

## HISTORY 220: INTERPRETATIONS IN HISTORY History of Everyday Life

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore historical works of the past 50 years that attempt to reconstruct the experience of everyday life". Specifically, we will be exploring how people outside of the political, intellectual and/or economic elite experienced, conceptualized, and tried to shape the world around them. The class will focus on two related issues. First, we will explore what historians of the mundane and ordinary are attempting to add to our sense of the past and analyze what is gained (and perhaps lost) by this kind of focus. Second, we will critique a series of key texts in the history of everyday life, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of different problems, analyses, and methodologies.

Readings explore approaches to a wide range of topics such as: economic and commodity-focused history; studies on the history of childhood, family life, sex, and death and dying; small scale studies of communities and individuals; and explorations of the ways that humans conceptualize food, the senses, and time. Class will be held in a seminar/discussion format, and students are expected to participate extensively in regular discussions.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the semester, students' work in class and in papers should clearly demonstrate the ability to:

- identify the problem and thesis in a given piece of historical writing
- identify the different kinds of sources and methodologies that historians use
- articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different historical interpretations and methods
- explain how a book or article relates to broader trends or debates in historical scholarship
- compare the arguments, strengths and weaknesses of multiple books or articles on similar topics.
- present critical ideas both orally and in writing in a manner that is clear and concise, and conformable to standard English usage.

The final paper project should reflect all of the above skills, as well as the following:

- the ability to define and articulate a feasible paper topic
- the ability to locate library resources available at Geneseo and through Interlibrary Loan
- the ability to build a substantial bibliography on a narrowly defined topic
- the ability to distinguish between reliable and unreliable examples of historical writing
- the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- the ability to critically analyze and synthesize the interpretations of a large body of independent research.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Short Writing Assignments (10% each)	30%
Final Paper	40%
Journal	15%
Class Participation	15%

### **Short Writing Assignments (each worth 10% of grade)**

This course requires periodic writing assignments, which are due according to the schedule listed below. Details on the specific requirements for each writing assignment appear at the end of this syllabus. Students are encouraged to review drafts with the instructor.

- Response Paper (3-4 pages, due no later than 20 September)
- Critical Book Review (4-5 pages, due no later than 13 October)
- Comparative Book Review (4-5 pages, due no later than 22 November)

### **Final Paper (approx. 20 pages, 40% of grade)**

On December 4, students will be required to submit a final paper of approximately 20 pages. This paper should focus on a topic of personal interest in the field of social, cultural or intellectual history. Students should plan to incorporate readings from at least 5 book-length secondary sources beyond the regular course reading list. The paper should identify and compare different scholarly approaches and interpretations, with special attention paid to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and methodology of these works.

To facilitate the preparation of the paper, the following preliminary assignments are required. Final Paper projects 1.2 through 1.4 will receive a letter grade, which will each be worth 5% of the Final Paper grade (or, 2% of the final grade). **Students who do not complete all of these preliminary assignments will receive a failing grade on the final paper.**

#### Final Paper Project 1.1: Topic (due 15 September)

Students will submit a one page topic proposal for the final paper. This paragraph should clearly spell out the specific topic, the intended parameters of the project (i.e. a focus on a specific time period, geographic region, school of historiography, etc.), and must include a list of at least two scholarly books published within the past 10 years on your topic.

#### Final Paper Project 1.2: Book Review and Bibliography (due 18 October)

Students will submit a 2 page essay that critically reviews one recent, scholarly and relevant book for the final paper. This review must address a book that is not read in class. Guidelines for the writing assignment are identical to those for Short Paper 2 (Critical Book Review). The bibliography should include a complete list of secondary sources that will be used in the paper, and should be annotated (i.e. a 2-3 sentence description of each source).

Any intended topic changes must be approved before submission of this part of the final paper project. No topic changes will be allowed after 18 October.

#### Final Paper Project 1.3: Sample writing (due 3 November)

Students will submit a 5-6 page essay that critically reviews and compares at least three recent, scholarly and relevant secondary sources for the final paper. This review should use material from Final Paper Project 1.2 and may incorporate critical writing on one relevant text from class. This part of the assignment will be subjected to peer reviews during the week of 17 November.

