Western Civilization
(History 100)

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Departmental course website: http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/westernciv/

Introduction
This is not your father’s (or your mother’s) history course.

It’s a pretty safe bet that a good bit of your experience with history classes has been focused on what might be called the “fact acquisition model” of teaching and learning. That is, the teacher pours facts out at you through readings and lectures, you do your best to remember as many of them as possible for tests or to deploy as many of them as possible in papers. And then, I’m willing to bet, you forgot a substantial fraction of those facts.

The strange thing about this model of history teaching is that it has nothing to do with history—that is, history as practiced by historians. I’ve been a historian for a while now and I have yet to meet one who memorizes facts. So this class is going to be about history, not the rote retention of facts.

What do I mean by history? History, as studied by historians, is not so much the study of what happened—by now we have a pretty good understanding of what happened and when. History is the investigation of change—why and how societies, beliefs, political systems, relationships, and how knowledge changed. Notice the emphasis on why and how. We may know what happened at a particular historical moment, but why it happened and what made it possible for those things to happen are often topics of significant disagreement among scholars.

To understand the why and the how historians gather evidence through research. With that evidence they construct analytical narratives that explain, to the best of the historian’s ability, why and how changed occurred. And those explanations take place in a conversation among scholars and enthusiasts that is often quite contentious. As a result, the past turns out to be very contingent terrain, fraught with uncertainty and misunderstanding…a very different past from the one that is entirely encompassed by facts to memorize.

Thus, if what you want from a history course is lots of facts to memorize, I strongly suggest dropping this section of History 100 in favor of another one that will be more to your liking. If, however, you are ready to approach the past in a different way—the way historians approach it—then stick around. It could turn out to be fun.
What’s going to happen here?
First, let’s start with what is not going to happen.

There will be no quizzes.
There will be no exams.
There will be no formal essays.

So what does that leave?

Instead of all of those standard methods of grading student effort, in this course you will be expected to do eight things:

1. Be an active participant in class discussions, both in the classroom and via the class blog;
2. Take part in several out of class activities (films, a museum trip, etc.);
3. Learn how to work with evidence gathered through research;
4. Learn how to recognize change (or the lack thereof) over time and to explain the reasons for that change;
5. Learn how to construct analytical narratives from that evidence;
6. Investigate the intersection between the history of Western Civilization and your own life;
7. Learn how to create a digital narrative on that intersection that is supported by evidence and demonstrates analysis;
8. Be able to discuss what you learned and how you learned it.

Note the focus on learning. Now, let’s take it point by point.

Class Participation
This class is about learning to say something worth listening to. So, throughout the semester you will be expected to participate actively in our class discussions both in the room and online. Sometimes you will have more to say in class, sometimes you will have more to say online. Sometimes what you say will be original to you, sometimes it will be a response to something someone else has said. Saying nothing isn’t an option. One quarter of your grade in the class will depend upon your participation—the quality, not the volume or amount of that participation—so you’ll need to get used to the idea that you are going to have to have something to say—something that is worth listening to.

Out of Class Activities
During the semester there are several scheduled and several unscheduled out of class activities. You are expected to do them all. Many of these activities substitute for the other day per week that this class ought to be meeting, so if you don’t do them, you only deserve 1.5 credits for the class instead of 3. Because I can’t give you fewer than 3 credits for the course, I have to require you to do these things. Fortunately, none of them is a punishment.

The scheduled out of class activities for this semester are:

1. Class visit to the Holocaust Museum, Saturday December 2 (tentative);
2. Screening of the film Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death on November 8 (tentative);
3. Two individual learning assessment meetings during the weeks of either October 2 or 9 and December 4 and 11.
The unscheduled out of class activities for this semester are:

1. Watch one of the documentary films placed on reserve by October 24;
2. Visit a site of memory somewhere in the greater Washington D.C. area by November 1 (more on this in class);
3. Visit one (or more) museum in the greater D.C. area by December 5;

**Learn to Work With Evidence**
Throughout the semester I’m going to ask you to learn how to make sense of different kinds of primary source evidence—that is, texts, images, artifacts, films, etc., produced by people in the past. Making sense of this sort of evidence is often difficult and will require careful thinking on your part about such things as authorship, chronology, argument, intention, veracity and authenticity. It is essential that you learn this skill, because you will build your final project—your digital narrative—on a foundation of this sort of evidence. Many of our class sessions will be devoted to making sense of these sources, so you’ll have plenty of practice along the way.

