HISTORY 600: Creative Historical Writing

Professor: Emily Callaci
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Course Time: Monday, 1:20-3:15
Class Location: Humanities 5245
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3pm
Office: 5125 Mosse Humanities Building
Requisites: HIST 201 or HIST SCI 211
Canvas site: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/470032

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As historians, we care about getting the facts about the past right; but to what extent is imagination and creativity also part of the historian's craft? Should historians write in the first person, making themselves be part of the story they tell about the past, or should they aim for an impartial "objective" perspective? How do journalists, playwrights, tv writers, or novelists use archives and historical expertise in crafting compelling stories? To what extent can historical fiction be "true?" What are the ethics of different modes of representing the past? This class invites students to explore creative writing as a mode of studying, exploring and communicating about the past, and to experiment with different genres in their own historical writing. Together, we will read and compare how writers across various genres write about history. By the end of the semester, each student will develop and complete their own original historical writing project in a genre of their choice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This advanced level course meets the Humanities breadth requirement and counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand different ways historical narratives and truths are created from evidence
- Assess historical accuracy in different registers
- Assess the role of imagination and creativity in historical work
- Examine the possibilities and limitations of various modes of representation of the past
- Experiment with writing in multiple genres
- Ask creative questions and work to find relevant primary and secondary sources to answer them
- Craft an original historical research project, using primary and secondary sources
- Communicate findings to diverse audiences, in various formats
- Give and receive helpful, respectful feedback
- Lead and participate productively in purposeful discussion

FORMAT:

This course meets in person. Most weeks, students will complete two assignments. The first is to complete a task that furthers your final project. The second is to complete the assigned reading and write a brief response to a prompt. Both will be due on Canvas by 9:00am on Monday morning, the day of class. Please plan your week accordingly so that you are leaving yourself enough time!

Usually, our class session will be divided into two halves. For the first half of class, we will discuss the assigned readings. Then, following a brief break, we will spend the second half of class working towards your final project. Often, we will spend time doing writing prompts together in class. I highly recommend choosing your topic within the first few weeks of the semester! If you do not have a topic in mind, I will share a list of potential archives and primary sources available on campus.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT:

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

As an historian, I recognize that my profession has privileged certain people and excluded others—both in terms of the people who hold jobs as history professors, and in terms of the perspectives and experiences that have been deemed worthy of historical inquiry. I also acknowledge that the University of Wisconsin-Madison itself occupies the ancestral lands of the Ho-Chunk, a place their nation has called Teejop. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. While we cannot undo all forms of historical injustice in a single course, we recognize our ongoing obligation to foster a more just and inclusive university, and within it, a more just and inclusive discipline of History.

We must start by educating ourselves about how our institution, UW Madison, fits into histories of exclusion. Towards that end, I encourage all students to take the time to visit the online exhibition Sifting and Reckoning, which explores UW's history of exclusion and resistance.

As a professor, I take seriously my responsibility to create a safe learning environment where all students can participate in open and honest dialogue with one another. I expect all members of the seminar to contribute to a learning atmosphere that is respectful and inclusive, and which recognizes the dignity of each member. I welcome disagreement and varying viewpoints as a productive and necessary part of intellectual inquiry, and I expect seminar members to express disagreement in a respectful way.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities, which include regularly scheduled meeting times during class and office hours, reading, writing, revising, conducting research, providing feedback to other students, and participating in self-assessment. Students are also required to meet with the professor outside class time, in office hours, at least once during the semester.

GRADING CRITERIA

Grades are based on a 100-point scale, which translates to the following letter grades:

96-100 A
90-95 AB
85-89 B
80-84 BC
75-79 C
70-74 D
<70 F

We will calculate your grade based on the following assignments:

ASSESSMENT:

-7 out of a possible of 8 Weekly Reading Responses, 250 words (35 points total, 5 points each)
-Research Tasks (25 points)

Breakdown:

- topic (2)

- restatement of topic, with primary sources (5)
- synopsis of one secondary source related to topic (2)
- annotated bibliography (5)
- close reading analysis of one primary source related to topic (2)
- statement of purpose (5)
- 3 pages of writing to share (2)
- 3 more pages of writing to share (2)

-Final writing project (20 points)
-Peer review (5 points)
-Participation (10 points)
-Final Reflection (5 points)

ASSIGNED READINGS:

All readings will be available on the class Canvas site, except for these three books, which we will read in their entirety, and which are available at most bookstores. They are also available on course reserve in College Library.

1. Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* (Pantheon, 1992)
2. Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These,* (Grove Press, 2021)
3. David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon,* (Doubleday, 2009)

RESOURCES AND POLICIES

Office Hours:
I encourage you all to come to my office hours to discuss any aspect of the course or your academic program. These hours are set aside specifically for your benefit, and I really hope to see you there! I am available both in person in my office or remotely, via Zoom.

