

History 100: How History Works
Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 9:00-9:50
Fall 2022

Edward Cohn
ARH 3226 (X3107)

cohned@grinnell.edu
Office hours: Tues. 10-11;
Wed. 1-2; or by
appointment (outside
when possible)

Course description

Most history classes focus on one particular time and place in the human past, but this course provides an introduction to issues of historical causation, argumentation, and evidence by pursuing a series of questions, big and small, illustrating how historical thinking can change how we see the world. Is there really a difference between “history” and “prehistory”? When are fairy tales and folklore useful historical sources? Was Caligula really Rome’s “mad” emperor, and how can we know for sure? How is being a historian like being a spy, and how can scholars understand the opinions and worldview of people who lived under brutal dictatorships or in cultures alien from our own? Does humor have a history? By pursuing questions like these, students will learn both about the forces that have shaped the past and about the ways that historians understand the world around them.

Course readings

The following books are on reserve at Burling Library and are available for purchase at the Grinnell College Bookstore:

John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*
Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun’s City: A Japanese Woman and Her World*

Other readings (marked “[Pioneerweb]” below) will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.

Learning Goals

This course has two broad objectives: to help students to understand the way historians analyze the past and to enable students to express their ideas more effectively. More specifically:

Historical Analysis Goals

By the end of the course, students will have refined their ability to:

- interpret a primary source (historical document) by analyzing its structure, audience, goals, and biases;
- identify and critique the argument of a secondary source (a book or article by a present-day historian), while situating that source within a larger historical debate or literature.
- evaluate and synthesize the ideas in a body of historical writings;

- explain the manner in which historical analysis of the past often differs from analyses by other types of scholars.

Writing and Discussion Goals

By the end of the semester, students will have improved their ability to:

- craft a clear, specific, and nuanced thesis statement in response to a historical question;
- construct a well-organized, evidence-rich, and cohesive paper in defense of a central argument.
- present their ideas orally in class, using evidence to support their ideas or to add nuance to the larger discussion.

Keep these goals in mind throughout the semester. Class discussions will be based on the analysis of primary sources and secondary sources; writing assignments will be graded based on your ability to develop a nuanced thesis and to defend that thesis in a well-organized paper.

Assignments and grading

Your grade in this class will be based on the following requirements. Note that you must hand in every written assignment in order to pass the class, and that if your grades improve steadily over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration in deciding your final grade:

Film analysis (15%). A 2-page analysis of the film *A Midwife's Tale*, due on Friday, September 9, at 5:00 PM by email. A revised version of this paper will then be due on Friday, September 16, at 5:00 PM.

Short paper (15%). A 3-page analysis on the history of things that aren't people, due on Monday, October 3, at 10:00 PM (by email.)

Oral history analysis (20%). A 4-to-5-page analysis of the oral history interviews of the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (available online), which looks at life under Stalin; this paper will be due at 10:00 PM on Monday, November 21.

Annotated bibliography with introduction (20%). Your final assignment of the semester will be to write a research guide to a topic that interests you. There will be several preliminary due dates, with the final project due on December 15.

Class participation (30%). The most important requirement for this course is active and informed participation in classroom discussions: since this is not primarily a lecture course, the course's success depends on the involvement of all its members. This semester, I will be experimenting with developing an approach to participation and attendance based on discussions with the class, but here are some general thoughts and guidelines:

In general, I'll be looking for evidence that you've done the reading, that you're thinking about the themes and issues covered by the class, and that you're making a good-faith effort to improve

the classroom experience for everyone enrolled in the course. Remember that there are many ways to make a useful contribution:

- answering one of my questions or bringing up a detail from the readings;
- finding evidence for your ideas (or a classmate's) by directly quoting a course text or pointing to a specific detail (with a reference) from the reading;
- making connections between the day's readings and earlier discussions;
- responding directly to your classmates;
- synthesizing comments made by your classmates (or the professor);
- asking informed questions of the class, the professor, or both;
- making comments that not only summarize the reading, but analyze it.

