

Students: Please note that the fall '2019 syllabus will be substantially the same as the syllabus below, although the dates given for each week will change.

BC 3904 – Fall, 2017

Introduction to Historical Theory and Method

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The purpose of this class is to introduce students to theories and methods attached to the writing of good history. Its practical focus is to promote critical reading, analytical writing, and the development of research skills and strategies, with the goal of preparing students to tackle their senior thesis essays and other serious research projects. At the end of the term, students will have created a research proposal proper to a senior thesis in history. (Seniors who take the seminar will complete a different final writing assignment.) The thesis proposal consists of a workable topic, a chapter outline, and a tentative preliminary bibliography. The construction of these elements will be discussed over the course of the semester. This course thus helps to bridge the gap between lecture classes in history and the research papers required in junior and senior seminars.

Course grade: Paper 1 (Mandatory, but No Grade Given); Paper 2 (30%); Paper 3 (25%); Thesis proposal, bibliography, and archive paper (or optional historiography paper for those not writing a senior thesis) (30%); **Class and Courseworks/Canvas Discussion List participation (15%)**. The Courseworks/Canvas account for the class keeps a running and continuous record of all contributions. The quality of your weekly contributions to Courseworks/Canvas will be an important determinant of your class grade.

More than two unexcused absences or continued lateness will lead to a lowered grade for the class.

Required Texts:

Course Reader (Collection of xeroxed articles) available at Columbia Copies, B'way betw. 108th and 109th
(Please call to order: 865-1212)

Course Texts: Available at Book Culture, 112th St. between B'way and Amsterdam

J. Appleby, *Telling the Truth about History* (W.W. Norton, Paper)

ISBN 0-393-31286-0

M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage, Paper)

ISBN 0-679-75255-2

K. Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics)

S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (Penguin, Paper)

ISBN 0-14-009233-1

In the syllabus, **(R)** after a work means that you will find it in the Xeroxed Course Reader.

Most weeks students will respond to the class readings by writing in to the class discussion group on Columbia Courseworks/Canvas. In the syllabus, you will often find one or two questions to focus the weekly writing assignment, but at times I will simply ask for your impressions of a given reading. Since it is important for all of us to read what our fellow students have written before class, **all comments must be mailed to the list no later than the midnight before class.** Comments on the contributions of your fellow students are particularly welcome. I read these comments carefully, and I save them as a record of your class participation.

Week 1. (9/6) **Organizational**

Discussion: What is History? What do Historians do?

There are numerous history discussion lists. You might want to check out the History New Network and add it to your bookmarks :

<http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/category/2>

By connecting to this list you will be able to keep up with current controversies concerning the writing of history and the impact of history on the present.

Week 2. (9/13) **Who owns History?**

Reading Assignment for this week: E.T. Linenthal, "The Anatomy of a Controversy"; Appleby, Introduction to *Telling the Truth About History*.

While reading the Linenthal you may want to check Nagasaki website:

<http://www.exploratorium.edu/nagasaki/mainn.html>

The Enola Gay website <http://www.afa.org/enolagay/home.html>

For the other side of the controversy, see the article by John Correll, "The Smithsonian and the Enola Gay,"

http://www.jstor.org/stable/42896918?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Courseworks discussion list -- question for this week:

(Answer **either** A, B, or C) in ½ to 1 page:

- A. From reading the Linenthal: Does the trained historian "know" history in a way that the untrained person cannot or does not? Can the historian "know" history better than one who lived through it? Should history be the property of trained historians?
- B. Can you venture an opinion on the similarities and/or differences between history and memory?
- C. What are the points about history you find most important/interesting/instructive in Appleby's introduction? What do you make of her suggested redefinition of "objectivity"? (p.10)

******PAPER TOPIC # 1: (Due in Week 4)**

History is not merely an abstract subject taught in the classroom--it is alive and moving, pulling and pushing us in ways of which we are often unaware. The purpose of this first paper is to heighten your sense that you exist **in** history, or better, that your personal history is being moved by and within other, larger histories. The best papers will convey this sense.

It is 50 years from now and you are writing your autobiography. In this short segment, you are attempting to put your life into *historical* perspective. (You may choose to write on your life up to this point, or to focus on your life at this moment.)

