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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**

### **Overview:**

The purpose of this course is to acquaint you with a variety of approaches to the past used by historians writing in the last several decades. 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. One concern is the evolution of historical studies in the western tradition, which is not to say that the western approach is the only valid one, nor is it to suggest that we will only read histories of the west. But MIT and many of the institutions in which you will work during your careers are firmly rooted in western intellectual paradigms, and the study of times and places far removed from the western past has been deeply influenced by western historical assumptions. (And, to be honest, this is the historical tradition with which I am most familiar!)

We will begin with a brief overview of the construction and deconstruction of historical thinking in the west from the European renaissance to the present. Then we will consider questions of scale, a major preoccupation of post-WWII historians: should history be written at the national, global, or micro level? Next, we will sample two of the more recent innovative trends in the historical profession, environmental history and gender history. How does the incorporation of these perspectives alter our traditional national, global, and micro perspectives? After these considerations, we will turn our attention to historiographical evolution by looking at one of the richest, most contested fields of the past two centuries, the study of the French Revolution of 1789. Finally, we will think about the future of the past by reading the work of a contemporary historian committed to introducing neurobiological perspectives into the historian's analytical repertory.

Our focus, therefore, is on structure, methodology, and conceptualization, not on specific historical content.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.), because of the richness of its historiographical tradition. We will think about the reasons for the broad influence of this work throughout the semester. 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 a number of the

core readings are drawn from the work of historians who teach in the HASTS program. I especially want you to have some familiarity with the contributions to new fields of 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. Some of these works 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 (Monday afternoon at the latest), a forum posting of at least two to three substantial paragraphs with your reactions to the reading (not summaries, but critiques: reasoned argument is preferred, but gripes and raves are allowed). In the interests of fairness, I will also post a reaction each week. 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. We will be examining some of these approaches in our readings towards the end of the term. 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 *problématique*, 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.

## **Books to Acquire**

These books are available for sale at the MIT Bookstore, and have also been placed on 2-hour reserve in the Humanities Library. Other core readings indicated below with an asterisk will be available on the web site for this subject.

- G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* trans. Robert S. Hartman (Bobbs-Merrill, 1952)
- Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford UP, 2006)
- Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650-Present* (Cambridge UP, 2008)
- Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Cornell UP, 2009)
- Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, 1947; orig French ed. 1939)
- Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (University of California Press, 1992)
- Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (University of California Press, 2008)

## **Books to be Provided by Instructor**

I will provide copies of the following required books:

- Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford UP, 2008)
- Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008)
- Harriet Ritvo, *The Dawn of Green: Manchester, Thirlmere, and the Victorian Environment* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)

## **Schedule of Readings**

### **Week 1**

**9/8. Reg Day – No Classes**

### **Week 2**

**9/15. Introduction: Constructing and De-Constructing History in the Western Tradition**

Core Readings:

- \*Paula Findlen, "Historical Thought in the Renaissance," in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza, eds. *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Blackwell, 2002), 99-120.
- G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* trans. Robert S. Hartman (Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), ix-xlii, 3-95
- \*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event," in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon, 1995), 70-107, 167-76.
- \*For fun: look at visual representations of time in Cabinet issue 13 (2004) on-line at <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/13/timelines.php>

Supplementary:

- Donald Kelley, ed., *Versions of History* (1991)
- Anthony Grafton, *What Was History?* (2007)
- Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Penn State UP, 1992)
- Anthony Molho & Gordon S. Wood, *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton UP, 1998)
- Laura Lee Downs & Stéphane Gerson, eds. *Why France? American Historians Reflect on an Enduring Fascination* (Cornell UP, 2007)

**Week 3**

**9/22. National History (Guest: Prof. Chris Capozzola, MIT)**

Core Reading:

- Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen*

Supplementary:

- Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell UP, 1983)
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983)
- E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge UP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992)
- Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Harvard UP, 2005).
- Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Yale UP, 1992)
- David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Harvard UP, 2001)

## Week 4

### **9/29. Beyond the Nation: The Case of Atlantic History**

#### Core Readings:

- \*Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Green, "Introduction: The Present State of Atlantic History," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, eds. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford UP, 2008), 3-33.
- Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford UP, 2006), all.
- \*Peter A. Coclanis, "Beyond Atlantic History," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, eds. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford UP, 2008), 337-56.

