This course provides an introduction to historiography by following the development of history as an academic discipline in Europe and North America from the late eighteenth century to the present. We will be reading and discussing some of the most influential books and programmatic texts that shaped the discipline, in combination with historiographical essays that contextualize these works.

The selection of texts is meant to shed light on the range of methodological approaches and narrative strategies historians have employed. We want to understand their choice of topics and questions, and discuss their assumptions regarding the forces and agents of change, the nature of the changes that affect human societies, and the historian’s role in this process. This course’s broad chronological perspective will also allow us to engage in a conversation about the changes within the discipline over time, and discuss the real and imagined novelty claimed by the advocates of the more recent academic “turns.” Last but not least, working through this reading list might inspire us to reflect upon the place of our own research within the tradition of the discipline, and the direction the discipline is likely to take in years to come.

Needless to say, it is impossible to fully cover the development of history as a discipline during the past two centuries in a dozen class sessions, not even by limiting the reading list to texts that emerged within the discipline’s “western tradition.” A selection had to be made, and it can’t be other than subjective. While my goal was to design a reading list that reflects the discipline’s methodological breadth, and that complements the reading lists of the department’s current core seminars in Texts & Contexts (fall 2015), Power & Inequality (fall 2016), and World History (fall 2016), to a degree it also reflects my personal preferences and regional expertise. But I am open to all changes you propose, and suggestions you make for future revisions.
Course requirements

Attendance and participation:
You are expected to attend all class sessions and contribute generously to discussions. To get the most out of in-class discussions, a focused, goal-oriented, and inclusive conversation is crucial. The most helpful contributions to the conversation tend to be those that are based on careful preparation of the reading assignments, and that engage with the questions posed during our meetings.

Weekly response papers:
Please submit via email to me by Sunday noon prior to each class session a brief reflection on the assigned readings (400-800 words). For the 13 text-based class sessions of this course, please submit at least 11 response papers (with addendum).

The response paper should reflect what you found most intriguing about the assigned readings, and what questions you would like to discuss during the upcoming class session. Keep in mind that this is a course on historiography, specifically on how the approaches of the various historians differ from each other, and what changes we can see over time. While we cannot avoid talking also about the topics of the classic texts we discuss, they are not the main subject of this course.

What is relevant about the selected readings and worth discussing in class is determined by you. But as a general orientation, your weekly response papers might engage with the following questions:

• What do the historians in question consider to be the agents and forces of historical change?
• How do they understand the nature of change?
• What value judgments do they make?
• How do they see their own role as historians?
• What sources do they use?
• What narrative strategies do they employ?
• How do their works compare to the historiography of preceding and succeeding eras, and to the historiography of our own time?
• What inspirations may these texts offer today?

Obviously, the brevity of the response paper will not allow you to engage with all of these questions at once, and you might very well come up with questions that are more useful than those proposed. Therefore, please feel free to focus on what seems most relevant to you. To make that clear what your general argument is, please provide your response papers with good titles.

The conversations during the course sessions constitute the most valuable part of the overall learning experience. I therefore want you to add an addendum (300–400 words) to each response paper after class, summarizing what you consider to be the most important conclusions reached during in-class discussion. Feel free also to revise the preceding part of your response paper. The final document, which should not exceed 1,800 words, needs to be submitted to me by Wednesday noon. Please use the track-change mode, so that I
can see what changes you made. I will merge the final papers into a single document for each class session and post it on CourseWeb.

The response papers need to be in MS Word format. For me to keep track easily, please give the file name to following format: your last name_feb22(=session)_revised.

Discussion leadership

Each student will introduce one of the historical “classics” (the underlined titles). This includes a 10-minute presentation of a text’s general argument and a contextualization. Apart from this, discussion leaders prepare questions to kick-off the discussion, and lead the the discussion during the first part of the session (until break). The discussion leaders will have access to the response papers prior to our meeting, so that they can engage with them while preparing the discussion.

Grade weighting:

Attendance and participation: 30%
Response papers: 50%
Discussion leadership: 20%

– Course schedule –

Jan 11       Introduction
Jan 18       *** Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday Observance ***
Jan 25       Universal History in the Age of the Enlightenment


Feb 1       The forces and agents of history: two interpretations

- Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852)
Feb 8 Historians and the nation


Feb 15 The establishment of history as an academic discipline

- Theodor Mommsen’s Rectorial Address (On the Training of Historians) (1874), In The Varieties of History, 191–196.

Feb 22 The School of the Annales

- Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. (Revised edition 1972). Please read: Preface to the first edition / Part One: Introduction; I (The Peninsulas); V (The Mediterranean as a Human Unit), 1, 2, 4; / Part Two: Introduction, VI (Civilizations), 1, 2; VIII (By way of conclusion) / Part Three, IV (Lepanto), 1; Conclusion.

Feb 29 Social History


Mar 7 *** Spring break ***
Mar 14  From Women’s History of Gender History


*** The author of The Company They Kept will join our conversation ***

Mar 21  The New Cultural History


Mar 28  Rediscovering the spatial dimension of history


Apr 4  Histoire totale? Trying to bring everything together

Apr 11  History and psychology


Apr 18  History and natural science


Apr 25  Concluding session: Where are we headed?
