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HIST 300.01: Methodology - The Historian's Craft

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History 300: Methodology/ The Historian's Craft

Fall, 2001, LA 250, T, TH., 2:10-3:30//K. Lockridge, 261 LA, T.,TH., 3:30-5

In a course entitled "Methodology," the development of skills prevails over the learning of a given period of history. We will work primarily on developing your skills at reading historical writings and actual historical sources closely and analytically, and on building the expository and synthetic writing skills needed to clarify for yourselves and for others what you discover in these readings. These are the essential skills of the historian. We aim also to reflect on the business of reflection itself, on what it means to have a reflective view of life and of human history. Read at various points in the term, Sven Birkerts' Gutenberg Elegies, John Demos' Unredeemed Captive, and Greg Dening's moving but difficult Death of William Gooch, will help us see that history as a discipline is more reflective than scientific. Historians call this kind of discussion "philosophy of history," and we aim to learn some of that, too.

In terms of historical content, or substance, we will spend most of our time in America in the years 1675-1800. Here, our aim will be to see how American history looked through the eyes of persons who at the time were regarded as peripheral to that history, persons we might call in one sense or another outcasts. We will use a textbook, Evolution and Revolution, for background, but will read primarily in the lives of three early Americans, in two cases using their own original accounts of their experiences. The first is Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity with the Indians of New England in 1675-1676, the second John Demos' modern history of another captive, Eunice Williams, who around 1720 became the wife of an Iroquois warrior and so never returned to live as a Puritan, and finally the third is Olaudah Equiano's tale of his captivity as a slave and as a free man of color in America and in the Atlantic world as a whole in the years 1740-1800. We seek to learn how the emerging "America" looked to these persons outside the mainstream, variously female, Indian [by marriage and choice], and African. All, incidentally, were captives in one sense or another, an idea we can use as a tool in understanding the clashing cultures we will encounter. All three captives raise the issue of what made race relations difficult in the new America. With Dening's Death of William Gooch, they raise the possibility that violence and misunderstanding are everywhere common along the lines where cultures meet – not so much an American condition as a human one. But before, while and after we consider these three lives and the history they reveal, we will be working on the skills of analytical reading and expository, synthetic writing, and playing occasionally with philosophy of history.

If I were allowed to describe this course, free of the new requirement that we break our courses down into specific pedagogical aims, I'd say simply that we are going to read some of my favorite books together, acquiring skills, confidence, and knowledge of early America, and perhaps some ability to reflect about what historians do, along the way.

One third of your grade is based on the frequent spot quizzes that will test your preparation of the readings and on performance in class discussions. The first quiz, and discussions for the first third of the term are free of grading, as their purpose is to teach you how to prepare the readings. After these landmarks pass, then, one third of

the grade rests on quizzes and discussions, and these will receive double weight in the last one-third of the term. Prepare well, but also be patient with yourselves, as reading and discussion are arts you will all learn as you go along. It will help if, when you raise your hand, you give us a page and paragraph reference to the passage your question or comment refers to, so we are all on the same page working together on the same evidence. See me when you become uneasy or frightened, as such feelings are normal, and we can solve most problems together, probably improving the course in the process! It's a new course, so your responses at all stages will be helpful in improving it.

[Past students report, in fact, that the one problem we cannot solve together is over-commitment. Their experience is that small 300-level history courses, and above all History 300, are not compatible with an 18+ credit load and/ or more than 15 hours of employment. They say that the main reason students do not get the grades they wish in small 300-level history courses is that they are over-committed elsewhere. This shows up most dramatically with the final paper at the end of the term. Only you can solve this problem.]

Another third of the grade is a short paper of 5-7 pages due at the beginning of class on October 9. No late papers will be accepted. In this paper, I want you first to summarize what our textbook, Evolution and Revolution, says about women and Puritanism, using evidence from all relevant passages in chapters 1-4 [see also under "New England" etc. etc.] in the textbook, and then to present two or three ways in which Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity either confirms, enriches, extends, supplements, or contradicts—you decide which, in each instance—the textbook's view of women, men, gender, and authority in Puritanism or indeed its view of Puritanism itself.

