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HSTR 200.02: Introduction to Historical Methods

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HSTR 200:02: Introduction to Historical Methods Monday, 12-12:50pm; LA 244

Robert H. Greene, office hours W, 10:30am-12:00pm (LA 257A)

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the practice of history and prepares them for upper-division courses in the field. Students will learn to conduct library research, familiarize themselves with electronic databases, analyze primary sources, read secondary sources critically, write clear and convincing historical prose, and cite sources in Chicago style.

Readings

Copies of the following book are available at the UM bookstore.

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 9th ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017)

Additional readings will be available on the Moodle course page. These will be indicated in the syllabus below.

Assignments, Grading, and Expectations

- Exercises and assignments (50% of your final grade)
 1. Carr assignment (Jan 29)
 2. Darnton assignment (Feb 5)
 3. Enola Gay assignment (Feb 12)
 4. Primary source analysis (March 19)
 5. Research question exercise (April 2)
 6. Thesis statement exercise (April 9)
 7. Historiography assignment (April 16)
 8. Draft research proposal (April 30)
- Research Proposal and Bibliography (no later than May 7) (40% of final grade)
- Attendance and participation (10% of final grade)
- All assignments will be turned in on time in class; late assignments will NOT be accepted
- All assignments will be typed and printed. Use 12-point font and standard margins. Proofread carefully before submission. Do not turn in sloppy work hot from the printer without proofreading it 2 or 3 times first.
- This course meets only once a week. Your attendance and active participation are essential. I expect that you will come to class having read the assigned readings carefully. You will bring the assigned readings to class each day. Invest in a printer or print out the readings at the computer lab. If you do not have the readings in front of you, we cannot have a meaningful discussion; I will ask you to leave and count this as an absence. More than 2 absences will result in a zero for your attendance/participation grade
- No cell phones are permitted in this class. If I see you using a cell phone during class, I will count this as an absence.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: What is History and What Do Historians Do?

M, Jan. 22: Intro to the Course: What is History, and What is it *Not*?

M, Jan 29: Arguments and Facts

- **MOODLE:** E. H. Carr, “The Historian and His Facts,” in *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 7-30.
- **READ:** Rampolla, Ch 1
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) How do Acton and Clark represent two different approaches to understanding what history is? 2) What does Carr mean when he says that facts never come to us pure, but are “always refracted through the mind of the recorder” (p 22) 3) Carr makes use of an extended metaphor that depicts the historian as a fisherman and the facts as fish. What does he mean when he says that *where* the historian “fishes” determines the kind of facts/“fish” he will catch? 4) What does Carr mean when he says that history is a dialogue between past and present?

M, Feb 5: Why the Past is Not the Same as the Present; or, Reading and Thinking in Historical Context

- **MOODLE:** Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 75-104.
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Why did 18th-century French workingmen think it was so funny to kill their master’s cats? 2) What does this episode tell us about past mentalities and the difficulties that historians face in trying to understand the past?

M, Feb 12: The Past in the Present

- **MOODLE:** Michael J. Hogan, “The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory, and the Politics of Presentation,” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200-32.
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Why did the proposed Enola Gay exhibit elicit such controversy? 2) What sides can you identify in the debate and which positions did they take? 3) How does the Enola Gay controversy show us that “history is contested terrain” (p 231)?

M, Feb 19: PRESIDENTS’ DAY; NO CLASS

Unit 2: How Historians Work

M, Feb 26: Preserving the Past: What's Worth Saving and Who Decides?

- MOODLE: K. Ross Toole to Helen Dawson Edkins, October 14, 1952, Toole File, Montana Historical Society Directors' File
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Why couldn't the Montana Historical Society accept Mrs Dawson's piano? 2) What, according to Toole, makes an object historically significant? Do you agree with his criteria?

M, March 5: Excursion into the Archives

- Donna McCrea, Head of Archives, will acquaint us with the sources and databases for historical research available at the K. Ross Toole Archives.
- We will meet at the Archives on the 4th floor of the Mansfield Library (no food, no drinks, no pens; bring a pencil to write with)

M, March 12: NO CLASS; work on your primary source project

M, March 19: Reading Primary Sources

- READ ONLINE: "[How to Analyze a Primary Source](#)" (from the History Department at Carleton College):
- READ: Rampolla, Ch 2 and Ch 5c-g
- DUE TODAY: Go back to the Archives. Choose a primary source. Using that source, answer the 12 questions in the link above. Your answers to each question should be about 2-3 sentences; number your responses.

M, March 26: SPRING BREAK; NO CLASS

M, April 2: Finding Topics and Asking the Right Research Question(s)

- READ: "[How to Frame a Researchable Question](#)" (from the homepage of William Cronon, Frederick Jackson Turner Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin and president of the American Historical Society)
- READ: Rampolla, Ch 5a and 5b
- DUE TODAY: Choose a historical topic based on your research in the Archives. Draw up a list of 5 good research questions that you could ask about the topic you've selected. Draw up a list of 5 bad research questions. In a sentence or two, explain why each of the questions you've composed is either a good research question or a bad one.

M, April 9: Turning a Research Question into a Thesis

- READ: Rampolla, Ch 4a-d
- DUE TODAY: Now that you've identified a research question from your work in the Archives, formulate a thesis statement. Give at least one example of a good thesis statement and at least three examples of a bad research statement. Then answer the following questions in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences: 1) What purpose does a thesis statement serve in a research paper? 2) What characteristics mark a

good thesis statement and why? 3) What makes for a bad thesis statement and why?

M, April 16: What is Historiography? or, Why are There 250,000 Books on Napoleon?

- READ: Christopher Read, "[Writing the History of the Russian Revolution.](#)" from the Reviews in History website; and Rampolla, Ch 3
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences.
- 1) What is historiography? 2) Where do Figes' and Read's interpretations of the Russian Revolution differ and on what points are they similar? 3) Why have there been (and why will there continue to be) so many books on the history of the Russian Revolution?
- DISCUSS IN CLASS: Is it possible to produce an objective and completely impartial account of an historical event? Or does the very act of creating a narrative (selecting facts, ordering events, using language itself) make objectivity impossible? If there are always going to be multiple (and valid) interpretations of past events, what makes one "better" than another?

M, April 23: When (and How) to Cite Sources in Historical Writing

- READ: Rampolla, Ch 6, Ch 7a and 7b
- REVIEW: Rampolla, Ch 7c and 7d

M, April 30: Framing the Question

- READ: Rampolla, Ch 4e-g
- WRITE a 2-3 paragraph draft research proposal on a question of your choice connected in some way to the holdings in the Mansfield Library Archives and building off of the archival sources you've examined and the research questions and theses you've formulated over the past weeks. The proposal should indicate your research question(s), how your project would fit in to the existing historiography on the topic, and (briefly) some sense of the significance of your project. In addition to the proposal, prepare a bibliography with a total of at least 20 sources (both primary and secondary), formatted in Chicago Style. Accompanying the bibliography, on a separate sheet, include 2-3 sentences per source indicating the advantages/insights of each source and the potential limitations. What are the advantages and possible shortcomings of each source you include? What aspect of the question would each source allow you to answer (i.e., does it provide background on the historiography of the question? does it include valuable first-person perspectives on the question? etc.)
- We will break into small groups and you will share your draft research proposal with your comrades for feedback and comments. You will submit a revised version of the proposal during finals week.

FINALS WEEK

- Revised version of your research proposal is due in my mailbox by 5pm on Monday, May 7. Faculty mailboxes are in the History department office (LA 256).