Academic Honesty:
The University of Wisconsin takes matters of academic honesty very seriously. Plagiarism in particular is a very serious offense that can pose a real threat to your success and to the integrity of our broader learning community. I will strictly enforce the university policies on academic honesty. The rules about plagiarism can sometimes be confusing. If you are unsure about them, please be on the safe side and check. You can start here:
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

If you are still unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, and whether you are committing plagiarism, please come speak to me during office hours. Ignorance of the definition of plagiarism will not be an acceptable excuse. More detailed information about student codes of conduct may be found here:
http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html#points

Writing Resources:
I encourage you to make use of the resources and services available through the History Lab. The History Lab is a resource where expert PhD students work with you and your history/history of science projects 1-on-1. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff will help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Visit our website http://go.wisc/edu/HLAB early and often to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA or to find writing tips, guides, and resources.

DoIT Help Desk – If you have questions about Canvas, BBCollaborate, Zoom or other platforms supported by UW, you can contact the DoIT Help Desk: https://it.wisc.edu/services/help-desk/. They can also guide students to resources for help with bandwidth issues.

SCHEDULE:

Week 1, Sept 8: Introductions

Read:

1. Hilary Mantel, "Why I Became a Historical Novelist," *The Guardian,* June 3, 2017
2. Hilary Mantel, "Extract: Bring Up the Bodies," *The Guardian,* October 16, 2012

Due: write a few sentences about a potential topic for your final project. You can change your mind later; the point is just to get you to start thinking. You may answer any (but not necessarily all) of the following questions.

- What is a general historical topic that fascinates you?
- Is there a time and place, or particular event you want to write about?
- Is there an historical question you would to grapple with?
- Is there a primary source or sources that you may potentially want to use?
- Is there a genre of historical writing you want to try?

Week 2, Sept 15: Archives, Silences and Imagination

Read:

1. Saidiya V. Hartmann, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* (Norton, 2019), xiii-xxi and 1-79
2. Annette Gordon-Reed, "Rebellious History," *New York Review of Books,* October 22, 2022

Due: reading response

Week 3, Sept 22: History as Travel Writing

Read:

1. Clint Smith, *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America,* 1-50, 291-293 and two additional chapters of your choice

Due: reading response

Week 4, Sept 30: Family as History

Caution: this week's by Spiegelman reading may be disturbing to some readers, as it is about the Holocaust and includes an incident of suicide. Please prioritize your own wellness and let me know if you need any accommodation.

Read:

1. Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* (Pantheon, 1992).
2. Sherene Seikaly, "How I Met My Great-Grandfather: Archives and the Writing of History," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 38 (1), 2018, 6-20
3. Heather Roller, "A Shared Toxic History," *American Historical Review* 125 (5), December 2020, 1740–1750

Due:

1. a paragraph restating your topic and identifying primary sources that you might use
2. reading response

Week 5, Oct 6: History as Detective Thriller, History as Reckoning

Read:

1. David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI,* (Vintage, 2017), first half

AND

2. One scholarly article or book related to your research project

Due:

1. paragraph synopsis of a scholarly source related to your research topic
2. reading response

Week 6, Oct 13: Killers of the Flower Moon, Part 2

1. David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon,* second half
2. Jim Gray and David Grann, "The True Story Behind 'Killers of the Flower Moon' is being Erased from Oklahoma Classrooms," *New York Times,* October 20, 2023.
3. Christopher Kuo, "In Indigenous Communities a Divided Reaction to Killers of the Flower Moon," *New York Times,* December 12, 2023

Due: reading response

Week 7, Oct 20: Research and Writing Workshop

Due: Annotated Bibliography

Week 8, Oct 27: Historical Fiction I

Read:

1. Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These,* (Grove Press, 2021)

Due:

1. primary source analysis
2. reading response

Week 9, Nov 3: Historical Fiction II:

Read:

1. Namwali Serpell "The Afronauts Archives: Reports from a Future Zambia," *Public Books,* March 18, 2019
2. Namwali Serpell, *The Old Drift* (Hogarth, 2020), 140-199

Due:

1. Statement of purpose, 1 page
2. Reading response

Week 10, Nov 10: Writing Workshop

Due: 3 draft pages of writing

Week 11, Nov 17: group workshop of 5 paper drafts

Week 12, Nov 24: no class

Due: another 3 draft pages of writing

Week 13, Dec 1: group workshop of 5 paper drafts

Week 14, Dec 8: group workshop of 5 paper drafts

December 15, due: final paper and final reflection