Each of these two or three specific comparisons must use at least one brief quotation from the textbook and two such quotations from Rowlandson herself [not from her modern editor and ideally even not cited by him in his introduction], in making its comparison between the textbook's claims and what we learn from Rowlandson. For example, if you have a quotation from the textbook that, carefully read, says or implies that women were expected to defer to male authority, do you find that, in context and/ or in her actual words, her account offers this same expected deference to male authority? Whatever you decide, in this example you would then go on to provide and explain carefully to us the evidence about and from her account, that persuades you that she confirms or enriches or contradicts [etc. etc., as you decide] the view of male authority implicit in the quotation from the textbook you have given us.

To help you write the paper, the general standards of thought and clarity expected in it [and in the second paper] are set down in the "Advice on writing for historians" distributed earlier. Remember, too, that 5-7 pages is very, very little space in which adequately to introduce your paper, clearly explain two or three points of comparison between the two books, using at least three quotations to develop each point, summarize your points, and conclude. Every word counts, and must be carefully chosen. At the same time, this is a very simple, commonsense assignment: In common, clear language, with convincing evidence and in an organized fashion, i.e. using the basic tools acquired in first-year English and summarized in the "Advice," explain to a stranger how reading Mary Rowlandson enriched or altered the view of Puritanism [and gender?] the textbook had given you. "What more did I learn by reading this?" is the simplest and oldest of questions, and the advice on writing offered in

the “Advice on writing,” is just a way of reminding you that answering this simple question, for yourself and for others, calls for some careful thought, well-considered evidence and organized explanation. All that is really new is that you are using a real historical document as evidence

Papers which do not meet these standards fully will be returned with a grade of “rewrite,” and ½ grade penalty will be deducted from the grade given the rewritten version, to encourage you to take the “Advice” seriously the first time around. At the same time, help will be made available during office hours held by the instructor and by the grader, both before the paper is due and before the rewrites are due. The best way we can help you is to see a page containing the quotations from the textbook and from Rowlandson most crucial to your argument and/or to look over your first three projected paragraphs. The English Department also provides assistance, if you enquire at their office on the ground floor of the Liberal Arts building and schedule a series of appointments before there is a crisis. If you have received a strong “B” or above on a paper in a small [25 students or fewer] course with me, Voekel, Jabour, Eglin, Mayer, or Drake [i.e. those who usually offer such courses], you probably don’t need such extensive advice. But otherwise, if you are worried, I would strongly urge you to go see the folks in English. Composition is their job.

Finally, the last third of the grade is the final paper, due on the first day of the exam period in my mailbox in the History office at 12 noon.. I’d suggest that you take one of two choices, both leading to papers of 10-12 pages, which must be written to the standards set forth in the “ Advice on writing...” Choice one is to compare what we learn about native-white encounters in John Demos’ Unredeemed Captive with what we learn in Greg Dening’s Death of William Gooch. Do these two historians treat the encounters of different cultures and races in the same ways? Differently? Both? [Are their philosophies of history similar?] Hint: look up reviews. Reduce your observations to three exemplary points, each demonstrated with short quotations from Demos and Dening, and make a paper of these points and of what, cumulatively, they teach you. Or, choice two, look up all the reviews of Dening you can find—using on-line databases such as Academic Index, America History and Life, and the relevant social science/ anthropology [and even English literature?] database, all available in the Library—and tell us how historians and anthropologists have received Gooch, and indeed Dening’s other recent work if that seems relevant. Note that references may also exist under the original title for Gooch, namely History’s Anthropology. Organize your paper, not as a report, but around such analytical questions as: do historians and anthropologists differ in their opinions of Gooch and of Dening? Is the book treated primarily as a piece on cultural confrontation or as a study in the philosophy of history? Do reviewers see the book as we did in our discussions together?

Alternately, or as a fall-back in case this new assignment does not pan out, any topic half of whose evidence as cited is from at least two of the course readings, and cleared with me during office hours, is acceptable. Consider making a final paper out of our three captives, or out of two of them plus Gooch or with a new source. See me. You must begin work on this paper by November 15 if you are to complete it successfully. Each of you will give a 5-minute presentation of your topic and progress in class on December 4. The paper is due at 12 noon, Dec. 17 in my mailbox in the History office.

Schedule

Tuesday, September 4: Read syllabus, introduce the course. Issues of schedule, coffee and cookies, etc.

Thursday, Sept. 6: Prepare [read, take notes, bring questions, always expect a quiz] Sven Birkerts, The Gutenberg Elegies, 3-69. This is a wild book, but get what you can and don't worry about the rest. Quizzes always possible.

