

Nanyang Technological University
HH1001: What is history?
Semester 1, 2015-2016

Academic Units: 3
Pre-requisites: None
Instructor: A/Prof. Hallam Stevens

Overview

This course provides an introduction to the study of history. There are two main aims. The first is for students to become familiar with the methods of historians. What kinds of sources do historians use? How do they use them? How do you write a historical essay? The second is to examine the different approaches to history. We will read biographies, social history, cultural history, economic history, psycho-history, global history, gender history, race history, and micro-history and try to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each. The past consists of a huge amount of disorganized data. It sits around in books, manuscripts, museums, buildings, artifacts, and people. The aim of this class is to understand how it is possible to transform all that data into stories. That is, it is about developing the skills to turn facts into history.

Learning Objectives

- Basic understanding of the nature of history, its methods, the major schools, and philosophies of history;
- Basic understanding of the relationship of history to social memory, culture, and nation;
- Ability to critically read and use primary sources in ways appropriate for writing history;
- Ability to critically read and use secondary sources in ways appropriate for writing history;
- Understanding of the basic rules of academic writing in history, especially the rules regarding plagiarism and citation.

Logistics:

Lectures:
Tuesdays 10.30-12.30
Lecture Theatre 9 (North Spine)

Tutorials:
Tuesdays 2.30/3.30/4.30pm
SPMS TR+14

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Tutor / Teaching Assistant: Lin Chia Tsun
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Required Texts:

- Tosh, John (2006). *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* 6th ed. (Harlow: Pearson-Longman). **Available for purchase at the NTU Bookshop.**
- Other readings for the course will be made available via Blackboard.

Assessment

This class has no examination. The assessment tasks aim to develop your skills as historians and to ask you to read and think critically about history. The assessment structure will reward those students who work consistently over the course of the semester.

Participation in Class Activities (20%):

This component will be made up of two parts:

- 1) attendance at tutorials (10%);
- 2) performance on the clicker-quizzes. The clicker quizzes will take place during about half the weeks of the semester (10%).

Presentation (group work) (15%):

At the beginning of the semester you will be assigned to a group of three or four. You will work in this group to prepare a 10-minute presentation. The presentations will be book reports on a book related to the subject of a particular lecture. The report may include not only a report on the content of the book, but also a description of the author, the context in which the book was written, and so on. Presentations will be graded partly on their effectiveness in communicating about the book to the class in interesting and creative ways that engage your peers. The presentations will take place in the lecture sessions, usually during the second hour. All members of the group will receive the same grade. Your group can choose which book to report on from the list provided by the professor. You may also pick your own book, subject to the approval of the professor.

Primary Source Exercise (20%)

You will select a primary source from the list provided by the provided by the professor. This exercise requires you to write a 800-1000 word analysis of this source. You should find and use at least one secondary source to provide background and context for your source. You will be graded on the clarity of your writing, your level of critical engagement with the source, and the correct use of citation conventions.

Due date: Monday September 14th, 12 noon (via Turn-It-In)

Planning an Essay (20%)

This exercise builds on the primary source exercise. You will be required to submit a historical question, thesis statement, essay outline, and annotated bibliography on a topic related to your primary source. In tutorials we will work on developing these skills. The annotated bibliography should contain five primary sources and five secondary sources related to your topic. Maximum length: 1500 words.

Due date: Monday 12th October, 12 noon (via Turn-It-In)

Peer Commentary on Essay Plan (10%)

You will be responsible for reading and commenting on the plan of two other members of the class. You will submit your comments both to both your classmates and to the teaching staff. You will be graded on the quality and helpfulness of your feedback.

Due date: Monday 26th October, 12 noon (on Edventure)

Museum Assignment (15%):

This will be based on your work during week XI of class. Before that week you will receive a set of questions that you must answer based on your visit to the museum.

Due: Wednesday 11th November, 12 noon (via Turn-It-In).

Course Policies

Your Responsibilities

You are responsible for making yourself aware of all the information in this document. Familiarize yourself with due dates, times, and so on.

It is also your responsibility to come to class prepared to participate. This means having completed the reading assignments, bringing your clicker, and having something to take notes with (either pen and paper or a laptop computer or tablet).

Medical Certificates

Medical Certificates (MCs) are not “get out of jail free” cards. The presentation of a medical certificate does not automatically excuse an absence or late work. Depending on the circumstances, I will usually ask for additional work to be completed in order to “make up” for missed classes or deadlines.

Late Policy

Late work will be penalized at the rate of 10% of the maximum grade per 24-hour period overdue. For example, work that is 2 hours late will receive a 10% penalty, work that is 26 hours late a 20% penalty, work that is 55 hours late a 30% penalty, and so on. Extensions may be granted in some special cases. However, no extensions will be granted within one week of the deadline (in other words, if you think you need an extension, ask early).