### Final Paper Project 1.4: Rough Draft (due 29 November)

Students will submit a readable draft of their final paper. At a minimum, the draft must contain a clear introduction with thesis, critical writing on at least 5 secondary sources that are not on the regular course reading list, and full citations. Drafts will be subjected to peer reviews during the week of 6 December. The final paper (due on the exam day) must reflect significant revisions of this draft.

### **Class Journal (15% of grade)**

Students must keep a journal consisting of reflective writing on the readings. At a **minimum**, student journals should contain one entry for 7 of the 9 required books in this class. Each journal entry should begin with a one or two sentence analytical question and approximately 2 pages of writing that addresses this question and uses specific references from the reading to back up ideas. Journal entries should be completed before the last class in which we discuss a book (so, for example, your journal entry for Braudel must be completed before class on 13 September). Material from journal entries may be incorporated into short papers (with revisions).

For the first two books, I will provide you students with questions for the journal entry. Please bring your journal to every class, as we will use these in class discussions and I will collect them at random over the course of the semester.

Individual journal entries will receive a check plus (roughly equivalent to a low A), check (roughly equivalent to a low B), or a check minus (roughly equivalent to a low C) grade. In assigning a final grade for the journal, I will take these marks into consideration, as well as evidence of consistent performance and/or improvement. Evidence of declining work on the journals may also be factored into the final journal grade.

### **Class Participation (15% of grade)**

Students are expected to attend class and participate in discussions. Although I am sympathetic to the problem of shyness, students who do not engage themselves with class discussions, group work, or other class activities will see this portion of their grade suffer. Likewise, habitual absenteeism will quickly have a negative effect on your grade.

Part of the class participation requirement includes regular peer reviews of components of the final paper project. Once everyone has selected a paper topic, students will be assigned to a draft group of two or three other students who are working on similar projects. Students will be responsible for reading Final Paper Projects 1.2 through 1.4 from other members of the draft group and will be asked to write up substantive critical comments for these assignments. Peer review exercises will be worth 25% of the class participation grade (or 3.75% of the final grade).

All students must also make a final oral report on their research paper during the exam session on 20 December. These are short (5-10 minutes), low stakes opportunities for students to discuss their work, and will be worth 10% of the class participation grade (or 1.5% of the final grade).

## **OTHER POLICIES**

### **Readings**

Students are required to read all assigned texts **before** class. The books for this class are admittedly difficult and lengthy; this is why the course is worth 4 credits. You should leave

yourself enough time to complete the readings and critically reflect on what the authors are trying to say.

### **Assignment Due Dates**

Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. **Please plan ahead to ensure that your papers are written, spell checked and printed early enough that you can arrive to class on time.** Late papers will lose 10% per day. Barring a major catastrophe, papers that are submitted more than one week late will automatically receive a zero.

Preliminary assignments for the final paper are non-negotiable requirements to receive a passing grade on the final project. Unless a documented emergency occurs, students will receive a failing grade on the final paper for preliminary assignments that are more than one week late. Car troubles, colds and most computer problems do not constitute emergencies.

If you hand work in late, please be aware that your work will be graded at my convenience. It takes several days for me to read and comment on papers and drafts, and late work automatically moves to the bottom of my to-do list.

### **Classroom Conduct and Class Participation Standards**

Geneseo is a liberal arts college. The curriculum assumes that students will show up to class having prepared and reflected upon the course materials and will be ready to discuss them. To get an A in class participation, you need to be present, you need to demonstrate that you've read and thought about the readings, and you need to be willing raise relevant and high quality critical points during class discussions. I do take other factors into consideration including: evidence of engagement with the class materials (e.g. visits to office hours, participation in small group discussions, or particularly impressive journal entries), a commitment to individual improvement over the course of the semester, and quality of participation (I do not believe that the amount that a student talks necessarily translates into high quality class participation).

There is no formal attendance policy. However, since this is a discussion-based class, you are expected to attend class regularly. Excessive absenteeism will negatively affect your class participation grade – and frankly, if you miss more than an accumulated 3 weeks worth of class in a 15 week semester, I will with a clear conscience give you a zero for class participation, regardless of your work in discussions in which you are present. These penalties can be waived if a long-term absence arises as a result of illness, injury, family emergency, etc.. Please, however, inform me of these issues early so that I am aware of your situation.