**Learn to Recognize Change**
As we move along through approximately 3,000 years of human history in just 14 weeks, there will be plenty of change for you to consider. To make this more manageable, I’ve designed the course content around several main topics. We’ll consider change, the lack of change, and the reason for those changes (or their absence) within these topics, rather than trying to make sense of the entire history of Western Civilization—an impossible task in any case.

**Learn How to Construct Analytical Narratives**
Too often, historical writing goes like this: “This happened, then that happened, then another thing happened. The end.” Interesting, isn’t it? Good historical writing has an argument—a thesis—that is built upon evidence and makes a point worth paying attention to. So, consider these three very brief examples:

1. Between 1933 and 1945 the German Nazi party and its associates were responsible for the deaths of approximately six millions Jews.

2. The German state’s campaign of destruction against European Jewry, a campaign that resulted in the deaths of approximately six million Jews, was the culmination of a long-planned and intentional effort to rid the world of a people who leading Nazis considered a biological, ideological, and economic threat to the survival of the German nation.

3. The German state’s campaign of destruction against European Jewry, a campaign that resulted in the deaths of approximately six million Jews, was a crime of opportunity that resulted from the German state finding itself, in 1942, in control of the vast majority of the European Jewish population. Leading Nazis considered the Jews a biological, ideological, and economic threat to the survival of the German nation.

In the first example, all we get are the facts—facts that, with the exception of a fringe group of Holocaust-deniers, are not in dispute. But in the second and third examples, we get two different interpretations of why the Nazi state pursued its campaign of destruction—a long-planned effort or a crime of opportunity. Which is
correct? Or more to the point, which is more compellingly argued from the available evidence? You would have to read both versions in their entirety to know the answer to this question and only then could you decide for yourself which account was more compelling. That is the essence of history—not example number one.

**Investigate the Intersection Between Western Civilization and Your Life**

Many history professors are fond of saying that it’s a dangerous thing to invite students to make connections between the past and their own lives. After all, these connections are often artificial or teleological (look it up). Letting students do this just encourages them to think that the people in the past thought like people in the present, or that there is some sort of direct causal link between, say, the war in Iraq and the Crusades. People in the past didn’t think the way we do now (and I can cite as many examples as you like to demonstrate that) and any attempt to “connect the dots” between the Crusades and the current war just doesn’t work. So, if we (meaning professors) invite you to make connections between your life and the past, we’re teaching you bad history.

Of course, to say that means we’re also saying that the past should have no relevance for you or your life. Call me crazy, but I think there is some relevance there.

Thus, what I’m going to ask you to do is to consider the intersection or intersections between the past and the present—your present—and to produce your end of semester project out what you learn. If that makes me a bad professor, I can live with that.

But, and this is an important but, I’m going to hold you to a very high standard when it comes to not imposing your present values or ideas onto the past. That is bad history and it results in bad grades.

**Learn How to Create a Digital Narrative**

The end of semester project that you are going to create to demonstrate what you’ve learned this semester is a “digital narrative.” I’ll have a lot more to say about what I mean by digital narratives as we go along, but the short version is:

1. A 5-7 minute digital product that could be a film, a podcast (with images), a flash file, an animation, a PowerPoint converted to movie, a website, or something else of your own devising.

It must be situated at the intersection between the history of Western Civilization and your life.

It must be the answer to a question – an historian’s question

It must include:

- An argument
- Analysis
- Evidence -- primary sources (images, texts, sound files, etc.)
- Images
- Audio (music, sound files, and especially narration by you)
If this assignment makes you a little nervous, that’s okay. I’ve lined up help from the student technology lab (STAR lab) to assist you with this, so even if you are not very facile with computers, you needn’t worry.