Plagiarism and Cheating

This course is partly designed to teach you about proper conventions for using and acknowledging the work of others. Using the works of others without properly acknowledging that use (that is, copying) is considered “cheating” and will be met with harsh punishment in terms of grades and may, at my discretion, be reported to the university to be placed on record in your academic file. Learn how to cite the work of others properly. Do not ever copy. If in doubt, ask.

Since some assessment will be carried out using “clickers” in this class, these circumstances should be considered “test conditions.” In particular, keep your clickers to yourself. Any student found in possession of another student’s clicker during class time will be considered to be cheating: both the holder of the clicker and the owner of the clicker will be graded zero for all clicker quizzes throughout the semester.

Course Outline and Readings

Part I: Introduction and methods

*Week I (August 11th): **The Uses of History***

The first week will mostly serve as an introduction to the class. I will introduce the history faculty and explain the aims of the class, the mechanics of how the class will work, and the assessment. There will be a brief lecture introducing the question “What is history?”

Tutorial: There will be no tutorial in Week 1.

Reading:

- Tosh, Chapter 1: “Historical Awareness” and Chapter 2: “The Uses of History”

*Week II (August 18th): **Archives and Historical Documents***

We will examine the main source from which historians get their data: written and printed documents. What is a historical source? What do historians do with their sources? During class we will read and analyze one or more early modern sources. These source(s) will be concerned with medicine during the early modern period (roughly the 16th and 17th centuries) – using older sources will help to highlight some of the difficulties and problems that historians encounter when reading such sources.

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Reading:

- Tosh, Chapter 4: “The Raw Materials” and Chapter 5: “Using the Sources”

Week III (August 25th): Oral History

Another important source of historical material is from interview (oral histories). How should such material be treated? How is it different from written material? How is it possible to transform an oral history into a historical narrative? We will also discuss interviewing techniques in order to prepare for essays that may use oral history.

Tutorial: Interviewing within the class to construct a family tree.

- Tosh, Chapter 11: “Memory and the Spoken Word”
- Cecilia Chang (2007) Oral history interviews conducted by Victor Geraci, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (pp. 1-36 and 65-83).

Week IV (September 1st): Secondary Sources

Historians also read the work of other historians. For the most part, we don’t have time to read all the primary sources ourselves and so we must learn about the past through others’ writing. How should we treat these secondary sources? To what extent should we rely on them? How can we go about writing our own history without just copying primary sources? This lecture will also focus on the topic of plagiarism and proper citation practices.

Tutorial: Secondary source exercise

Readings:

- I.W. Mabbett (2007) *Writing History Essays: A Student’s Guide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), Chapter 4 “Knowing Your Sources” (pp. 33-42), Chapter 5 “Reading critically” (pp. 43-55), and Chapter 9 “Writing and Independent Thought” (pp. 86-94).

Part II: Types of history

Lecture V (September 8th): Biography and Social History

We now turn to looking at some of the different ‘schools’ of history. History is a big field – there are lots of different approaches and ideas about how to write history. Lecture V – VII provide a kind of map for understanding some of these differences. In this week we examine two contrasting styles of historical writing: biography and social history. The two readings are about a very similar period of time and topic, yet they do not give us the same information. What are the advantages and disadvantages of biography? Social history attempts to describe social and cultural circumstances, often focusing on ‘the masses’ rather than ‘elites’ such as monarchs, politicians, or the rich. From where did this perspective arise and why is it important?

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Readings:

- Tosh, Chapter 3: “Mapping the Field”
- Janet Browne (2002) *Charles Darwin: The Power of Place* (Princeton University Press) [Chapter 1: Stormy Waters, pp. 3-42]
- James A. Secord (2001) *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (University of Chicago Press) [Prologue and Chapter 1, pp. 1-40]

Week VI (September 15th): Economic History and Data-Driven History

Again, the readings offer very different accounts of similar subjects. At root, different historians have different ideas about what drives historical change. Economic history places economic circumstances at the centre of its accounts. Economic historians use data about goods, money, capital flows to explain events. In contrast, psycho-history places emphasis on things that happen inside people’s heads. Often using Freudian theories, they try to explain history by explaining people’s conscious and unconscious motivations. Why might some historians choose one approach over another? In what circumstances might each be appropriate?

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Readings:

- Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Bellknap Press. [selections]
- Explore at least three of the examples / visualizations here:
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/gallery.php>

Week VII (September 22nd): Microhistory, Global History, Big History

This week explores some of the more recent trends in history. Microhistory takes single events or small episodes in history and describes and analyzes them in microscopic detail. Ideally, such histories reveal something not just about the isolated event but about the larger culture in which it is embedded. Global history (otherwise known as ‘world history’ or ‘transnational history’) takes almost the opposite approach. Rather than focusing on specific events or places it attempts to tell history in broadest possible contexts, looking for large scale dynamics and trends. Why have these approaches emerged? How are they different from older approaches? What advantages and disadvantages do they offer? The lecture will discuss some of the recent histories of food and drink to illustrate some of the characteristics of microhistory and global history.