Tues., Sept. 11: Prepare [see definition of this term under date above] Birkerts, Gutenberg, 69-229. Get what you can. Is the life of the mind doomed in the age of MTV and the PC?

Th, Sept. 13: Prepare Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and revolution, chapters 1,2. Quizzes always likely.

Tues., Sept. 18: Prepare Henretta and Nobles, EvRev., chapters 3,4.

Th., Sept.20: Prepare EvRev, chapter 5. What thesis links the different events included in this chapter? Hint: Look at the beginning and end of the chapter and at the start of the next chapter. Can you link each event articulately to this thesis?

Tues, Sept. 25: Prepare The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, 1-55, Neal Salisbury's introduction to Mary Rowlandson's account. This is rich and surprising stuff. Also, study 169, chronology, and 172, questions that will make reading Rowlandson easier.

Th.,Sept. 27: Prepare Sovereignty, 63-67 [Cotton Mather's ?? introduction to the first publication of MR's narrative. What issues led him to write this?], and prepare 67-76, where her actual account begins. How would you react? When did she write this? Why? Whose "American" history is this? The Puritans'? Hers? The Indians'? All three? If you hate it, use that energy to ask questions of it.

Tues, Oct. 2: Prepare Sovereignty, 76-94. Rowlandson herself again. See it from the Indians' point of view. Also, is Mary always a good Puritan? What happens to captives, psychologically?

Th.,Oct. 4: Sovereignty, 94-112, the vital conclusion to Mary's account. Did she remain true to the Providential framework she was expected to confirm?

Tues, Oct. 9: [If you bring quotes from the relevant passages of EvRev., we can discuss the paper assignment today as well.] Prepare Sovereignty, 115-168. Here is a lesson historians learn: further sources enrich and even alter the conclusions one has reached! The rest of the story.

Then, if you are prepared, let's discuss the coming paper?

Th., Oct 11: No class meeting. Open time to do your work. Prepare John Demos' Unredeemed Captive, xi-76, and write your papers as well. Note: There will be a quiz on Captive, xi-76 on this coming Thursday, and this assignment is too much to read between the time you turn in your papers, next Tuesday, and next Thursday when we discuss these pages in Demos., so I'd start reading Demos now. Another reason is that you might find the opening pages of Captive relevant to your papers, so I'd read it first, and then do the paper on Rowlandson? That way you cover the quiz of next Thursday and might get some bonus material for the paper. Be sure you read Demos' preface, i.e. xi-xii. His chapter three, 56-76 is difficult, because who can know the mind of a Puritan, and a father, when his daughter is held captive for years by Indians? Reverend Williams was not an easy man to know. Give Demos credit for trying, and see the chapter as an effort to know the unknowable.

Tues, Oct. 15: **PAPERS DUE AT START OF CLASS. NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.** We will conduct a debriefing on the papers, so this is a full normal class meeting.

Th., Oct. 17: Prepare Demos' Unredeemed Captive, xi-xiii, 1-76. See notes above. Quiz. With this book we flash ahead to Puritan New England in 1703-1771, and an historian tells us the story of another captive, one who did not come back, or not for a very long time, and never in domicile or in spirit. How does the American version of Puritanism handle this shock? A new question arises as well: Can we even tell such tales when we have so few facts to go on? Is this book mostly reflection and speculation? Is this History? Shall we allow it? Philosophical issues begin to gnaw at the edges of our awareness.

Tues, Oct. 23: Rewrites due. Prepare Demos' Captive, 76-166. With so few facts, can we even tell this part of Eunice Williams' story? Also, let's compare this tale to Mary Rowlandson's. What do we learn? [Good quiz topic!] Were Mary and Eunice both captives of Puritanism? Does this make the Indians heroes? What about the Indians' motives? Keep an eye on this issue in the rest of this book!

Th., Oct. 25: Prepare Captive, 170-213. She returns! Why? What do we learn about her, Indians, Puritans, America, life? Further comparisons to Rowlandson's case?

Tues, Oct. 30: Prepare Captive, 213-252. The rest of the story. What do we learn? Can we trust such histories? And begin The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, 1-23, and study the chronology on 197-198. The questions on 203 will help you read this account, as will the map and the pictures on 204-211. Here we move on to the America, and the Atlantic world, of 1742-1800, and entirely into the captive's point of view, in this case a civilized African among the white savages? Does the editor have a bias? Does this mean he is wrong?

