

History 203L
Dimensions of History
11:00-11:50, M, W, F
CAS 228
Spring Semester, 2008

Debra A. Mulligan, Ph. D.
Office: CAS 158, Ext 3779
Hours : M, W, F, 1200 - 1:00
Th, 1:00-2:00 or by Appointment
E-mail: dmulligan@rwu.edu

Class Introduction

Course Description: This course will introduce you to the various methods used by historians to uncover historical data. By the same token, "history" is quite different from "fact" and we will explore the difference between the two.

Course Objectives: Students will be required to:

- 1.) Assess the methods utilized in history from antiquity to the modern age.
- 2.) Evaluate various written works to determine "point of view" of various historical eras.
- 3.) Assess the validity of the written primary and secondary source in determining an accurate retelling of a historical period
- 4.) Judge the importance of media in the development of historical memory
- 6.) Review web-based documents and assess their value for historical study

Texts:

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle.
After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection. 5th ed.
NY: McGraw Hill, 2005.

Rutherford, Edward.
London. NY: Fawcett Crest, 1997.

Academic Requirements:

CLASS REQUIREMENTS: 60% of your grade

1.) Reaction Papers

See enclosed sheets for details on individual paper assignments. By following several of the chapters in *After the Fact*, we will test the various methods used by historians to recreate past events. ***You will be responsible for reporting orally on two*** of your short papers, ***but you will need to complete five in all.*** I will distribute a sign-up sheet. Indicate your top five choices. For example, sign "John Smith- #1 choice", "John Smith- #2 choice," etc. I will try to accommodate you to the best of my ability. You will still be required to read all the chapters and pose questions to the presenters.

Therefore, you will have a total of five short reaction papers. You will need to submit the five papers on the last day of class: May 7, 2008.

2.) Oral Presentation

For each oral presentation, you may work with others in the class, or you may complete your project individually. Either way, we will have a few of you discussing each topic. I will also ask all in class to comment on the respective chapter in *Davidson, Lytle*. Therefore, each of you will be required to read the chapter before coming to class.

3.) In-Class Assignments

Throughout the semester, there will be various impromptu in-class assignments on the nature of historical inquiry and methodology. You must be present to receive credit, however. I may ask you to respond to a film, television program, or documentary that we watch in class. I may also ask you to prepare for an in-class debate, etc.

ABSENCES/TARDINESS, ETC.

A significant amount of class time will be spent in discussion and analysis of source material. You will be required to participate both individually and as part of a team. Therefore, your presence will not only enhance your individual learning but will also impact the overall group performance. As such, I will deal with attendance in the following manner:

I will take attendance on class days. Any absence above three (3) will be dealt with as follows:

- a.) **Five points** will be deducted from your final average for each additional absence. For example, a final grade of "95" will become a "90" for three absences, an "85" for four absences, etc. In the event of a serious scheduling conflict requiring you to miss more three or more classes, you will need to contact the Office of Student Affairs, who will notify your individual professors of your absence.
- b.) On the same note, I am very vigilant about keeping track of tardiness, private conversations, etc. Repeated interruptions detract from the overall flow of the classroom. Consequently, I will require you to be on time, turn off your cell phones, and otherwise refrain from disruptive behavior.

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON PLAGIARISM

"Roger Williams University exists to foster the mature pursuit of learning, which is premised upon the exercise of honest care in representing data, findings and the sources of ideas used in an academic exercise. The University expects students to observe these principles of academic integrity in order to ensure the excellence of their education and the value of their diploma."

I adhere to the university's policy regarding plagiarism and academic integrity. Proof of plagiarism will result in a failure for the assignment, notification to the dean, and a possible failure for the course.

GRADING AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Reaction Papers (5 in all) 30% of total grade
- Oral Presentations (2 in all) 15% of total grade
- In-Class Assignments/Participation 15% of total grade

- Total 60%

The rest of your grade will be determined by your lab work.

List of Reaction Papers.

Reaction Paper #1: (based on "after the fact: prologue: Silas Deane")

"Scandal, murder, and mayhem"

Direction: **Choose a topic below and respond to the following:**

- 1.) April 12, 1922- Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle is acquitted of manslaughter
- 2.) September 24, 1919- Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker conspire to fix game between Cleveland and Detroit to earn profit from gambling
- 3.) September 19, 1919- White Sox players conspire to throw the world series
- 4.) Nan Britton publishes memoir of her affair with president Warren G. Harding
- 5.) March 3, 1932- kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby
- 6.) September 4, 1932- Jean Harlow's husband commits suicide
- 7.) November, 1942- teenage girls accuse Errol Flynn of having raped them
- 8.) June 23, 1943- Joan Berry files paternity suit against Charlie Chaplin
- 9.) January 14, 1947- unsolved murder of Elizabeth Ann Short- the "Black Dahlia"
- 10.) August 31, 1948- actor Robert Mitchum is arrested for possession of marijuana
- 11.) April 4, 1958- daughter of actress Lana Turner kills Johnny Stompanato, Turner's lover
- 12.) July 18, 1969- Mary Jo Kopechne drowns when Senator Edward M. Kennedy drives off a bridge at Chappaquiddick Island
- 13.) 1976- former Beatle George Harrison loses plagiarism suit
- 14.) September 23, 1987- Senator Joseph Biden drops out of presidential race after revelations of plagiarism and exaggeration of academic background
- 15.) January 18, 2002- historian Doris Kearns Goodwin accused of plagiarism
- 16.) January 4, 2002- historian Stephen Ambrose accused of plagiarism
- 17.) March 2005- baseball player Mark McGwire is noncommittal about steroid when probed by Congressmen at a hearing
- 19.) October 6, 2005- members of the Minnesota Vikings are accused of having a sex party aboard a boat