Here are some general observations about class participation:

- Class participation is the largest part of your grade for several reasons, but the most important one is this: I believe that being able to delve into an intelligent, nuanced, civil, and respectful discussion with your peers is one of the most important skills a liberal arts education can give you. Moreover, having everyone participate—in one way or another—makes the experience better for everyone.
- Remember that there are many ways to participate in class discussions. The strongest participants in discussion will often make comments that analyze the readings (rather than merely recapping them), but I expect that active participants in discussion will play different roles at different times. For example, here are some different rhetorical moves you might make in class:
 - Answer a question posed by me or a classmate
 - Ask a question for the class to consider
 - Summarize a reading or part of a reading
 - Provide evidence or an example for a point someone else has made
 - Disagree (respectfully!) with a previous comment from class
 - Agree with a previous comment from class while adding an example
 - Connect two comments made by different discussion participants
 - Connect the day's reading to an earlier reading
- In general, any form of participation that shows engagement with the material and helps the class to understand the course's subject matter is fair game. Remember, too, that class participation depends not only on speaking, but on listening—both to me and to your classmates. Be respectful, listen carefully, and be ready to respond to your classmates and not just to me.
- *All else being equal, it will help you to provide evidence for your arguments when you speak in class.* Ground your participation in the text: be ready to quote the readings or to point out specific passages that you find useful, significant, or relevant.
- You should therefore come to class with copies of the day's reading and with your notes on what you've read. (You are welcome to bring the readings either in hard copies or on a computer, but you should remember that it is often easier to mark significant passages in a paper copy of the readings.) In particular, I recommend that you make note of quotations and details in the readings that you find especially compelling.

- Although I hope that all students will take part in the discussion (ideally speaking at least once per class session on average), remember that the thoughtfulness of your comments is generally more important than the quantity of your remarks.
 - I also realize that some students will always be more talkative or more reserved than others. I'm happy to talk to you at any time about ways you might become more involved, and I think it's part of my job to make sure the classroom atmosphere is conducive to a broad, inclusive discussion.
 - Students sometimes ask if talking to me in office hours can substitute for participation in class. My answer: not entirely. Talking to me in class can show engagement with the material, so if you've been quiet in class, it can help me understand how you've related to course materials. (If you've been active in class, I'm also happy to talk to you, but coming to office hours won't improve your grade.) On the other hand, I value class participation in part because discussion helps all your classmates to understand the course material and to have a good class experience, so coming to office hours is never a perfect substitute for class discussion.
- Class participation depends on attendance. This semester, I plan to experiment with developing an attendance policy with the input of class members, but I want to emphasize one idea: ***I expect that everyone will miss class a couple times this semester***: people get sick, or get exhausted and sleep in by accident, or suddenly have to travel home for a family obligation. Therefore, everyone in the class can miss three class sessions without their absences affecting their final grade. (Plus, it goes without saying, that absences because of serious illness or Covid isolation will not hurt your grade.)
- Finally, I will generally give each student a brief "participation update" each time I send you feedback on a written assignment. I also encourage you to check in with me at any point if you have questions about the class or about how you can become more involved in the discussion.

Writing resources; paper revision policy

Remember that as a Grinnell student, you have access to a number of resources that may be useful for you as you work on writing assignments:

- I am of course happy to meet with you to discuss your writing, either at my regular office hours or at an independently scheduled appointment.
- I recommend that all students consider taking advantage of Grinnell's Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center, which supports students working on papers, projects, presentations, and applications. You can schedule a session with one of the Center's professional instructors and get feedback as you interpret readings, talk through your ideas, analyze evidence, develop and organize arguments, craft introductions and conclusions, rewrite sentences and paragraphs, or plan presentations. Center instructors do not proofread papers, but they can show you how to edit your own work effectively. You can make an appointment at this link: <http://mywco.com/grinnell>.

For the first paper of the semester, everyone in the class will hand in two drafts, and your final grade will be the average of the grades on the two drafts. For subsequent papers, students will

not be required to do a revision, but will have the opportunity to do a revision on any paper that they'd like to keep working on. The process will work as follows:

- Students will be able to hand in a rewrite any time up to two weeks after they get their paper back from me with comments.
- If you want to do a rewrite, I ask that you come speak to me early on in the revision process to discuss how you plan to respond to my feedback on the first version of your paper. (Please come to this meeting with a tentative plan for your revisions and a marked-up version of your original paper.)