**Assigned Course Materials**

For this course you need to purchase:

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*

Optional (don’t buy them until after the first class):

1. Any of the Western Civilization textbooks available in the University Bookstore
2. Western Civilization video lectures (on DVD) – these are also broadcast on GMU-TV, so you don’t have to purchase them.

**Grading**

As mentioned already above, in addition to being a full participant in the class, you must complete all of the course assignments. Note: Anyone who fails to complete all of the assignments for this course will receive a failing grade for the course! This includes the unscheduled activities listed below.

Grades for this course will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Narrative proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Due October 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft script</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Due October 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised draft of script</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Due November 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final narrative</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Due November 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary on final project</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Due December 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Unscheduled activities – you do them on your own schedule, but have to report their completion with evidence that will be described in class.

Late work will be accepted. However, for each day the scrapbook is late, one-half of a letter grade will be deducted from your final grade for that portion of the total grade in the course. In other words, a scrapbook that would have received an A-, but was two days late, would receive a B- instead. No matter how late your work is, it must be handed in, even if it has already reached the “F” level. Similarly, you must write a weekly entry into the class weblog on time.

**Extra Credit Opportunities**

1. Contribute a personal reflection to the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank ([http://hurricanearchive.org](http://hurricanearchive.org)). Your contribution to the database must be at least 250 words in length. Assuming you were not personally affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, your contribution will be a reflection on your reactions to what happened last summer or to the continuing struggles of the Gulf Coast to recover from the storms. This extra credit is worth one-half a letter grade on either your proposal or on either of your scripts. **It must be completed by September 15.**
2. You can attend any “Western Civ related” performance at the Center for the Arts (tickets are free to students) during the fall term. For this extra credit, turn in your ticket stub and the program, along with a one-page reflection on the performance. This extra credit is worth one-half a letter grade on either your proposal or on either of your scripts. The latest this can be turned in is the last day of class.

Course Policies (please read them all)

Attendance: Because this course covers several thousand years in just one semester, attendance is absolutely necessary if you want to keep up and grasp the essential points that I am making. Because a significant portion of your grade is predicated on your participation in the discussions that take place in class (or online) if you are not in class you cannot participate effectively. As a result, if you fail to attend class, your participation grade will certainly suffer.

ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me to make necessary accommodations (before September 15 please). Students should present appropriate verification from the Disability Resource Center.

Medical and Other Excuses: Every semester someone is forced to miss either an examination or the due date for an assignment either as the result of an illness or a family emergency. If you find yourself in this situation, fairness to all students in the class requires the proper documentation, without which your excuses will not be accepted. If you need to know more about this process consult me as soon as the emergency is taken care of.

Plagiarism and Cheating: In my courses all students are responsible for adhering to a certain standard of behavior when it comes to honesty and plagiarism. I expect each individual to adhere to these standards so that every member of the class knows that his or her work is being held to an equal standard. If one student cheats, all students in the class suffer. Even worse, however, is the fact that the student who cheats is hurting him or herself. When you are cheating, you are not learning and the reason you are here is to learn.

In addition to my own high expectations when it comes to academic honesty, the University also expects students to demonstrate a high code of personal honor when it comes to academic work. Please read the George Mason University Honor Code. If you have any questions about what is expected of you in this regard. Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, including, but not limited to failing the assignment, failing the course, many hours of community service, suspension or even expulsion from the University. If I have reason to believe you have cheated or plagiarized another person’s work, I will discuss this matter with you. If I am not satisfied that no cheating or plagiarism has occurred, your case will be referred to the Honor Committee. If you have any questions about these policies, please come talk to me in my office.

Also, it is worth passing along to you the fact that I use two different software packages to scan the Internet for papers purchased online or for text copied from websites. Three of the past four semesters this software has resulted in one or more of my students facing an honor hearing, all of whom were convicted and punished by the University. Cheating and plagiarism are not a game and the academic and personal consequences that stem from such actions can be very severe here at
George Mason, and will follow you (on your transcript) for the rest of your professional life.

