ISS 335: National Diversity and Change
Social Science Approaches to the American Past
Mondays/Wednesdays, 10:20am-12:10pm
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 10-11:30am, 306A Old Horticulture

Course Summary:
This section of ISS 335 focuses on social science approaches to the study of the American past. History is one of the social sciences at Michigan State, but only a few years ago was part of the College of Arts and Letters (that is, it was considered one of the humanities). At schools throughout the country, the discipline is defined as either a social science or a humanity. What accounts for this confusion? ISS courses are designed to help you understand how social scientists think. This course will do that by asking whether historians are social scientists. We will ask how the disciples of the social sciences affect the study of the past. This is an issue of considerable importance to our contemporary society, as the past is often used politically to justify current events. By thinking about how we can evaluate what constitutes historical “truth” and what types of analysis shape historical argumentation, we can become better consumers of news and culture.

This course is broken up into several units that examine different social science approaches to American history. It is organized thematically, not chronologically, in order to keep our focus on methodological questions. Our readings will cover topics including race, gender, and religion in American history and politics.

Assignments and Grading:
Grade breakdown:
   In-class participation: 25%
   Methods Project: 15%
   Memory Project: 15%
   Reading responses: 25%
   Final Paper: 20%

This class involves active discussions of readings and films; it will only be successful if you come to class ready to take part in these conversations. You are expected to come to class having completed the assigned reading for the week, to participate in class discussions, and to actively listen to lecture, in-class films, and your classmates. Please note that simply showing up is NOT sufficient to get full points for in-class participation. Your participation in discussion as well as your engagement in class throughout the semester will figure into your “participation” grade. You will be granted three “free” absences for illness, family emergency, etc. before your absences will begin counting against your grade. I keep a daily record of participation on a check/plus/minus scale. Attendance without participation will earn you a check-minus (half-points for the day); attendance with some participation will earn you a check (85% of points for the day); active participation will earn you a check-plus (full points for the day). By “active
participation,” I expect that you will be clearly listening to lecture or discussion and contributing to the discussion. If you want to know how you are doing or how you might improve this part of your grade, feel free to come and discuss it with me in office hours. Altogether, your participation counts for 25% of your final grade.

You will be expected to post responses to the readings on D2L ten times over the course of the term. These must be up by 11:59pm on the night preceding class discussion of the readings (listed on the syllabus). Your responses should be short (about a paragraph in length—no more than a page) and should demonstrate that you have done the readings and thought carefully about them. You may use the week’s thematic question(s) as a jumping off point, or can focus on something else that struck you. If you were confused about something in the reading, feel free to note it here and I will be sure to go over it in class. Altogether, these responses make up 25% of your grade. Please use your “off” weeks responsibly—I will be keeping track of how many posts you have made, but it is your responsibility to be sure that you have completed the assigned number. If you are not sure where you stand, please check in with me.

There will be two group projects in this class: one on quantitative and qualitative research methods, and the other on history and memory. Each project is worth 10% of your final grade. These will be graded BOTH on the basis of the work of your group as a whole and on your individual contribution to that group. Accordingly, you will submit a short (approximately 250 word) reflection on each project, explaining how you think about the issue under consideration.

4-Point Scale:
On your final transcript grade, the scaling for the 4-point grades are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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Readings:
All readings for this course are available online on JSTOR, except where noted. There is a link to the library website on our ANGEL page. You are responsible for downloading the articles and reading them in time for class discussions. You should either bring printed or electronic copies to class (with your notes) to aid you in discussion.
UNIT ONE: THEORY, SOCIOLOGY, ECONOMICS

Week One: Theory, Evidence, and Asking the Right Questions
Monday, Jan. 12: Introduction: Is History a Social Science?
Wednesday, Jan. 14: The Value of Facts; Reading Discussion

Reading:
Edward Hallett Carr, “The Historian and His Facts,” in What is History?, 3-35
Sam Wineburg, “Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts,” The Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 80, No. 7 (March, 1999), 488-499

Thematic Question:
What is the goal of history? In what ways is history a social science? What is a fact?

Week Two: Quantitative Methods
Monday, Jan. 19: MLK DAY, NO CLASS
Wednesday, Jan. 21: From Counting to Regressions: What Numbers Tell us About History

Reading:

Thematic Question:
What is the value of quantitative methodologies? What are their limits?

Week Three: Racial Theory and Race in America
Monday, Jan. 26: The Development of Race in Early America
Wednesday, Jan. 28: Reading Discussion

Reading:

Thematic Question:
What is race? How has its definition changed over time, and what effect have those changes had?
Week Four: “Microhistory” as Ethnography?
Monday, Feb. 2: In-class film: “A Midwife’s Tale”
Wednesday, Feb. 4: Discussion of Film and Reading; Team assignments

Reading:

Thematic Questions:
Ulrich is creating a “microhistory”—what does this mean? How is it like ethnography? How does it tell us about a broader story? If the Ulrich article from two weeks ago is part of the same project that resulted in A Midwife’s Tale, can you get a sense of some of the different ways that she constructed her microhistory? How is she using her evidence to tell certain kinds of stories in these different venues?