### **Email and Outboxes**

Everyone will automatically be enrolled in a HIST 220 listserv. Announcements for this class (e.g. schedule changes, class cancellations, etc.) and occasional handouts will be distributed through this list. **Be sure to check your geneseo.edu account on a regular basis.**

Email is a terrible format for communication certain kinds of information, and is particularly unsuited to giving feedback on written work or class participation. If you want to discuss your work, please try to make an appointment to see me or drop by during open office hours. If you cannot find time to speak with me personally, you may email me. However, my response will not be instantaneous (especially at busy points in the semester and over the weekends) and may not be as detailed as you would like.

I store copies of all class handouts and papers for peer reviews on my network outbox. Please check the outbox before you ask me/email me for copies of handouts (please do, however,

email me if you can't find a document in the outbox). Learn how to use this incredibly useful resource at [www.geneseo.edu/~cit/quickguides/pdf/boxes.pdf](http://www.geneseo.edu/~cit/quickguides/pdf/boxes.pdf).

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is defined in the SUNY-Geneseo Undergraduate Bulletin as the “deliberate representation of someone else's words or ideas as one's own or the deliberate arrangement of someone else's material(s) as one's own. Any one of the following constitutes plagiarism: (A) Direct quotation without appropriate punctuation and citation of source; (B) Paraphrase of expression or thought without proper attribution; (C) Dependence upon a source for a plan, organization or argument without appropriate citation.” (<http://handbook.geneseo.edu/3>).

I take academic dishonesty very seriously, and since coming to Geneseo, have regularly failed on average one to two students per semester who are foolish enough to test this policy. If you commit an act of academic dishonesty on any assignment in this class, you will automatically fail the course and a letter will be placed in your academic file at the dean's office. I will not negotiate this penalty.

### **Grades**

If you have questions or concerns about your grades, please come talk to me. Please remember, however, that the main objective in this class is for you to cultivate the skills needed to practice and/or teach history. I respond positively to evidence of self improvement, engagement with the course material, and a commitment to excellence. Conversely, I tend to respond poorly to the question: “what do I need to do to get an A in your class?”

### **Accessibility**

I will be happy to make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented physical, emotional or learning disabilities. Students should discuss needed accommodations with me and should contact the Director in the Office of Disability Services (Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, 105D Erwin) as early as possible in the semester.

### **REQUIRED READINGS** (Available for purchase at Sundance Books)

- Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century, vol. I: The Structure of Everyday Life. University of California Press. 0520081145
- Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life. Vintage. 0394702867
- Seaver, Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century London. Stanford University Press. 0804714320
- Ladurie, Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error. Vintage. 0394729641
- Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. University of California Press. 0520059298
- Wills, 1688: A Global History. Norton. 0393322785
- Ulrich, A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard. Vintage. 0679733760
- Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History. Penguin. 0140092331
- Srebnick, The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in 19<sup>th</sup> Century New York. Oxford University Press. 0195113926

### **ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE** (paper due dates are in bold)

August 30:	Introductions
September 1	Braudel, pages 23-29.

September 6 September 8	Braudel, 31-50, 70-91, 104-144 Braudel, 163-282
September 13 September 15	Braudel, 334-372, 385-414, 479-508, 559-564. <b>FINAL PAPER PROJECT 1.1 DUE</b> Individual consultations in office hours
September 20 September 22	Ladurie, vii-xvii, 3-77 <b>SHORT PAPER 1 (RESPONSE PAPER) DUE</b> Ladurie, 139-203
September 27 September 29	Ladurie, 203-356 Ariès, 9-133
October 4 October 6	Ariès, 241-268, 315-328 Ariès, 339-415
October 11 October 13	Fall break, no class Seaver, 1-111 <b>SHORT PAPER 2 (CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW) DUE</b>
October 18 October 20	Seaver, 112-208 <b>FINAL PAPER PROJECT 1.2 DUE</b> Ulrich, 3-71, 102-203
October 25 October 27	Individual consultations in office hours Ulrich, 235-261, 309-352
November 1 November 3	Srebnick, xiii-108 Schivelbusch, 1-112 <b>FINAL PAPER PROJECT 1.3 DUE</b>
November 8 November 10	Schivelbusch, 113-197 Mintz, 1-150
November 15 November 17	Mintz, 151-215 Draft Group Meetings
November 22 November 24	Draft Group Meetings <b>SHORT PAPER 3 (METHODOLOGY CRITIQUE) DUE</b> Thanksgiving, no class
November 29 December 1	Wills, 1-166 <b>FINAL PAPER PROJECT 1.4 DUE</b> Wills, 167-304
December 6 December 8	Draft group meetings Draft group meetings
20 December (Exam Day)	Oral Reports, 12pm-3pm <b>FINAL PAPER DUE</b>