Extension policy

In general, each student in the class can have one 48-hour extension on a writing assignment over the course of the semester. To claim this extension, send me a brief email asking for extra time before the assignment's deadline. I will grant this extension automatically, so there is no need for you to explain why you need more time. Keep in mind, however, that once you've been given an extension on an assignment, I will generally not give you an extension on another except in the case of a documented emergency. Note, too, that you can have one extension of up to 48 hours; you cannot break your extension into two 24-hour extensions, for example. In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day.

Office Hours

I strongly encourage students to come talk to me during my office hours, so we can discuss course readings, assignments, the study of history, or related issues. This semester I will be available to meet with on Tuesdays from 10:00 to 11:00 and on Wednesdays from 1:00 to 2:00, either in my office (ARH 3226) or (weather permitting) outside.

These are drop-in hours; you are welcome to come by without an appointment (and, in fact, I will leave these hours free for drop-ins.) You are also welcome to email me to arrange a different time to meet. I will most likely cancel my regular office hours a couple weeks each semester (say, during registration week) and instead offer meetings by appointment only. I can always find time to meet with you!

Students are welcome to meet with me to discuss any questions they might have about this course, the study of history, or other academic issues at Grinnell. If you're having trouble with a written assignment, I particularly encourage you to come: If you get stuck writing a thesis statement or can't figure out what you want to say in a paper, it's often better to meet with someone about it than to try to just push yourself to get something done. I'm also happy to discuss course readings in more detail, to answer questions, to talk about the history major, or to discuss any academic questions that might concern you.

Academic accommodations

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students need to provide documentation to the Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, Jae

Hirschman. Students should then notify me within the first few days of classes so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course and coordinate your accommodations.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Unit One: What is History?

Friday, August 26: Introduction to the Course

Monday, August 29: What is History?

Reading: John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-14
Annette Gordon-Reed, "Origin Stories: Africans in Texas" [Pioneerweb]
Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, August 31: Sources, Facts, and Interpretations

Reading: Arnold, pp. 15-79
Assignment: email me 4 quotations from Arnold that you feel capture his approach to history (deadline: Tuesday, August 30, at 10 PM)

Friday, September 2: Is the Past a Foreign Country?

Reading: Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue St. Severin" [Pioneerweb]

Monday, September 5: How to Read a Source

Reading: Arnold, 80-109
short primary sources [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 7: A Midwife's Tale

Viewing: watch the film *A Midwife's Tale*, available at the following URL:
https://fod.infobase.com/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=44085

Friday, September 9: A Midwife's Tale, continued

Reading: Reading: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
<http://dohistory.org> (browse a little)
Arnold, pp. 110-125

Assignment: **two-page analysis of *A Midwife's Tale* is due by 5:00 PM**

Monday, September 12: History and Video Games

Reading: Andrew Denning, “Deep Play? Video Games and the Historical Imaginary”
[Pioneerweb]
American Historical Review video game reviews [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 14: History and Memorialization

Reading: Keisha Blain, “Destroying Confederate Monuments isn’t ‘Erasing’ History. It’s Learning From It” [Pioneerweb]
Simon Schama, “History is Better Served by Putting the Men in Stone in Museums” [Pioneerweb]
Steve Coll, “Things to Think About When Taking Down Statues” [Pioneerweb]
Pete Burkholder and Dana Schaffer, “A Snapshot of the Public’s Views on History” [Pioneerweb]

Unit Two: Do Rocks, Trees, and Elephants Have a History?

Friday, September 16: When Did History Start?

Reading: Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Ian Hesketh, “The Idea of Big History” [Pioneerweb]
Ted Steinberg, “Rocks and History” [Pioneerweb]

Assignment: **Revised version of *Midwife’s Tale* paper is due by 5:00 PM**

Monday, September 19: The Grand Forces of History

Reading: Jared Diamond, “The Evolution of Guns and Germs” [Pioneerweb]
J.R. McNeill, “The World According to Jared Diamond” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 21: The History of Elephants and Forests

Reading: Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants*, xix-xxviii, 1-40 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, September 23: Do Squirrels Have a History?

Reading: Etienne Benson, “The Urbanization of the Eastern Gray Squirrel in the United States” [Pioneerweb]

Unit Three: What Can We Learn from Fairy Tales, the Oral Tradition, and Family History?

Monday, September 26: Once Upon a Time...