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Readings:

- Robert Darnton (1984) “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin” in *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, NY: Basic Books): 75-106.

- Mark Kurlansky (2003) *Salt: A World History* (Penguin) [Introduction and Chapters 3, 13, and 24] (47pp).

Mid-Semester Break

Week VIII (October 6th): Gender and History

Lecture VIII and IX also examine two recent developments in history: the examination of gender and the examination of race. Of course, ‘gender history’ provides accounts of women who have often been neglected or entirely left out of older narratives. But this field also tries to discover how ideas about sex and gender have evolved over time and how gender dynamics have shaped the course of history.

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Readings:

- Susan Kingsley Kent (2012) “Woman: from the imperfect male to the incommensurable female” in *Gender and history* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan): 9-27
- Elaine Tyler May (1999) “Explosive issues: sex, women, and the bomb” in *Homeward bound: American families in the cold war era* (New York, NY: Basic Books): 80-99.

Week IX (October 13th): Race and History

History has traditionally been Eurocentric. A lot of history has focused on the white people and their domination over other parts of the world. Some recent history has partially redressed this balance, telling the stories of other races, or including the points of view of other races in history (eg. the history of slavery from the point of view of the slaves, or the history of colonialism from the point of view of the colonized people). But, like gender history, race history also demonstrates the history of the *idea* of race itself and the importance of this idea in shaping history.

Tutorials: Discussion of readings.

Readings:

- William B. Provine (1986) “Geneticists and race” *American Zoologist* 26: 857-887.
- Ganesan Narayanan (2004) “The political history of ethnic relations in Singapore” in *Beyond rituals and riots: ethnic pluralism and social cohesion in Singapore*, Lai Ah Eng, ed. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press).

Part III: History in the world

Week X (October 20th): Performance and Film

The last part of the course examines the importance of history for our society, culture, and politics. Lecture X looks at the portrayal of history in films and movies. History is portrayed not just in documentaries but also in fictional films too. Films to open up different kinds of subjects

for historical investigation and for providing new perspectives on familiar subjects. This weeks main examples will show how sports can be used as a window onto history. We will also examine some of the challenges presented by portraying history on film and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of history in film.

Tutorial: Discussion of film.

Readings:

- *The Act of Killing* (2012) Joshua Oppenheimer, dir.
- Robert A. Rosenstone (1995) “History in images, history in words: reflections on the possibility of really putting history into film” in *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996): 19-44.
- Maarten Pereboom (2011) “Moving pictures as a historical resource” in *History and film: moving pictures and the study of the past* (Prentice Hall): 1-14.

Week XI (October 27th): Museums and Artifacts

History is also on display in museums. How does the presentation of exhibits influence how we interpret history? What are museums trying to do? What role do they play in our society? Historians refer to the artifacts on display in museums as ‘material culture’ – material objects that are preserved from the past. Like books or oral histories, material culture can also be a historical source. How do historians treat and use these special source materials? What can we find out from them that we cannot find out from a book? This week will also serve as preparation for the second assignment.

Museum visit: There will be no lecture or tutorial this week. Instead, you will visit a museum in Singapore. You will be asked to complete an assignment based on your visit that will comprise 15% of your final grade (see above).

Readings:

- “Museum Primer”
- Craig Gilborn (1981) “Pop pedagogy: looking at the Coke bottle” in *Material culture studies in America*, Thomas J. Schlereth, ed. (Rowman Altamira): 183-194.
- John T. Schlebecker (1981) “The use of objects in historical research” in *Material culture studies in America*, Thomas J. Schlereth, ed. (Rowman Altamira): 106-113.

Week XII (November 3rd): History and Nation

History is also crucial in forming ideas about where we come from and who we are. In other words, history is crucial for our *identity*. This is especially true for *national identity* – nations rely on history in order to encourage loyalty and patriotism. Taking examples from South-East Asia, we will explore the history of nations and nationalism and the processes through which nations construct histories for themselves.

Readings:

- Benedict Anderson (1991) “The last wave” in *Imagined communities* Revised ed. (London: Verso): 113-140.
- Thongchai Winichakul (1994) “Mapping: a new technology of space” and “Geo-body” in *Siam mapped: a history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press): 113-139.
- Paul Rae (2013) “Performing Singapore: City/State.”

Tutorial: Discussion of readings.

Week XIII (November 10th): No Class Due to Deepavali Public Holiday