- 20.) January 9, 2006- former House Majority Leader Tom Delay resigns from Congress
- 21.) July 28, 2006- Actor Mel Gibson reportedly makes anti-semitic remarks when arrested for drunk driving
- 22.) May 2007- Chinese Government finds two companies guilty of knowingly exporting tainted pet food
- 23.) June 4, 2007- Louisiana Congressman William J. Jefferson is indicted for corruption
- 24.) July 11, 2007- Florida Republican Politician Bob Allen is arrested for solicitation of prostitution

Choose one of the topics above and consider the following:

- Was/were the participant(s) convicted for the alleged "crime"?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the event?
- How did the Press handle the event?
- How did the person/people respond to allegations?
- How did the defendant plead (if apropos)? What arguments were used in his/her defense? Were the arguments valid?
- Did a trial ensue or was the case settled out of court?
- What was the verdict?
- What action(s) did the participant(s) take? For example, if the baseball players were convicted of conspiring to throw the World Series, were they ousted from the Major Leagues? Were they imprisoned?
- Do you believe that the person/people had a fair hearing? Explain your response. From what proof do you base your argument?
- Extenuating circumstances/conclusions
- Bibliography

This entry should be typed, double spaced and entered into your Reaction Paper Binder. Some of you will be reporting on this Reaction Paper. Include your preparation for your oral presentation here.

Reaction Paper #2 (Based on After the Fact, Chapter 3: "Declaring Independence")

In- Class Assignment on Primary Source Documents

Description: Historians often confront incomplete information, and must then solve the puzzle by engaging in further research. Indicate what information was discovered from reading the document.

Historical Document

- 1.) Choose a document from a period in history. When was the document written? Some examples are listed here:
 - a. Franklin Delano Roosevelt asks Congress for a Declaration of War against Japan
 - b. State Constitution of Virginia or any other state
 - c. Political Platform of the Major Parties during Election Year: Example: Democratic Platform of 1920
- 2.) How and why was the text "created"? (See pages 50-54 in Davidson and Lytle)
- 3.) Does the author reveal any information about the period? What is the purpose of writing the document?
- 4.) Now, as a prospective historian, you must interpret the contents of the document. (pp. 54- 62- Davidson and Lytle) How is the document organized? What are its major points?
- 5.) Do the authors harbor any hidden or obvious biases?
- 6.) How reliable is this source, in your estimation? Clarify your statement.
- 7.) Final comments

Reaction Paper #3: (Based on After the Fact, Chapter 5, "Jackson's Frontier—and Turner's) Historical Interpretation:

- The Circulation Desk in the Roger Williams University Library will have on its reserve shelf under Mulligan/Swanson three books:
 - o *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives- Volume II* (3rd edition)
 - o *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives- Volumes I and II* (7th edition)
 - o *American Historians: A Selection*
- Choose any chapter and discuss the following:
 - o Who is your historian and what is his/her subject?
 - o When does he/she write?
 - o Find out some information on your historian. What significant biographical information is listed that might help explain his/her interpretation. (Consider Turner's comment: "Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time." (After the Fact, p. 115)

- o What is the difficulty with this "presentism"?
- o Give a brief synopsis on your historian's interpretation. Do you have any difficulty with his/her argument(s)? Discuss your criticism.
- o Overall conclusions.

Reaction Paper #4- (Based upon "After the Fact," Chapter 7, "The Madness of John Brown.")

"The Madness of King George"

- Based upon historical evidence, do you consider King George III "mad" or suffering from metabolic illness?
- What sources led you to your conclusion?
- What were the political considerations of the time?
- How many "bouts" did George suffer?
- Which of these episodes is considered the most controversial and why?
- How "credible" is psychohistory in explaining a historical event, or in determining the character of a historical figure like King George III?
- Did the film help you to draw any conclusions?

FOR THE NEXT THREE ENTRIES, FIND A FEW NEWSPAPER ARTICLES FROM THE PERIOD: (1880- 1920s) YOUR NEWSPAPER ARTICLE(S) MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING: A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE EVENT IN QUESTION, DISCUSSION OF AN IMMIGRANT GROUP OR PERSON, MUCKRAKING, OR SOME FORM OF INDUSTRY.

- What does the photograph reveal to you about the event in question?
- When was the photograph taken?
- Who is portrayed in the photo? What are the circumstances?
- What does the photograph tell you about the period? How do you know?

Reaction Paper #5- Visual Evidence (Based upon "After the Fact," Chapter 9, "The Mirror with a Memory.")

- The Photograph and Historical Memory
 - o The Immigrant

Reaction Paper #6- (Based upon "After the Fact," Chapter 10, "USDA Government Inspected.")

- Progressivism and Industry- "The Jungle"
- "The Muckrakers"
- What did local newspapers have to say about industry, the immigrant, poverty, etc.
- Discuss any inherent biases that appear in the article
- Does the article favor business, the immigrant, the poor, etc?

Reaction Paper #7- (Based upon "After the Fact," Chapter 11, "Sacco and Vanzetti.")

- How did the newspapers portray the case?
- How valuable is this information in studying the trial?
- What part did ethnocentrism play in this case? What about anti-Catholicism? Explain your response.
- What is the difference between law and history?
- Why was the 1920s the "High Tide of Nativism?"
- Include your article here