## HIST 220 (Cope) SHORT PAPER 1: RESPONSE PAPER

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In a 3-4 page essay, answer the following: “What is the history of the everyday life, and why is it important?”

Your essay should focus on the material presented in Braudel’s Civilization and Capitalism, and particularly his definition of the term “everyday life”. At least one paragraph of the paper should be devoted to defining this term and explaining Braudel’s presentation of this concept.

In the body of your paper, you should critically assess the concept of “everyday life”. You may wish to critique one of the following aspects of Braudel’s work:

- Is Braudel’s definition of everyday life too narrow or too broad?
- Does Braudel’s work put too much emphasis on economic and material culture?
- What aspects of everyday life experience does Braudel overlook?
- What is gained and/or lost by shifting the focus of historical writing from traditional topics (e.g. great men, wars, and massive historical transformations) to less traditional topics (e.g. what people ate in the past)?
- Braudel suggests that his categories of “everyday life” experiences are cross cultural. Does he present enough evidence to support this?
- Does Braudel do enough to explore constructions of gender, race, ethnicity, or religion as components of “everyday life”?
- Does Braudel’s focus on “structures of everyday life” artificially obscure evidence of historical change?

### Hints:

Assume that your instructor is fairly dense. Walk me step by step through your thought process and don’t assume that your audience necessarily is thinking the exact same thing that you’re thinking. Some issues to consider in this regard are:

- Too much detail is better than too little detail.
- Short sentences that are clear are often better than long sentences that are confusing, convoluted or awkward.
- Short quotes that surgically demonstrate your point are better than long block quotes that wander. Use ellipses...if necessary (but make sure you don’t change the content of the author’s argument versus ...make sure you...change the...author’s argument).
- Avoid sweeping generalizations that you can’t support (e.g. one thing I really dislike are opening statements that say something like “Many historians since the beginning of time have explored the monumental problems of everyday life”; you’re not talking about “many historians” in your paper, and you distract your reader when you make a claim like this).
- Pursue definitions. We sometimes throw around abstract words too easily, and thus talk around each other. Think about explaining key words or concepts, particularly if they are subject to misinterpretation (if you think about it carefully, many common words – e.g. “symbol”, “cultural”, “natural” or “people” – are subject to multiple potential interpretations). Braudel’s choice of title – Civilization and Capitalism: The Structure of Everyday Life – contains at least four abstract concepts that might merit discussion.

## HIST 220 (COPE) SHORT PAPER 2: CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

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In a 4-5 page essay, write a critical book review of either Ladurie's Montaillou or Ariès's Centuries of Childhood.

This essay should be clearly written and concise. Generally, a basic outline will look something like the following:

1. **A summary of the book topic, audience and research problem/thesis** (this summary should not take up more than two paragraphs of the paper).

The discussion of the book topic should address what the book is about and should also define the parameters of the author's research. This may also include the chronological or geographical limits that the author imposes on the project and definitions of potentially vague terms (for example, what does Braudel mean by "everyday life")

The discussion of the audience should assess whether the intended reader is academic or general, and what you think that the author is trying to accomplish by writing this particular book.

All works of academic history contain two key components: a research question and an answer to that question (in other words, the thesis). You should be able to distill the research question down to one or two sentences and pinpoint a place in the text where a clear, concise statement of the author's thesis can be found.