Which historical context(s) have been most important to your development? Which have most influenced the direction your life has taken and the choices with which you have been confronted?

Some possibilities to choose from: the history of your gender? your generation? your country? your place in the world? economic history? the history of education? the history of technology? *other* histories of your own definition? Choose what you think are the 2 or 3 "histories" most important to the direction your life has taken, and write a brief (4-6 page) essay supporting your decision. You may want to refer to our readings from weeks 1-3 in your essay.

One question to consider: Do any problems arise from situating yourself in more than one history at the same time?

Take this paper in the direction of a serious attempt to look back at the present and to set it in historical perspective. Refrain from writing a fantasy about the future.

Class writing assignment on Courseworks: As you jot down your preliminary thoughts (full sentences aren't necessary), send them to our common class discussion list on Courseworks. You can enter material at any time during the week when something occurs to you. **At least one substantial contribution to the class list on the subject of this paper is required.**

[A former student wrote the following in regard to this assignment:

"Nameable events and the people closest to me (my family) have had the most recognizable impact on my life. At the same time, there are other historical forces so deeply entrenched in my way of thinking and way of life that I most often do not recognize them. For that reason, they are arguably *more* powerful than particular events or people because of their pervasive yet so elusive hold on our lives."

Although the history of your family (for example) might seem most pressing to you at first, and you are free to write on this if you care to, please try to see through to these deeper forces and histories.]

Week 3. (9/20) History and Identity

Reading Assignment for this week: E. Said, *Orientalism*, Introduction (R); D. Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?" (R); C. Clunas, *Fruitful Sites. Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (selections) (R).

Courseworks Writing for This Week: To be sent in **before** midnight of the night before class. Please respond to one or two of the following questions:

A. I wonder, as you read the Said, if it makes you realize that you too may be guilty of accepting questionable historical narratives, definitions, and categories without question.

B. Another possibility: I would like your thoughts on either the Said or Chakrabarty articles--strengths, memorable points, debatable points, problems, etc.

Class Discussion Question: What points from the Said and Chakrabarty readings strike you as most meaningful? Does Clunas and the history he writes seem to have benefitted from his respectful reading of Said and other theorists of Orientalism?

Week 4. (9/27) Can History be Objective?

****FIRST PAPER DUE****

Reading Assignment: Novick, *That Noble Dream*, "Historians on the Home Front (ch.5) and "Objectivity Beseiged" (ch. 6) (R); Appleby, *Telling the Truth*, chs. 1 and 4.

Courseworks Writing for This Week: Please respond to *both* A and B.

A. An analysis of the use of footnotes. An extraordinary range of information can (and should) be contained in proper footnotes. Look carefully at Novick's footnotes to see the different uses he makes of them. Find **3** footnotes that contain different kinds of information. Provide the number of each, and then briefly describe the information they contain. Discuss at least one footnote that contains substantive (rather than strictly bibliographical) information.

B. What do you think of Novick's use of (long) direct quotations? Do you find them an effective tool for the telling of his story? Why or why not?

Class Discussion: Does the story Novick tells undermine belief in the possibility of historical accuracy - in the historical profession itself? If so, how does he convince us that *his* history is believable and meaningful?

PAPER ASSIGNMENT # 2* (1st Draft due week 6, **final draft due in Week 8.**) 6-8 pages.

Question: A) What points raised in our readings [from weeks 1-7] have made you think most seriously about the **problems** attached to the writing of history? B) What in your mind are the strongest points made **in the defense** of writing meaningful history? Please give thorough attention to **both** part A and B.

Points to consider: Novick, Said, Chakrabarty, and to some extent Linenthal and Appleby, each present points that suggest a serious challenge to history as a meaningful endeavor. Each in his/her own way exposes the problem of equating history with "truth." But most of us will trust (to some degree) their critiques, their readings, and the history they themselves employ in constructing their cases. **Why? How do they establish their own authority as historians to view and judge the past, even as they criticize the notion of historical authority and insist on the relativity of historical judgments?**

Or put another way: given the problems attached to notions of historical truth and historical objectivity, and granted that all observers are "biased" to some degree, how do historians go about establishing their authority and their right to speak for the past? How do they make their points convincing? What is it that makes some history writing "good" and convincing and meaningful while some is not?

