At the heart of good history is a naughty little secret: good storytelling.
-- Stephen Schiff

History is and should be a science.
-- Fustel de Coulanges

Let the science and research of the historian find the fact and let his imagination and art make clear its significance.
-- George Trevelyan

History and the Problem of Narrative

History 396

Prof. Jenny Hale Pulsipher
Fall Semester 2010
T Th 9:30-10:45 AM
116 HRCB

Prof. Jenny Hale Pulsipher
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Phone: 422-3286
E-mail: jenny_pulsipher@byu.edu
Office Hours: T 2:30-3:30 PM and by appointment.

Books:


History is one of the few academic disciplines in which professionals actively attempt to bridge the gap between the academy and the general public—to appeal to both specialists and lay enthusiasts. Thus, historians have the dual goal to provide a solidly researched, accurate study and to sell it to the market—to satisfy science and art. The market’s role in historical writing is also dual: it offers the possibility to inform and delight a large and interested audience, and the danger of allowing market forces to reduce the professional standards of the discipline, a fact highlighted by recent scandals involving historians such as Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin. Even for writers not targeting the popular market, the tension between art and science exists. How far, for example, can a writer extend his or her imaginative recasting of historical
experience in the absence of detailed historical records? How should the writer inform the reader that the line between documentation and imagination has been crossed? And, in our post-modern age, how does the writer deal with the heightened awareness among writers and readers of the slipperiness of facts, of the inevitability of personal bias coloring an author’s selection of and presentation of information? In this class, we will explore these issues by reading examples of historical writing, both academic and popular, and by experimenting with different ways of writing history ourselves.

**Learning Outcomes:** The history department has developed a set of expected learning outcomes which should be achieved by history majors during the course of their study. These can be accessed at:

[https://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/wiki/index.php/History](https://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/wiki/index.php/History)

This course directly fills the second, third, and fourth outcomes: 2) acquire the ability to analyze historical questions and issues clearly, assess historical information accurately, and distinguish between questionable and valid historical assertions; 3) demonstrate proficiency in using the historical method of research effectively by skillfully and honestly using primary and secondary sources; and 4) skillfully integrate data into a coherent argument expressed through a clear, well-written style and through oral communication.

**Writing Assignments:** There are three writing assignments in this class. The first two should be from 5 to 7 pages in length. The first will be based on primary documents from *Christopher Columbus and the Enterprise of the Indies: A Brief History with Documents*. The second will be a biographical sketch based on a biographical subject of the student’s choice. These papers should be distributed to other members of the class at least 24 hours before class meeting, and critiques with one other member of the class should be completed several days before class meeting, in order to give students time to incorporate comments into their revisions. The final paper, 12 to 15 pages in length, should be either a new piece of writing in a narrative form, or an older piece of historical writing reworked in a new narrative form. Topics and approaches should be cleared with me in advance. Students revising previous work should submit both new and former versions of their papers.

**Participation:** Because active participation and discussion are vital to the reading and writing work that will be done in this class, participation will count for a large portion of your grade. The participation grade will be based on the quality, not just the quantity, of contributions to class discussion; preparedness for class discussion; and participation in critiques with other students. Paragraph-length questions written in response to the readings will also be counted as part of the participation grade.

**Grading:** Grades will be weighted as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biography paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**HISTORY DEPARTMENT AND BYU POLICIES:**
**Honor Code Standards:** In keeping with the principles of the BYU Honor Code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact be your own work and not that of another. Violations of this principle may result in a failing grade in the course and additional disciplinary action by the university.

Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for yourself and others and ensures an effective learning and working environment. It is the university’s expectation, and my own expectation in class, that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. Please call the Honor Code Office at 422-2847 if you have questions about those standards.

**Preventing Sexual Discrimination or Harassment:** Sexual discrimination or harassment (including student-to-student harassment) is prohibited both by the law and by Brigham Young University policy. If you feel you are being subjected to sexual discrimination or harassment, please bring your concerns to the professor. Alternatively, you may lodge a complaint with the Equal Employment Office (D-240C ASB) or with the Honor Code Office (4440).

