

History and Theory: The Annales Tradition in
European Social HistoryCourse Description:

The most innovative and influential historians in this century have been scholars associated with the journal Annales, E.S.C. The French masters who established the Annales school, Febvre, Bloch, and more recently Braudel and Le Roy Ladurie, have called for a new kind of history, a total history of past societies that embraces every aspect of human experience. They and the writers who have been influenced by them have produced a magnificent series of works that are designed collectively to realize their ideal. The aim of this seminar will be to clarify the principles that characterize this new school of historical writing and to examine the practice of those principles in a representative selection of books by French, English, Italian and American scholars. The course will begin with theoretical statements, then proceed to studies of whole regions and classes, and finally conclude with works about popular culture and thought. Throughout the course, the seminar as a group will consider how well each of the books we read embodies the theoretical prescriptions of the Annalists and how valid the statements themselves seem to be when they have been tested in practice.

Seminar Meetings/Assignments:

Seminar meetings are scheduled for M 2:30-4:30. Every student will be expected to participate in discussions and to lead at least one class during the semester. Reading assignments are heavy; writing assignments will therefore be light. All students who are taking the class for credit will be asked to write two short essays analyzing the issues raised by the reading assignments for two class meetings. Little or no outside reading for these essays will be required; they will be limited to approximately 1500 words (or fewer) in length.

Reading Assignments*

Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences" in his On History.

Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean in the Age of Phillip II, vols. 1 & 2 (selections).

J.H. Hexter, "Fernand Braudel and the Monde Braudellien," in his On Historians.

Pierre Goubert, Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "History that Stands Still" in his The Mind and Method of the Historian.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, The Peasants of Languedoc.

Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy.

* One or two articles on the history of mentalites will be added to this list when the syllabus is made up.

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Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Montaillou.

Georges Duby, The Three Orders.

Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe.

Natalie Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France.

Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms.

Philip Aries, The Hour of Our Death (Selections).

Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World.