Th., November 1: Prepare Equiano, 27-59. A civilized African? What did the slave trade do to his part of Africa?

Tues, Nov. 6: Prepare Equiano, 59-125 and read on to 136. Slavery and freedom.

Th, Nov. 8: Prepare Equiano, [125-] 136-196. What was he doing helping to run a slave plantation? How did it end? What was he doing 1776-1782? What are his circumstances when he reappears in 1783, reporting the Zong massacre? How did he achieve an identity? What was his identity? What does this tell us about slavery? About captivity? Whose captive was he after he was free? Do Rowlandson, Williams, and Equiano tell us that America was full of captives by its very nature? In a looser and less traumatic sense, all intercultural worlds are full of captives? Remember that Quizzes and discussion now count double. [Hmmm...seems that courses are full of captives, too.]

Tues, Nov. 13: Prepare Dening, The Death of William Gooch, ix-16. [Do we first need more time to discuss our three captives and what they teach us?] Then on to Dening, whose Death is a maddeningly coy and obscure, but moving, tale of a man who got himself not captured but killed in the course of a cultural encounter. While this isn't American history strictly speaking, the theme of intercultural misunderstanding and violence will be familiar. A new theme, however, only touched on lightly before, is what we historians really do and whether we could actually write our histories, whether of captivities and of deaths, i.e. our histories of misunderstanding, or indeed any histories, "as if that [i.e. Dening's view of what we really do] were true." Get what you can from Dening's cryptic 13-16, and we'll discover his purpose together.

Th, Nov. 8: Prepare Dening, [1-16 and] 17-47. Here he articulates the ways others have already made their own kinds of histories of Gooch's death. We will take 20 minutes at the end to discuss the topics for the final paper. For Dec. 4, I would like each of you to to give a 5-minute verbal report on the progress you have made on your topic. Hopefully, you will help each other, both by example and with comments. Counts as a quiz.

Tues, Nov. 13: Dening, 47-75. This chapter is a bit ironic, as a lot of what he does, in preparing to write his history of Gooch, "as if "his philosophy [or anthropology?] of history " were true," is very much like what a conventional academic historian would do—i.e. find all the sources he can in the archives! How do we explain the paradox of a person who does not believe in history as the essential truth of the past, yet pursues every scrap of evidence in the archives as if truth mattered? What does Dening really mean?

Thurs., Nov 15: Denning, 75-125. He writes his own history of Gooch, “as if that were true.” He calls this reflective history. What does he mean?

Tues, Nov. 20: No class.

Tues, Nov. 27: Denning, 125 -159. The end of a sad, beautiful tale, reflectively told. Can all histories be so reflective?

What do we learn from Denning? What have we learned this term?

Th., Nov. 29: Meet with me individually to discuss final papers. Reports on topics and progress made are due Tuesday! Note that this asks you to pass out a page to each of us. See below.

Tues, Dec. 4: Each of you will give a 5- minute presentation of your final paper topic and of the progress you have made on it. You should pass out to each of us a page giving your topic and four brief quotations from sources you identify fully for us, and relevant to the paper you intend to write. [Counts as a quiz, with the usual late-term double weighting for experience.] We’ll probably run on into the next class, but may all make it through today, hence all should be prepared for today. We aim particularly to solve problems of approach and of research. For help with writing, see “Week of Dec. 11-13,” below.

Th., Dec. 6: The rest of your reports on the final paper. Evaluations; I evaluate you; you evaluate the course. [If forms are not yet distributed, I can get one in the office and run off copies.]

Week of Dec. 11, 13: Open. We’ve gone at a fast pace, and this open time is your due, to help you with the problem of over-commitment. Take this week and do a good job on the final papers. I’ll be in my office at the time of each class, as well as the usual office hours, to help you. Research problems should have been solved in the days before and after the reports of Dec. 4, and the best way I can help you now, with writing, is to read your first three projected paragraphs. Bring these in.

Final Papers Due Dec. 17, by 12 Noon in my mailbox in the History office, 256 LA.
No late papers accepted.

December 13, Thursday, at 5 PM, I will be at the Press Box, buying snacks and nonalcoholic beverages, and paying my fair share of any beer consumed. All comers from all classes welcome.