Please find support for your analysis in the writings we have read in class. As all good historians must, use direct quotations and/or paraphrases from your sources to support your points.

You can't cover every author and every point that touches on your reading. Be selective. Think about which of our readings speak most directly to these questions, and treat those you do use with insight and depth.

Week 5. (10/4) The Defense of History

Reading assignment for this week: Selections from G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, ch. II; J.Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors*, 89-135; Appleby, *Telling the Truth*, ch. 7.

Courseworks Writing for This Week:

Novick's reading of the historical situation revised the "triumphant" narrative of history as "science"; Said's reading revised the widely accepted narrative that had constructed a purely oppositional "East and West." Such revisionism has been virtually continuous in the past century of historical writing. Previously accepted "narratives" have been challenged and re-written on the basis either of new sources, or, more frequently, on viewing the same sources from new perspectives and with new values brought to the fore. **Question: Does the reality of continual historical revision speak to the weakness of history or to its strength, or to both weakness and strength?**

Debate in Class: Question: Can the historian overcome problems introduced by the recognition of bias, relativity, and ideology? Can history be objective? Is history built on “facts”?

*****THESIS PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT***** First assignment, a one paragraph to one page outline of your history thesis topic, Due Week 9.

For guidance on selecting your thesis topic, See Appendix A to this syllabus. Please make an appointment to see me about your possible choices *before* week 9.

(Seniors and those who do not intend to write a senior thesis may substitute another assignment. Please make an appointment to talk with me as soon as possible to discuss possible substitutions. The thesis proposal is a serious exercise. Substitutions should be commensurate in both seriousness and in the commitment of time and energy.)

The assignment is to write a proposal for a thesis on a topic of your choice (historical, of course), including an **annotated** bibliography for your topic that:

- (a) draws on Clio, the periodical indices, the web, and specialized bibliographies;
- (b) mines footnotes from related articles and books; and
- (c) shows your ability to use a wide range of bibliographical and informational sources;
- (d) contains a separate section describing your experience doing research at a New York archive.

For more information on the requirements of this assignment, beyond the annotated bibliography, see Appendix A to this syllabus.

*****ARCHIVE ASSIGNMENT: 2-3 page written report to be handed in along with your thesis proposal in week 13.**

There are scores of archives in New York City, including the rare book rooms of our great libraries. Over the next five weeks, **everyone** should spend at least two afternoons in one or two archives doing archival research. For that to happen, you must begin to think about which nearby archives might be helpful for your final research project. Write a 2-3 page paper describing a) the process through which you chose your selected archive, b) your experience at the archive c) what you learned there that you may not have learned through the normal channels of library work d), and, if possible, how this changed your perspective on your final research

project. Please be prepared to discuss your experiences in our class meetings.

Archives at Barnard, Columbia, Teacher's College, JTS, etc. are eligible, but **try to be imaginative in your choice**. To that end, I suggest you consult librarians at Barnard and Columbia or query other scholars who are working close to your fields/subjects of interest.

I think you will find the following sources quite helpful in choosing your archive and writing your archive paper. (My thanks to Thai Jones for his suggestions on this matter.)

1) William Cronon has created an excellent website that walks students through the experience of historical archival research. He discusses asking good questions, being flexible, taking notes, leaving room for serendipity, etc. The website is:

<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/>

2) In Courseworks "Files and Resources" for Week 5, you will find: Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997). This offers an overview of the history of archival collecting. It will alert you to the reality that archives are themselves historical creations with specific and historically rooted structures, silences, and biases.

3) Available as an EBook: "Contested Archives, Contested Sources," Chapter 8 in Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg,, *Processing the past: contesting authority in history and the archives*. This chapter summarizes the idea of reading against the archival grain.

Week 6. (10/11) Doing History: Grand Philosophies of History

I would like to meet this week and next during my office hours (extended if necessary) with every student who will be writing the thesis proposal. Please contact me to make an appointment.

***** DRAFT OF 2ND PAPER DUE***** (The "draft" should be a serious first version of the paper, in good mechanical shape). 2 copies: one to me and one to be exchanged with a fellow student. To be read and commented on by next week.

