

History 900
The Historian's Craft for U.S. Historians

Professor Jeremi Suri	Fall 2005
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Mondays 9:AM to Noon
Office: 5119 Humanities Building	Seminar meetings: 5255 Humanities Building
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Course Description

This is our department's main introductory course for all entering graduate students in American history. The course has four primary aims. First, we will examine *what it means to be a historian*. What do we do? What is our purpose? How do we know if we are doing "good" work? We will address these ontological questions at the start of the semester, reading and discussing a diverse set of books on historical methodology and the history of American history. Students will write a short (5 page) personal reflection on this topic. We will also focus on some of the fundamental experiences and tools that make one a historian – including archival research, writing book reviews, and teaching. Our course will include two hands-on archival workshops (at the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum), as well as specific book review and teaching exercises.

Second, this course will interrogate the nature of *professionalization*. How do historians regulate one another? How do we publish our work and get jobs? What are the rights and responsibilities that come with being a historian? We will begin to address these basic issues by surveying how the discipline became professionalized. We will then examine some of the hinges of contemporary professionalization, including: the awarding of Ph.D.s, membership in professional organizations, the American Historical Association's Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct, the book and article peer review process, the general disciplinary standards of evidence, and the protections for intellectual creativity.

Third, this course will showcase the many *varieties of American history*. The strength of our discipline derives largely from its methodological and empirical diversity. This great virtue, however, also creates difficulties in organizing a common body of knowledge for research and teaching. Throughout the second half of the semester different members of the faculty will visit our seminar for a series of “Field of Study Discussions.” Visiting faculty will assign a short reading for students in advance. They will provide brief presentations to the seminar on some of the major themes and debates in their fields, as well as the areas of methodological and empirical focus. Students should use these discussions to gain familiarity with various approaches to American history, and the faculty who “represent” these approaches on campus.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, this course is designed to foster good *citizenship*. We will build a strong community among American history graduate students, as well as faculty. As a community, we will learn to mix critical scholarly engagement with a congenial and cooperative working environment. We will value rigor and diversity. We will build a culture that recognizes the interdependence of research, teaching, service, and collegiality. We will strive to become much greater than the sum of our parts.

The four aims guiding the course promise to make this an exciting semester. We obviously have a lot to cover. As a consequence, weekly meetings will have a somewhat intricate organizational structure, detailed in the schedule that follows. Please familiarize yourself with the planned structure of each meeting, including required readings and assignments.

Course Web Site

Shawn Peters, one of the students in our course, will help the instructor to maintain a course web site. This web site will contain a copy of the syllabus, links to assigned readings, and links to other helpful web sites. We will also run a discussion thread through the web site. Please contact the instructor with any and all suggestions for the course web site. We hope to make this a valuable resource that will long outlive our seminar.

Seminar Participation

This is a graduate seminar. Every student is expected to participate actively in every session. Make sure that you complete all assignments in advance (not late Sunday night!), leaving yourself time to gather your thoughts and present considered contributions to seminar discussions. I suggest that, in advance of seminar, students prepare personal notes of questions, comments, and interventions they might offer to the group. During seminar meetings students should listen attentively to one another and respond thoughtfully to points of discussion.

Historical Methodology Paper: Comparing Gaddis and Scott

Each student will write a 5 page paper that compares the expositions on historical methodology offered in John Lewis Gaddis' *The Landscape of History* and Joan Wallach Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History*. Students should structure their papers around three basic questions, preferably in this order:

1. To whom are Gaddis and Scott responding? For whom are they writing?
2. What is "good" history for Gaddis and Scott?
3. Which author did you find most compelling? Why?

The historical methodology papers are due, in hard copy, at the start of seminar on **October 17.**

Book Review Assignment

Each student will write a 1,000 word book review on a historical monograph that he/she has already read. Books read in other courses are acceptable, so long as the student has not already written a review of the same book. Textbooks, broad surveys, and essay collections are not acceptable. Students should review a monograph that addresses a discrete historical question with attention to historiography and detailed primary source evidence.

Student book reviews should follow the general style of those appearing in the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*. As is the case with both of these journals, the instructor will strictly enforce the word limit. The book reviews are due, in hard copy, at the start of seminar on **October 31**.

Review of Curti Lectures Assignment

From November 7-9 Paul Boyer, Emeritus Professor from our department, will deliver the 2005 Merle Curti Lectures. This is the most distinguished annual lecture series sponsored by our department. All History 900 students are required to attend the lectures. They will write a 1,000 word review of the lectures, assessing their historical argument, evidence, and exposition. Student reviews should also comment on how the lectures compare to related course readings in content, methodology, and style. These reviews are due, in hard copy, at the start of seminar on **November 14**.

