

Western Civilization (History 100)

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Introduction

In this course we're going to move very quickly through about 2,000 years of European history in just 14 weeks. Obviously, covering what happened in such a long span of time is impossible, so instead we're going to focus on a few main themes that will help us make sense of the rise of the West, its influence on the world, and why things turned out the way they did in Europe over time.

To do that we're going to study history as it is studied by historians, not the way it has likely been pounded into you by previous teachers. What do I mean by that? 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?

Class this semester will be a mix of lecture and discussion (in class and online). If you think of the semester as being divided into two-week pairings, the first week of that pairing will be "lecture week" and our two classes will be devoted to me presenting information to you and asking you to analyze it in class. The second week of the pairing will be "discussion week," during which we'll meet in groups of 25 (see below) to discuss the readings for the week in more detail.

Those readings will be largely the six books assigned (see below), each of which is one person's take on a particular moment in history, or in the case of one of the books, the author's take on 3,000 or so years of history. I expect you to show up for class ready to discuss these books when they are assigned and I'll be giving you some guiding questions for each book before you start reading.

In addition to the discussions, there are three essays and a Wikipedia assignment for the class. Your grade will be a combination of your grade for these essays and your class participation.

Class Participation

One of the big themes of this class is 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 six class meetings that you will miss as a result of our discussion week schedule (see below).

The scheduled out of class activities for this semester are:

1. Screening of the film *Marie Antoinette* (date TBD) – **required**
2. Screening of the film *From Hell* – **optional**
3. Screening of the film *Return of Martin Guerre* – **optional**

The *unscheduled* out of class activities for this semester are:

1. Visit a site of memory somewhere in the greater Washington D.C. area (more on this in class);
2. Visit one (or more) art or history museum in the greater D.C. area;

Learn to Unpack a Book

Works of scholarship, whether they are written by historians, chemists, anthropologists or economists make an argument based on evidence. This semester we're going to learn how to unpack the books I've assigned so that by the end of the term you will have acquired this skill—so necessary to success in (and beyond) college. In addition to recognizing the author's argument, we'll focus on how he/she

deploys evidence in support of that argument and probe each work for its strengths and weaknesses.

Learn to Recognize Change

As we move along through approximately 2,000 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.

Assigned Course Materials

For this course you need to purchase the following books, all of which should be available in the bookstore:

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*
 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Return of Martin Guerre*
 Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*
 Georges Lefebvre, *Coming of the French Revolution*
 Tom Standage, *A History of the World in Six Glasses*
 R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, (Broadview Edition)
 Textbook: *Wikipedia*. No kidding.

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 above.

Grades for this course will be calculated as follows:

Wikipedia assignment	5%
Class participation	20%
First essay	25%
Second essay	25%
Third essay	25%

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 an essay 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 paper 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.

Wikipedia Assignment

As I’m sure you know by now, the Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) is one of the most used information resources on the web. You might be surprised that I assigned it as our class textbook, but here is the reason why. Textbooks are largely compendia of facts with little analysis—just like encyclopedias. I do not teach to a textbook—because this is not a class about memorizing facts—so I have decided instead to let you use this free resource for the facts you need to acquire to do the historical analysis we’ll be doing this semester. Remember, analysis is very different from acquiring facts.

At the same time you ought to be aware that anyone, anywhere, anytime can edit any entry in the Wikipedia. Does this mean that the entries are not reliable? Yes and no. Because the entries change all the time, you have to be careful and really read every entry. Don’t just accept what it says at face value. *Think* about what the entry says and ask yourself if you can trust it. If you are worried, check the entry’s history to see what kinds of changes have taken place in the past couple of weeks. Then you can decide if you want to use it or not. And, if you find vandalism in the entry, fix the problem!

Your assignment is to pick one topic of interest to you in the history of Western Civilization that does not currently have an entry in Wikipedia (or one that has only a very minimal entry). First create a Wikipedia account. Then write a full entry for that topic (at least 250 words with at least one image/graphic and at least two sources). Link your entry to at least three other Wikipedia entries. Once you have posted up your entry, send me the link. This is phase one of the assignment and it is due by **February 15**. For the rest of the semester, you need to track what happens to your entry and on our last class you need to turn in a two-page (500-600 word) essay on

(a) what happened to your entry and (b) what you learned from writing for Wikipedia.