Reading assignment: Karl Marx: "The Materialist Conception of History"; *The Communist Manifesto*; Primary Source: Friedrich Nietzsche (at back of Reader).

Courseworks Writing for This Week:

Does the reading from Marx's *Communist Manifesto* lead you to sense that history might have patterns and directions that are potentially knowable to the historian? Please cite particular passages to support your points.

Class Discussion Question: Is history pointing somewhere? If so, can historians know (or sense) where, in what direction(s), or how it moves? Does Nietzsche have the same attitude toward the direction of history as Marx?

Week 7. (10/18) History in Postmodern Times

Reading Assignment: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, esp. Pt. I, ch. 1, (pp. 1-31); Part III entire (pp. 135-228); P. O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture" (R); Primary Source (at back of reader) from an Amsterdam Commune c. 1972. Suggested: Appleby, ch. 6.

Courseworks Writing for This Week: Write on **either** A or B, **and** C.

- A. Why is Foucault uncomfortable with traditional historians, and why are they uncomfortable with him?
- B. What do you find most successful or unsuccessful in Foucault's approach to history? to his primary sources?
- C. The source from the Amsterdam Commune was written in the same period as *Discipline and Punish*. Can you pick out specific similarities in (A) the language and (B) the concerns in these two texts?

Class Discussion: What can the historian learn from Foucault?

Week 8. (10/25) Material Life and History, Annales School

*****2ND PAPER DUE*****

Reading assignment for this week: F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, Selections; Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, chs 1-3.

Courseworks Writing for This Week:

Please send in whatever comments you choose on the Braudel reading.

Class Discussion Topic:

Time is the medium of history, and history might be described as “motion through time.” How does Braudel’s treatment of time make us re-think it as an historical category? How does Braudel’s treatment of space do the same?

****PAPER WRITING ASSIGNMENT # 3**** 5-7 page maximum
(**Due Tuesday before Thanksgiving, November 21st**). An analysis of Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power*.

Possible Mintz Prompts for Paper 3:

As your assessments of the Braudel selection for this week suggest, history written beneath (or beside) the level of individual human agency can be both productive and engaging. It may also have its limitations.

Two possible questions on Mintz to write on:

1. History is all about seeing and drawing connections between things — often connections that earlier historians mostly failed to see. Seeing and drawing connections are pivotal to *Sweetness and Power*. Choose two or three connections that Mintz sees and draws (and that you find **particularly important to the overall argument of the book**), and assess their strength and their importance; that is, assess the strength of the argument(s) he makes, the evidence he provides for connection, and the historical importance of the connection.
2. Mintz insists on connecting “webs of meaning” to “webs of power.” Choose 2 or 3 points of connection between these two webs that you find important, and then analyze: How does he connect them? What arguments, evidence, and sources does he employ? How do you assess the arguments, evidence, and sources he does employ? Or put another way, how strong do you find his historical arguments on these points?
There can be a part B to this question, at your discretion. What connections can you see between Mintz’s understanding of (and insistence on) the role of power in determining meaning and Foucault’s understanding?

As you read, keep in mind that Mintz is trained as an anthropologist. In his book he attempts to integrate anthropology and history, an attempt the adherents of the *Annales* school would applaud.

Week 9. (11/1) The Engines of History? From the Small to the Large

Reading Assignment: Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (entire).

Courseworks Writing for This Week: Answer either A, B, or C

- A. What do you think Mintz is trying for in this work? Does he succeed?
- B. How does Mintz's work build on other works we have already read?
- C. What can you as an historian learn from this work?

For class discussion: Please pick out one argument (or interpretation of evidence) in Mintz that you think is particularly successful, or particularly weak, and be prepared to explain your choice in class.

Due for Next Week (Week 10) in Class: An outline of your final thesis proposal—minimum one paragraph, preferably more – with some preliminary bibliography. 2 copies: one to me and one to a peer reviewer. We will discuss these in seminar next week.

Week 10. (11/8) History of Ideas

Reading Assignment: Joel Kaye Introduction to *A History of Balance, 1250-1375*. (We will discuss in class after our going around the room to discuss the senior thesis topics you have chosen.)

