

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Department of History  
Spring, 1994

History 829      Research Seminar in Latin American History      Steve J. Stern  
5105 Humanities  
263-1800

Course Description

This research seminar focuses on the practice of historical research on Latin America. We have a three-fold agenda. First, we will explore together the craft and purpose of historical research and analysis in its varied dimensions--from debate by historians on grand issues of meaning and method, to hands-on exercises in the analysis of varied kinds of documents, to the art of scouting out relevant sources. Second, we will explore the special research and source conditions that may or may not apply to projects on Latin America. Third, and most important, the seminar will provide a collective workshop setting within which students may research, write, and present essays and thesis chapters. The course will conclude with student research panels.

Although the practical hands-on exercises emphasize colonial documents, students will be free to focus their research projects on any period of Latin American history.

The assignments of the seminar include active and thoughtful participation in our meetings and panels, a library practicum, a research paper, and formal commentary at one of the panels on the syllabus schedule. In addition, students will turn in a journal recording their responses to the assigned reading and documents.

Two of these assignments are "customized" according to the student's phase in the graduate study cycle.

- (1) Customized Research Paper Option. Students in write-up phases of M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations may write and present a polished chapter or set of chapters, with consent of the instructor, so long as these are chapters written (or very heavily revised) during the semester, and so long as chapters are accompanied by a short thesis abstract and chapter outline. The abstract and outline will provide context for intelligent discussion and critique in the student panels.
- (2) Customized Practicum Assignment. Advanced Ph.D. students will serve as mentors of pre-prelim students in the library practicum exercise, and connected task of defining intellectually exciting and feasible research paper topics, rather than preparing and presenting a library practicum of their own.

Talk with me if you need any clarification of assignments or if you need to pursue other customization options. Teamwork and sensitivity to students' varied locations in the graduate study cycle are high priorities in the course, and I am therefore open to negotiation. (Remember, however, that openness to negotiation does not imply a priori approval of your requests.)

Schedule (tentative)

UNIT I. CRAFT AND PURPOSE: APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

Week 1. Introduction. Jan. 27.

Organizational meeting.

Tasks:

- \*\*begin selection/negotiation of research areas and topics, and begin related work on library practicum/mentoring;
- \*\*commit to Group A versus Group B for Roundtable session in Week 3, and identify formal commentators for Week 3;
- \*\*begin your readings for the next two weeks.

Week 2. The Debatable Art of Reading Between the Lines:

The Historian as Detective. Feb. 3.

Rdng.: Friedrich Katz, "Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico," American Historical Review 83:1 (Feb. 1978), 101-30.  
Exchange between James A. Sandos and Katz in ibid 84:1 (Feb. 1979), 304-07.

Task: Begin working hard on library practicum, prepare for roundtable meetings.

Week 3. SPECIAL THREE-HOUR PANEL. Feb. 10.

PANEL: "WHAT DO HISTORIANS THINK THEY PRACTICE?  
REFLECTIONS ON CRAFT, TEXT, AND DEBATE"

Commentary #1: "Two French Historians on the Doing of History:  
What Difference Does a Half-Century Make?"  
(based on Grp. A readings)

Commentary #2: "Objectivism and Relativism,  
Community and Fragmentation, in the History of History"  
(based on Grp. B readings)

Rdng.:

Grp. A: Marc Bloch, The Historian's Craft (New York: Vintage, 1953).  
Natalie Zemon Davis, Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987).

Grp. B: Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

Steve J. Stern, "Africa, Latin America, and the Splintering of Historical Knowledge: From Fragmentation to Reverberation," in Frederick Cooper et al., Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 3-20.



UNIT II. DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH AND WORKSHOPS.

During this unit, students will work intensively on research and writing. After the library practicum is completed, students will also devote a modest amount of time--in the form of assigned readings and formal class meetings--to practical workshops on the use of various types of documentary sources. Your job during the three workshop weeks is to subject the sample documents to your sharpest historical eye: to analyze the insights you may draw from them, and to analyze the methods appropriate for drawing insight from the documents.

I have tentatively listed below the types of documents for which I will distribute samplings for our workshops. I am happy to provide samplings other than those listed, if the class provides me enough lead time. Weeks 4-5 is the best period to alter the proposed samplings.

During the weeks in which we do not have formal class meetings, Steve Stern will be available during the Thursday morning class periods by appointment to discuss specific research ideas or problems as they arise in your research and writing. Sign up for extra appointment hours at 5105 Humanities.

Week 4. What Constitutes a Source,  
What Constitutes an Interrogation? Feb. 17.

Readings: none assigned, since by this time you will be in the final phase of your library practicum preparation. By this time, your definition of research topic should also be crystallizing.

Discussion topic for class:

We shall try together to imagine the widest possible range of historical source types for Latin America, and we shall also explore the value of theory and interdisciplinarity in interrogating sources. We shall also finalize decisions about the kinds of sample documents you want to explore in Workshops 1, 2, and 3.

Week 5. Library Practicum Presentations: Dialogues  
of Research Inspiration and Research Feasibility. Feb. 24.

Tasks:

- \*\*presentation of results of library research practicum;
- \*\*presentation by instructor on designing significant and viable historical research proposals.

Week 6. Workshop #1. March 3.

The Tales and Silences of Cultural Script and Cultural Memory:  
Chronicler and Eyewitness Observer  
Oral Interview and Oral Tradition,  
Ethnographic Traveller and Audience

Reading: chronicle/eyewitness account of 1692 riot in Mexico City.

Week 7. No formal class meeting. March 10.

History 829, Spring 1994, page 4.

Week 8. Workshop #2. March 17.

The Rhythms and Accountings of Daily Life:  
The Routines of Transaction, Accounting, and Recording

Reading: notarial and census records  
involving Spaniards, Indians, Blacks.

Week 9. No formal class meeting. March 24. [March 31 = Spring Break]

Week 10. Workshop #3. April 7.

Confidential Report and Public Dispute:  
Private Communications and State-Regulated Conflict

Reading: internal papers on labor problems of a sugar plantation,  
trials of prisoners in Túpac Amaru insurrection.

Task: We will also review the source list we established in Week 4 to see  
whether we wish to modify it in view of our workshops and our  
individual research experiences.

Week 11. No formal class meeting. April 14.

### UNIT III. STUDENT RESEARCH PANELS.

Weeks 12-15: Student Panels. April 21, April 28, May 5, May 12.

Format: Advance circulation of research papers/thesis chapters,  
opening remarks by formal commentators, and ample time for  
discussion will characterize these panels. The specific  
schedule and number of panels will be worked out early in the  
semester. Some panels may require a three-hour period.

NOTE: Seminar groups occasionally like to push panel dates forward  
into final examination week. It is generally not a good idea  
to schedule flights to leave Madison as soon as classes are over,  
and I am usually unsympathetic to the schedule problems of those  
who make this choice. Enough said.

### Grades

Since this is a research seminar, the bulk of the grade will be based on  
the quality of the research papers. Research papers will account for about  
two-thirds of the final grade, and oral participation will account for the  
remaining one-third. Both your week-to-week participation and your formal  
panel commentary will weigh strongly in the oral participation evaluation.

You have the option, with consent of the instructor, of declaring your  
research paper a "first draft" and submitting a second one. This is not  
usually feasible, however, for students who insist on leaving Madison as soon  
as classes end. Sometimes you really cannot have it both ways!