the author builds the argument, the kind of sources he or she uses, and any special methodologies the author uses; (3) a critical evaluation of the argument. A basic rule of thumb is to judge the book on its own terms. Pay attention to the author's purpose and critically evaluate whether it meets the goal the author set. What are the book's strengths and weaknesses? Did the author offer logical reasoning and sufficient evidence to support the thesis? Is the author's argument persuasive? The précis should be single-spaced (Times New Roman, 12 pt., 1 inch margins) and no more than 750 words in length. These don't need to be polished reviews, although they should be coherent, in clear, grammatically correct English. You do not have to write a précis for the two books for which you are a discussion leader (that said, I recommend you do that for yourself, especially if it's a book that might appear on your reading list for comprehensive exams).

■ Book review outline: For **Oct. 10**, consider your favorite scholarly monograph written within the last ten years and find a book review for it in a major academic history journal. Outline the structure of the book review and bring two copies of your outline to class, along with the review itself.

■ For 2 of the books (any weeks from Oct. 17 to Nov. 28), of your choice, you will write a **formal book review**, approximately 500 words in length, not counting the complete citation. (That is the length of a standard book review.) These should be well written, publishable reviews. Note that the short length requires that you write concisely, even as you discuss the book in depth. Follow the basic templates of reviews in academic journals and my tips on writing book reviews, available on Canvas (under "Files").

### ***Historiographical Review of Literature*** (20%)

■ Find two historiographical essays on your own field of study, one published within the last ten years and one published more than ten years ago but roughly within the last twenty or twenty-five years. Read each of the essays and outline each, so that you get a sense of the structure of each essay. Bring two copies of both outlines to class. Be prepared to discuss in class how your field has changed over the last two decades or so. This may involve changes in focus, inclusion of voices, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, or other issues. *Please consult with your advisor regarding the key historiographical essays to read in your field.* The outlines are due **Oct. 24**.

■ This assignment has four steps: (1) Choose a major journal in your field of study, and skim through the titles/abstracts/essays sufficiently to get a serious sense of the current trends of the journal over the last several years (roughly 2010-2015). (2) Look at the journal for the ten years from

2000 through 2009 and for the ten years from 1990-1999. Sample two or three years from each of those two periods. What were the main trends in the field roughly ten to twenty years ago? What were they roughly twenty to thirty years ago? (3) In an essay of about 1,000-words, discuss the historiographical trends of the field over the past twenty-five years. You may wish to highlight particular articles as examples of trends and shifts in emphases. (4) Append to your essay a list of five key journals in your field, and provide a one-sentence annotation that describes the distinguishing characteristics of each journal, compared with the others in the list. This paper is due **Nov. 14**.

### **Final Paper (40%)**

You will write a 10-12 page historiographical essay (3500-4200 words), based on three books on a topic of your choice; if applicable, you may include additional books from the class reading list. The three books should be books you haven't yet read. One should be a "classic," that is, a book that is one of the touchstones for the field, and the other two should be books published within the last ten years or so. You may also draw on key books you've already read as you write your essay. Plan ahead, because these books may not be in our library's holdings, and you'll need to allow time to order them through Summit and ILL.

For guidelines on writing a historiographical essay, please consult the information posted on Canvas. Situate your three books within the historiographical context you have identified in developing your historiographical review, above. (Both the historical review essays and the review of the journal literature in your field should help with this.) This paper is due **on Thursday, Dec. 7 (finals week)**.

### **Class Policies**

- *Honor.* Absolutely no academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. If you feel you do not fully understand the issue of plagiarism, please consult with me. **Any student discovered plagiarizing will receive an F for the course, end of story.** If you submit work you have done for other courses for credit, that work will receive an F for the assignment.
- *Attendance.* Attendance is required. Students who arrive late for class, who repeatedly leave early, or who miss more than two class meetings may be dropped from the course at my discretion, without consultation. Please come see me if there is a reason for prolonged or repeated absences that I should know about.
- *Make-up.* No make-up opportunities will be available, except in extreme circumstances such as a death in the immediate family or a major medical emergency. No extensions will be granted for final papers (except in the event of one of the above circumstances), and no make-up opportunities for discussions will be offered. No extra credit opportunities will be offered. One exception: students who are passing the course and who are absent on documented university business (including presenting papers at professional conferences) have an automatic right to excused absences and to make up work.
- *Withdrawal.* No incompletes will be given. It is the student's responsibility to withdraw him- or herself from the course.

## WEEKLY DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

(readings marked with a C are posted on Canvas; those marked with a J are on JStor)

- Sept. 26      •Introductions  
                 •What is historiography?  
                 Jeremy D. Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net: The Story of Historiography* (232 pp.)
- Oct. 3         Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (382 pp.)  
                 • Paul Cohen, "Was There an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the Limits of a Historiographical Concept," *European History of Ideas* 34 (2008): 388-410. (C)  
                 • Richard White, "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006): 9-14. (J)  
                 • Philip J. Deloria, "What Is the Middle Ground, Anyway?" *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006): 15-22. (J)  
                 ► Special guest: Brett Rushforth
- Oct. 10        Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash : The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (322 pp.)  
                 •E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class," *Social History* 3 (1978): 133-65. (J)  
                 ► Skype with Nancy Isenberg (Louisiana State University)  
                 ► Book review outline due
- Oct. 17        Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russia's and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (241 pp.)  
                 • Arthur McEvoy, "Toward an Interactive Theory of Nature and Culture: Ecology, Production, and Cognition in the California Fishing Industry," *Environmental Review* 11 (1987): 289-305. (J)  
                 • Mary Louise Pratt, "Introduction: Criticism in the Contact Zone," in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) (C)  
                 • Bruno Latour, "Centres of Calculation," in *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (1988) (C)  
                 ► Special guest: Ryan Jones

- Oct. 24 Brian deLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexico War* (310 pp.)
- Marshall Sahlins, ““The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series 63 (1961): 322-45. (J)
  - ▶ Skype with Brian deLay (UC Berkeley)
  - ▶ Analysis/outline of historiographical essays due
- Oct. 31 Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (314 pp.)
- Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (2013): 785-810. (C)
- Nov. 7 Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier : California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (235 pp.)
- Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053-75. (J)
  - Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 113-24. (J)
  - ▶ Special guest: Stacey Smith, Oregon State University
- Nov. 14 Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie* (224 pp.)
- Natalie Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, Ch. 1 (C)
  - ▶ Special guest: Julie Weise
  - ▶ Journal analysis due
- Nov. 21 Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (338 pp.)
- ▶ Skype with Kate Brown, University of Maryland-Baltimore County
- Nov. 28 Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature : The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (251 pp.)
- ▶ Skype with Jake Hamblin, Oregon State University
- Dec. 7 Wrapping up at Falling Sky, EMU
- ▶ Historiographical paper due (please place it in my box before joining us at Falling Sky)