By This Point in the Semester, You Should Have A Draft Of Your Final Thesis Proposal Ready, Along With A Preliminary Bibliography: One copy to peer reviewer, one copy to me. We will discuss everyone's thesis topic in class.

Later in the week we will also visit the Rare Book Room at Columbia, where you will have a chance to see what archive sources exist on your chosen topic. (Your final archive written reports will be handed in

along with your thesis proposal. See Archive assignments in syllabus, week 5).

Week 11. (11/15) Narrative History: Reading Primary Documents:

******PAPER ASSIGNMENT # 3 (ON MINTZ) DUE Tuesday next week, 11/21.**

Reading Assignment: S. Maza on narrative history (R); R. Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre" (R).

Coursework Writing for this Week: (on one or more of the following questions)

The short primary text on which Darnton bases this study is given at the back of the article. Please read the primary source **first**, and then examine how Darnton proceeds to "read" it.

How does Darnton exploit the **disjunctions** in his narrative and his text? How does he set up the reality of disjunction from the beginning?

Note how Darnton consistently works against expectations. Does this make for powerful/revealing history? What connections can be made between the comedian and the historian?

Class Discussion: Continuation of the above.

(11/22) [[***Thanksgiving Break***]] Mintz Paper Due Tuesday, 11/21.

Week 12. (11/29) Mentalités: Intellectual/Cultural History: Reading Primary Sources.

Reading Assignment: P. Brown, "The Invisible Companion," (R); C. Bynum, "The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women" (R).

Courseworks Writing: Either A or B:

A. Peter Brown. How does a great historian talk about the **motion** of ideas and feelings – the evolution of new sentiments and perspectives? Can you find examples of the language Brown uses to give body and weight to the delicate shifts in thought and sentiment he is describing?

Something to consider: How well does Brown have to know the universe of primary texts in his period in order to be able to make the fine points and distinctions that he does?

B. Do you find Bynum's writing strong? And if so, what makes it so? What do you find noteworthy about the way she presents her material and her argument? How does she play the present off the past to illuminate her subject? As a reader, do you find yourself being led along by the logic of her presentation?

Class Discussion:

Here we focus on the craft of constructing an historical argument. Compare the way Bynum and Darnton use their primary sources and place them in social and intellectual contexts. Are there similarities in the way they structure their narrative? How does "reversal" (in roles, in meanings,) figure in their historical reading and writing? Do they use "reversal" in similar ways? How do they exploit disjunctions in their presentation and understanding of history? Does it work?

Week 13. (12/6) Contextualizing Sources: Revisionism

*****FINAL VERSION OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE*****

*****FINAL VERSION OF THESIS BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE*****

Reading Assignment: N. Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known" (R); C. Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual."

Courseworks Writing Assignment:

At the conclusion of the Painter article you will find the 2 primary sources on which she based her historical argument. Please read the appendix containing these two sources **first**. Get a sense of what you, as an historian, would have made of them. Then read the Painter article.

To the class list: (either 1 OR 2 of these questions, as you choose)

A: In our first reading by Linenthal, we saw that critical history often attacks and destroys myths – sometimes myths that serve genuine social and psychological needs. With Painter we have another historian attacking myths. By doing so, does she enhance or threaten the historical figure of Sojourner Truth?

B: Did you find Painter's article to be an example of good history? If so why, if not why not. (You may want to use our list of "good history elements" in your response.)

C. What does the Smith-Rosenberg article tell us about the history of words and sentiments? Do the definitions and meaning tones of words and even gestures change over time? What can we learn from this as historians?

Week 14. **(12/13) What is History (Reprise)**

Reading Assignment in the History of Ideas: J. Kaye, Introduction to *A History of Balance: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought, 1250-1375*; G. Mosse, "From Romanticism to the Volk" (R) .



APPENDIX A:

INFORMATION ON THE WRITING OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, DUE WEEK 13 AND 14

The paper assignment is in 2 parts.

PART I: A description of a **workable** history research topic on a subject of your choice (4-5 pages) that contains your initial strategy for constructing a serious research paper on this topic.