Reading: selection of fairy tales from Perrault and Afanas’ev [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 28: Folklore and French Peasant Life

Reading: Robert Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, September 30: Slavery, Sex, and Politics in Early America

Reading: Dumas Malone on Jefferson and Hemings [Pioneerweb]
Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Venetria Patton and Ronald Jemal Stevens, "Competing Truths in the Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings Paternity Dispute" [Pioneerweb]

Monday, October 3: The Hemings Story

Reading: James Thomson Callender, "The President, Again" [Pioneerweb]
Madison Hemings, "Recollections of Madison Hemings" [Pioneerweb]
browse the Monticello website's account of the Sally Hemings case

Assignment: **three-page paper is due at 10:00 PM (by email)**

Wednesday, October 5: The Hemings Family in History

Reading: Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Friday, October 7: Murder in Poland

Reading: Jan Gross, *Neighbors*, xv-xxii, 1-65

Monday, October 10: Neighbors?

Reading: Gross, *Neighbors*, 66-124

UNIT FOUR: Telling Ancient Lives

Wednesday, October 12: The Early Life of an Enemy of Rome

Reading: Adrienne Mayor, *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates, Rome's Deadliest Foe*, pp. 1-72 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, October 14: The Poison King

Reading: Mayor, *The Poison King*, 236-261 and 347-370 [Pioneerweb]

FALL BREAK: October 15-23

Monday, October 24: Is Ancient Biography Even Possible?

Reading: Mary Beard, "Cleopatra: The Myth" [Pioneerweb]
Mary Beard, "Nero's Colosseum?" [Pioneerweb]

Mary Beard, "Hadrian and His Villa" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, October 26: Rome's Mad Emperor?

Reading: Suetonius, "Life of Caligula," excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Friday, October 28: A More Calculating Caligula?

Reading: Aloys Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Assignment: **submit a one-paragraph proposal for an annotated bibliography by 5:00 PM**

Monday, October 31: Roman Imperial Politics

Reading: Winterling, *Caligula*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Mary Beard, "Caligula's Satire?" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, November 2: Other Roman Lives

Reading: Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

UNIT FIVE: Modern Lives under Dictatorship

Friday, November 4: Joseph Stalin

Reading: Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: In the Court of the Red Tsar*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Monday, November 7: Stalin's Place in Soviet History

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 235-289 [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, November 9: What was it like to live under Stalin?

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 1-39, 67-88 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, November 11: **NO CLASS (the professor is at a conference)**

Assignment: **send me three sources for your bibliography, in bibliographic formatting**

Monday, November 14: Everyday Life under Stalin

Reading: interview from the Harvard Project

Wednesday, November 16: Economic Life under Stalin

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 67-114 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, November 18: Surveillance and Stigma under Stalin

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 115-138, 164-194 [Pioneerweb]
Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, pp. 1-19 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, November 21: Stalin and the Cult of Personality

Reading: Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Sarah Davies, "Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult" [Pioneerweb] Sarah
Davies, "The Leader Cult in Official Discourse" [Pioneerweb]

Assignment: **4-to-5-page Harvard Project Paper is due at 10:00 PM**

UNIT SIX: Everyday life and Surveillance in Britain

Wednesday, November 23: British Life in the 1930s

Reading: Thirties Britain: An Overview [Pioneerweb]

Friday, November 25: **NO CLASS (Thanksgiving!)**

Monday, November 28: Mass-Observation and Polling?

Readings: J. Michael Hogan, "The Road Not Taken in Opinion Research: Mass-Observation
in Great Britain, 1937-1940" [Pioneerweb]
"Mass-Observation: A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service"
Look at the Mass-Observation website

Wednesday, November 30: Spying on Construction workers

Reading: Report from Mass-Observation on "Demolition in London, 1941" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, December 2: Understanding Emotion in War-Time

Reading: Mass-Observation documents on morale and "The British Sense of Humour"
[Pioneerweb]

Unit Seven: Summing Things Up The Story of a Woman in 19th-Century Japan

Monday, December 5: Telling the Story of a Japanese Woman

Reading: Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World*,
pp. xvii-xxvi, 1-86

Wednesday, December 7: Life in Edo Japan

Reading: Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*, pp. 87-161

Friday, December 9: The Art of History

Reading: Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*, pp. 162-252

Assignment: **send me a list of 10 sources for your bibliography, with two annotations**

Thursday, December 15: **annotated bibliography is due!**