Field of Study Assessment Paper

At the end of the semester each student will write an 8-10 page paper that examines one of the “Fields of Study” discussed in our course. In addition to assigned readings, students should read two books from the bibliography distributed by the guest(s) who spoke about the particular Field of Study. Student papers should address three questions, preferably in this order:

1. What are the main themes and debates in the Field of Study?
2. How are historians addressing these themes and debates? What do the books you have read argue with regard to these themes and debates?
3. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Field of Study?

These papers are due, in hard copy, at the start of seminar on **December 12**.

Circulated Questions for Field of Study Discussions

Each student will circulate a question in preparation for each Field of Study discussion by **Noon on the Sunday before the appropriate class meeting**. On weeks when we have two Fields of Study discussions, students are required to submit a question for each Field of Study. We will circulate these questions through the course's electronic discussion list. I will not grade the questions, but I will check that everyone submits them.

Grading

Seminar participation	50%
Historical Methodology Paper	10%
Book Review Assignment	10%
Review of Curti Lectures	10%
Field of Study Assessment Paper	<u>20%</u>
	100%

Required Books

(Available at the University Bookstore)

Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953).

John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Weekly Schedule

September 12: Becoming a Historian

9:AM-10:30 Why are we here? What does it mean to be a “historian”?

10:30-Noon Discuss Marc Bloch’s views of the historian’s craft

Reading: Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, all.

Friday, September 16, 5:PM -7:PM: Reception for new American history graduate students and American history faculty at Jeremi Suri’s house, 1806 Chadbourne Avenue. Pizza and beverages will be provided.

September 19: The History of American History, Part I

9:AM-10:30 The Discipline of History and Professionalization

10:30-Noon Objectivity, Evidence, and Public Relevance

Reading: Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 1-411.

September 26: The History of American History, Part II

9:AM-10:AM The Fragmentation of the Discipline of History

10:AM-11:AM Writing Workshop

Guest: Professor Arthur McEvoy

11:AM-Noon Professional Standards for the Twenty-First Century

Reading: Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 415-629;

American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct,

6 January 2005, available at:

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm>

October 3: Archival Research Workshop, Part I

9:AM-Noon Visit to Wisconsin Historical Society Archive with archival exercises organized by James Danky and Harry Miller.

Reading: John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, all.

Week of October 10: Individual Meetings with Instructor, to be arranged by appointment.

Individual meetings will serve as a personal “check-in” after students have completed their first month in the history department graduate program.

Reading: Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, all.

October 17: Archival Research Workshop, Part II

9:AM-9:45 What is evidence? How do we use it as historians?

10:AM-Noon Visit to Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archive and Oral History Collection, archival exercises organized by Jeffrey Kollath.

5 page historical methodology paper due.

October 24

9:AM-10:30 Plagiarism – the Bane of Historical Scholarship

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: Colonial History

Guest: Ned Blackhawk

Reading: Peter Charles Hoffer, “Reflections on Plagiarism” Parts 1 and 2, American Historical Association, *Perspectives* (February and March 2004), available at:

<http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/2004/0402/0402vie1.cfm> and

<https://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2004/0403/0403vie1.cfm>

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

October 31

9:AM-10:30 Field of Study Discussion: Political History

Guest: John Milton Cooper, Jr.

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: Western and Environmental History

Guest: William Cronon

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

1000 word book review due.

November 7

9:AM-10:30 Field of Study Discussion: Labor and Working Class History

Guest: Camille Guérin-Gonzales

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: The History of Reform Movements

Guests: William Reese, John Sharpless, and Adam Nelson

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

November 7-9

4:PM Annual Curti Lectures delivered by Professor Paul Boyer, Pyle Center

Attendance at these lectures is mandatory.

November 14

9:AM-10:30 Field of Study Discussion: History of the Mass Media

Guest: James Baughman

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: Race, Ethnicity, Immigration, and Diaspora

Guests: Thomas Archdeacon and Cindy Cheng

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

1000 word review of Curti Lectures due.

November 21

9:AM-9:45 General Reflections on Fields of Study Discussions

9:45-11:15 Field of Study Discussion: Economic and Business History

Guests: Colleen Dunlavy and Arthur McEvoy

11:15-Noon Discussion of Book Reviews

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

November 28

9:AM-10:30 Teaching American History, Part I

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: Gender and Sexuality in History

Guests: Jeanne Boydston and Anne Enke

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

December 5

9:AM-10:30 Teaching American History, Part II

10:30-Noon Field of Study Discussion: Internationalizing American History

Guests: Brenda Gayle Plummer and Jeremi Suri

Field of Study readings to be posted on class web page.

December 12

9:AM-10:30 Interacting with the Academic Community Outside the History

Department and the University of Wisconsin – Conferences, Publications, Job Market

10:30-Noon What have we learned? Where do we go from here?

8-10 page Field of Study assessment paper due.