Footnotes should be included in this section (at least 5) referring to works you cite in your bibliography (see below). **All footnotes must follow the form outlined below in this syllabus.** Please pay close attention to the forms you find there – they are simple but perfectly adequate. Like Novick *et al.*, you can and should use your footnotes to convey information beyond the strictly bibliographical.

Your paper must have 4 recognizable parts:

1. State the topic (or question) of primary concern first, as clearly and concisely as possible. The question you should be able to

answer: **why should the reader care about this topic?** Why is it interesting/ important to investigate?

2. Strategize how you might divide up your thesis.
--Imagine your thesis divided into 4-6 chapters and devise provisional headings for each chapter.
3. Discuss what related issues and information you might have to consider in conjunction with your topic.
4. Define the historical problems you are likely to confront in framing and answering your question.

Your grade for this paper will NOT be based on the size (immensity) or ambition of your topic. Far from it. I assume that you will be asking interesting questions. What I am looking to see is how well you can articulate a focused topic (or a focused thesis question) that is proportional to a forty or fifty page paper; how well you design your research *strategy* (i.e., how likely your sources are to open up and illuminate your topic); and how conscious you are of the problems that must be overcome to bring your topic to fruition.

The most common problem in the papers I've received in the past is a failure to conceptualize a **focused** topic. You need to distinguish between the background information that will be necessary to set up your topic and the topic itself. Make this distinction clear in the way you structure your paper proposal. I understand your desire to tell the "whole story" of whatever aspect of history you choose to discuss. **But resist this temptation.** It is necessary for you to learn the general history of your subject in order to do your work, but it is not your task to recapitulate this information. **You've got to choose one limited aspect of the story on which to focus--one focused area in which to make a real contribution to the subject through your particular reading of available primary sources. The most successful papers work from the particular to the general -- from the small to the large.** Think of yourself as a **contributor** to a much larger project. You are responsible for illuminating your piece of the puzzle and for getting it right so that others coming after you can use and build upon your work.

Obviously, in order to know where to focus, you will have to have some idea of the work already done on your subject. For this reason, I require that, once you have chosen a general area to work in, you read at least one book or article on your subject every week. List the books and

articles that you have actively consulted in a special section within your annotated bibliography.

A hint on finding a topic: Follow your curiosity. Conceiving your topic in the form of a question often helps. Work continually to focus your question. Once you have your topic, begin to recognize its parts and to break it down into manageable pieces. Visualize how it can be divided into chapters and what the headings of the chapters might be. It is almost always easier to work on a topic part by part than to attack the whole directly.

If read carefully, the works we have read by Brown, Bynum, Mintz, Ginzburg, Darnton, Chakrabarty, etc., , can give you a sense of how you might shape your own research topic. What techniques employed by these historians might work for you? I would hope that the answer to this question turns up in some form in your thesis proposal.

Finally, keep in mind that **History is motion over time**. When you construct your topic, be thinking of what kind of motion (transforming, evolving, splitting, disintegrating, incorporating, substituting, etc.) you, as historian, want to reveal. In order to speak about motion, you need to have a recognizable (if arbitrary) beginning and end, and "recognizable" means that you will need to give shape to the abstract. **Motion and shape: how will you reveal these through your topics?**

PART 2: An **annotated bibliography** of primary and secondary works (15-25) on your topic. In your case, the annotation will **briefly describe each source and explain where and how you found it**. If you don't know what an annotated bibliography should look like, consult one or two in the Library Reference Room (the librarians will help you here). **Separate your bibliography into separate headings for primary and secondary sources.**

Try to include in your bibliography some works from most of the following categories: general reference works (Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Printed Bibliographies and subject bibliographies found on the web); clio; Butler card catalogue;; the Humanities and Social Science Indexes for books and articles; JStor and other bibliographic data bases on the Clio web page; **bibliographic citations you have found by looking through footnotes in other books on the general subject**, book reviews on your topic; specialized History Net lists; the Internet.

Check, for example the websites:

(History Archives) <http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/history/>)

(American Memory) <http://rs6.loc.gov/amhome.html>

(Jefferson and Early American – interactive)

<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/>

(Medieval) <http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth>

APPENDIX B:

SHAPING A TOPIC--SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Most of the time, topics (questions) are made, not born. You begin with a fuzzy notion of something that seems worth investigating, and you proceed from there. But how? How do you get from something broad and general and incoherent to something defined and doable?

