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21H.991J / STS.210J Theories and Methods in the Study of History  
Fall 2004

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## **STS 210J/21H.991J: Theories and Methods in the Study of History**

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Wed. 10:00 AM- 1:00

### ***1. Introduction to the Course***

The purpose of this course is to acquaint you with a variety of approaches to the past used by historians writing in the twentieth century. Most of the books on the list constitute, in my view (and others), modern classics, or potential classics, in social, cultural, and economic history. We will examine how these historians conceive of their object of study, how they use primary sources as a basis for their accounts, how they structure the narrative and analytical discussion of their topic, and what are the advantages and limitations of their approaches.

Historians as a community pursue a huge variety of topics with widely disparate methodologies. A central concern of ours will be the question: is history a discipline? Do historians have anything in common? Or are they a rather random collection of people united only by a shared interest in the past (excluding geologists and paleontologists on one end and journalists on the other)?

It would be impossible to survey everything that historians do. The works I have chosen emphasize long-term social processes, the experiences of ordinary people, collective mentalities, and the structures of material life. They downplay the prominence of great leaders (kings, queens, generals, philosophers, scientists), the simple narration of political events, or the analysis of idea systems divorced from their political and social context. They share an openness to the use of concepts from related social sciences (anthropology, sociology, and economics). They aim to reconstruct the experience of everyone who lived in the past, and they pay special attention to the obscure, the oppressed, and the poor. They try to transcend the narrow boundaries inflicted on historians (and everyone else) by an exclusive concentration on the fortunes of the nation-state and its leaders.

This approach to history originated with the French founders of the *Annales* school, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, around the turn of the century. (The school is named after the journal which they founded and coedited). Since its founding, the *Annales* historians have exerted tremendous influence on historical writing around the world. Their paradigm not only constituted a significant new approach to the European topics of initial interest but also had a significant influence on non-Western history, especially that of Asia. Of course, many other trends contributed to and altered the *Annales* paradigm. Things did not look the same when *Annales* topics migrated to England, the U.S. or China. But following the themes of this historical approach over time provides a useful way to unify the course and get some sense of the commonality of historical problems across time and space.

Our focus is on structure, methodology, and conceptualization, not on specific historical content. A sizeable proportion of the studies here focus on early modern Europe (roughly 1500 - 1800 A.D.). As you can see, there is also representation from nineteenth-century Europe, America, and China. I would urge you to read in areas with which you are not familiar as well as in home ground. It is not necessary to "know the facts" or become an expert in any of these areas; the point is to find out how similar historical approaches work in different cultural areas and time periods.

You will also note that some number of the core readings are drawn from the work of historians who teach in the HASTS program, or in one case graduated from it. I especially wanted you to have some familiarity with the contributions to new forms of comparative history made by your immediate colleagues. When possible we will invite MIT colleagues to join us for discussion and I strongly encourage you to take opportunities to discuss the work of this course with them in person.

**Requirements for the course:** 1) Read the core readings for each week and be prepared to discuss them in class. Many of these classics are large, fat books. I will give you some hints to devise the best way of tackling them. (Starting at page one and plowing straight through is almost never the best method.) 2) Read or skim at least one of the works from the supplementary list. Each week you should submit **before** the class meeting (Tuesday afternoon at the latest), a one page essay with your reactions to the reading (not summaries, but critiques: reasoned argument is preferred, but gripes and raves are allowed). These will be useful in stimulating discussion. This is mainly a discussion course; I may sometimes give brief orienting lectures, but I will try to keep them short.

Also, someone may be assigned each week to report on one of the supplementary readings, orally: this can be more of a summary with critique, like an extended book review. (Look at reviews in the *American Historical Review* or *New York Review of Books* for examples)

3) Finally, at the end of the term, a longer paper is due (10-15 pp). You are free to choose the subject, but you should take one of two tacks: 1) "Horizontal": examine the characteristics of the same historical approach used in several different countries and time periods (one of these countries should be non-Western), e.g.: the historical demography of 17th century France and Japan; the history of women in twentieth-century Russia and China; 2) "Vertical": examine a variety of perspectives on the same historical topic (the French Revolution is the classic one: it is open to Marxist, populist, economic, cultural, feminist, and many other interpretations. Other good possibilities are the English Industrial Revolution, American slavery, European imperialism). In either case, you need to search out the major works in the literature, analyze the basic *problematique*, discuss the different analytic tools and sources employed, and evaluate the relative merit of different approaches. You might even have ideas of your own about where work in this subfield should go, which you should feel free to develop. You will find, I suspect, that science and technology get short shrift in most historians' accounts. Think about how they might usefully be integrated into general history.

## **SYLLABUS**

Nearly all the core books are available at the MIT Bookstore, and at the Reserve Room of the Hayden Library. Other readings will be provided on the course website.

### **Sep. 3. Introduction**

Reading: &Charles Tilly, "How (and What) are Historians Doing?" *American Behavioral Scientist*, July – August 1990, p. 685-711.

