

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
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Fall 2011

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
620 Fayerweather  
Office Hours: Tu 4-6

History C4398x

### SENIOR SEMINAR IN HISTORY

In this year-long seminar, students will write a paper of between 13,000 and 17,000 words (including footnotes and bibliography), based on research in primary sources. In addition to seminar meetings listed below, students should meet frequently with Professor Foner to discuss progress. Students are also required to seek out another member of the History faculty, expert on the subject of the paper, to serve as a second reader. This semester, the second reader's input is particularly important at the outset of the project, when the research topic and bibliography are being formulated. Please inform Professor Foner when you have identified your second reader.

The first semester will begin with a brief introduction to historical methodology. Students will then concentrate on revising or strengthening the prospectus developed last spring, and beginning the research. Writing of a draft of one part of the paper will begin toward the end of the semester. Over the winter break, students should substantially complete their research. The second semester will meet at the same time and will be devoted to writing and discussing the essay. As we go along, students will read and comment on each others' outlines and drafts. For future planning, please remember that the first complete draft of the essay will be due the week before spring break and the final draft in mid-April. Students receive a single grade for the entire year; temporarily, a grade of YC (year course) will appear on your transcript for the fall.

At first, assignments can be distributed to the seminar by email but as the number of pages lengthen we will require paper copies for editing and commenting. The Xerox Room is located on the fourth floor of Fayerweather, adjacent to the History Department office. Drafts should be photocopied there and left in the box for the course for the other students to read. The cost of copying can be billed to the course number. Check with the Department office (413 Fayerweather) for hours when the reading room is staffed – do not count on being able to make copies at the last minute!

Columbia College has made available research grants of up to \$500 (the average grant is \$250). All students should apply for one of these awards, via the Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies. The application for such grants is posted on the History Department website (go to "Undergraduate" and then "Thesis"). Make sure to note the application deadline, and to save all relevant receipts.

The books listed below for September 19 can be purchased at Book Culture on 112th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam. Footnotes must follow the style summarized in Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (also available at Book Culture)

A note on honors in the history major: Writing a senior thesis is required for honors in History but does not guarantee it. No more than 10% of history majors can graduate with honors, and they are chosen on the basis of grade point average in the major as well as on the senior essays. To be judged worthy of honors, a senior thesis should:

- be well-written and well-organized, following the standard format for a scholarly historical essay, including footnotes and bibliography
- have a cogent, sustained, and original argument (I. e., a thesis)
- make substantial use of primary sources to support the argument
- utilize secondary works and situate the project in the existing historiography

\*\*During September, students must meet individually with Professor Foner, a second reader, and a reference librarian in Butler.

**Do not bring laptops to class and do not even think of accessing your cell phone, Blackberry, ipod, or any other such device during seminar meetings.**

List of class meetings and deadlines:

NB: On dates when no class meeting is scheduled, I will be in my office during class hours, available to meet individually with students.

September 12: Introductory session. Be prepared to make a brief presentation of your topic and central research question as well as any problems you think you face in getting started on research

September 19: Reading: E. H. Carr, What is History? Browse Wayne C. Booth, et al., The Craft of Research, Pts. I-III

September 26: Reading: two senior theses from 2010-11: the prize-winning theses by Learned Foote and Timothy Reuter. Be prepared to comment on their strengths and weaknesses, the historical questions being asked, the use of sources, and how each thesis relates to the relevant historiography. Senior theses can be found online at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/history/ugrad/main/prizes/index.html>

October 3: Reading: A scholarly journal article related to your topic (have your selection approved in advance by Professor Foner via email). Be prepared to discuss the article and how it relates to your thesis briefly in class.

October 10: Class meets at Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, 6<sup>th</sup> floor of Butler Library, for introduction to use of manuscript collections.

Friday, October 14: Updated thesis prospectus due to class and Professor Foner (Ten page essay, including bibliography, defining the historical problem, identifying sources and methods to be used, and briefly surveying the existing historical literature).

October 17: Prospectus discussion. Each prospectus will have 2 commentators, who will each make a 3-5 minute presentation outlining his or her understanding of the historical problem to be addressed, what they find exciting about the project and what they see as potential problems. Due: Commentators will turn 1-2 pages of written comments to the student whose work is being discussed and to Professor Foner. NB: The entire seminar should be prepared to discuss each prospectus and should read each with care.

October 24: Prospectus discussion

October 31: Prospectus discussion

November 7: No class (election day holiday – even though there is no election)

November 14: Progress reports

November 21: No class meeting

November 28: Progress reports

December 5: No class meeting

December 12: Draft of one section of the thesis due: 10 pages, prefaced by a 1-2 page outline of the entire thesis. Please indicate where the draft will fit into the project as whole. Bring to class enough copies for each member plus Professor Foner.

Winter break: read others' draft sections; complete as much research as possible, review Booth, Craft of Research, Pt. IV.