Your question needs to be one that can be asked and answered historically. What this means, of course, is that it has to involve the "past" in some form or other. The "past" comes in all shapes and sizes. As we've seen this semester, the practice of history in the last few decades has expanded to include a large number of new subjects and areas previously excluded, so that almost any aspect of human experience is now fair game (provided, of course, that there are sources with which to get at it). It helps, for all sorts of reasons, if you locate your subject in a period that has, in some sense, "closed," so that what you're writing about is not completely open-ended and absent of form. In fact, "form" and "shape" is something you should be thinking about when constructing your topic.

Historians are generally less concerned with discovering universal truths and constructing seamless systems than they are with investigating **disjunctions**--pieces that don't seem to fit (see the Darnton and Bynum articles); evidence that raises questions; beliefs and actions that have a certain strangeness to them and thereby indicate shifts in social, political, and cultural life over time.

Historians are not lawyers. Our job is not to construct an air-tight brief or to discount and devalue evidence that does not fit. Our job is more difficult: to capture the richness and complexity of the past while at the same time working to isolate and clarify particular aspects of a particular

historical subject. Once we have isolated and clarified, we are in a position to suggest how the pieces originally fit together or worked together in their historical context. Good history proposes and tests hypotheses--it makes a case for the answers it provides--but it doesn't presuppose that there is only one "right" answer, or only one way to read the pieces, or only one way to reconstruct the way they worked together in the past.

It is likely that the full outline of your topic will emerge only after you have had a chance to familiarize yourself with the primary sources. The more you do this, the more you are likely to see what it is that requires further examination and explication. This recognition, in turn, helps you to sharpen and focus the questions you are asking. You start out with a question, a problem, an issue, on a subject that you're interested in, and then proceed to refine it by working dialectically--you approach your sources, the sources in some sense talk back to you, and the process continues until you sense that you have arrived at a question that is working for you and leading you into interesting territory.

Some general considerations of a practical nature need to be taken into account from the outset. If you are planning to use primary sources (and all of us will for this project) ask yourself whether they are locally available and accessible (in a language you can read). What about the secondary literature? Is it available and accessible? And, of course, how much do you know about the subject? Is it something you're going to have to learn from the ground up? If so, do you have the time to learn enough of the basics before you proceed to the more sophisticated aspects of the topic? Or is it something you already know about in some detail (perhaps something you've studied in an introductory course) and can approach from a position of less than total ignorance?

The best history papers always give the reader a general idea about the body of the sources available (and the sources actually consulted) on the subject chosen. This can be done either in a series of footnotes as each particular primary source is introduced, or in a general discussion within the text itself, or both. What are the particular questions this body of sources raise? Which sources are most trustworthy, which have to be approached with extreme caution? Through what lens(es) should the modern reader look at them, and why? It is good to begin thinking about these questions right from the start of your project.

At some point, and it is better if this happens sooner rather than later, you will come to the realization that you cannot afford to reinvent the wheel. You don't have all the time in the world, and you need to find an efficient and economical way of getting at your subject. **Don't spend your time and energy simply recapitulating the information you have gotten through reading secondary sources.** Rather, look for openings, questions, points that have not been considered to your satisfaction, problems that have been raised by the information you have found in the primary and secondary sources. Often your reader will need *some* broad, preliminary information in order to understand where you are heading, and the providing of contextual information may be necessary at various points in your paper, **but get to the meat of *your* topic and *your* interpretation as soon as and whenever possible.**

Again, think of yourself as making a finite, limited, yet **trustworthy contribution** to the larger history of your subject.

You will not be able to exhaust your subject if it's a good one. Selection is the key: pick a topic that is defined enough so that you can say something about it in detail (the history of women in the 19th century, or the history of the city in the 13th century, are good examples of bad topics in this sense); consider it in relation to the length of the paper you are going to write; and don't worry too much if the finished product is not quite what you had in mind when you began.

The question you ask may not be resolved in any ultimate sense; your conclusions may be fairly tentative. Historians must often use language that can seem maddeningly evasive--"on the whole," "nevertheless," "for the most part," and so on. That is not to say that you should avoid taking positions but rather that all positions are provisional, and it is appropriate to recognize this and be fairly upfront about it.