### **Sep. 10. The Annales School: Origins and Establishment**

## Core Reading:

Marc Bloch, "The Advent and Triumph of the Water Mill", in Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe*, p. 136-68

Fernand Braudel, *On History*, Chapter 3, "History and the Social Sciences", pp. 25-54.

## Supplementary:

Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, p.25-138, 246-67, 418-60, 543-70, 734-57, 1088-1106.

Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-1989*

Traian Stoianovitch, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm*;

Carol Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Biography*;

Lucien Febvre, *A New Kind of History* (collected writings)

Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society; The Historian's Craft*

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*

*Journal of Modern History*, 1972/12, special issue on Braudel[PCP3]

**Sep. 17. Labor History; Class as a Historical Category**

## Core Reading:

Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*, pp. 1-31, 65-87, 131-66, 239-58.  
& Samuel Coen, *When Strikes Make Sense*.

## Supplementary:

E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* Preface, 1-54, 189-212, 331-400, 429-447, 779-832.

Alex Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts*;

David Montgomery, *The Decline of the House of Labor*;

Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America*

Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan*;

Gail Hershatter, *Flying Hammers, Walking Chisels: The Workers of Tianjin (China)*

**Sep. 24. Women's History; Gender and Textiles**

## Core Readings:

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (Knopf, 2001), p. 12-40, 76-107.

Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, p. 173-273.

Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: the First 20,000 Years*, pp. 17-70.

## Supplementary:

Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 15-50.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, p.3-134

And more of the Bray or Ulrich above.

**Oct. 1. Race, Culture, and War**

## Core Reading:

John Dower, "Race, Language and War in Two Cultures"; "Fear and Prejudice in U.S.-Japan Relations", in *Japan in War & Peace: Selected Essays*, pp.257-335.

Craig Wilder, *Covenant with Color*.

## Supplementary:

Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, pp. 1-112, 162-93, 255-79, 588-612

Barbara Field, "Racial Ideology in American History", in *Region, Race, Ideology: Festschrift for C.Vann Woodward*

Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*

George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*

**Oct. 8. State Formation and Nationalism**

## Core Reading:

Chris Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*.

## Supplementary:

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

Peter Perdue, *China Marches West*.

**Oct. 15. No Class****Oct. 22. Environmental History**

## Core Reading:

David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*.

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

## Supplementary:

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*

Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*

John F. Richards, *The unending frontier : an environmental history of the early modern world*,

John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*

Richard White, *The Middle Ground*

"A Round Table: Environmental History", *Journal of American History*, 1990/3

**Oct. 29. Historical Geography and Representations of Space**

## Core Reading:

William Turkel, *The Archive of Place*.

## Supplementary:

Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 1-33, 161-179

Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 106-197

Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*

**Nov. 5. Global History: Economic and Demographic**

## Core Reading:

Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*.

Anne McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World" *Journal of World History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2007, pp. 433-462.

Sevket Pamuk, "The Black Death and the Origins of the Great Divergence across Europe," *European Review of Economic History*, Vol. 11, part 3, Dec. 2007, pp. 289-318.

## Supplementary:

Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*

James Z. Lee and Wang Feng, *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Myths and Chinese Realities*

William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*

Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik: *The World that Trade Created*

Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1500-1800* (3 vols., especially look at volume 1)

Charles Tilly, *Huge Structures, Big Comparisons...* (reviews and critiques some of the above works)

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*

K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe*

Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680* [2 vols.]

M.W. Flinn, *The European Demographic System*

Massimo Livi-Bacci, *Population and Nutrition*

Anne McCants, *Civic Charity in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam*

**Nov. 12. Historical Demography**

## Core Reading:

John Hatcher, "Understanding the population history of England, 1450-1750", *Past & Present*, 2003

John Brown and Tim Guinnane, "Regions and Time in the European Fertility Transition", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 60, no. 3, August 2007, pp. 574-595.

## Supplementary:

Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England and Wales*.

Susan Watkins, *The Decline of Fertility in Europe*.

**Nov. 19. The New Cultural History: Microhistory**

## Core Readings:

Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*.

## Supplementary:

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, p. 3-107

Clifford Geertz, "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 412-453

Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers*

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*

Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (esp. chapter by Alberta Bierstadt)  
James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee", in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*.  
Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*  
Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*

Nov. 26 **History and Fiction**

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*

S.D Goitein, *A Mediterranean society : an abridgment in one volume* (Berkeley, 1999), pp. xi-xvii, 9-68, 240-247

John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive*.

Dec. 3. **Historical Memory and History Wars**

Core Reading:

Edward Linenthal, Tom Engelhardt, eds. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*

Appleby, Jacob, and Hunt, *Telling the Truth About History*

Supplementary

Laura Hein, Mark Selden, *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*

Tai, Hue-Tam Ho. "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory." *American Historical Review*, no. 3 (2001): 906-22.

"AHR Forum: The Old History and the New", articles by Theodore Hamerow, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Lawrence Levine, Joan Scott, John Toews; in *American Historical Review*, June 1989  
Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (last chapter); Symposium on Peter Novick's book in *American Historical Review*: articles by Hexter, Megill, Hollinger, et.al.

Dec. 10. **Class Presentations of (draft) Final Projects**

No new reading.