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, you should get in touch with the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (1520 WSC). This office can evaluate your disability and assist the professor in arranging for reasonable accommodations.

**Class Schedule:**

**Part I: Christopher Columbus: A Case Study of Varieties of Historical Narrative**

*Art is the lie that makes us realize the truth.*

--- Pablo Picasso

Aug. 31       Introduction.
Sept. 2       Readings: Muller, “Style is Not a Luxury Option” (Blackboard)
               Cronon, “A Place for Stories” (Blackboard)
               Stone, “The Revival of Narrative” (Blackboard)
               Topolski, “Historical Narrative” (Blackboard)

Sept. 7, 9    Readings: Geoffrey Simcox and Blair Sullivan, *Christopher Columbus and the Enterprise of the Indies: A Brief History with Documents*

Sept. 14, 16  Readings: Card, *Pastwatch*
               Excerpt from Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise* (Blackboard)
               Excerpt from Morison, *Christopher Columbus, Mariner* (Blackboard)

Sept. 21, 23  Workshop: Writing Narrative

**Assignment Due:** Short narrative based on primary documents from *Christopher Columbus and the Enterprise of the Indies: A Brief History with Documents*. Drafts to be exchanged and critiqued before class meeting.

**Part II: Biography**
There is properly no history, only biography.
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

One of the most arrogant undertakings, to my mind, is to write the biography of a man which pretends to go beyond external facts and gives the inmost motives. One of the most mendacious undertakings is autobiography.
-- Theodor Haecker

Sept. 28, 30 Biography
Readings: Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma

Oct. 5 Microhistory vs Macrohistory
Readings: Excerpt from Morris, Dutch (Blackboard)
Lepore, “Historians who Love too much” (Blackboard)
Demos, “In Search of Reasons” (Blackboard)
Appuhn, “Microhistory” (Blackboard)

Oct. 7, 12, 14 Workshop: Writing Biography
Assignment Due: Biographical narrative based on a person of the student’s choice. Drafts to be exchanged and critiqued before class meeting.

Oct. 19 Midterm exam

Part III: History and its Uses

A new future requires a new past.
-- Eric Foner

The truth is more important than the facts.
-- Frank Lloyd Wright

Oct. 21, 23 Academic History
Readings: Lebsock, A Murder in Virginia
“Round Table: Self and Subject” The Journal of American History, vol 89:1 (July 2002), 17-53. (Blackboard)

The distinction between history and fiction is profound. The literary imagination is boundless—and should be boundless. History is an imaginative construction, too; but the historical imagination must be bounded, closely bounded, by the documentation—limited by the evidence that has survived, and limited too by the obligation to be consistent with what has previously been established. It must somehow fit together with what is already known.
-- Bernard Bailyn

Oct. 26, 28 Pushing the Envelope
Readings: Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*

Nov. 2, 4  Popular History
Readings: Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*

Nov. 9, 11  Film and other approaches to history
Readings: Excerpt from McCullough, *John Adams* (Blackboard)

Nov. 16, 18  Writing Workshop

**Assignment Due:** 10-15-pages, presenting in narrative form some aspect of your scholarly research, or re-working in a new narrative form some of your previous historical research.

Nov. 23, 25  NO CLASS (BYU Friday and Thanksgiving Holiday)

Nov. 30  History and Truth

> If a modern historian were to show his works to the Venerable Bede, the man might well say, well and good, but I want to know how it was that God ordained the conversion of the British Isles.
> -- Charles W. Cole

> All history is an attempt to find pattern and meaning in a section of human experience, and every historian worthy of the name raises questions about man's ultimate destiny and the meaning of all history to which, as history, he can provide no answers. The answers belong to the realm of theology.
> -- G.B. Caird

> The only significance of life consists in helping to establish the kingdom of God; and this can be done only by means of the acknowledgment and profession of the truth by each one of us.
> -- Leo Tolstoy

Dec. 2, 7  Writing Workshop

**Final Paper Due by 5:00 PM at my office, 2142 JFSB:**
10-15-pages, presenting in narrative form some aspect of your scholarly research, or re-working in a new narrative form some of your previous historical research.

Final Exam:  Monday, Dec. 13, 7-10 AM