If you have done things correctly, you will find that not all your research can be used. Do not regard this as a mistake; it is a normal part of the process. Trying to stuff everything you've found into a paper can lead to real problems--too much detail on some aspects, not enough (by comparison) on others.

It should be apparent by now, that the rules in this game are not hard and fast (every third word seems to be a qualifier). Many of the

considerations outlined here are practical rather than theoretical. You have enormous latitude within which to maneuver--perhaps in your minds too much latitude. Remember that this is a process. Persevere and you will see your topic gradually take shape around your interest, your sources, and your understanding.

PROPER FORMATTING FOR FOOTNOTE REFERENCES:

The first time you use any source, cite it in full. **You need to use a full citation only the first time you cite any work.** Every time thereafter you should use the abbreviated **short title form** (see the section under this heading below).

EXAMPLES OF FULL CITATIONS FOR BOOKS:

(Please pay careful attention to the form)

Author: The first time an author's name appears it should be written in full. **For footnotes, place the first name first and the last name last.** (Only in the Bibliography should you place the last name first.)

1. Judith A. Baer, *Equality Under the Constitutions: Reclaiming the Fourteenth Amendment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 105.

All book titles must *either* be placed in Italics or underlined (choose one or the other and then be consistent throughout).

Note Well: There must be a **comma** after the authors name, a **comma** between the place and date of publication, a **comma after** the parenthesis containing the publication place and date (but **no** comma before this or any other parenthesis), and a **period** at the conclusion of every footnote.

Editors and Translators: The names of editors and translators appear after the title, unless that person had primary responsibility for preparing the book for publication:

2. Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 69.

3. Deborah L. Rhode, ed., Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 257-260.

Multivolume Works: Works of more than one volume should be identified in footnotes by the number of volumes in the work and the number of the volume from which a quote has been taken.

Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap, 1971), 1:119.

FULL CITATION FORM FOR ALL ARTICLES:

(To be used **only** the first time a work is cited. Every time thereafter, use the **Short Title** citation form as outlined below.

Article in a Scholarly Journal:

Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920's France," American Historical Review, 98 (1993), 657.

(If you are citing the work itself rather than a particular page, give the page range: (1993), 622-59.

Note Well: **First name first**; **comma** after the author's name; **comma** after the title of the article (should be placed inside the quotation marks); the name of the periodical must be placed **either** in Italics or underlined (choose one but be consistent); **comma** after the name of the periodical; **comma** after the date of the periodical in parentheses; **period** at the conclusion of the footnote.

Chapter in a Book:

For its first citation:

Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in *The New Cultural History*, ed., Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-55, at 25.

Or:

Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in *The New Cultural*, Lynn Hunt (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-55, at 25.

Or:

Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-55, at 25.

If you are citing the work itself rather than a particular page, give only the page range it occupies within the book: e.g., Patricia O'Brien etc. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-55.

You may use any one of the above 3 forms, but whichever you choose, you must remain consistent.

Citing Dissertations:

Anna Louise Bates, "Protective Custody: A Feminist Interpretation of Anthony Comstock's Life and Laws" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991), 34.

***SHORT TITLE CITATIONS*:**

After the first reference to a particular source of whatever kind, **all** subsequent references should be shortened.

The shortened reference to a **book** should include only:

Last name of the author

Shortened title of the book (underlined or in italics)

Page number of the reference.

Example:

For the **first** citation of any book use the

Book, Full Title:

Judith A. Baer, *Equality Under the Constitution: Reclaiming the Fourteenth Amendment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 105-08.

For all succeeding citations use the

Book, Short Title:

Baer, *Equality Under the Constitution*, 105-08.

SHORT TITLE CITATIONS FOR ALL ARTICLES:

The shortened reference to an article should include only:
Last name of the author; Short title of the article; Page numbers of the
reference.

Example:

Article, Full Title Citation: (First time used)

Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of
Women's Fashion in 1920's France," American Historical Review, 98 (June
1993), 657.

Article, Short Title Citation:

Roberts, "Samson and Delilah," 657.