Week Five: Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods
Monday, Feb. 9: No class—meet in your teams to prepare for Thursday
Wednesday, Feb. 11: In-class activity, presentations

Assignment:
The goal of this project is to help you think about the different benefits and setbacks of quantitative and qualitative methods. This is a group project, and you are expected to work together as a team using the provided primary sources as well as some suggested secondary sources. As a group, you will be assigned a certain subset of runaway slave advertisements to look at in order to form an argument about what sorts of slaves ran away and why. Each group will have a different sample size, and will accordingly find different types of methods most useful to make a story out of their data. As a class, we will discuss on Wednesday what seemed the most useful way for you to make sense of these records, what was difficult, and what you think this means.

Reading: There is a list of recommended sources on the assignment sheet. You should plan on doing some reading of these sources or others that you find (please do inform me of these) as you work on your project.
Week Six: Economics, Slavery, Race
Monday, Feb. 16: The Capitalism of Slavery
Wednesday, Feb. 18: #economistbookreviews

Reading:

Thematic Question:
Was slavery capitalist? How? How not?

Week Seven: Women and Work
Monday, Feb. 23: In-class film: “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter”
Wednesday, Feb. 25: Film and Reading Discussion

Reading:

Thematic Question:
What are the links between the economy and society? How does economic change relate to social change?

Week Eight: The Global Effects of the US Economy
Monday, March 2: Early American Globalization
Wednesday, March 4: Reading Discussion

Reading:

Thematic Question:
When did globalization start? How has it changed over time?
UNIT TWO: ANTHROPOLOGY, MEMORY, AND THE USES OF HISTORY

Week Nine: Historical Archeology
Monday, Mar. 16: In-class film: “Jane: Starvation, Cannibalism, and Endurance at Jamestown”
Wednesday, Mar. 18: Discussion of film and reading
Reading:

Thematic Question:
How does archeological evidence alter our understanding of the past? What is the role of this kind of study in contemporary discussions? What does the story of “Jane” tell us about early America that we didn’t know before?

Week Ten: Native Americans: Subjects of History or Anthropology?
Monday, Mar. 23: Anthropology and Racial Studies at the Worlds’ Fairs
Wednesday, Mar. 25: Reading Discussion

Reading:
Danielle LaVaque-Manty, “There are Indians in the Museum of Natural History,” Wicazo Sa Review, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), 71-89

Thematic Question:
What, and who, counts as part of American history? Why have Native Americans’ stories been made a part of a natural history narrative in ways that other groups’ stories have not?
Week Eleven: The Politics of Memory, I
Monday, Mar. 30: In-class film: “Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property”
Wednesday, April 1: Reading and Film Discussion; Group Assignment
Reading:
Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts*, ch. 1

Thematic Question:
How is memory different than history? How does memory affect the way history is told? What are the implications of this?

Week Twelve: The Politics of Memory, II: Thomas Nast
Monday, April 6: NO class—meet in your teams to prepare for Thursday
Wednesday, Apr. 8: In-class activity, debate

Assignment:
In 2011, Thomas Nast was nominated for the fourth time to take a place in the New Jersey Hall of Fame. Each time, his nomination was rejected due to considerable controversy about how he ought to be remembered. Nast was an important political cartoonist of the nineteenth century, when he created the illustration of the Republican elephant and Democratic donkey and many cartoons about Reconstruction politics. His work was also marked by a deep anti-Catholicism. How ought the legacy of this artist, and other people of the past like him, be remembered by people today? For this assignment, you will be divided into two groups and have an in-class debate on Wednesday considering the question of whether Nast deserves to take a place in the Hall of Fame for his contributions as an artist.

Week Thirteen: Public and Private Lives
Monday, Apr. 13: Jefferson and Character
Wednesday, Apr. 15: Reading Discussion

Reading:

Thematic Question:
How have ideas changed over time about the ways that politicians’ private lives affect their public lives and political personas?
Week Fourteen: Psychology, Gender, and History
Monday, Apr. 20: In-class film: “The Lobotomist”
Wednesday, Apr. 22: Film and Reading Discussion

Reading:

Thematic Question:
How do ideas about psychology and psychological problems change over time? What social factors (gender, race, etc.) shape these developments? From the other angle, how do ideas about these psychological issues affect history?

Week Fifteen: History, Experts, and Facts
Monday, Apr. 27: “History on Trial”: The Sears Case and Expert Testimony
Wednesday, Apr. 29: Reading Discussion

Reading:
Brief of Amici Curiae Historians in Windsor v. United States of America (posted on website)

Thematic Questions:
What is the use of history to current affairs and policy? How should historians act to serve the public, and how much should history bear on today?

In-Class Viewing:
Nancy Cott testimony in Prop. 8 Trial Re-enactment, begins at 38:38
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1RKTu8XpVQ

Final Paper Due: Wednesday, May 6