#### Supplementary:

- Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (English translation 1972; first published in France in 1949)
- Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Greenwood Press, 1972)
- Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Harvard UP, 2005).
- J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale UP, 2006), all.
- Paul d'Arcy, *People of the Sea: Environment, Identity and History in Oceania* (Hawai'i UP, 2006)
- Milo Kearney, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Routledge, 2004)

## Week 5

### **10/6. Global History: Economic and Demographic (Guest: Prof. Anne McCants, MIT)**

#### Core Readings:

- 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*

## **Week 6**

10/13. **No Class – Monday Schedule of Classes**

## **Week 7**

10/20. **Microhistory**

Core Readings:

- \*Jacques Revel, “Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social,” in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, eds. *Histories: French Constructions of the Past* (New Press, 1996)
- \*David A. Bell, “Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms,” in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza, eds. *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Blackwell, 2002), 262-76.
- Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008)

Supplementary:

- Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in Peter Burke, ed. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Penn State Press, 1995), 93-113.
- Clifford Geertz, “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 412-453
- Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, p. 3-107 [and critiques by Chartier, LaCapra, Mah]
- Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers*

- Arlette Farge & Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics Before the French Revolution* trans. Claudia Miéville (Harvard UP, 1991)
- Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*
- Nathalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard UP, 1983). [& the AHR debate]
- James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee", in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*.
- Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Penguin, 1982)
- Emmanuel LeRoy-Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (Vintage, 1979)
- Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*

## **Week 8**

### 10/27. **Environmental History (Guest: Prof. Harriet Ritvo, MIT)**

#### Core Reading:

- Harriet Ritvo, *The Dawn of Green: Manchester, Thirlmere, and the Victorian Environment* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)

#### Supplementary:

- David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*.
- William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.
- 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*
- William Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (University of British Columbia Press, 2007)
- "A Round Table: Environmental History", *Journal of American History*, 1990/3

## **Week 9**

### 11/3. **Women's History and Gender (Guest: Prof. Elizabeth Wood, MIT)**

#### Core Readings:

- \*Joan Scott, "Women's History," & "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (Columbia UP, 1988), 15-50, 200-11.
- \*Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana UP, 1997), pp. 49-67, 194-214.
- Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Cornell UP, 2009).

Supplementary:

- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (Knopf, 2001).
- Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*.
- Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: the First 20,000 Years*.
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*,
- Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Duke UP, 2001)

**Week 10**

**11/10. Historiographical Evolution: Social Interpretations of the French Revolution**

Core Readings:

- Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, 1947; orig French ed. 1939), all.
- \*François Furet, "The Revolutionary Catechism," in *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge UP, 1977), 81-131.
- \*William Doyle, "Writings on Revolutionary Origins Since 1939," in *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford UP, 1999, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), 5-41.

Supplementary:

- Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794* trans. Remy Inglis Hall (Anchor Books, 1972)
- Alfred Cobban *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge UP, 1964)
- Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* trans. Alan Sheridan (Harvard UP, 1988; orig French ed. 1976)
- Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (University of California Press, 1984)
- François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds. *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Harvard UP, 1989)
- Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge UP, 1990)

**Week 11**

**11/17. Historiographical Evolution: Cultural Interpretations of the French Revolution**

Core Reading:

- Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (University of California Press, 1992), all.
- \*Suzanne Desan, "What's after Political Culture? Recent French Revolutionary Historiography," *French Historical Studies* 23-1 (Winter 2000), 163-96.

Supplementary:

- Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell UP, 1988)
- Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Duke UP, 1991)
- Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell UP, 2002)
- Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Harvard UP, 2003)
- Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (University of California Press, 2004)

**Week 12**

11/24. **Individual Consultations with Instructor.**

**Week 13**

12/1. **New Directions in History: Neuro-biology? (Guest: Prof. Dan Smail, Harvard)**

Core Reading:

- Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (University of California Press, 2008)

**Week 14**

12/8. **Class Presentations of Final Projects**

Final Paper Due on December 15