**Food, Drink, Tobacco:** In my classes drink is permitted, but food and tobacco products of all kinds are prohibited. If you must chew, whether food or tobacco, do it before you arrive or after you leave.

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**Course Schedule**

**August 29 – Class Introduction**
No readings. Familiarize yourself with the course materials. Try posting a test entry to the class weblog.

**September 5 – Investigations**
Assignments
Go to the *Investigations* portion of the class website and read what you find there, including following the instructions. When you get to the “Real Case from the Past”, read through the evidence and write up a 200-250 word conclusion about who was guilty of the murder and post it to the class weblog. Bring that to class with you.

**September 12 – The Rights of Man**
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor Lytton's video lecture (#2) and Professor Censer's video (#7). Note: you can either watch the entire lecture, or only those portions of the lecture I recommend in class.
Textbook: In the textbook, read those chapters that deal with political rights and systems in Greece, Rome, early modern (1500-1800) France and early modern Britain. I know this seems like a lot of reading, but in class we will discuss strategies for dealing with a textbook.
Web: Go to the *Rights of Man* portion of the class website and follow the instructions you find there.
Additional Resources: For more on how to read constitutional or official documents, visit *World History Matters* and listen to and interview with Professor Dina Khoury: [http://chnm.gmu.edu/whm/analyzing/documents/analyzingdocsintro.html](http://chnm.gmu.edu/whm/analyzing/documents/analyzingdocsintro.html)

**September 19 – The Rights of Man**
Assignments
Come to class prepared for our debate.

**September 26 – Inheriting the Wind**
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor Stearns’ video lecture (#8).
Textbook: In the textbook, read the chapters dealing with the Scientific Revolution and Darwin.
Web: Go to the *Inheriting the Wind* portion of the online syllabus and follow the instructions there.

**October 3 – Inheriting the Wind**
Assignments
Come to class prepared for our trial of Darwin.
October 10 – Criminals and Children
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor ffolliott’s (#5) and Professor Copelman’s (#9) lectures.
Textbook: Read portions of the textbook that deal with women in European society (check the index)
Web: Go to the Criminals and Children portion of the class website and follow the instructions there.

October 17 – Criminals and Children
Assignments
Web: Complete the second half of the online assignment (on Milada Horakova)
Many of the documents assigned for these two weeks are in the form of a personal narrative. To learn more about how historians work with personal narratives, visit World History Matters: http://chnm.gmu.edu/whm/unpacking/acctsmain.html

October 24 – The White Man’s Burden?
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor Copelman’s lecture (#9) if you missed it before.
Textbook: Read chapters in the textbook dealing with imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.
Web: Go to the White Man’s Burden section of the website and follow the instructions there.
Many of the primary sources on European imperialism fall into the category of traveler’s accounts. To learn more about how historians work with such accounts, visit World History Matters: http://chnm.gmu.edu/whm/unpacking/travelmain.html

October 31 – The White Man’s Burden?
Assignments
Come to class prepared to discuss Hochschild’s King Leopold’s Ghost.

November 7 – Total War
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor Deshmukh's lecture (#12)
Textbook: Read chapters concerned World War I, the interwar period, World War II and the Holocaust.
Web: Go to the Total War section of the class website and follow the instructions there.

No Class November 14

November 21 – Total War
Assignments
Web: Go to the Holocaust Museum website and try to find the answer to the question you formulated. Come to class prepared to answer questions about your research process.

November 28 – Right vs. Left
Assignments
Video: Watch Professor Holt's (#6) and Professor Stearns' video lectures.
Textbook: Read the chapters dealing with European liberalism and socialism.
Web: Go to the *Right vs. Left* portion of the class website and follow the instructions there.

**December 5 – Right vs. Left**
Assignments
Web: Read the *Communist Manifesto* and come class prepared to discuss the questions posted online.