

CH 6010: Introduction to Contemporary History

Fall Semester 2013
Tuesday, 7-10 pm, Brown House

Instructor:
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A. Description:

CH 6010: Introduction to Contemporary History is the first half of the CHI seminar sequence. This seminar considers the applicability of historical approaches as a means to interpret contemporary history and it considers how the recent past and even the present inform historical understanding. It aims to introduce different historical methods and a general sense of historiography in the process. In what ways and to what degree does history inform policy? What are the advantages of various historical approaches? What are the limitations, dead ends, and risks of historical lessons for contemporary problems? Does history offer firm lessons, open-ended question, or something in between? Who uses history and to what ends? How and why do we interpret and reinterpret the past? This year's seminar uses the Cold War policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and the Vietnam War as case studies and poses these questions with regard to strategy and policy, i.e., the conceptualization and application of national (or alliance) power and international security or war, but note that you will find similar approaches and methodologies in other fields (cultural, intellectual, social, gender, etc.).

This is a seminar and relies upon your participation in discussion. You will be graded in large part on what you bring to discussion. Every day we meet, you will bring in a reaction paper to the readings. This will be one page (no more; regular 12-point font, no doctoring of margins) and state the arguments of what you've read. Each paper should end with a question that you want to pose to the seminar group about the readings. I won't assign letter grades to your reaction papers; I will provide feedback as necessary and I will figure my impression of your papers into your overall participation grade.

B. Assessment:

75% - in-class discussion and weekly reaction papers

25% - capstone paper: a 12-15 page review essay (in the style you would find in the *New York Review of Books* or *Times Literary Supplement*) on three or four recent major scholarly contributions in your field of study. Your capstone paper should

address in what ways historical understanding has been shaped by the authors' objectives and context and you should assess how their interpretations of past events may help us raise questions about present-day policies, discourse, and events.

Please submit a 3-page outline on November 5: what are your three or four books (or seminal articles), what issue or issues do they illustrate or investigate, what is your working hypothesis or central theme?

C. Schedule (books are on reserve at Alden library and also available for purchase at Little Professor):

I. Introduction and Historiography

Aug. 27: Intro to CHI and to the seminar

Sept. 3: History and Historiography

1. Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1999.
2. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

II. Objectivity, Interpretation, Debate

Sept. 10: Objectivity and the History of the discipline in the U.S.

Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Sept. 17: Orthodoxy and Revisionism in Cold War Historiography and Beyond

1. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Origins of the Cold War" *Foreign Affairs*, 46, October, 1967, pp. 22-52.
2. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. New York, 1959.
3. Andrew Bacevich, "The Revisionist Impulse," *Journal of Military History*, April 2012 – accessible on Blackboard

III. How Do We Know What We Know?

Sept. 24: Pickett's Charge – History, Memory, and Myth

1. Watch the scenes in the 1997 movie "Gettysburg" that depict Pickett's Charge (there is a 29-minute clip on Youtube that I will try to post on Blackboard)
2. Carol Reardon, *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Oct. 1: World War II – Memoirs and History

David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War*. New York: Random House, 2005.

Oct. 8: Projecting Past into Present (and vice versa)?

1. Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*. New York: The Free Press, 1986. Selected chapters, on Blackboard.
2. Donald Kagan, *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History*. New York: Viking, 2009.

IV. Journalism, Oral History, and Historical Interpretation

Oct. 15 : The Journalist's First Crack at History

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Random House, 1972.

Oct. 22: Oral history and the participant as witness and interpreter

1. Documentary: *The Fog of War* – copy on reserve at Alden library
2. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Historian as Participant," *Daedalus*, Spring, 1971.
3. Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Oct. 29: Political Science and History

1. Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam*. New York: Henry Holt, 2008.
2. Andrew Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

V. Narrative and popular history

Nov. 5: Biography as interpretive genre?

1. Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.
2. Gregory A. Daddis, "On Lewis Sorley's *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*" *Parameters* (Autumn 2011).
3. Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal," *The Journal of Military History* (October 2008).

3-page outlines for capstone paper due in class

Nov. 12: Narrative history and the question of structure and contingency

Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2012.

Nov. 19: Hollywood's Take

1. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*
2. Watch the 1950s and 2000s movie versions
[How do they compare to one another? How do they compare to the novel? How do the novel and the movies compare to Logevall's history of the First Indochina War?]

VI. A Usable Past?

Nov. 26: Predictive and Practical Uses of the Past

1. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Spring 1989).
2. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).
3. Steven Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008.

Dec. 3: Interpreting the Past to Divine the Present?

1. David Petraeus, "Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam," *Parameters* (Fall 1986) – accessible on Blackboard
2. Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013.

D. Rules and Regulations

This is a seminar that requires active and engaged participation from all of its members. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss, debate, and evaluate the assigned materials. Any unexcused absence will lead to significant reduction in your participation grade and a second unexcused absence will result in an automatic "F".

There are two kinds of writing assignments:

1. Weekly reaction papers on the assigned readings. Every day we meet, you will bring in a reaction paper to the readings. This will be **one page (no more)** and state the arguments of what you've read. It will also have a "Prompt Question" at the end that can be used to direct our discussion of the works in question.

These are **due at the beginning of seminar meetings from Week 2 to Week 15** and are meant to help you prepare for discussions as well as allow me to assess the progress of your reading comprehension and critical and analytical skills. Focus on arguments of what you have read and on how several arguments may be in conversation (in weeks with multiple readings). Reaction papers cannot be submitted late unless you have been granted an excused absence in advance. I will return comments as necessary and appropriate; there is no letter grade for these papers, but I will take them into account as part of your participation.

2. A 12-15 page (double-spaced) review essay on three or four major recent books (or seminal articles) in your field. Make sure to select works that can be placed in conversation with one another.
A 3-page outline is due on November 5 (hardcopy).
Your term paper is due (by e-mail) on Wednesday, December 11, 2013.

I strongly discourage "PR" grades, and reserve the right to decide on a case-by-case basis whether such a grade is warranted. Any "PR" that I may grant must be cleared by the second week of the 2013-14 spring semester. Late completion will incur a penalty of one letter grade per month (for the course).

Any form of plagiarism or academic misconduct will lead to automatic dismissal from the class, an "F" for the seminar, expulsion from CHI, and further proceedings through appropriate university judiciary channels.