Extra Credit Opportunities

1. Contribute a personal reflection to the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (<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 February 1.**

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 February 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.

Because plagiarism has become such a problem here at GMU (and in higher education generally), I now use the plagiarism prevention service Turnitin.com. Last semester I used this service on an *ad hoc* basis and ended up submitting five cases (out of 50 students) to the Honor Committee. This was obviously very disappointing to me—especially since I told the students I was going to submit any suspicious essay to the Turnitin.com service.

In hopes of preventing a similar rash of honor cases, this semester you will submit your essays to me through the Turnitin.com website. This means the essays will come to me already vetted by this service—a database that matches what you submit to literally billions of pages on the Internet. If you use material that is not your own, Turnitin.com will identify the plagiarized passages to me and I will immediately submit the offending essay to the honor committee for action. I always recommend failure for the course when I submit a file.

The message here is simple—do the work yourself and don't plagiarize. Your odds of fooling the Turnitin.com database are so low that they're not worth the risk. Instead, put the effort into your essay rather than into plagiarizing.

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.

Course Schedule

Note: For each week you should read appropriate material in the class textbook so that you have the essential historical context (what happened when) in your mind. So, for instance, if you think the French Revolution happened in 1850, you're going to look pretty silly in class.

January 22/24

22nd – Introduction to the class/Historical thinking.

24th – The Ancient World

Read: "Beer in Mesopotamia and Egypt" in *History of the World in Six Glasses*.

January 24/31

29th – Using the class technology

Class will meet in a computer classroom on the 29th (IN 223). Before class, go to the website "Who Killed William Robinson" (<http://web.uvic.ca/history-robinson/>), review the evidence, and decide who *did* kill Mr. Robinson. Come to class prepared to discuss your conclusion. Be sure to be ready to discuss the specific evidence that convinced you. In this class we will be logging into the class blog and going over the Wikipedia assignment.

31st – Greece and Rome

Read: "Wine in Greece and Rome" in *History of the World*

February 5/7

5th – Judaism and Christianity

Read: Natalie Zemon Davis, "Introduction" (on e-reserve)

Read: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Return of Martin Guerre*

7th – Orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism

February 12/14 – First Discussion Week

Group 1 meets on Monday, Group 2 meets on Wednesday

Discussion of *Return of Martin Guerre*

**** February 15 – Film Screening – Return of Martin Guerre ****

February 19/21

19th – The Early Modern World

Read: "Spirits in the Colonial Period" in *History of the World*

21st – Coming of the French Revolution

Read: "Coffee in the Age of Reason" in *History of the World*

Read: Lefebvre, *Coming of the French Revolution*

February 26/28 – Second Discussion Week

Group 1 on Monday/Group 2 on Wednesday

Discussion of Lefebvre, *Coming of the French Revolution*

**** February 27 – Film Screening – Marie Antoinette ****

**** First Essay Due by 5:00 p.m., March 2 ****

March 5/7

5th – Industrialism and Nationalism

7th – Science and Race

Read: "Tea and the British Empire" in *History of the World*

Read: Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

March 12/14 – Spring Break

March 19/21 – Third Discussion Week

Group 1 on Monday/Group 2 on Wednesday

Discussion of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

**** March 22 – Film Screening, *From Hell* ****

March 26/28

26th – Europe at the Fin-de-Siècle

28th – War, Revolution and Remapping

**** Second Essay Due by 5:00 p.m., March 30 ****

April 2/4

2nd – Interwar Society

4th – Fascism, War, and the Holocaust

Read: Browning, *Ordinary Men*

April 9/11 – Fourth Discussion Week

Group 1 on Monday/Group 2 on Wednesday

Discussion of *Ordinary Men*

April 16/18

16th – The Cold War

18th – Communist Europe and 1989/1992

Read: Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*

April 23/25 – Fifth Discussion Week

Group 1 on Monday/Group 2 on Wednesday

Discussion of *The Fall of Yugoslavia*

April 30/May 2

30th – Making Sense of Western Civilization

2nd – Wrap up and evaluation

**** Final Essay due by 5:00 p.m., May 2 ****