2. **Critical Analysis**

The bulk of the review should consist of analysis. The specific topics that you chose to write about are up to you. The topics, however, should be meaningful and the paper should be structured in a clear manner. Questions that you might think about are:

- Does the author prove the thesis?
- Is the scope of the author's examination feasible? Is it too broad? Too narrow? Too obscure or trivial?
- Does the structure and organization of the book make sense?
- What kinds of evidence does the author use? Is this evidence reliable? Could other evidence have been used; or could the author's own evidence have been used in different ways?
- Are there approaches or methods to the research problem that the author overlooks?
- How does this book challenge/support/complicate other historians' work?
- Are there specific sections of the book that are either particularly compelling or particularly suspect (several paragraphs picking apart such sections in detail are acceptable)?
- Are there any particularly glaring problems in the writing style? Be careful here. Your indictment of a writer's style should never take up more than one paragraph.

3. **Conclusion**

The last one or two paragraphs of the review should expand upon your assessment of the book as indicated in the introductory paragraph. You should think about confronting some of the following:

- On balance, is the book successful or unsuccessful (both in thesis and method)?
- What audience would benefit most from this book?
- Are there questions that the book raises that would be worth future research or exploration?
- Who cares? It is perfectly acceptable to address why this book is important and what it adds to our understanding of the past.

### **Hints:**

A critical book review is not a book report. If you are spending more than 2 paragraphs summarizing what the author says rather than analyzing the argument, you're writing a book report.

Critical analysis should be detailed. If you review Ladurie's Montaillou, don't just assert that Inquisition records are an unreliable historical source. Tell me what specifically you find objectionable about these kinds of documents and locate specific places in the text where Ladurie seems to miss the significance of problems with these kinds of sources.

Critical analysis doesn't have to be negative. It is entirely conceivable that Ladurie's use of Inquisition records is perfectly acceptable given the kinds of questions that he wants to answer. If this is the conclusion that you arrive at, it's fine – just make sure that your analysis walks through your reasoning.

Critique a work on its own terms. If Ladurie chooses to frame his project around the local experience of the Inquisition, it really isn't fair to pan the book because he fails to address relations between the French crown and English wool merchants. However, some omissions are fair game – for example, you might address whether Ladurie neglects the importance of papal authority and the church bureaucracy because of his local focus on the environs of Montaillou.

A critical book review should be balanced. Unless there is absolutely no redeeming value to the text (and you would need to defend this position very carefully), you should comment on both strengths and weaknesses.

Avoid mindless ad hominem attacks (e.g. "Ladurie was a socialist, so of course he's going to be critical of the Church"), complaints about writing style, or anything that suggests you were bored by the book.

## **HIST 220 (Cope)**

### **SHORT PAPER 3: COMPARATIVE BOOK REVIEW**

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Select two books from the following list, and write a 4-5 page critical book review: Seaver, Ulrich, Srebnick, Mintz, and Schivelbusch.

For both books, you should write a condensed book summary and critique. This should include a basic assessment of the topic, thesis and methodology for each book. The bulk of the essay should compare and contrast the books, exploring how they relate to one another. Although any aspects of the books are fair game for comparison, some particularly effective approaches are:

- Similarities/differences in topic, thesis, or methodology
- Complexity in the explicit or assumed definitions of terms (e.g. although two different historians may use the term “literacy”, they may not mean the same thing).
- Relative success in conveying and proving the thesis.
- Relative importance of the contribution that each book makes to our historical understanding

When selecting books for review, you should carefully select two works that are comparable in a meaningful way. Consider carefully which books makes sense to review together and spend some time in your paper explaining why you chose to compare them. Possible organizing topics include, but are not limited to:

- Family, sex and marriage (Seaver, Ulrich, Srebnick)
- Market economy and conspicuous consumption (all)
- Ideas about the religion and/or the natural world (Seaver, Ulrich, Schivelbusch)
- Work and labor (all)
- Literacy and reading habits (Seaver, Ulrich, Srebnick)
- The methodology of “microhistory” (Seaver, Ulrich, Srebnick)
- The use of diaries as historical sources (Seaver, Ulrich)
- The history of medicine, science and technology (Ulrich, Mintz and Schivelbusch)
- The history of urbanization (Seaver, Srebnick, Schivelbusch)